

The Rescue of the Danish Jews in the Latter Half of 1943

Myths and Facts



Fig. 1 : Three Jewish brothers and their sister upon arrival in Sweden in a row boat on Oct. 6, 1943. With them in the boat were also their aunt and a fisherman. One of the oars (displayed on the photo) broke near the Swedish coast.

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<http://www.historywalks.eu>

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Introduction

It is 1943. Europe is in a complete state of war. The *Endlösung*, a term used by the Nazis for the destruction of the Jews, is in full swing. In large parts of German occupied Europe, Jewish children, women and men are being murdered and captured, without much opposition from their compatriots. Those who are captured are taken to concentration camps or deported to extermination camps, including Sobibor and Treblinka.

The fortunes of war turn during the course of the year, and the Germans are increasingly on the losing side. In February, the last remnants of German divisions surrender to the army of the Soviet Union during the Battle of Stalingrad. The Soviet advance to Berlin begins. In May 1943, German-Italian troops surrender in Tunis. The idea that the Germans might lose takes hold everywhere in Europe, including in occupied Denmark, where people are fully aware of these developments through the underground press and through Swedish and English radio broadcasts.

In Denmark, Danish government has been able to continue ruling from the moment of the German invasion on April 9, 1940 until August 1943, and the Jews remain undisturbed. The Danish people, who are said to have hitherto shown their repulsion to the Germans by adopting a "cold shoulder policy", begin to show more and more resistance during the spring of 1943. (see fig. 2)¹ In the course of the summer, tensions become so high that they result in riots and strikes, which prompt the Germans to proclaim a state of emergency on August 29. In September during the state of emergency, the Germans decide to capture the Jews and deport them to Germany. However, their raid during the night of October 1, 1943, fails. The majority of the 7,000 Danish Jews manage to go into hiding with the help of the Danes, and later escape to Sweden.

¹ Jörg-Peter Findeisen, *Dänemark. Geschichte der Länder Skandinaviens* (Regensburg 1999) 220.

Fig. 2 : Cartoon 'Cold-shoulder politics'

The Danish population's reaction to the occupation is to publicly shun the German soldiers. The Danish doctor Österberg published a series of cartoons in the underground press and characterised this attitude with the drawing below:



I. Research question

The majority of Danish Jews were able to go into hiding and flee to Sweden between September 27 and October 6, 1943, despite there being a state of emergency and night-time curfew.² How could so many people - more than 7,900 - successfully hide and escape initially appeared to be a hopeless situation?

Why did the Germans, who were so successful in deporting Jews from other countries fail here? In popular literature, in first-person accounts, in films and also on innumerable websites, the rescue is attributed almost entirely to the courage of the Danes. They apparently placed their own lives in danger in order to save the Jews. Is this version of history correct?

² Michael Mogensen, 'October 1943-The Rescue of the Danish Jews' in: Mette Bastholm Jensen and Steven L.B.Jensen., *Denmark and the Holocaust* (Copenhagen 2003) 39-40.
Gustav Meissner, *Dänemark unterm Hakenkreuz. Die Nordinvasion und die Besetzung Dänemarks 1940-1945* (Frankfurt am Main 1990) 345.

II. The myth

2.1 The rescue according to popular literature

Here is the personal account of Herbert Pundik, a 16-year-old Jewish student at the Metropolitan Gymnasium in Copenhagen. On the morning of Wednesday, September 29, 1943, the rector entered the classroom during the French lesson. He pointed to a number of Jewish children and asked if there were others with a Jewish background. A number of children raised their hands. He asked them to follow him into the hallway. The French teacher, most likely also Jewish, had packed his bag and followed as well. In the hallway, the rector told them that the school had been warned that the Jewish persecution would begin very soon and that the Germans could be here at any moment. His message was : you must go home immediately. On arriving home, Herbert discovered that his parents, brothers and sisters were already completely prepared to flee. They were dressed in warm winter clothes and their handbags were packed with their necessities.³

Herbert's father and about one hundred others who had attended the morning service at the Krystalgade synagogue, had heard from the Rabbi that the Germans would be holding a raid on the night of October 1.

³ This text is reproduced from: Herbert Pundik, *Die Flucht der dänischen Juden 1943 nach Schweden* (Husum 1995) 13.



Fig. 3 : Chief Rabbi Friediger in the Synagogue Krystalgade Copenhagen

Source: unknown

The Jewish feast day, Yom Kippur, fell on October 1 in 1943. Most Jews were celebrating the feast in their homes with their families on this day. Rabbi Friediger instructed them to warn as many Jewish friends and acquaintances as possible.⁴ Nobody was to stay in their own home during the coming nights, they were strongly advised to stay at the homes of Christian friends or others whom they knew. Within a few hours, almost all the Jews in Copenhagen were informed. After fleeing for four days, the Pundik family was able to reach the Sont river and escape to Sweden by means of a short crossing by fishing boat, just to the north of Helsingør (See fig. 4). With the help of the Danish people during the month of October the majority of about 7,000 Danish Jews managed to escape into Sweden, often together with their non-Jewish spouses.

⁴ Aage Bertelsen, *Oktober 4, Ereignisse und Erlebnisse während der Judenverfolgung in Dänemark* (München 1969) 14.

It is remarkable that, while the *Endlösung* was at its height in 1943, the Jews in Denmark managed to escape from the Germans.

Fig. 4 :



This boat, named "Sunshine" (formerly "Lurifax"), was used during World War II to transport Danish refugees from German-occupied Denmark to neutral Sweden. View of the Danish fishing boat and monitor on the second floor of the permanent exhibition at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Source: <http://digitalassets.ushmm.org/photoarchives/detail.aspx?id=1092960>

This escape raises many questions about the preparations for, and the effectiveness of, the Jewish persecution in Denmark. Below, an overview from 1991 by Wolfgang Benz is shown for the purpose of comparison. It indicates the estimated numbers of Jewish victims in European countries.⁵

Germany	165,000
Austria	65,459
Luxemburg	1,200
France	76,134
Belgium	28,518
The Netherlands	102,000
Denmark	116
Norway	758
Italy	6,513
Albania	591
Greece	59,185
Bulgaria	11,393 deported from the Bulgarian occupied areas. However, all Bulgarian Jews are rescued.
Yugoslavia	60,000 – 65,000
Hungary	550,000
Czechoslovakia	143,000
Romania	211,214
Poland	2,700,000
Soviet-Union	2,100,000

In the popular literature, infilms, in first person accounts, and also on innumerable websites, the emphasis is primarily on the bravery of the Danish people.⁶ The Danish apparently helped in the thousands, bringing a large number of Jews along with their non-Jewish family members, across to the other side of the Sont. For many survivors of the Holocaust, this escape succeeded due to the uniquely humane, courageous, and altruistic attitude of the Danish people.

⁵ Benz, Wolfgang, Hrsg., 'Die Dimension des Völkermords. Einleitung', in: Benz, Wolfgang, Hrsg., *Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*. (München 1991) 15-16.

⁶ A known film about the rescue of the Danish Jews is: *The Danish Solution. The rescue of the Jews in Denmark*. A documentary film narrated by Garrison Keiller (2003).

Examples in populaire literature about the rescue:

Tjeskov, Peter H., *Conquered, Not Defeated. Growing up in Denmark during the German Occupation of World War II* (Oregon 2003).

Barfod, Jørgen, *The Holocaust failed in Denmark* (Kopenhagen 1981).

Bertelsen, *Oktober 4*. Pundik, *Die Flucht*.

Emmy E. Werner, *A Conspiracy of Decency. The Rescue of the Danish Jews During World War II* (2002 Boulder).

In *Rescue in Denmark*, published in the United States in 1963, Harold Flender described the rescue of the Danish Jews according to dozens of eyewitness accounts that are filled with praise. The book received many positive reviews in the American press.⁷ In the same year, the Jewish community in the United States established the foundation *Thanks to the Danes* and the total Danish population in Israel was listed in *Yad Vashem's book of Righteous Gentiles*.⁸ In Israel, the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Center was established, and in 1973 this postage stamp appeared:

Fig. 5



⁷ Harold Flender, *Rescue in Denmark* (NY 1963) passim.

⁸ Yad Vashem is an institute founded by the Israeli parliament in 1953 to commemorate and honor victims and heroes of the Holocaust. In 1963 Yad Vashem undertook a world-wide project with the goal of attributing the title 'Righteous Among the Nations' to non-Jews who had risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

See also: <http://www1.yadvashem.org>

Andrew Buckser, *After the Rescue. Jewish identity and community in contemporary Denmark* (New York 2003) 194-195.

In his book *Hitlers Willing Executioners*, Daniel Goldhagen wrote of a courageous Denmark having the highest survival rate of Jews in all of the German occupied countries:

The Danes rescued the Jews in their country and opposed the imposition of anti-Semitic laws by the Germans. In general the Danes showed a very clear inclination to treat the Jews of Denmark as human beings and as members of the Danish national community.⁹

The philosopher, Hannah Arendt, stated that each political science student should study this period, because it shows just what can be achieved with non-violent resistance against a superior opponent.¹⁰ There is a tenacious myth about the Danish king, Christian X, who, during his morning horseback rides through Copenhagen, supposedly wore the Star of David in order to protest against the persecution of the Jews (see fig. 6). The revival of attention to the rescue and the probable creation of the myth about the King is due to the appearance in 1958 of the novel by Leon Uris, *Exodus*, and the filmed version of this in 1960. In his novel, Uris described how the King in response to the demand of the German commander in Copenhagen that all Jews wear the Star of David, declared that every Dane is equal, and that he himself would be the first to wear a Star.

⁹ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitlers gewillige beulen* (Antwerpen 1996) 395.

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jeruzalem*, 286.



Fig. 6 : King Christian X in Copenhagen on his seventieth birthday, September 26 1940, during the German occupation.

Source: C. Næsh Hendriksen: *Den danske Kamp i Billeder og Ord*, Odense: Bogforlaget Dana, 1945, p. 176.

At this website, you can view a short video of King Cristian on his horse in Copenhagen:

<http://v7.tinypic.com/player.swf?file=f03hqw&s=7>

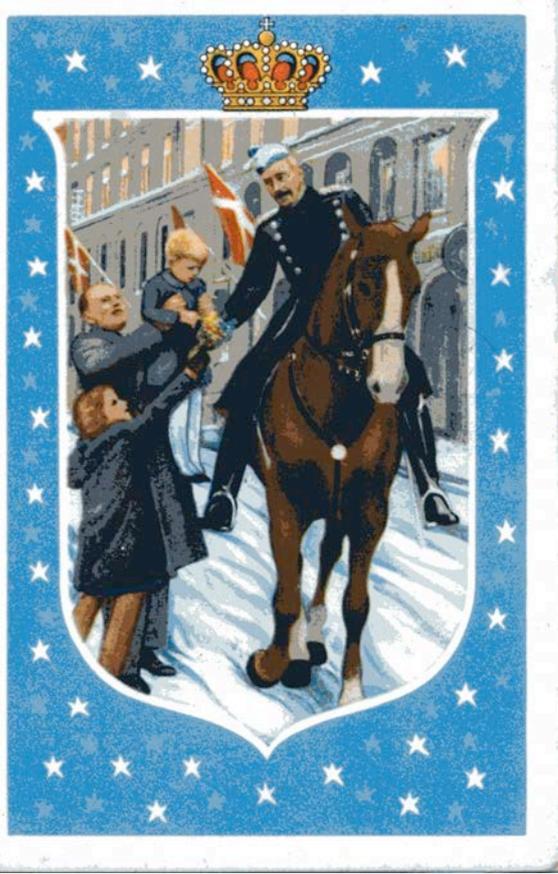


Fig. 7 : A Danish christmas card from the 1950s

The following morning, apparently almost the entire Danish population wore The Star of David, along with the King.¹¹ It is possible that Uris had read an article published in London on September 4, 1942, in *The Jewish Telegraph Agency* and incorporated what he had read in *Exodus*. The article suggested that Christian said he would be the first to wear The Star of David on his uniform, should this be demanded of the Jews.¹² However, the Jews in Denmark never wore The Star of David because the Danish government was always able to prevent this.¹³

Yet in January 2005, Simon Kuper, correspondent for *The Financial Times* in Paris, published a fierce attack in that newspaper on the attitude of the Dutch during the Second World War. In his column, Kuper stated that while the Danes, who had

¹¹ Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjálmsón, 'The King and the Star' in: Mette Bastholm Jensen and Steven L.B.Jensen., *Denmark and the Holocaust* (Kopenhagen 2003) 102-104.

¹² Ibid, 104-105.

¹³ Ibid, 116.

really saved the Jews, allowed barely any credit to be attributed to themselves, the Dutch created the false myth of the ‘good’ Dutchman.¹⁴ The fact that, as described earlier, the entire Danish population is mentioned in *Yad Vashems’s book of Righteous Gentiles* is of course confrontational for other countries.

The historian Gunnar Paulsson commented upon this manner of high praise for the Danes, even suggested that other countries may miss ‘the courage to care,’ as he describes it.¹⁵

Also, the historian Leni Yahil wrote in her book :

The Holocaust was a catastrophe in the life of the nations no less than it was a catastrophe in the life of the Jewish people. It did not happen in a vacuum; it happened within the very heart of the peoples of Europe and thus cast into grave doubt the value of that human culture which Europe had created. This culture has two roots: the ancient culture of Greece and Rome, and Christianity. Its modern social-political embodiment is what we call Western democracy. In most countries of Europe this culture did not stand in the Holocaust. Yet the Danish experience shows that it was possible to preserve cultural values in theory and in practice, and in so doing prevent the implementation of barbaric extermination.¹⁶

The rescue attained mythical proportions in the 2001 edition of the *Oxford Companion to World War II*, which states that the Jews were transferred by the Danes to Sweden in just one night.¹⁷ Clearly, much attention has been given to the unique and large scale rescue by the brave Danes. The background to this rescue, and especially the role that the German played, remains unexplored and invites further examination.

¹⁴ Simon Kuper, ‘*Delivered from evil*’. FT.com, Financial Times (21 Januari 2005).

¹⁵ Gunnar S. Paulsson, The ‘Bridge over the Øresund’: The Historiography on the Expulsion of the Jews from Nazi-Occupied Denmark, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30 (1995) 431-464, 431.

¹⁶ Yahil, Leny, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry. Test of a Democracy* (Philadelphia 1969) 394.

¹⁷ L.C.D. Dean, (ed), *The Oxford companion to World War II* (Oxford 2001) 229.

2.2 Punishment and danger to the rescuers

In order to call the Danes ‘brave’, we must find that they overcame difficulties and danger. It is therefore appropriate to ask, whether there was any threat of onerous punishment of, for example, the rescuers, and if so, was this widely known before the rescue. Paulsson downplays the fear experienced by Herbert Pundik of being caught by the Gestapo.¹⁸ He points out that in reality not one Dane was ever sent to a concentration camp. Danish citizens were covered by the Danish legal system and there was no onerous punishment for offenses such as helping Jews to cross illegally to Sweden.

