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Persecution and Deportation in Western Europe
– Rescue and Survival of Jews in Occupied Western Europe – A Reappraisal
Translation: E06 Post-war report of the Ofipresse newsletter on the Committee of
the Protection of Jews

AA1915 Heiber Files 13 CDT

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WEEKLY BULLETIN

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No. 23

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THE OPPRESSION PERIOD. – This issue marks the end of the regular publication of this column, in which we have provided a brief, objective summary of the actions taken by a certain number of individuals and organizations in Belgium in order to thwart the Germans' anti-Semitic measures.

THE COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF JEWS.

The Committee for the Protection of Jews (CDJ) was established in July 1942 in several Belgian cities (Brussels, Charleroi and Liège), without prior communication among the different branches. It became necessary to establish the Committee after the occupant strengthened the measures against the Jews. Some

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branches were created spontaneously and others were created on the initiative or with the support of local branches of the Independent Front (FI).

This is how it came to be that the FI delegated to the Brussels chapter of the CDJ Emile Hambresin, former editor of *L'Avant-Garde* [*The Avant-Garde*] and president of the Comité Belge contre le Racisme [*Belgian Committee Against Racism*].

The first meeting brought together eight participants: Mr. Hambresin, Mr. Hellendael, Mr. Jospa, Mr. Mandelbaum, Mr. Nykerk, Mr. Rotkel, Mr. Werber and Mr. Perelman. The latter two escaped the clutches of the Gestapo. Of the remaining six, all of whom were deported, only Mr. Jospa and Mr. Mandelbaum came home from the concentration camps.

Mr. Katz and Mr. Broder were the main leaders of the Charleroi branch. Mr. Katz was also arrested and sent to Germany, where he disappeared.

Mr. Wolf, Mr. Federman and the lawyer Mr. Vandenberg were the leaders of the Liège movement. Mr. Vandenberg was also arrested and deported and has not been heard from since the liberation.

The Anvers branch was created in 1943. It was run by Mr. Flam. Mrs. Castermans and several others helped him with the children's section. Nearly all the members of this committee were arrested during one of their meetings.

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Mr. Molter and Mr. Monastir escaped. The latter owes his salvation to the fact that he was freed from the Dossin barracks in Mechlin.

The CDJ's activities were divided into two departments: 1) political and propaganda assignments; 3) various practical interventions. The political and propaganda department made a special effort to encourage the Jews to actively resist the enemy's orders and the initiatives of the Association of Jews in Belgium (AJB), which was founded by the Germans and was thus obligated to help execute the occupant's decrees. The department members made a special effort to influence the leaders of the Association of Jews in Belgium in order to prevent them from following the association's directives.

In general, they used every means possible to prevent wavering and uncertain individuals from participating in collaboration of any kind, particularly financial collaboration, even if it provided protection against deportation.

It was this department of the CDJ that published the underground periodicals *Le Flambeau* [*The Torch*] and *De Vrije Gedachte* [*The Free Thought*].

The main role of the practical intervention department was to save children. This work was specially assigned to a sub-department that received help from Ms. Nèvejean, Director of the Belgian Office of Birth and Childhood (ONE). In this sub-department, which was first led by Mr. Héber and then later by Mrs. Emile Allard, the most active members included Mrs. Jospa (alias Mrs. Jaspar), Mrs. Moens (alias Mrs. Brigitte), Ms. Sterno (alias Ms. Jeanne) and Mrs. Castermans in Anvers.

The threatened Jewish children were placed in people's homes and in secular and religious institutions. If they were placed in institutions, they received fake identities. In total, over the course of the occupation, 2,100 children were saved by the CDJ, which fully covered their lodging and living expenses.

As part of these efforts, Mrs. Perelman created a group of "godmothers" whose main purpose was to visit the children. This group included Mrs. De Groott, Mrs. Lameere, Mrs. Olbrechts, Mrs. Snoeck and other wives of professors at