The Danes must have been aware of the German threat to the Jews, considering that Danish scientists and political leaders raised the issue dozens of times in public between 1940 and 1943 and that the Danes were still permitted to listen to foreign radio stations after the invasion.¹⁹ Also, the illegal press published articles on the misconduct of the Germans, sometimes with photographs of tortured Danish prisoners (see fig. 8). The intellectual and political elite were therefore certainly aware of the mentality of the Nazis in Denmark. In eye-witness accounts, in books and in films, it was always stressed how frightening it was to go into hiding. Especially on the night of October 1, when telephone traffic was impossible in all of Copenhagen, and German police and Danish collaborators were looking for Jews, the intentions of the Germans must have become abundantly clear to the Danes. Moreover, among the 600 to 700 illegal crossings to Sweden, there are numerous descriptions of the tension and fear that the Jews and their rescuers endured.

¹⁸ Pundik, ‘*Die Flucht*’, 123-124. Paulsson, “*The Bridge over the Øresund*”, 433-434.

¹⁹ Susan Seymour, *Anglo-Danish Relations and Germany 1933-1945* (Odense 1982) 194.



Fig. 8 : Presumably a Dane, tortured by the Nazis, who was arrested after the riots in Odense on August 19 1943 during which the German lieutenant Wieseler was almost hanged. This photo must have contributed to the fear of reprisals by the Germans if one were caught helping the Jews.

Source: <http://www.universitypress.dk/shop/krig-og-besaettelse-518p.html>

2.3 Possible success factors

What were the factors and circumstances that were decisive for the rescue? The popular literature and also many historians refer to the massive willingness of the Danes to take action. Some of the Danish historians, including Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjalmsson and Bent Blüdnikow, question this. They argue that there was collaboration, betrayal and abuse by the Danes with regard to the Jews, more often than has been described by the historiography until now.²⁰ Also the proximity of Sweden – the Sont is only a few kilometers wide at certain places – may have played a role in the success of the rescue. Finally, the fact that the majority of Danish Jews lived in Copenhagen, close to the Swedish border, is likely to have been to their advantage.²¹

That something unusual was going on in Denmark, is clear. It is known that Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, notably a German and one of the closest associates of Werner Best, the *Reichsbevollmächtigter* in Denmark, informed the Danes of the planned *Judenaktion* (see fig. 9 en 10).²²

²⁰ Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjalmsson en Bent Blüdnikow, Rescue, Expulsion, and Collaboration: Denmark's Difficulties with its World War II Past, *Jewish Political Studies Review* 18:3-4 (Fall 2006) 2.

²¹ Blom, J.C.H., 'De vervolging van de joden in Nederland in internationaal vergelijkend perspectief' in: J.C.H. Blom red., *Crisis, bezetting en herstel. Tien studies over Nederland 1930-1940* (Den Haag 1989) 134-150.

²² Ulrich Herbert, *Best. Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903–1989* (Bonn 1996) 368. Bertelsen, *Oktober 4*, 14.



Fig. 9: The German Reichsbevollmächtigter Werner Best, likely at the funeral of the victims of the RAF air raid on the German police headquarters, the Shell House in Copenhagen, on March 21, 1945.



Fig. 10 : Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz worked as a maritime attache in the German embassy in Copenhagen (September 29, 1904, † February 16, 1973)

The leading Danish historian Hans Kirchhoff, wrote on the website of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (dated June 9, 2012) that without Duckwitz's contribution, the rescue would have failed.²³ Furthermore, the occupation regime in Denmark was extremely lenient in comparison to that in other occupied 'Germanic' countries, and therefore also remarkable. And also noteworthy was the treatment of, and return of, almost all of the Danish Jewish prisoners from the concentration camp Theresienstadt before Germany surrendered on May 9, 1945 (see fig: 11 and 23). In April 1945 they were transported to Denmark by Swedish Red Cross busses across

²³ Hans Kirchhoff, *Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz. Die Zeit in Dänemark*, Hrsg., Auswärtiges Amt, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit Inland (Berlijn 2004) op: www.auswaertiges-amt.de (zoekterm: Kirchhoff) passim.

the American and Russian front lines, passing the border on April 17.²⁴



Fig. 11: Swedish Red Cross busses, likely in the neighbourhood of Friedrichruh in the German province Schleswig-Holstein about 20 km to the north east of the Neuengamme concentration camp.

Source: unknown

²⁴ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 315-317.

Fig. 12: The Danish minister of Foreign Affairs, Erik Scavenius (left) and the Reichsbevollmächtigter Dr. Werner Best.



III. Prelude to the War Years

3.1 The history of the Danish Jews

The Jews in Copenhagen formed the main indigenous Jewish community in Denmark, having been there since the beginning of the seventeenth century. They were primarily from Portugal, Germany, and Poland. During the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, social, economic and political restrictions were increasingly removed, thus allowing this first group of immigrants, called ‘Viking Jews’ by the Danes, to integrate fully into Danish society. Anti-Semitism and violence towards Jews rarely occurred in Denmark.

The following quote illustrates the sense of surprise at the tolerance and friendly attitude of the Danes, and the integration of the Jews in Denmark in the nineteen-thirties:

[...] a conversation between a Jewish immigrant and his elderly father-in-law, who had come to visit him from Poland. The father-in-law had been shocked to see his grandchildren playing with Christian children and their mothers drinking coffee in her kitchen with Christian neighbours, and he could not understand the matter-of-fact manner in which these encounters were regarded. Finally, he had to get the mystery answered. “Gabriel,” he said to his stepson, are the Danes also Christians?” “Yes, father-in-law,” answered Gabriel, “the Danes are not only Christians, they’re real Christians.” “And so who are the others?” asked the stepfather. “The others that you’re thinking of, they’re goyim!”²⁵

In the early twentieth century there was also a flow of poor immigrants from Eastern Europe as a result of pogroms and other types of anti-Jewish violence. These immigrants, called ‘the Russians’ (*russerne*) by the Danes, also integrated quickly into Danish society. By the 1930’s, most of them had found better financial circumstances. Yet at the end of the nineteen-thirties, most Viking Jews were still of a more intellectual and higher social class; they were wealthier and more Danish oriented than the *russerne*. As we will see later, these social and economic differences had an effect on the rescue in October 1943.²⁶

²⁵ Andrew Buckser, *After the Rescue, Jewish identity and community in contemporary Denmark* (New York 2003) 242.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 44, 197.

3.2 Danish-German Relations

Beginning in the eighteenth century, the great difference in power between Germany and Denmark, and the struggle for the border areas, the old Dukedoms of Schleswig and Holstein, strongly determined the course of Danish politics in relation to Germany. During the German-Danish war of 1864, Denmark lost Schleswig entirely, resulting in 200,000 Danish families coming under German control. After the First World War, a reverse movement was set in motion. At the Paris Peace Conference, through the Treaty of July 5, 1920, the interests of the Danes were honored after long negotiations and a public vote, and North-Schleswig once more came under Danish administration. Seated on a white horse, King Christiaan X strode across the border into North-Schleswig, symbolically confirming the reunification with Denmark in legendary manner.²⁷



Fig.13: Christiaan X Source:
www.museum-sonderjylland.dk

²⁷ Therkel Straede, 'Dänemark. Die schwierige Erinnerung an Kollaboration und Widerstand', in Monika Flacke, Hrs, *Mythen der Nationen. 1945 –Arena der Erinnerungen* (Berlijn 1945) 138.

The German government in 1920 nevertheless appealed to the borders in the protocol of 1864. When Hitler tore up the 'Treaty of Versailles' in the spring of 1933, and occupied the demilitarized land of the Rhine in 1935, the fear of the Danes returned that North-Schleswig would be *Heim ins Reich*. Peter Munch, the minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, was pressured to ask Berlin to recognize the current border. Munch refused to do this in order to prevent tensions from rising.²⁸ Also disturbing was the loud and high-pitched public demands made by the German minority in North-Schleswig, in their plight to join Germany.²⁹

As a result of the raids that took place in Austria and Czechoslovakia, the Danish government became increasingly aware of its precarious situation. Thorvald Stauning, the social-democratic prime-minister, was unable to convince any other Scandinavian country to implement a common defense strategy. Considering the military relations and geographical location, they did not think Denmark would be capable of resisting the Germans in the event of a military conflict.³⁰ The British also declined Denmark's request for military support should the Germans invade. Winston Churchill, at that time still First Lord of the Admiralty (minister of Maritime Affairs), apparently responded in an interview with Scandinavian journalists on February 2, 1940: 'The others at least have some sort of canal across which the tiger can be fed, but Denmark is so fearfully close that it is impossible to provide help.'³¹

The situation strongly resembled the situation in 1863, just before the German-Danish war of 1864, when the Danes were also left with no allies. The Swedish king, Oscar I, had promised military support in the framework of Scandinavian unity. However, this support was withdrawn on December 15, 1863, when the Swedish government blocked the call by Oscar I to support the Danes with Swedish troops. Henry John Palmerstone, the British Prime Minister, also withdrew

²⁸ Steen Bo Frandsen, *Dänemark – 'Der kleine Nachbar im Norden'*. *Aspekte der deutsch-dänischen Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt 1994) 154.

²⁹ Erich Thomsen, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Dänemark 1940-1945* (Düsseldorf 1971) 102.

³⁰ Frandsen, *Dänemark*, 164.

³¹ Dähnhardt, Willy, e.a. (red.), *Exil in Dänemark. Deutschsprachige Wissenschaftler, Künstler und Schriftsteller im dänischen Exil nach 1933* (Heide, 1987). And: Susan Seymour, *Anglo-Danish Relations and Germany 1933-1945* (Odense 1982) 143.

his initial offer of support. In the 1930s, the Danes' memory of the invasion of the Prussians and Austrians on February 1, 1864, in Schleswig, was still fresh.³²

They probably wanted at all costs to avoid a conflict with the Germans, and increasingly employed a strategy of 'invisibility' in order to prevent any increase in tensions.³³ Then on April 15, 1939, when President Roosevelt also called upon the Germans to declare that they would not attack their small neighbours, Peter Munch immediately gave his assurance in a statement to Cecile Von Renthe-Fink, the German ambassador, that Denmark did not feel threatened by Germany (see fig. 14). On May 31, 1939, a pact of non-aggression was offered by Germany to the Scandinavian countries for a period of ten years. The Danes did not dare to refuse this, being the only Scandinavian country that had not signed the treaty.

³² Frandsen, *Dänemark*, 182.

³³ Frandsen, *Dänemark*, 155.



Fig. 14: Cecil von Renthe-Fink, the German ambassador to Denmark during the attack on April 9, 1940. In the early morning of April 9, Von Renthe-Fink had still threatened to bombard Copenhagen should the Danes not capitulate soon.

The Danish government did not mobilize the army and turned down all suggestions to summon the reservists, as this would likely have been seen as a provocation by the Germans. When the Russians attacked Finland in November, 1939, the Danish government realized that the Danes had much less chance of resisting an aggressor than the Finns. Munch even toyed with the idea of honoring the German demand for military bases, and allowing German troops to march through Denmark. Munch thought that this would not conflict the Danish policy of neutrality, since the Danes would have been forced to do this by the German superpower anyway.³⁴

³⁴ Ibid, 168-169.

3.3 The refugee problem

In Denmark, Christiaan X participated in a ceremony on April 12, 1933 to mark the centennial of the Jewish synagogue in Copenhagen. According to Leni Yahil, the author of the standard reference work on the rescue of the Danish Jews the presence of Christiaan X at the ceremony was a conscious symbolic act against the discrimination of the Jews in Nazi-Germany.³⁵ In Germany, in April of the same year, a boycott against Jewish doctors was proclaimed, and a law was passed that regulated the dismissal of Jewish employees and the removal of all Jewish businessmen from representative functions.³⁶ In Denmark however, according to Yahil, from the beginning of the Jewish persecution in Germany, the Danish population and its leaders - with their King in the lead - remained unconditionally on the side of their Jewish citizens.³⁷

In the course of the 1930s, there was an increased sense of public outrage in Denmark with regard to the anti-Semitism in Germany. This outrage reached its height after the *Reichskristallnacht*, the night of November 9, 1938. The Danish amendment in 1939, which, amongst other things, made it an offense to sow sentiments of hatred towards other religions, can be seen as the Danish response to these events. Yet despite the public outcry over the treatment of the German Jews, people in government circles were hesitant to admit Jews from Germany. Denmark, like most of Germany's neighbours, was challenged by a large refugee problem. The refugees streamed into the country in waves, synchronized with the stages of persecution in Germany. The first wave occurred after the *Berufsbeamtengesetz*, the racial legislation in April 1933.³⁸ The second came after the enactment of the *Nürnberger Gesetze* – the infamous Nuremberg racial laws of September 15, 1935, that Werner Best, who later became the *Reichsbevollmächtigter* in Denmark, had a large share in preparing.³⁹

³⁵ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 13-14.

³⁶ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler. Vergelding 1936-1945* (Utrecht 2000) 583.

³⁷ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 14.

³⁸ Wolfgang Benz, Hermann Graml, Hermann Weiss (red.), *Enzyklopädie des Nationalsozialismus* (München 1997) 488.

³⁹ Herbert, *Best*, 210.

The last stream of refugees occurred after the *Reichskristallnacht*. Shortly afterwards there was a large public meeting in Copenhagen on ‘Antisemitism and Culture’, in which all of the major political parties participated. It is perhaps no coincidence that John Christmas Møller, leader of the Conservative People’s Party, and later a staunch opponent of the Germans, warned the audience that Denmark was in no position to take 50,000 to 100,000 refugees.⁴⁰ This attitude was quite common, as can be seen in the Danish refugee policies that developed between 1933 and 1940.

The Danish Aliens Act of 1933 was initially very mild. And since there was no large refugee problem before 1933, there was no previous legislation in this area. German, Austrian and Czech nationals could enter Denmark without a Danish visa and stay for six months. During the 1930's, however this law was tightened. In the autumn of 1933, the number of refugees rose significantly, and the Danish Ministry of Justice adapted the Aliens Act in accordance therewith. Refugees could remain an additional six months if they made effort to obtain an entry visa to another country. Also, they were required to abstain from political activities and could work only after obtaining permission from the Ministry of Justice. Subsequently, these regulations were tightened even more sharply. From 1938 onwards, foreigners were required to register with the Police, and in September 1939 an entry visa was obligatory for all foreigners.⁴¹

At this point it became almost impossible for Jews to legally enter the country unless they could prove that they had had to leave Germany for political reasons, or that they had family in Denmark who could vouch for them financially. Many Jews tried to cross the border illegally. Because of the strict border surveillance, however, they often did not succeed and were subsequently sent back.⁴²

Many obstacles were placed in their way.⁴³ Residential permits were rejected

⁴⁰ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 16. Seymour, 186.

⁴¹ Dähnhardt, Willy, *Exil in Dänemark*, 30-31.

⁴² Vilhjalmsen Blüdnikow, ‘*Rescue*’, passim,

Vilhjalmsen Blüdnikow wrote that between 1940 and 1943 21 stateless Jews were handed down to Germany and died in concentration camps. A source was not mentioned.

⁴³ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 433, aldaar noot 38.

Willy Dähnhardt, e.a. (red.), *Exil in Dänemark. Deutschsprachige Wissenschaftler, Künstler und Schriftsteller im dänischen Exil nach 1933*, 44.

and legal work was forbidden, based upon the argument of the economic recession and the resulting large Danish unemployment.

Jewish refugees, having few resources of their own, received no financial support because they were not recognized as political refugees. They became dependent upon aid committees because they were not allowed to work.⁴⁴ The unwillingness of the Danish government to recognize Jewish refugees as political refugees was justified with the argument that the Nuremberg racial laws were ordinary civil laws. Therefore, according to Karl Kristian Vilhelm Steincke, the Social Democratic Minister of Justice, there was no legal or moral necessity to take Jewish refugees who wished to leave Germany for Denmark.⁴⁵

The real reasons were more likely the economic crisis and the fear of Germany. Neither the prevention of Jewish immigration nor the expulsion of Jewish refugees was perceived as a crime, however, something which was strongly criticized by historians Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjalmsson and Bent Blüdnikow in 2006.⁴⁶ According to some officials, the Danes had established rules of conduct after the war, which included the demand for capital punishment for anyone who had directly helped with the transport of Jews from Denmark to the extermination camps. According to Vilhjalmsson and Blüdnikow, however, not one official who had played a role in the deportation of Jews to Germany either before or during the occupation was ever indicted, let alone tried.⁴⁷

The precise number of failed attempts of German, Austrian and Czechoslovakian Jews to cross the border into Denmark is unknown. Yahil writes that the number of refugees who fled from these countries to Denmark was relatively low in comparison with the number of Jewish refugees who fled to the Netherlands, Great Britain and France.⁴⁸ Yahil displays an understanding for the harsh attitude of the Danish government, stating that it should be seen in light of the country's great economic problems and its high level of unemployment. In 1933, the unemployment

⁴⁴ Weiss, *Die Rettung der Juden*, 23-26.

⁴⁵ Willy Dähnhardt, e.a. (red.), *Exil in Dänemark*, 26.

⁴⁶ Vilhjalmsson en Blüdnikow, 'Rescue', passim,

⁴⁷ Vilhjalmsson en Blüdnikow, 'Rescue'.

⁴⁸ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 19.

rate was 33 percent of the total working population and this only got worse in subsequent years. The question, however, is whether this argument holds water from an internationally perspective, because unemployment in the Netherlands was also extremely high, and according to estimates there were between 25,000 and 33,000 Jewish refugees admitted to the Netherlands in 1938.⁴⁹ The historian Cecilia Felicia Stokholm Banke brings some nuance to the economic motive by suggesting that the real reason for the immigration policy might have been the wish of the Danish Social-Democrats to develop Denmark into what could later be called a welfare state. According to her, an important goal of this social planning was qualitatively better demographics and this would have been jeopardized by admitting foreign refugees. Thus the exclusion of refugees had little to do with anti-Semitism.⁵⁰ Of course it was impossible to predict in the 1930s that German anti-Semitism would lead to the Holocaust and that repatriation of Jewish refugees would in fact mean their death sentence.

But during the occupation of Denmark, Jews were expelled to Germany. In their article, Vilhjalmsson and Blüdnikow wonder whether Yahil would have taken such an uncritical point of view had these facts been known.⁵¹ Yet it is clear that the ‘ordinary’ Dane had no sympathy for the Nazi ideology as can also be seen by the few votes for the Danish Nazi Party, Danmark’s National-Socialistiske Arbejder Parti (DNSAP) led by Frits Clausen (see figs. 15 and 16). In March 1939, the DNSAP received only 2.1 percent (43,309) of the approximately 2 million votes cast at the MPs elections for the Danish Parliament.⁵²

⁴⁹ Jong, Dr. L. de, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*. Deel 12. Epiloog. Eerste helft (Leiden 1988) 114-128. Moore, Bob, *Refugees from Nazi Germany in the Netherlands, 1933-1940* (Dordrecht 1986) 22-23.

⁵⁰ Cecilia Felicia Stokholm Banke, *Welfare, Refugees and Rescue: Denmark and the Jewish Question from 1933 to 1945, Diis Working Paper no 2007/31* (Kopenhagen 2007) 5.

⁵¹ Vilhjalmsson en Blüdnikow, ‘Rescue’, passim,

⁵² Yahil, *The Rescue*, 86.

Fig. : 15 : Frits Clausen at one of his speeches:



Fig. 16: After the defeat of the Germans, the following was expressed to Frits Clausen in a cartoon: "Judas went off and hung himself, get lost now and do the same".



IV. The short Danish battle

4.1 The *Weserübung*

Despite the anti-aggression treaty and the Danish strategy of invisibility, at 5:15 on the morning of April 9, 1940, German troops moved into Denmark at various locations, headed by General Leonard Kaupisch.⁵³ The attack was part of the *Weserübung*, the battle plan that aimed to conquer Norway in order to secure the supply of iron ore from Narvik, Sweden. The Germans argued that Great Britain had begun to lay mine fields on the Norwegian coast and they expected a British invasion. In *Der Norden Sonderlehrgang*, a handbook for the German soldiers in Denmark, the following justification was given for the attack on Denmark:

The occupation of Norway and Denmark by the German Wehrmacht, prevented a British attack at the last minute and enabled an armed protection for these countries, resulting in so many German soldiers being led to foreign countries and to foreign conditions.⁵⁴

The Danish hope during the first months of 1940 of maintaining neutrality had proved to be an empty one. The German air force had already decided in February that Danish support bases were definitely needed for safeguarding the Norwegian iron ore routes.⁵⁵ Munch, the Danish minister of Foreign Affairs had considered agreeing to the demand for German support bases, but the support bases for the air force were included in the plan of attack and had already been approved by Hitler on February 29. It is likely that the Danes were aware of the impending attack. In early April, 1940, Hans Oster, an employee of Wilhelm Canaris and the chief of staff of the foreign secret service, the *Ausland/Abwehr*, of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, had passed the attack plans on to the Swedish and the Dutch embassies, who immediately passed the information on to the Danes.⁵⁶

The attack began on April 8, when a military convoy more than 50 km long, approached the Danish border at Jutland between Rendsburg and Flensburg, in order

⁵³ General der Flieger, Wehrmachtsbefehlshaber für Dänemark.

⁵⁴ *Der Norden Sonderlehrgang. Soldatenbriefe zur Berufsförderung*. Herausgegeben vom Oberkommando der Wehrmacht Abt.J/WU im Verbindung mit der Nordische Gesellschaft in der Reihe der Tornisterschriften (Breslau/Leipzig 1941) 57.

⁵⁵ Findeisen, *Dänemark*, 216.

⁵⁶ Frandsen, *Dänemark*, 176.

to, as it was said, prevent a possible landing of the British. Von Renthe-Fink had warned the Danish minister of Foreign Affairs that a British attack could also have consequences for Denmark,⁵⁷ but at the same time he requested the Danish government not to call up any reservists and conscripts 'so as not to alarm Berlin'.⁵⁸ (sic)

Nine thousand German soldiers crossed the border at North Schleswig (see figs. 17, 18, 19) and 900 landed on the coast of Zeeland. The German warship Hanzestad Danzig docked unhindered at 5:15 am along the wharf of the Danish capital, Copenhagen. Armored cars and German commandos on bicycles went from the harbor to the Royal Palace Amalienborg, where two Danish soldiers fell wounded in battle. At the sight of her two wounded guardsmen, Queen Margrethe was said to have begged her spouse, Christian X, to immediately cease the unequal struggle.⁵⁹ At 7:20 am, the Danish ceased their resistance after Von Renthe-Fink had threatened to bomb Copenhagen. The battle had lasted two hours and five minutes. Danish losses were estimated at 16 dead and 24 wounded.⁶⁰ German losses were likely large considering the number of German aircraft that were shot down and military vehicles destroyed.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Findeisen, *Dänemark*, 217.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Walter Hubatsch, *Die deutsche Besetzung von Dänemark und Norwegen 1940* (Göttingen, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main 1960) 142.

⁶⁰ Findeisen, *Dänemark*, 217.

⁶¹ See the website http://www.milhist.dk/besattelsen/9april/9_april_uk.htm for an overview of the battles on Funen, Jutland and Seeland. For footage of the occupation of Denmark on April 8, search for "occupation of Denmark" on Youtube.

Fig. 17 : German Junker 52 transport aircraft on the morning of April 9, 1940.



Fig. 18 : Danish soldiers at Abenraa shortly before the arrival of the German tanks.



Fig. 19 : It was over quickly. Now German tanks roll past the same location.



Source: http://www.milhist.dk/besattelsen/9april/9_april_dk.htm

4.2 Surrender and negotiations

When negotiating the surrender, Von Renthe-Fink had promised the Danes that they would retain their sovereignty. The King, the Parliament and the Government, the Police, the Judiciary, and even the army remained in service without the direct intervention of the Germans. Von Renthe-Fink was appointed as *Reichsbevollmächtigter*, the official diplomatic representative of Germany. The contact occurred at the level of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. This indirect governance, involving the assistance of only a few dozen German officials (a form that was called *Aufsichtsverwaltung*), was unique within occupied Europe.

Werner Best, who later became the *Reichsbevollmächtigter*, was actually the chief of staff in 1941 of the German commander in France. Based upon his experiences there, he had described how German governance would appear after an occupation. Werner Röhr cites Best's description *Aufsichtsverwaltung*:

Surveillance administration (*Aufsichtsverwaltung*) was executed by a staff of specialised civil servants. They were delegated from the Berlin Reich-ministries in order to control the collaborating administration. (In these cases, national sovereignty was formally respected although there could be no doubt that the National socialist rule was superior to indigenous decisions.)⁶²

Because the Germans did not have to govern the country at all levels, a few dozen officials and diplomats were sufficient. They renounced the monopoly of force, other than in military affairs, such as guarding the North Sea coastline. As a result, fewer troops were needed than would be in cases of true occupation, such as that in other European countries. Perhaps the Germans believed that their approach would work well in a country with a Nordic Culture, where citizens would feel an ideological affinity as Germanic people.

Sincere cooperation was expected from the Danish government, and this was the case until the autumn of 1943. The Social Democratic Prime Minister, Thorvald Stauning, had gathered together a sort of crisis cabinet immediately after the

⁶² Werner, Röhr, 'System oder organisiertes Chaos? Fragen einer Typologie der Deutschen Okkupationsregime', in: Robert Bohn (Hg), *Die deutsche Herrschaft in den 'germanischen' Ländern 1940-1945* (Stuttgart 1997) 14.

surrender, with representatives from all parties. He declared that the undamaged leadership of Denmark during this period could later bring repercussions that would cause Denmark to be spat upon.⁶³ Germany also wanted these ‘soft’ politics for the purpose of showing that they were prepared to undertake a mild occupation and take Danish interests into account. In the British press, however, people derisively called Denmark ‘Hitler’s canary’.

⁶³ Findeisen, *Dänemark*, 217.

V. The occupation

5.1 The economic exploitation

For the Germans, it was of crucial importance to maintain the uninterrupted export of Danish agricultural, industrial and shipbuilding products to Germany. In 1939, the Danish exported 23 percent of their agricultural produce to Germany. By 1941, this had risen to 75 percent, which was crucial to the overall need for agricultural produce in Germany.⁶⁴

‘In February 1940, the Statistisches Reichsamt had produced an extensive report on Denmark, page 60 of which reads: “The economic value of Denmark for the German Reich lies solely in its agricultural sector. Here, however, it is by all means enormous. The Danish export surplus of meat (including bacon), butter and eggs is sufficient to cover the German supply gap”.’⁶⁵

At the production level, Danes had to adapt the German wishes. For example, pig breeders that had been producing lean pork for the English now had to adapt to produce fat pork for the German market.

Because Danish industry was largely dependent on raw materials like coal and iron ore, and its supply of these materials from Britain stopped, Germany took this over.⁶⁶ Since 1930 both countries had an equilibrium in their import and export trade. After the invasion, Danish exports to Germany were much greater than their imports, and the Danish government funded the trade deficit by accepting “IOU’s” from Germany. The Danish government also funded the cost of the occupancy. This included the procurements of the German army and the salaries of the Danes in service of the Germans. Although this was in accordance with the Convention of The Hague of 1907 (the burden of occupation was to be borne by the occupied country), Denmark became financially drained: at the end of the war in October, 1944, it owed

⁶⁴ Herbert, Best, 327. Köller, Vera, *Der deutsche Imperialismus und Dänemark 1933-1945 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der faschistischen Wirtschaftspolitik*, Diss. Phil.(Berlijn 1966) 10.

⁶⁵ Quoted from : Futselaar, Ralf Duurt, *Lard, lice, and longevity. A comparative study of the standard of living in occupied Denmark and the Netherlands, 1940-1945*. Academisch Proefschrift (Groningen 2007) 35.

⁶⁶ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 57.

Germany 6.5 billion Kroner or 2.53 billion Reichsmarks.⁶⁷ This important contribution to the German economy provided the Danish with the opportunity to ask the Germans to take their interests into account.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Herbert, *Best*, 397.

⁶⁸ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 59.

5.2 Denmark as fraternal Germanic country

According to the ideology of the Nazis, Denmark was a fraternal ‘Germanic’ country. However, the Nazis had no idea how things were meant to progress after the German victory, including whether Denmark would become part of a large Germanic empire. There was, as yet, no post war plan for a Europe dominated by Germany. Yet the ‘Germanic’ idea substantially influenced their occupation policy.⁶⁹ The union of Germany and the Scandinavian countries was extensively discussed and emphasized in the soldier’s handbook for Denmark.

In 1921 in Lübeck the *nordische Gesellschaft* (Nordic Society) was founded, an organization to enhance the cultural and trade exchange between Lübeck and the countries of the Baltic Sea region⁷⁰:

In the context of the Führer (Adolf Hitler) announcing a restructuring of Europe under the leadership of the Axis (Germany, Italy and Japan), the "Nordic blood and soil idea" as common Scandinavian future obtained significant meaning.⁷¹

The German commander Leonhard Kaupisch, along with Von Renthe-Fink, also addressed the German troops with the following recommendations:

Every German must be aware that he is in a befriended and not hostile country, and that the German army’s role is to protect the Kingdom of Denmark. But every German in Denmark should always be fully aware that he, too, represents the German empire and that Germany is assessed due to his attitude. Everything which may offend the national honor of the Danes should be omitted. The Danish women should be addressed with respect. Political conflicts must also be avoided, and also any unnecessary sharpness and paternalism. Be cautious in conversation! Knowledge of the German language is very common.⁷²

This attitude was partly related to the Nazi ideology of *die nordische Rasse* that was embodied in their hypothesis that in Northern Europe, a Germanic people had developed. This Germanic race was to be protected against the danger of mixing with the Jewish ‘opposing race’. That the majority of the Danes did not share such a view

⁶⁹ Herbert, *Best*, 327.

⁷⁰ Hans-Jürgen Luthhöft, *Der Nordische Gedanke in Deutschland 1920-1940* (Stuttgart 1971) 55.

⁷¹ *Der Nordenlehrgang*, 56.

⁷² Meissner, *Dänemark unterm Hakenkreuz*, 47.

is illustrated the demise of the *nordische Gesellschaft*. In the eyes of the Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg, head of the foreign office of the NSDAP, this organization was extremely effective in gaining influence within the Scandinavian countries. In 1934, as part of the *Gleichschaltung* - the acquisition of all civil organizations by the Nazis - the old board was replaced, and on recommendation of Rosenberg, a majority of Nazis were appointed to the board.⁷³ That some non-Nazis were allowed to remain was solely to prevent the organization from being regarded as a German propaganda machine.

The takeover of the organization was complete once the leading German racial theorist, Professor Hans Günther (who was nicknamed *Racial Günther*), joined.⁷⁴ By very careful strategic maneuvering, Rosenberg thought he could convince the Scandinavians of the great Germanic vision for the future. That this was not likely to be successful in Denmark was already apparent from the declining presence of writers and musicians at the Nordic meetings before the occupation in 1940. Several prominent Danes, such as Johannes Jensen, who was the Nobel prize winner for literature in 1944, did not want their names to be connected with the goals of the organization any longer.

But the German diplomatic service was also distrustful of Rosenberg's activities, regarding him as a nuisance in their relations with the Scandinavian countries. Foreign Affairs wrote in its report on the meeting in Lübeck in the summer of 1936 that the *nordische Gesellschaft* was viewed by the Danes with much distrust and with little sympathy. The idea of a German kinship was far removed from the Scandinavians, and the German's attraction to this idea met with much misunderstanding and rejection in Scandinavia.⁷⁵ Increasingly, the Scandinavians believed that Germany would strive for dominance in the field of culture and commerce. In the winter of 1944, the Germans realized that *nordische Gedanke* had completely failed. The office was closed ostensibly because there were too few

⁷³ Benz, Wolfgang, Hermann Graml, Hermann Weiss Hrsg., *Enzyklopädie des Nationalsozialismus* (München 1997) 490.

⁷⁴ Ernst Klee, Ernst, *Das Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich, Wer war was vor und nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005) 208.

⁷⁵ Hans-Jürgen Luthöft, *Der Nordische Gedanke in Deutschland 1920-1940* (Stuttgart 1971) 351.

activities to justify its existence in wartime. It was clear: the Danish cultural and intellectual elite would not have anything to do with it.

5.3 The 'Jewish question'

In the background, the issue of the Danish Jews continuously played a role in the relationship between the Germans and the Danish government. During the first years of the occupation there were regular attempts made within Nazi circles to bring the Jewish question onto the agenda. This happened within the German institutions themselves, without the Danes knowing about it, but it also occurred overtly through requests to the Danish government to take measures to restrict the Jews, for example in the form of imposing *Berufsverbote* (Official edicts that prohibit individuals, or groups of people identified by certain characteristics, from practising a particular occupation).

It was mainly Martin Luther and Franz Rademacher of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who together with the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* led the way in making a start with *de Lösung der Judenfrage*.⁷⁶ Luther had a report prepared in July 1942 in which he outlined the dangers of the Jewish presence in Denmark. The Danish economy would become controlled by the Jews and the leading Communist circles would consist mainly of Jewish East-European workers. In fact very few Jews were active Communist party leaders.⁷⁷ In August 1942, Von Renthe-Fink demanded that the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Erik Scavenius, see to it that all Jews be removed from senior positions. After Scavenius refused, arguing that his position, and therefore that of the government, would be in jeopardy since the Danes would never accept this, von Renthe-Fink dropped his demand. In September 1942 von Renthe-Fink proposed to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs that only Danish firms who had laid off their Jewish employees, be supplied with needed resources. This proposal also was not carried out. Von Renthe-Fink did, however, delay for an

⁷⁶ Martin Luther appointed by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to encourage dependent governments to extradite Jews.

Franz Rademacher lead the department Referat D III or Judenreferat of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁷⁷ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 444, there footnote 95.

entire year the request that Rademachers made in July, 1940 to compose a report about the number of Jews who held important positions in Danish society. He claimed that research into this question was difficult because of a lack of publications and statistics.

It is doubtful that Von Renthe-Fink's fear of taking drastic actions against the Jews was an indication that he liked the Jews. His continuous pressure on the Danish government to take measures against the Jews was probably an opportunity to advance the German *Bühne* (for the theater; only for show). It wasn't hate for the Jews that drove Von Renthe-Fink, he probably wanted to maintain the perception that the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs was busy persecuting Jews. When Paul Kanstein, who was Best's closest collaborator, discussed the Jewish issue with Himmler in September 1942, the latter accepted that there would be no actions taken against the Jews. Himmler probably thought that this would prevent strikes that might jeopardize the Danish export of agricultural produce to Germany.⁷⁸

Although the lenient treatment of the Danes can also be attributed to the German racial ideology and propaganda, the factors that were decisive were mainly the protection of exports and the greater financial, personal and military advantages of *Aufsichtsverwaltung*. The argument regularly addressed at the negotiating table was the fear of jeopardizing Danish agricultural exports to Germany. Every time that the Germans threatened to take action against the Jews, the Danish people would subtly hint that such measures would lead to large strikes which would threaten exports.⁷⁹ Denmark was a major supplier to Germany of high quality agricultural products such as meat and butter. It's plausible that no German wanted to be accused later of having endangered this supply.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid, 72. Paul Kanstein, SS-Brigadeführer (Generalmajor) was 'Leiter der Verwaltung und Innenpolitik beim Reichsbevollmächtigten in Dänemark' and the key employee from von Renthe-Fink and Best.

⁷⁹ Herbert, *Best*, 333.

⁸⁰ Futselaar, *Lard, lice, and longevity*, 35.

5.4 Danes resist the anti-Jewish measures

In the first years of the occupation there were dozens of open protests against potential anti-Jewish measures. The protestant theologian Hal Koch, professor of church history, gave well-attended lectures throughout Denmark in which he called upon everyone to protect the Jews should the Germans in Denmark begin to persecute them.⁸¹ The Dane Christmas Møller was actively involved in British propaganda directed towards Denmark, giving speeches on London radio. Møller had been the Danish Minister of Trade until 1940, but after the invasion he was relieved of his post due to pressure by the Germans. He fled to Great Britain in May 1942. The fire bombing of the Copenhagen synagogue by Nazi supporters in 1941 was also a warning message. In short, the government, the populace and the Danish Jews had now been warned.⁸²

The Danish Nazis continuously published articles in the anti-Semitic journal *Kamptegnet*, the Danish equivalent of *Der Stürmer*, in which, for example, they portrayed Hal Koch as a Jewish lackey. In the Daell-Wassermann case, the director of a Copenhagen department store of the same name, Peter M. Daell, was accused by *Kamptegnet* of having an intimate relationship with his Jewish secretary, Ella Wassermann. Daell was involved in the opposition to the Danish participation in the fight against the Russians in Finland. Ella Wassermann was accused of using 'Jewish methods' to ensure that Daell would use his influence to torpedo any participation in the war in Finland. This anti-Semitic publication led to the imprisonment and fining of two of its editors in early 1942, their sentences even being increased in 1943 when they filed an appeal.⁸³ The Danish legal system still worked. Although Von Renthe-Fink, and later Werner Best, effectively 'muzzled' the Danish Nazis, probably for their own opportunistic motives, the Danes did not allow themselves to be lulled to sleep. Through their policy of negotiation, *Forhandlings-politiken*, also called a policy of cooperation, *Samarbejdspolitik*, in September 1943 there was still no real

⁸¹ Hal Koch co-Founder of the Danish youth organisation, Danske Ungdomssamvirk, that was communication channel for politically sensitive cases that not could done in the media..

⁸² Yahil, *The Rescue*, 38.

⁸³ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 94-96. Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 82-87. Formal participation could not be required from Denmark given their appointments in the Anti-Kominternpact.

threat. Some critical Danish historians called it a *Kolaborationspolitik*. An unexpected incident however, brought an end to the hitherto stable situation.

5.5 The appointment of *Reichsbevollmächtigter* Werner Best

Towards the end of 1942, Von Renthe-Fink was replaced by Werner Best as the *Reichsbevollmächtigter*. For years, Best had been the second in command under Reinhard Heydrich in the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*. He thus worked on the preparations in July 1939, to deploy the *Einsatzkommandos* in Poland after the German invasion.⁸⁴

Between August 1940 and June 1942, he worked in the Wehrmachtstaf in France, and played a significant role in the persecution of French Jews. When the German government was faced with attacks by the French resistance, such as those on the German marine Moser and the German petty officer Schölz in the Paris metro on August 21, 1941, no one knew how the German authorities would react. In the first instance, their response was withheld because they were reluctant to disturb the hitherto peaceful situation. But under pressure from Hitler, when the attacks persisted, 98 hostages were eventually executed.⁸⁵

Best was a great opponent of this type of *Sühnemassnahmen* and later ensured that, instead of taking hostages, they would transport French Jews to the extermination camps in 'the East'. These measures would provoke less resistance than shooting hostages. And above all, this would meet the demand for *Sühnemassnahmen* from Berlin and the Wehrmacht in France. On March 24, 1942, 1.112 Jews were deported to Auschwitz from the transit camp at Compiègne. This was the prelude to a further systematic deportation of Jews from France.⁸⁶ In the summer of 1942, Best was called back to Berlin where he had worked for several months at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, before being appointed in Denmark.

The replacement of Von Renthe-Fink by Werner Best had a curious cause. The Danish king had, in previous years, always replied with a brief answer to Hitler's

⁸⁴ Herbert, *Best*, 238.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 299, 302.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 312.

congratulatory telegram on his birthday with ‘*Spreche meinen besten Dank aus. Christian R*’. (Thank you very much). This time, however, an unexpected reaction to this reply came from Berlin. On September 29, 1942, by order of Hitler, Von Renthe-Fink presented himself to Scavenius at the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He declared that a congratulatory message from *der Führer des grossdeutschen Reiches* was a special honor for a King of Denmark, and that a simple acknowledgement would not suffice with a simple acknowledgement. Hitler would receive this as an insult, and would *not be amused*. It would be seen as ‘one drop too many in an overly full bucket’.⁸⁷

But it’s more likely that this telegram was used as a means to act against the Danes, and that the cause of Hitler’s displeasure lay elsewhere. The flight of Christmas Møller to Great Britain and his anti-German broadcasts on the BBC had been a prior thorn in his side.⁸⁸ But he also suspected that the Danish King had given his consent to the independent action of the Danish ambassador Henrik Kaufmann in the United States-Greenland question.⁸⁹ At that particular moment, Joachim von Ribbentrop was hunting in Slovakia and could not exert any influence on Hitler’s decision. Hitler rejected the Danish ambassador in Berlin and summoned Von Renthe-Fink and the German commander General Erich Lüdke back to Germany. Lüdke had, like his predecessor Generaal Kaupisch, shown moderation and restraint in political matters.⁹⁰ Hitler immediately appointed a new commander in Denmark: General Hermann von Hanneken, who was known for his hard line and his absolute obedience. Von Hanneken was ordered to regard Denmark from that point forward as a hostile country (see fig.20).⁹¹

⁸⁷ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 110-111.

⁸⁸ Steen Bo Frandsen, *Dänemark – ‘Der kleine Nachbar im Norden’*, *Aspecte der Deutsch-Dänischen Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt 1994) 181, 183.
Seymour, Susan, *Anglo-Danish Relations and Germany 1933-1945* (Odense 1982) 186.

⁸⁹ Henrik Kauffman, ambassadeur in de VS had zich vanaf het begin van de bezetting beschouwd als de vertegenwoordiger van het Deense volk en koning en had zonder opdracht van de Deense regering gehandeld, die hij beschouwde als marionetten van de Duitsers. Het Groenlandverdrag hield in dat, daar de Denen niet meer konden voorkomen dat ook Groenland door Duitsland zou worden ingenomen, de Amerikanen dit zou bezetten. Kauffman ondertekende dit verdrag en handelde dus zonder toestemming van de Deense regering.

⁹⁰ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 112.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Fig. 20: General Hermann von Hanneken, 1890-1983



Danish democracy was to be abolished. Denmark was to become a province of Germany, and a puppet regime was to be established under the leadership of the Danish Nazi party, the DNSAP. These changes were to be carried out without jeopardizing Danish exports.

This contradiction set the tone for negotiations. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs had become alert to the change in policy through the mandate to Von Hanneken, and managed to reverse the situation with much difficulty through the course of October. Yet again, the threat to agricultural exports was especially

decisive, alongside arguments that the oppressive policy would cause strikes and riots, and above all, that the DNSAP was not yet ready to take part in the government.

As mentioned above, Best had made proposals for various forms of the *Okkupationsverwaltung* and for how Europe would look under future German governance. In this context, in the summer of 1941, while in Copenhagen, he had studied the situation in Denmark. His views and interests were consistent with those of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and furthermore he was an SS man, who could represent SS interests in Denmark. He was therefore a good candidate for both German superpowers, the SS and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On October 27, 1943, Werner Best and Von Renthe-Fink were called upon to appear in the *Führerhauptquartier* in Winnitza in Ukraine. Hitler thanked Von Renthe-Fink for his work and said that it was not his fault that he was being replaced, but that action had to be taken because of the misconduct of the Danes and their King. Werner Best then received the appointment of *Reichsbevollmächtigter*.⁹²

At first it seemed that through the appointment of Best would bring a tougher stance from the Germans, as he held a high rank in the SS, and considering his work in France and in the *Gestapo*,⁹³ he could be seen as a hardliner.⁹⁴ His orders from Hitler were to form a Danish government that was more pro-German, and in which the DNSAP could partake.

Thus it seemed that the lenient treatment of the Danes under Von Renthe-Fink had come to an end. But in fact, Best continued the same policies as Von Renthe-Fink, and also objected to possible actions against the Jews. On April 24, 1943, Best issued a statement to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which he emphasized the risk that the entire Danish government would resign should measures

⁹² Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 119.

⁹³ Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt.

⁹⁴ The Danes were not aware at that time of Werner Best's involvement in the persecution of the Polish and French Jews. Best had the rank of SS-Obergruppenführer, similar to the rank of General in the German army.

Wildt, Michael, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg 2003) 422, 603.

Herbert, *Best*, 234-240.

be taken against the Jews.⁹⁵ He threatened that he'd have to govern Denmark as Reich Commissioner, just as in Norway, where Josef Terboven, the former Gauleiter and President of the Prussian Rhine province, was appointed directly by Hitler. Von Ribbentrop succumbed, probably fearing that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would lose its power in Denmark.

An event which greatly contributed to the solidarity of the Danes themselves was the 90% turnout for the parliamentary elections of March 23, 1943. In flagrant contradiction to the orders of Hitler Best allowed the elections, scheduled by the Danish government, to proceed. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in agreement with this, for propaganda reasons. Considering the large military losses on the Eastern Front, German foreign policy needed a small success. In the context of 'Europa gegen den Bolschewismus' (Europe against Bolshevism), the free elections came at the right time. The elections could demonstrate how much leeway was given to a country occupied by the Germans if it strode together under German leadership against Bolshevism.⁹⁶

The five coalition parties, however mainly viewed the elections as a victory over the Germans and as an affirmation of faith in the Danish nation and in the future.⁹⁷ The DNSAP was wiped out. It received only 2 percent (43,000) of the total votes cast.

⁹⁵ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 179.

⁹⁶ Herbert, *Best*, 340.

On November 25, 1941 Denmark joined the (sic) Anti-Comintern Pact, although with the restrictive clause that there would not be any participation in military operations outside Denmark.

⁹⁷ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 121.

5.6 The tensions rise

On April 19, 1943, Von Ribbentrop gave Best the order to investigate how many positions of importance were held by Jews. He was also to investigate which possible measures could be taken against the Jews. This was to happen without causing difficulties with the Danish government and the Danes.⁹⁸ Best already delivered his comprehensive reply on April 24, 1943. He emphasized that the presence of the Jews was negligibly small, both in number and in key positions. It would therefore not be useful to take any direct measures, and these would not be in proportion to the potentially large negative effects. Furthermore, he was of the opinion that the Germans know exactly where the Jews live, and that the timing for anti-Jewish measures was not yet ripe. That Best could act in this way was primarily due to the backing of Himmler, who he still kept up to date on the situation in Copenhagen, sometimes with disregard to Von Ribbentrop.

This also shows how complicated the power games played within the Nazi leadership were. Himmler endorsed Best's policy and wrote in January 1943 that the protective policy of the Danes in relation to the Jews would have to be tolerated. Because, as soon as Germany had won the war, which he did not doubt, he would win the Germanic people to the side of Germany.⁹⁹ While Best sent rosy reports to Berlin, and emphasized once more that he was governing Denmark with only 215 German officials, in the spring of 1943 the Danes allowed their cautious stance to loosen more and more.¹⁰⁰ The Danes were well informed of the all but certain defeat of the Germans via Swedish and British radio. The hostile attitude of the Danes towards the Germans became more intense, and the attacks by the resistance, agents of sabotage who were dropped and supported by the British, increased. But even then, Himmler continued to support Best, sending positive reports about the security situation to Hitler.¹⁰¹

Through the increase in British bombing on Danish factories which were engaged in production for the Germans, the Danes became aware that they were

⁹⁸ Ibid, 79-80.

⁹⁹ Herbert, *Best*. 337. Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 131.

¹⁰⁰ Herbert, *Best*. 341.

¹⁰¹ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 131.

being viewed as the enemy by the allies. The underground press therefore called upon them to show that they were also enemies of Germany, in order to prevent further bombing.¹⁰² Danish politicians and the King urged in vain that the population and the resistance maintain peace and order in the country, in order to prevent a similar situation as had arisen in Norway.

Initially, the Norwegian government was also asked to cooperate after the attack on April 9, 1940, and to comply with the German occupation. But while Von Rente-Fink had success in Denmark, Curt Bräuer, the German diplomatic representative in Norway, did not succeed in convincing the Norwegians. The Norwegians fought on, and capitulated only on June 10, 1940. After King Haakom VII, the younger brother of the Danish King Christian X, fled to Britain on June 7, 1940, the Norwegian government appointed the Gauleiter Josef Terboven as the *Reichskommissar* to Germany. Terboven had all power and there was a dense network of German police and SS units across Norway.¹⁰³ The Jewish population there consisted of an estimated 1400 Norwegian Jews and 600 Jewish refugees.¹⁰⁴ In November 1942, 40 percent (760) of the roughly two thousand Jews living in Norway were deported to Germany. The transport of the Norwegian Jews went via the harbor of Copenhagen, and this did not escape the notice of the Danes.

What also contributed to escalating tensions in the Summer of 1943, was that the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) (the high command of the armed forces) was taking a possible British invasion into account.¹⁰⁵ Von Hanneken was afraid that the Danish army, which was still armed and intact, might at some point attack from the rear during an allied invasion. He threatened to disarm and intern the Danish army. The Danish Minister of Justice, Thune Jacobson hastily guaranteed Best that an attack to their back would go against the honor of the Danish army.¹⁰⁶ Best

¹⁰² Herbert, *Best*, 343.

¹⁰³ Robert Bohn, 'Die Instrumentarien der deutschen Herrschaft im Reichskommissariat Norwegen', in: Robert Bohn (Hg), *Die deutsche Herrschaft in den 'germanischen' Ländern 1940-1945* (Stuttgart 1997) 108.

¹⁰⁴ Mendelsohn, Oskar, 'Norwegen', in: Benz, Wolfgang, Hrsg., *Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (München 1991) 16,187.

¹⁰⁵ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 156.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 157.

quickly reassured the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and they in turn informed the OKW. A potential internment of the Danish army was thereby averted. Von Hanneken, who was repeatedly rebuffed by the OKW whenever he wanted to act more vigorously towards the Danes, complained about Best: ‘...every time he would take sharp measures against the Danes, the internal administration would intervene and shit in their pants’.¹⁰⁷

5.7 August escalation 1943

The *Aufsichtsverwaltung* came to an end in August 1943. There were major strikes and riots in Odense (see fig.21, 22), riots and sabotage in Esbjerg, and the lynching of the German officer Lieutenant Wieseler in Odense, which ignited tensions further.¹⁰⁸ On August 21, Von Hanneken placed the troops on high alert because he feared that an invasion was imminent.¹⁰⁹ Best convinced the Danish government to warn the population of adverse effects should the unrest continue. However, matters continued to escalate, and just as with his angry reaction to the birthday telegram of September 1942, Hitler now ensured the acceleration.

¹⁰⁷ Meissner, *Dänemark unterm Hakenkreuz*, 315.

¹⁰⁸ Thomsen mentions that Wieseler was passing by and a crowd of 400 to 500 demonstrators attacked and nearly lynched him. On the website of the city of Odense is written that in advance Wieseler had shot on the crowd.

Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 158.

¹⁰⁹ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 156. De veiligheidsdienst van het leger had nu 22-23 augustus aangegeven als een mogelijke datum.

Fig. 21 : The *Aufsichtsverwaltung* came to an end in August 1943. Below photos show the rioting in Odense.



Fig. 22 : It was the Danish police that brought an end to the rioting, not the German troops:



Source: <http://www.odense1940-45.dk/side12.html>

On August 21, *Oberleutnant* Walter Frenz, Hitler's cameraman and photographer, was at the Führer's headquarters in East Prussia, '*die Wolfsschanze*', to report on his photo reconnaissance on the coastal defense of Western Denmark.¹¹⁰ Since it was his birthday, he was seated next to Hitler during dinner. Hitler questioned him about the situation in Denmark. Frenz described it in a dramatically negative light. He had not found good examples of fortification. Using military jargon, he described that there was no question of a *Schlagsahnefront*. Far from it, in fact - it was noteworthy that the hotel in which he had resided had been destroyed by an act of sabotage.¹¹¹

On August 24, Werner Best was summoned to the *Wolfsschanz*. However, Hitler ignored him and did not want to receive him. He was received by Von Ribbentrop with the words: '*Der Führer ist rasend*' (the Führer is furious), and he received mostly blame regarding the rosy reports he had been delivering.¹¹² He made an attempt to defend his policies, but Hitler had already decided, and Best returned to Copenhagen as a fallen and humiliated man, resentful of the powers that had destroyed his *Musterprotektorat*.¹¹³

Berlin now demanded from the Danes that all riots stop, and that the government establish martial law, with special tribunals and the introduction of the death penalty. But these demands were unanimously rejected by all political parties and the government. Just as with the telegram incident with Christian X, Hitler intervened, and in the morning of August 29, 1943, Von Hanneken announced that a state of emergency was declared, which would last until October 6.

¹¹⁰ The remains of the 'Wolfsschanze' lie in Ketrzyn, a village in Poland, about 150 km east of Gdańsk, close to the border with Russia. Back then it was called Rastenburg and it was in East Prussia.

¹¹¹ Meissner, *Dänemark unterm Hakenkreuz*, 325. Ook: Gunnar S. Paulsson, 'The "Bridge over the Øresund": The Historiography on the Expulsion of the Jews from Nazi-Occupied Denmark', in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30 (1995) 431-464, there 445-446.

¹¹² Herbert, *Best*, 352.

¹¹³ Petrick, Fritz, 'Dänemark, das "Musterprotektorat?"', in: Robert Bohn (Hg), *Die deutsche Herrschaft in den 'germanischen' Ländern 1940-1945* (Stuttgart 1997) 111.

5.8 Operation Safari

In 1943 posters declaring a state of emergency by the Germans were hung everywhere in Copenhagen.¹¹⁴ Under the name ‘Operation Safari’, which had been prepared in top secret, the Danish army and navy were disarmed and remanded to barracks. Skirmishes broke out at several barracks in Copenhagen, and in cities on Funen and Seeland. In the harbor of Copenhagen the marine resistance sunk many Danish naval war ships and some Danish ships escaped to Sweden. The Germans occupied two royal palaces, many important buildings and businesses, and disarmed the Danish police. Werner Best demanded, amongst other things, that the government support such measures as the death penalty in cases of gun ownership. However, on September 6 the Danish government rejected all responsibility for governance, and from that moment onwards they had no further involvement with the board. The ministries did pledge however to continue to defend the regulating business and maintaining trade, with Nils Svenningsen, the Secretary-General of Foreign Affairs in charge.

The Danish judiciary was left untouched, and the police were able to continue in their duties, although unarmed. So one could still say there was a limited *Aufsichtsverwaltung*. Best had four hundred important politicians and intellectuals arrested, including Hal Koch, and some prominent Jewish clergy, such as the Chief Rabbi, Max Friedriger.¹¹⁵ Also, the business industry were informed that they could no longer refuse the orders of the German army. The *Wehrmacht* proposed state law for espionage and for helping prospective saboteurs. Through instating an evening curfew, gun fights, raids, and the massive presence of the *Wehrmacht* in the streets, the Danes and also the Jewish community could no longer be unaware that the peace was over. The threat that the Germans would undertake action against the Jews had now become real, and could no longer be ignored.

On August 31 it became even more serious. Three armed Germans raided the office of the Jewish lawyer Carl Bertel Henriques and took a number of documents

¹¹⁴ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 167.

¹¹⁵ Friedriger was later deported to Theresienstadt, where he remained imprisoned until April 1945. He survived the war

which had to do with the members of the synagogue in Copenhagen.¹¹⁶ On September 17 there was another raid on the synagogue when German police troops seized almost all administrative documents about the Jewish community. These actions resulted in some Jewish families leaving the city to escape the expected raids. Others already fled to Sweden via the Sont. When the raids initially failed to materialize, some returned in the course of September. However, in German circles there was no question of not enforcing the new policies.

¹¹⁶ The Danish war criminal Søren Kam would have participated in the robbery. Interviews with the BBC on 09/01/2008: http://www.bbc.co.uk/search/?q=søren%20kam&search_form=in-page-search-form

5.9 The telegram of Werner Best and its consequences

On September 8, 1943, Werner Best had sent a telegram to the German ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin, in which he requested permission to take action against the Jews:

“Cable (Encrypted) Copenhagen, September 8, 1943, at 13:10 hours Received: September 8, 1943, at 14:25 hours No. 1032 of September 8. Extremely Urgent

I request that the following information be passed on to the Foreign Minister:

With reference to your telegram No. 537 of 4/19/43 and my report of 4/24/43-II C 102/43 - I hereby beg, in light of the new situation, to report on the Jewish problem in Denmark as follows: In accordance with the consistent application of the new policy in Denmark, it is my opinion that measures should now be taken toward a solution of the problems of the Jews and the Freemasons. The necessary steps should be taken as long as the present state of emergency exists, for afterward they will be liable to cause reaction in the country, which in turn may lead to a reimposition of a general state of emergency under conditions which will presumably be less convenient than those of today. In particular, as I have been informed from many sources, the constitutional government - should it exist - would resign. The King and the Rigsdag would also cease their participation in government of the country. It may be assumed, moreover, that in such an event a general strike would break out, for the trade unions would cease their activities and their restraining influence on the workers would be removed. If measures are taken during the present state of emergency, it may be that the formation of a legally constituted government will be rendered impossible and it will be necessary to set up an administrative council under my leadership. I would then have to legislate by means of decree. In order to arrest and deport some 6,000 Jews (including women and children) at one sweep it is necessary to have the police forces I requested in my telegram No. 1001 of 9/1. Almost all of them should be put to work in Greater Copenhagen where the majority of the local Jews live. Supplementary forces should be provided by the German

Military Commander in Denmark. For the transportation, ships must be considered a prime necessity and should be ordered in time. As regards the Freemasons, a possible solution is the formal closure of all their lodges (to which all the leading personalities of the country belong) and the temporary arrest of the most prominent Freemasons and confiscation of lodge property. To this end strong operational forces are also necessary. I beg to request a decision as to the steps I should take or what I have to prepare in connection with the Jewish and Freemason problems.”¹¹⁷

It would be better to implement this operation during the state of emergency; matters were indeed already on edge now. In the prosecution after the war, Best managed to appear less responsible by stating that his telegram was in fact an attempt to prevent the operation. He said that the telegram was foremost a warning for the, in his view, unavoidably serious consequences in political and economic areas if the Jews were persecuted. There would be an end to the *Lieferungsfreudigkeit* of the Danes, and to his *Aufsichtsverwaltung*. The core of Best’s defense was that he was aware that Hitler had already decided to deal with the Jews during the state of emergency. He had apparent received a telephone call from Berlin on the evening of September 7, from an official of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This person had informed him that Hitler had decided, based on Himmler’s proposal, September 6, to undertake the deportation of the Danish Jews. It has never become clear who this official was. Best named two officials of Foreign Affairs, one of whom might have been his informer. Later, this defense was criticized by the German historian Ulrich Herbert, based upon three arguments. According to Herbert there has never been one even indirect source found who could support Best’s statement that Hitler had already decided to deport the Danish Jews, nor has there been any evidence for the telephone call on September 7.¹¹⁸ Nor can one rely on the postwar statements of German officials because they either directly or indirectly played a part in the *Judenaktion*. Also apparant is that, according to Herbert, if you research the stream of information thoroughly, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs could never have

¹¹⁷ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 138-139.

¹¹⁸ Herbert, *Best*, 363.

been informed before September 17 of Hitler's decision regarding the *Judenaktion*. And thirdly, Herbert states that the text of the telegram cannot be interpreted as a warning of the consequences should action be taken, but rather as a warning for it *not* being taken.

Whatever the background, on September 18 Hitler decided that the operation would proceed. In the harbor of Copenhagen, the ships *Wartheland* and *Friedland* were docked and ready to transport the expected 7,000 Jews. About 1,800 police and security troops arrived to carry out the mission.

The struggle for power between Best and Von Hanneken once again was a disturbing factor. While Best wanted the Jewish operation to take place during the state of emergency in order to impress upon the Danes that the *Wehrmacht* was the evil genius behind this operation, Von Hanneken wished to prevent this precisely by delaying it. He rejected participating in the raids by arguing, while other things, that his existing troops, partially formed with young recruits, would not be able to cope. The head of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, Wilhelm Keitel, however decided that he should cooperate, and Von Hanneken backed down. However, he delayed his cooperation by not enforcing the decree of Best that Jews should report to the *Wehrmacht* for work, and by delaying until October 2 the sending of a single platoon to the harbor.

The German Navy also didn't favor participation. The German port commander Richard Cammann sent his speedy patrol boats in for repairs, and thereafter announced that they were not usable, and further behaved completely passive during the operation.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 184. Meissner. *Dänemark unterm Hakenkreuz*, 341.

Cammann would have done this after a request from Duckwitz, according to Thomsen, a friend from his time in Hamburg.

As mentioned, in September an extra reinforcement of 1,800 men had arrived in Copenhagen at the request of Best. The 1,500 police agents were under the charge of *Generalmajor der Polizei* and *SS-Brigadeführer* Erik von Heimburg. *Standartenführer* Rudolf Mildner, the head of the *Gestapo* in Copenhagen, led a 300 man security force (see fig.23).¹²⁰ By the end of September, they had received direct orders from Hitler to carry out the deportations.

¹²⁰ Unterscharführer Pery Broad testified in a hearing in British captivity that Rudolf Mildner, between 1941 and 1943 chief of the political department of the Gestapo in Auschwitz was one of the bloodiest butchers of Auschwitz. In: Ernst Klee, *Das Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich, Wer war was vor und nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 412.

Fig. 23: A presumed photo of Rudolf Mildner.

Standartenführer Rudolf Mildner. (born 10-7-1902) was the head of the political department at Auschwitz since March 1941. He was described by a subordinate as the “bloodthirsty butcher” of Auschwitz. Mildner was head of the Sicherheitspolizei and SD in Denmark from September 19, 1943 until January 4, 1944. He testified for the defense during the Nuremberg trial against Ernst Kaltenbrunner, head of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt. Mildner disappeared in 1949, probably to Argentina. He was never prosecuted.



See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Mildner

Eichmann sent his representative Rolf Günther, who worked at the *Eichmann Referat IV*, to Copenhagen in order to coordinate operations.¹²¹ On September 28, the time had arrived. The Germans decided to carry out the raid in the night of October 1 to 2. That an operation was imminent, had, in the meantime filtered through to the Danish government. It buzzed with rumors of the aforementioned raid, the seizure of the synagogue's administration, the sudden arrival of hundreds of police troops and the presence of the two transport ships. On September 29 Best denied, even in the presence of the Secretary-General of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nils Svenningsen, that he was aware of the exact plans. Many Jews had already gone into hiding or had fled to Sweden because of the threat.

When Ferdinand Duckwitz, a close advisor to Best, heard on September 28 that the raid would take place on the night of October 1 to 2, he passed it on to a number of prominent Danish politicians.¹²² He rushed straight through to Roemer Street 29 in Copenhagen, where the Danish Social Democrats were meeting. There he informed Hans Hedtoft, the chairman of the Social-Democratic party, and later Prime-Minister, about the pending raid. Duckwitz's integrity was confirmed after the war by Hedtoft, and it is also apparent in diaries of Duckwitz's Jewish friends.¹²³

One cannot establish with any certainty what Best's motives were at that time. We have to question his postwar statement. After the war, Best tried to present the case that, after his earlier attempts to obstruct the operation had failed he consciously, for the of intensions, wished to inform the Jews through Duckwitz of the planned operation. He actually would then be 'the rescuer of the Jews'.¹²⁴ Considering his work for the war in the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* in Berlin, and his involvement with the Jewish persecution in France, this is improbable. It seems more

¹²¹ Michael Mogensen, 'October 1943-The Rescue of the Danish Jews', in: Mette Bastholm Jensen en Steven L.B. Jensen, *Denmark and the Holocaust* (Kopenhagen 2003) 38. Also: Safrian, Hans, *Die Eichmann Männer* (Wenen 1993).

¹²² Thomsen claimed that, September 13, 1943, Duckwitz, with permission from Best, flew to Berlin to prevent Best's telegram would be seen by Hitler, Thomsen 181.

Since September 17 Duckwitz warned his Jewish acquaintances that the raid was approaching: Hans Kirchhoff, *Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz. Die Zeit in Dänemark*, Hrsg., Auswärtiges Amt, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit Inland (Berlijn 2004) op www.auswaertiges-amt.de (zoekterm: Kirchhoff)

¹²³ Aage Bertelsen, *Oktober 4*, 13-14.

¹²⁴ Herbert, *Best*, 368-369.

likely that Best, due to his cool and rational conception of *judenrein machen* of Denmark, likely wished to strike fear into the Danish Jews, so that they would flee across the Sont and he would be rid of them.¹²⁵ If the Jews were to escape then the knife would have cut two ways: he would be able to tell Berlin that Denmark was *judenfrei*, and for the Danes this would probably have led to much less resistance than in the case of a successful deportation.

VI. Growing resistance amongst the Danes

In the meanwhile, the Danes and the Danish government had not been sitting idle, and they were undertaking actions in diverse areas, in order to be able to intervene at the moment that the deportation would become a reality. If the Danes had hardly shown resistance in the first years of the occupation, the danger now to their Jewish fellow countrymen changed this passive attitude to an increasingly greater readiness to act. But even after the imposition of the state of emergency on August 29, the Danish population was still reluctant to support the active resistance, such as offering their help to saboteurs. Officially, there had been calls by the government and unions, especially not to strike or demonstrate, so as not to provoke the Germans.

What may have played a role is that the resistance which rose in the course of 1942 was mainly organized by the Communists, who had been thrown out of the government. After the attack on November 30, 1939 by the Soviet Union on Finland, the Communists could expect little sympathy from the Danes.

At the end of June 1941, under German pressure after the attack by Germany on the Soviet Union, 116 leading Danish Communists were arrested. On August 2, 1941 the Communist Party was banned in Denmark. In the course of 1942 the Danish Communists began to organize the resistance. When Von Hanneken arrested 166 Communists during an operation in November 1942, the Danish government cooperated by interning the majority of them in the Danish concentration camp, Horserød. After declaring a state of emergency on August 29, 1943, the Germans occupied Horserød, and on October 2 deported both Communists and the arrested

¹²⁵ Ibid, 372.

Jews to Germany.¹²⁶ The Communists were sent to in the Stutthof concentration camp.¹²⁷ Although the government had consistently disapproved of sabotage, they supported family members of captured perpetrators, and those who suffered the consequences through various means. The underground resistance that was barely organized before August 29, now presented itself on September 16 publicly as the *Frihedsråd*, freedom council. This council sharply condemned the potential Jewish persecution, and threatened a postwar prosecution of all Danes that betrayed Jews or helped Germans.¹²⁸ In fact, the council took the lead in what was to become the resistance. The happenings of August 29 had not yet fully incited the Danes to revolt, but the threats and the raid of October 1 to 2 caused a wave of indignation, which gave the organization of rescue missions a huge boost.

Almost all Danes were members of the Lutheran church. There were hardly any other Protestants or Catholics. Although the Danes were not known as avid church goers, there was full attendance during the readings of Hal Koch. One of his readings was about a founder of the Danish Lutheran church, Nikolai Grundtvig.¹²⁹ His motto: 'First the man, then the Christians' meant that you could only be a good Christian if you behaved 'humanely'. It can be assumed that his readings had a great moral influence on the attitude of the Danes during the occupation and during the rescue of the Jews.

In Copenhagen in the summer of 1943, Frode Jacobsen organized resistance groups that were mainly based on professions. Doctors, teachers, architects and clergy played a prominent role in this collection of professional groups, also known as 'the Ring' or 'the Circle'.¹³⁰ The activities of the Circle were financed through its participants contributing 1 percent of their salary to the organization. All in all, this had the result that just before and after the raid of October 1 to 2, countless statements of protest from all over Denmark landed on the desk of Werner Best. The

¹²⁶ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 82.

¹²⁷ 150 Danish Communists, who were imprisoned in the camp Horserød, ended up in Stutthof, a concentration camp in Poland, 34 km outside of Danzig to the place Sztutowo.

¹²⁸ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 230.

¹²⁹ Grundtvig, Nikolai Frederik Severin (1783-1872), was church leader, poet, historian, politician and pedagogue and founder of the Folk High Schools in Denmark. Findeisen, 193.

¹³⁰ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 226.

King, the church leaders, many social organizations, education institutes, judicial bodies, the Danish army, the Navy and the police expressed their indignation. In short, Best could not have missed the massive Danish protest.

If the state of emergency had a great influence on the atmosphere in Denmark, after the raid of October 1 to 2 there was nobody remaining who continued to feel that the agreement of April 8, 1940 should be kept. The Danish solidarity with their Jewish citizens had come in the fore, and from then on there was a united front against the Germans.

VII. The *Judenaktion*

The Danish police in Copenhagen reported that on Friday evening October 1, 1943 at 8.00 p.m. twenty large transport trucks had entered Copenhagen in convoy from the harbor. The Germans were wearing green uniforms and there was suspicion that an operation against the Jews was about to begin. About an hour later there was talk of there being fifty transport trucks. At 21.45 p.m. the telephone service was out of order across all of Copenhagen. German police troops kept traffic at bay with roadblocks. Danish police were informed they were not allowed to interfere because it was a German issue. That night, the police report noted there was a busy traffic flow to the harbor and also that Danish Communists were being transported to the harbor from Horserød prison. On Saturday morning October 2 at 10.24 a.m. the police reported that the transport ship *Wartheland* had left the harbor. The operation was complete.

That night, a total of 284 Jews had been captured.¹³¹ They were transported to Germany by ship on October 2 and eventually ended up in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. In Copenhagen it was mainly the poorer Jews, those without a social network, that were captured in the raid.¹³² In the course of October and November, another 180 Jews were captured and deported. Of these 464 deported Jews, 53 died during captivity in Germany. A further number of Jews, around 30, died while fleeing across the sea to Sweden.

Although many had sought safety before September 28, the majority of the almost 7,000 Jews left their homes between Wednesday September 28 and the night of Friday, October 1. Considering the prevailing curfew, this must have taken place mainly during the day. At that time it was light between six in the morning and six in the evening. It is improbable that the Germans and the Danish Nazis did not know what was happening. Paulsson writes that the Bispebjerg hospital was being monitored by German police and Danish collaborators. The hospital must have been an important gathering place for Jewish refugees, from where according to the

¹³¹ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 275.

¹³² Hans Kirchhoff, Denmark: 'A Light in the Darkness of the Holocaust? A Reply to Gunnar S. Paulsson', in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30 (1995) 465-479 hier 467.

historian Leni Yahil, about 2,000 of the total number of Jews hid from their persecutors.¹³³ However, the hospital was not searched and Jews were able to enter and leave freely with the aid of simple disguises (such as pretending to be participants in a funeral procession) or possibly via back-door exits.¹³⁴

¹³³ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 244.

¹³⁴ Paulsson, *The Bridge over the Øresund*, 431-464, here 454.

VIII. The rescue and flight

8.1. The Jews go into hiding

Duckwitz's leak about the date of the raid was not without consequences. The news of the coming raid had spread rapidly around Copenhagen and the rest of Denmark. In popular literature, it's described that all Danes, from high to low, from young to old, were busy warning their Jewish countrymen that they should immediately leave their houses and go into hiding. On streets, in busses and trams, Jews were spontaneously approached and offered hiding places. The Danes went from house to house and rang doorbells with Jewish nameplates. A taxi driver had systematically called all Jewish names in the Copenhagen telephone directory, and had taken many of them with his taxi to hiding places, such as churches or hospitals.

The fully assimilated Viking Jews, having networks within the upper classes, more easily found temporary hiding places in the spacious homes or vacation homes of their Christian friends and acquaintances, than the poorer Jews who had few or no Christian acquaintances.¹³⁵ They hid in panic, sometimes in parks or out in the coastal forests. Groups of Danish students and schoolchildren searched for them, and brought them to safer places.

The work of the *Frihedsråd* towards building up a resistance network now started bearing fruit. Doctors, teachers, architects and clergy organized shelters everywhere. There is quite a difference in opinion as to the exact number of helpers. Straede talks about a number of thirty to forty thousand, while Paulsson doubts if there were more than ten thousand. This would count only the immediate friends and acquaintances of the refugees. Kirchhoff also considers this to be an estimate plucked from thin air, and suggests that there must have been far fewer.¹³⁶ Jews entered hospitals with false Danish names or were brought to hiding in rural parish houses, summer houses, or in people's private homes. As a result, when the Germans and

¹³⁵ Buckser, *The Rescue*, 198.

¹³⁶ Therkel Straede, *Why Denmark Stood Up for Its Jews: Altruism, Pragmatism, Anti-semitism?* Forelaesning til The Holocaust Educational Foundations international conference på Brown's University (Providence/Rhode Island) (2004) 6.

Paulsson, *The Bridge over the Øresund*, 431-464, here, 458.

Hans Kirchhoff, *Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz. Die Zeit in Dänemark*, Hrsg., Auswärtiges Amt, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit Inland (Berlijn 2004) on www.auswaertiges-amt.de (search: Kirchhoff).

their Danish accomplices rang the doorbells they were mostly not opened. Werner Best had given the order that the doors of Jewish houses were not to be broken open with violence. It would arouse great outrage amongst the Danes, and that was to be avoided according to him, for obvious reasons. But some Jews had not received the news about the raid, or they did not want to believe it, and they opened the door. Residents of a large Jewish retirement home close to the Copenhagen synagogue, all between the ages of 60 to 90 years old, were removed with brute force.¹³⁷ Relatively speaking, the spoils of the head hunting (*Kopffagd*) were small.

8.2 The passivity of the Germans prior to the raid

It cannot be that the movement of several thousand people in the middle of the day went unnoticed. Despite these notable activities, the Germans kept their police troops inside the barracks on the night of October 1 to 2, Von Heimburg, alongside Mildner, the leader of 300 security troops, noted as much on October 2: The result was zero, because the Jews had abandoned their homes and were accommodated elsewhere¹³⁸

About half of the Jews succeeded in fleeing from Copenhagen. The state of emergency of August 29 consisted of not much more than Wehrmacht checkpoints stationed at the exit roadways of the city to control the in and outgoing traffic. For the Jews and their helpers, who of course knew the city well, there were many other options to leave the city via shortcuts, such as through the city's community gardens. Also the harbor was quite large, and here also, if one knew the way, one could bypass the checkpoints. Moreover, the recently landed German police troops were completely unfamiliar with the terrain, as were their Danish henchmen, who mostly came from the Danish-speaking North-Schleswig, that had become a part of Denmark once more after the First World War.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 184.

¹³⁸ Mogensen, *October 1943*, 39.

¹³⁹ Therkel Straede, e-mail op 15-1-2008.

8.3 The share of Sweden

Duckwitz and later the Nobel prize winner Niels Bohr both pressured the Swedish government to take the Jews. On September 21, Duckwitz flew to Sweden (most likely with the acquiescence of Best) to urge the Swedish government to offer Berlin the option of Sweden accepting the Danish Jews. According to Thomsen Duckwitz would have informed Swedish Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson about the impending German action against the Danish Jews and Hansson would likely have offered Sweden's acceptance of the Jews to Berlin.¹⁴⁰ However, Kirchhoff states in an article written in 2004 on the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs website that there is no record of Duckwitz' visit in the Swedish archives.¹⁴¹

Niels Bohr, was smuggled into Sweden by the Danish underground on September 30 (before the raid). Because he was a renowned nuclear physicist, the British invited him to immigrate to Great Britain. In the afternoon of Saturday October 2, Bohr was able to organize an interview with the Swedish King. He requested him to make it officially known that Sweden had offered the Germans to take the Danish Jews. And indeed, on Saturday evening the Swedish radio broadcast the message that all Danish Jews were welcome in Sweden.¹⁴² That Sweden had made this bold move, showed that their attitude towards the Germans was changing. Germany began to lose the war and Sweden had already refused to allow re-supply of German troops in Norway through Sweden on August 5. Presumably they did not fear retaliation from the Germans, given the lack of it after asylum had been granted to a large group of Norwegian Jews in 1942.¹⁴³

As has been previously mentioned, during the raid in the night of October 1 to 2, 284 Jews were arrested, and later in October another 189, so that a total of 464 Jews were deported to Theresienstadt.¹⁴⁴ When the raid was over and a relatively small number of Jews were arrested, the Germans most likely knew that

¹⁴⁰ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 183.

¹⁴¹ Hans Kirchhoff, *Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz. Die Zeit in Dänemark*, Hrsg., Auswärtiges Amt, Referat für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit Inland (Berlin 2004) op: www.auswaertiges-amt.de (search: Kirchhoff).

¹⁴² Yahil, *The Rescue*, 330.

¹⁴³ Paulsson, *Bridge over the Øresund*, 443.

¹⁴⁴ Yahil, 291.

approximately 7,000 Jews in hiding would attempt to cross the Sont to escape to Sweden. Remarkably, the 1,800 police troops under Best's command did not repeat the raid of October 1 and 2 despite their extensive deployment of equipment.

8.4 Captain may I have passage to cross?

The influx of refugees to Sweden started after October 2. The Jews arrived at the harbors and the coast during daylight hours, using ordinary public transportation. In this way they certainly did not act like passive victims, but mostly organized their own escape by searching for boat captains who would take them across to Sweden.¹⁴⁵ According to some authors, many boat captains initially proposed a price, on average, 2,000 Crowns per person. Later, when the organized resistance supported the escape, the amount was scaled down to 500 Crowns.¹⁴⁶ 500 Crowns in 1942 would be worth about 10,000 Crowns today (which is equivalent to about 1,300 Euros).¹⁴⁷ Today, the Danes point to the so called 'Jewish Villas' along the coast between Copenhagen and Helsingør. These were paid from the exorbitant profits made by transporting the Jews to Sweden.

An important source of aid to the Jewish refugees was the fiery protest by Fugslang Damgaard. He was a bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark who allowed his protest to be heard from all the pulpits in Denmark on the Sunday that followed the raid of October 1 and 2. Later that week, aid and resistance organizations had organized the assistance and provision of facilities, and the Danish coastguard also contributed with about a thousand sailors. They patrolled with lamps all the way to the borders of the territorial waters of the Sont, guiding refugee transport, possibly towing, providing fuel and preventing German attacks.¹⁴⁸ It is improbable that Germans did not notice this and it is remarkable that no actions were taken by the Germans to prevent it. That Cammann had sent his boats in for repair must also have dawned Best, Mildner and Günther.

¹⁴⁵ Mogensen, *October 1943*, 43

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 47-48.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.dst.dk/Statistik/seneste/Indkomst/Priser/Prisberegner.aspx>

¹⁴⁸ Mogensen, *October 1943*, 42.

By the middle of October, in an estimated 600 to 700 crossings (almost half of them from Copenhagen harbor) almost 90 percent of the 7,000 refugees that crossed the Sont arrived in Sweden.

8.5 No manhunt after October 2

After the Germans realized that either the “birds had flown the coop” on the night of October 1, or they were in hiding, there were no more major manhunts. It is not clear why this happened, but there is much conjecture. For Best, going through with the manhunt on thousands of Jews in hiding would mean that he would be continuing for weeks or months with further raids. Many Danish houses would need to be searched, and the hundreds of kilometers long coastline would need to be guarded constantly. He would have to forgo a calm return to the situation before the state of emergency.

Another reason for there being no further large-scale actions after October 2 was possibly that the situation had unfolded under the eyes of the world press. These raids, that in fact took place in an independent country, became a symbol for the anti-Jewish politics of the Nazi regime. Furthermore, the Danish government was committed to the protected status of the deported Jews in Theresienstadt. Herbert states that Best must have been aware that a return to the peaceful situation was dependent on the fate of the Jews.¹⁴⁹

Rudolf Mildner, the head of the Copenhagen Gestapo, observed upon his arrival in Denmark on September 20, 1943, that the majority of the Jews were already informed about the impending raid. The police troops, after landing from Norway, had triumphally marched through the capital and had not kept the purpose of their arrival any secret. Mildner sent a message to the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* that an action on October 1 to 2 would be too soon, and that he wanted to postpone it. Rolf Günther, the Copenhagen representative of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, had to prepare however for the operation in a separate office, isolated from the other German personnel. According to Yahil, he was obstructed in this way by Best and Mildner.¹⁵⁰ This is also apparent in Best’s order that the front doors of the Jews were

¹⁴⁹ Herbert, *Best*, 372-373.

¹⁵⁰ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 172.

not to be forcefully opened during the raid. When, in the course of October 1943, criticism came from the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* in Berlin regarding the relatively small number of arrested Jews, Best was the first to lay the blame on Mildner.¹⁵¹ He, Best, had foreseen it all and it would have been impossible to guard the extensive Danish coast. In fact, with a maximum effort and the assistance of the Wehrmacht and the German Navy, the coast could have been guarded. Mildner on the other hand, claimed after the war during the Nuremberg trials, where he was a witness, that he, as commander of the police troops, was subordinate to Best. He would, for practical reasons have been against the action, to carry out Best's orders. That he later declared there to be moral grounds in addition to the practical reasons, his sincerity must be doubted in light of his activities in Auschwitz.¹⁵²

A remarkable event occurred in Helsingør. In the village Gilleleje, the Danish speaking SS officer from Flensburg, Hans Juhl, known as 'Gestapo Juhl', was able to arrest many Jews and prevent many attempts to escape. (see fig. 24 and 25). For some actions, he sought and received the assistance of the Wehrmachtstroepen in Helsingør. This strengthens the suspicion that between October 2 and 7 in Copenhagen, the German police and security troops were not actively deployed, and that they were not 'actively pursuing refugees', because Juhl managed to capture 130 Jews in Gilleleje.

¹⁵¹ Ibid,189.

¹⁵² Ibid, 152.



Fig 24 : Hans Juhl

Obersturmführer Hans Juhl, nicknamed 'Gestapo Juhl' was head of the German police in Helsingør. He was a German from Flensburg, who spoke Danish well and was feared in Helsingør.

In October 1943, in the church of the village Gilleleje near Helsingør, Juhl arrested 80 Jews that were later deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. After the war he was never charged, let alone convicted.

Fig. 25: The small church in Gilleje (2007) where Hans Juhl captured 80 Jews in 1943



With an effort similar to that of Juhl, it's likely that many more Jews would have been arrested in Copenhagen. Many stories were circulating about the Wehrmacht soldiers 'looking the other way' at the trains from Copenhagen to the coast. According to Yahil the soldiers did this under the influence of the higher German echelons in the Wehrmacht and the Navy, who did not support Best's actions.¹⁵³

Of course, it could also be that the Germans on the job, soldiers and n.c.o.'s exhibited such behavior because of the positive influence that the friendly atmosphere in Denmark had upon them. Perhaps it was the already mentioned soldier's guide book

¹⁵³ Ibid, 267.

of the Wehrmacht, that encouraged moderation in order to win friends in a befriended country. Another possible explanation is that the German troops consisted of young recruits and older soldiers who wished to avoid conflicts at the *Schlagsahnefront*. In his novel *Die Kirschen der Freiheit*, the German soldier Alfred Andersch described the sense of freedom that he felt when he was stationed in Denmark.¹⁵⁴

Thereby, there is still much uncertainty about German behavior and German decisions at the ‘field level’. There is much unstudied material in the German archives.¹⁵⁵ The diaries of the Wehrmacht and the Navy commanders in that period could reveal on what occurred in Denmark. National Socialism was not a monolith, and the German authorities often negotiated amongst themselves regarding *Führerweisungen*. Also, the continuing internal German struggle for power could have been an obstacle to the possibility of coordinated cooperation. In this way, the various local German authorities were able to make decisions that contradicted the Nazi policies towards the Jews elsewhere: Best forbade the doors of Jewish homes be forcefully opened; Camman who sent his boats in for repairs; Von Hanneken refused to allow his troops to participate in the hunt for Jews; and Duckwitz betrayed the operation by informing the Danes.

Partly because the manhunt was not fanatically pursued after October 2, around 5,000 refugees were able to successfully cross the Sont right through until October 10.¹⁵⁶ The German Navy was absent, and the German coastal defense batteries that could have made it practically impossible to cross the Sont, remained silent.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Alfred Andersch, *Die Kirschen der Freiheit. Ein Bericht* (Hamburg 1952) 62-63.

¹⁵⁵ Straede, e-mail 15-1-2008. Therkel Straede is professor of history at the University of Southern Denmark in Copenhagen (Syddansk Universitet) and a specialist in the area of the German occupation of Denmark during World War II.

¹⁵⁶ Mogensen, *October 1943*, 39-40.

¹⁵⁷ Paulsson, *The Bridge over the Øresund*, 434-435.

Fig. 26: On June 10, 1940, the Gestapo took over command in Theresienstadt. Czech and Moravian resistance fighters were imprisoned in the Theresin fort. From November 1941 onwards, Theresienstadt served as a ghetto for deported Jews. It had thereby become a concentration camp. Theresienstadt was mainly a transit camp for Jews who were being expedited to Auschwitz-Birkenau or other extermination camps.

Terezin 2009 © Peter Schaapman 2009



IX. The period up until liberation

9.1. Theresienstadt

Even after the deportation of the Danish Jews to Theresienstadt, the Danish government remained committed to them within their power and kept on pressuring Best (see fig. 26). After negotiations on November 2 between Best and Eichmann, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* agreed that the Jews could stay in Theresienstadt. Theresienstadt was used by Himmler as a showcase for foreign visitors.¹⁵⁸ In the standard work of Hans Günther Adler, *-Theresienstadt*, he notes that the Jews deported from Denmark were treated as a privileged group. They were frequently allowed to write and receive letters, and according to Adler what was allowed to pass the censorship of the SS was amazing. From mid March 1944, the Danish Jews received generous packages from the Danish Red Cross and from Sweden. They remained safeguarded from deportation to the extermination camps, even if they were not Danish citizens, but Jewish refugees from other countries.¹⁵⁹ It is questionable whether the Danes knew that extermination camps existed. But considering the negotiations of the Danish government with Eichmann, the Danes must have known that 'the East' was in any case a far worse place for the Jews than Theresienstadt. Representatives of the Danish government and the International Red Cross were allowed to visit the camp in the spring of 1944.¹⁶⁰

The day arrived on June 23, 1944. Frants Hvass, head of the political department of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Eigil Juel-Henningsen, a doctor from the Danish Red Cross and Maurice Rossel of the International Red Cross from Switzerland, got to see a "model camp" during their visit to Theresienstadt. It was entirely refurbished especially for this visit, and the Jewish prisoners were thoroughly instructed under threat to respond positively about the camp. This propaganda stunt was successful in that the three reports of Hvass, Henningsen and Rossel, were positive and that the Danish Jews, headed by the Chief Rabbi Friediger,

¹⁵⁸ Thomsen, *Besatzungspolitik*, 190.

¹⁵⁹ Adler, *Theresienstadt*, 163-164.

¹⁶⁰ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 302-313. Adler, H.G., *Theresienstadt 1941-1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (Londen 1960) 172-184.

had not voiced any complaints. After the war, there was much criticism of the fact that the visitors had allowed the wool to be pulled over their eyes in this way.

Compared with the other prisoners, the circumstances for the captured Danish Jews was relatively good. For example, as mentioned above, they received food packages from Denmark and Sweden, and they could write and receive letters. Nevertheless, many of the older Danes especially were unable to survive. Of the 464 Jews, 53 died while in the camp. On the other hand, the positive report also offered a certain degree of security to the prisoners. The question remains, what would have happened if major criticism had indeed reached the public. The visit did, however, have a terrible side effect. During the refurbishing, the *Verschönerungsaktion* of the camp, which was aimed at deceiving the international visitors, about 7,500 non Danish prisoners were deported to Auschwitz and gassed there.¹⁶¹

9.2 The people's strike in Copenhagen, end June 1944

The Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, gave the Danes even more hope that the Germans would lose in short term. The Danes wanted to prevent the Allies from considering them an ally to Germany. The atmosphere in Denmark thereby became increasingly grim. There were strikes, attacks by the Danish resistance, and an increase in German counterterror measures. As revenge for the Danish attacks, the *Schalburg-Korps*, a terrorist group operating anonymously and consisting of Germans and Danish nazis, blew up a part of the Tivoli amusement park in Copenhagen in June 1944, and let Best execute eight Danish resistance fighters.¹⁶² When, after a number of countermeasures, Best also issued a curfew for the capital city, it was the final straw.

On the last days of June the Copenhagen workers went on strike en-masse, a strike which is known in Denmark as *Folkestrejke* (people's strike), but also as the 'folk-gardens strike'.¹⁶³ The strike was bloodily suppressed. Hundreds were killed, six

¹⁶¹ Herbert, *Best*, 373.

¹⁶² Ibid, 386.

¹⁶³ Because strike was forbidden during the curfew the Danish workers denied that it was a strike. They would be hindered in go to their community gardens, *kolonihavehuse*, for the vegetable harvest

hundred were wounded, and Best threatened bombing the capital with firebombs. Although the strikes ended after several days, the German terror increased hereafter.

Because of the strikes and their opposition, the regard for the Danes by the Allies greatly increased. On July 12, 1944, the negotiations with British, Russians and Americans in Moscow by a representative of the Freedom Council, led to Denmark being accepted into Allied group.¹⁶⁴

Although in the beginning it was still possible for Best to play his card as *Lieferfreudigkeit*, his moderating influence on the treatment of the Danes decreased.¹⁶⁵ A low point was the action against the Danish police, of which Best came to hear only after it was in progress. Hitler had said that Best would have to be kept in the dark, because he would otherwise surely not be able to keep his mouth shut. *Aktion Taifun* consisted of the arrest and violent disarming of the Danish police on September 19, 1944, whereby 2,235 police officials were transported to Germany, of whom 117 were not to survive.¹⁶⁶ But despite the great conflicts, the Danish attacks and the German counterterror, the Danish agriculture and industry sectors continued supplying Germany. By the end of July, Best reported to his ministry:

It operates [the Danish agriculture industry] -except for the direct benefit to its 3,8 million people- exclusively for German purposes: in their extensive army operations, the agricultural and the industrial sector provide in accordance with German orders.¹⁶⁷

Whether the Danish government however, still had much influence after September 1944 on the fate of their deported police officials and the Danish Jews in Theresienstadt, can only be doubted considering the situation. The salvation for the Jews in Theresienstadt was that Himmler, after long negotiation, gave Count Folke Bernadotte permission to transport the Danish Jews on April 14, 1945 with white busses to Sweden.¹⁶⁸ Bernadotte was Vice President of the Swedish Red Cross and a

which was necessary because of the shortage of food.

¹⁶⁴ Herbert, Best, 387.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 375.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 391-394.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, Best, 391.

¹⁶⁸ Bernadotte, Folke, *Het einde* (Den Haag 1945).

family member of the Swedish King. Himmler had started the negotiations because he saw a chance of coming into contact with the Allies, via Bernadotte. Himmler expected that through his "humanitarian concessions", and through the struggle with the Soviet Union, that he would obtain some goodwill after a possible surrender to the Allies. Perhaps he hoped that this would bring him acceptance as an equal negotiating partner. Kershaw writes:

He [Himmler] harbored the remarkable illusion that the enemy would possibly overlooked his share in the monstrous crimes against humanity, because he had been of value in the ongoing struggle against the Soviet Union, who was not only the arch enemy of Germany, but also of the West.¹⁶⁹

9.3 The return of the Jews

In the popular press around 1960, a rosy colored picture had been painted of the return after the war of the Jewish refugees from Sweden. Upon their return they would ostensibly find their houses just as they had left them. Their Christian neighbours would have watered their plants, and even taken care of their pets. Harold Flender described the following experience of Benjamin Slor, a wine merchant, in *Rescue in Denmark*:

Benjamin Slor, the wine merchant, found his apartment in better condition than when he had left it. Thanks to his friend Henri Smyth it was newly painted and cleaned, and a four days' supply of food had been put in the refrigerator. In addition, he found that his clerks had continued to run his business in his absence, drawing only their normal weekly salaries and depositing the profits, which were sizable, to Slor's account, under a fictitious name.¹⁷⁰

Flender then writes that thousands of refugees found their homes in this manner on their return. At first glance, this image seems to contrast starkly with the bad experiences on return of, for example, the Dutch Jews.¹⁷¹ Yahil shows figures which correct Flender. The houses of 1,300 Jews were found on their return to be leased by

¹⁶⁹ Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler. Vergelding 1936-1945* (Utrecht, 2000) 1074-1075.

¹⁷⁰ Flender, *Rescue in Denmark*, 203.

¹⁷¹ Chris van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden*, (Amsterdam 2002) 356-360.

others, and so many Jews had to be temporarily housed elsewhere in Copenhagen.¹⁷² It is not known how many leased houses this referred to. Kirchhoff writes that the 5,000 Jews from Copenhagen formed about 1,600 families, which would come down to an average family size of three people. From this, one would have to conclude that about a quarter of all families; about 400 in total, were homeless on their return. Buckser also writes that many, especially poor families, found their houses to be occupied by others on their return, and that their belongings had disappeared.¹⁷³ What is hardly given attention in the popular post war media, is the wave of discrimination against the Jews after their return to Denmark. According to Yahil, anti-Semitism could take root in response to post-war problems.¹⁷⁴ On the street ‘dirty Jew’ could be heard ever more frequently.¹⁷⁵ In his article ‘Anti-Semitism in Denmark - Despite Everything’ the Rabbi Dr. Marcus Melchior writes:

If one happens to tread on someone’s toes in a bus one is a ‘damned Jew’. On Strøget [Copenhagen’s main shopping street] the cry ‘Jew’ is heard more than one cares to think, not only toward Jews who are disliked but towards anyone with whom there is score to settle. Moreover, many Jewish children suffer from this situation in the public schools, where it is no longer a question of anti-Semitism in its more ‘delicate’ form but a transition to something far more serious and dangerous.¹⁷⁶

This emerging post war anti-Semitism resembles the situation in the Netherlands, where even *Het Parool* marvelled that a Jewish member of the Provincial Executive dared to think that he would be able to step back into his old job.¹⁷⁷

9.4 The processes against the Germans

The key German players in the persecution of the Danish Jews nearly all managed a lucky escape. Best was given house arrest after the German surrender on May 4, 1945, and was arrested on May 21 and brought to the prison at the Fortress of

¹⁷² Yahil, *The Rescue*, 372.

¹⁷³ Buckser, *After the Rescue*, 199.

¹⁷⁴ Yahil, *The Rescue*, 374.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 375.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁷ Heijden, *Grijs verleden*, 358.

Copenhagen. From the beginning, it was unsure whether the evidence against Best could be obtained. His participation in the removal of the Jews, and his political responsibility for the terror in the last year of the war, was against him. But his policy of cooperation, whereby he constantly tried to prevent excesses, spoke for him. After all, he was also against the capture and disposal of the Danish police to Germany in September 1944.

Additionally, the German occupation in Denmark had been much less violent than in other countries, and the question was as to how far Best had contributed to this. Considering all these uncertainties, the Danish government tried to have the trial of Best take place in France, where he had indeed been working for a long period. In Paris it became clear that also the French had no desire for a trial against Best. The extensive cooperation of the French civil service with Best in relation to the deportation of the Jews and Communists, would embarrass the French.¹⁷⁸ After only two days, Best was sent to Germany where he was interrogated for some time in relation to the preparations for the Nuremberg trials. But also here, the trial of Best had no priority, considering the many hundreds of Nazi criminals that had a lot more to answer for.

Eventually, the trial against Best started on June 16, 1948 in Copenhagen, and he was sentenced to death on September 20 of the same year. He was found guilty of the deportation of the Jews in Denmark, and although he had kept contact via Duckwitz with the Danish politicians, he had never distanced himself from the anti-Jewish Nazi politics. Additionally, as judged by the court, he could have exercised his political authority in a much stronger way during the counterterror in 1944.¹⁷⁹ On May 9, 1949, his appeal brought the sentence back to five years imprisonment. The testimonies of Duckwitz and Sonnleithner supported Best's version. He had only sent his telegram, according to Sonnleithner, an official of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, when he heard from him of the decision already taken by Hitler to dispose of the Jews. Duckwitz supported Best's statement that he had consciously

¹⁷⁸ Herbert, Best. 407, 413.

¹⁷⁹ Lammers, Karl Christian, 'Späte Prozesse und milde Strafen. Die Kriegsverbrecherprozesse gegen Deutsche in Dänemark', in: Norbert Frei, Hrsg., *Transnationale Vergangenheitspolitik. Der Umgang mit deutschen Kriegsverbrechern in Europa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen 2006) 363.

warned the Jews via Duckwitz against the raids.¹⁸⁰

This very mild punishment brought about such great protests in Denmark however, that the Danish Public Prosecutor was forced to go into appeal at the Danish Supreme Court. In March 1950, Best was sentenced to twelve years in prison, but on August 29, 1951, he was pardoned and was deported to Germany. So finally he was only imprisoned for six years. Rudolf Mildner went into hiding, after he appeared as witness in Nuremberg, and has since disappeared. Rolf Günther committed suicide in the summer of 1946 while in American custody in the former concentration camp Ebensee, at Salzburg. Von Hanneken was acquitted on appeal after first being given a sentence of three years. Hans Juhl, *Gestapo Juhl*, has never been convicted.¹⁸¹

While there were 46 Danes who were put to death for their extensive collaboration, it is astonishing that not one of their German appointing authorities remained in prison for more than a few years. There are several possible explanations. Firstly, it could be that the demand for punishment and retribution was reduced in time. Secondly, there was the pressure to give pardon from the post war West-German government. And finally: the Danish government wanted a good relationship with Germany, in view of the Danish minority in South-Schleswig.¹⁸² By comparison: in the Netherlands between May 1945 and 1952, there were 39 death sentences, 34 Dutch and five Germans, and the sentenced Germans remained imprisoned for much longer than the sentenced Nazis in Denmark.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Herbert, *Best*, 363.

¹⁸¹ E-mail van Henrik Lundtofte, Arkivleder, Historisk Samling fra Besættelsestiden 1940-45 Niels Bohrs Vej 96700 Esbjerg, "Henrik Lundtofte" hln@hsb.dk.

¹⁸² Lammers, Karl Christian, 'Späte Prozesse und milde Strafen', 367.

¹⁸³ Belinfante, August David, *In plaats van bijltjesdag: De geschiedenis van de bijzondere rechtspleging na de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Assen 1978), 491. Dr. L. De Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Deel 12, Epiloog, Eerste helft (Leiden 1988) 617.

X. Historiography

Since the 90s a remarkable development has been going on in the historiographic vision on the German politics in relation to the Jews in Denmark. Historians like Mogensen Paulsson, Bastholm Jensen, Vilhjalmsson and Blüdnikow, have been attempting in their publications since the nineties to adjust the exaggerated image of the bravery of the Dane, as it was given form in *Yad Vashems's Book of Righteous Gentiles*.¹⁸⁴ They point to the harsh refugee policy of the Danes prior to the war, to the betrayal and even during the occupation the expulsion of 21 stateless Jews to the nazis.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, the rescue itself was much less dangerous than was suggested, and the alleged philanthropy was supposedly overshadowed by the profiteering of some Danish skippers.

The more established historians like Kirchhoff, Straede and at the time also Yahil, while agreeing that the Germans were remarkably passive and practically let the Jews go, offer different explanations. Straede writes that it was not proven that the escape across the Sont wasn't dangerous. Mogensen had published his thesis (his Master's thesis) only based upon the interrogations of the Swedish police to refugees who had reached the other side without any difficulty. Unsuccessful or disrupted escapes were not registered.¹⁸⁶

Vilhjalmsson and Blüdnikow accuse the Danish government of keeping the Danish archives closed for young Danish and foreign historians until long after the war. Only members of the organization *Danmarks Nyste Historie*, which mainly consisted of established historians from Danish universities like Hans Kirchhoff, were admitted. They were, according to Vilhjalmsson and Blüdnikow, engaged with *historical hairdressing*.¹⁸⁷ Exemplary for the question of whether the Danes were so brave and were entitled to the entry in *Yad Vashems's Book of Righteous Gentiles* is

¹⁸⁴ Mogensen,(1962, historicus, Universiteit van Aarhus), Paulsson, (1960, Brits historian collaborator of: the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies en the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum), Vilhjalmsson, (1960, Archaeologist, 2000-2002, The Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies), Bent Blüdnikow (Historian, 1983-1993 Danish National Archive Copenhagen, journalist *Berlinske Tidende*).

¹⁸⁵ Vilhjalmsson en Blüdnikow, 'Rescue', passim,

¹⁸⁶ E-mail Straede, 15 januari 2008.

¹⁸⁷ Vilhjalmsson en Blüdnikow, 'Rescue', passim.

the discussion between Paulsson and Kirchhoff in *Journal of Contemporary History* in 1995.¹⁸⁸ Paulsson writes:

Certainly, when one examines the matter from the standpoint of the Danish participants, Jews and non-Jews, without examining the actions and motivations of the Germans – the view, that is, prevailing in the memoirs and personal accounts of the operation – one has the clear impression of courageous and decisive action in the face of mortal danger. *For all Danes knew*, the dreaded Gestapo would drag them off to concentration camps if they interfered with plans. And *for all they knew*, the Sont was indeed ‘teeming with boats sent by the nazis.’¹⁸⁹

In reality, according to him, there was not one single Dane who was deported for helping the Jews, or because of personal opposition. The few who were caught by the Germans were all handed over to the Danish Prosecutor, who mostly let them go immediately with either a small, or fine none at all. Kirchhoff acknowledges in hindsight that the risk for these helpers was limited. But during the rescue this was not known. The Gestapo had certainly shot at boats, and a refugee and helper were definitely killed.

According to Kirchhoff, some Jews committed suicide from despair and fear, and dozens were arrested before they could cross The Sont. Although Kirchhoff confirms the German passivity described by Paulssons in the week of the raid, he provides totally different motives. Kirchhoff refers to the various individual interests of the German key players, and suggests in contrast to Paulsson that the Germans could not have foreseen that the Jews would dare to flee across the Sont in the first week of October. After the war, the American and Israeli press, according to Kirchhoff, spread laudatory and emotional descriptions of the rescued Jews, because journalists wanted to see a point of light in the darkness of the Holocaust.

¹⁸⁸ Kirchhoff, *Denmark*, passim. Paulsson, *The bridge*, passim.

¹⁸⁹ Paulsson, *The Bridge over the Øresund*, 431-464, daarin 433.

XI. Summary and conclusions

The majority of the Danish Jews were able to flee Denmark between September 27 and October 6, 1943, while there was a military state of emergency and an evening curfew. How could more than 7,900 people quickly hide and then relocate in what at first glance appears to be a hopeless situation?

That the Jews in Denmark could escape destruction was the surprising result of a number of exceptional factors. Political, economic and propaganda motives were all factors in the decision to refrain from actions against the Jews. The successful integration of the Jews in the Danish society was significant, as was the unrelenting opposition of Danish government to the German proposals to require Jewish registration and establish forbidden professions for the Jews. The Danish government also took strict action against expressions of anti-Semitism in the press and on the radio. But the Danish resistance was successful only because the Germans did not implement their plans due to the agreements of April 8, 1940, whereby the Danes were allowed to continue governing their own country.

For the Germans this state of affairs offered many advantages. The governance costs remained minimal, because the Danes could be controlled with a limited number of officials, while the country could also easily be economically plundered.

Another factor that contributed was that Best, the *Reichsbevollmächtigter*, continued to see the Jews as a minor problem, he made the comment; ‘there are so few of them’, a problem that could be fixed after the war. Even after October 1943, this factor played a role in the treatment of the Jews imprisoned at Theresienstadt. In addition, the Danes' minimal resistance to the German invasion, and the acceptance of the *Aufsichtsverwaltung* yielded benefits to the Danes. The Danish argument was that much suffering and many lives would be spared and that resistance to ‘the big neighbor to the south’ had no point, considering its overwhelming power.

Why didn't the Germans, who had succeeded in other countries in deporting the Jews, prevent the escape of the Danish Jews? Much of the scientific literature and many articles discuss the stalling by the Danes and the passivity of the Germans in

relation to anti-Jewish measures, but the explanations for the German passivity varies. Many writers have wondered whether the German deliberately allowed the Jews to escape. The passivity of almost all of the involved German authorities in the first week of October is noteworthy. It seems that the Germans, who were divided by internal power struggles, allowed the Jews to leave, perhaps by *force majeure*. That the Germans were unable to foresee that the Jews would attempt to flee across the Sont in the first week of October is unlikely. They must have known that the thousands of Jews in hiding would try to cross the Sont, considering that many hundreds of Jews had already made the crossing in the last weeks of September 1943.

In addition the Jews were explicitly welcomed by the Swedes via the radio on Saturday evening, October 2, 1943. Even if the Germans had not expected it, it was unlikely that they would not notice the crossing of thousands of men women and children.

In the popular press, in films, in individual accounts, and on many websites, the rescue is attributed to the Danes, who risked their own lives in order to save the Jews. Is this image of the rescue completely accurate? My conclusion is that it is not.

The Danes were assisted by the 'betrayal' of Duckwitz and by the Germans, who, for whatever reasons, temporarily weakened the hunt in the first weeks after October 2, 1943. The Danes thereby had the opportunity to help the Jews go into hiding and to flee to Sweden. But the favorable circumstances do not detract from the courage of the Danes, as some Danish historians have claimed. Helping the Jews to hide, to journey to the coast, to cross the Sont, must have been a terrifying experience for both the helpers and the Jews.

When we discuss the rescue, we should not overlook the Danish government's harsh refugee policy before the war, or the fact that the rescued Jews were not welcomed upon their return from Sweden after the war. There was even some talk of overt anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, in the American press and in many individual accounts by the Jews that fled, much attention is given to Danes to Danes' role in the rescue. This had led to the myth of 'the brave Danes', which is understandable. But even if one looks beyond the myth, the rescue remains a unique event and a point of light in the darkness of the Holocaust.

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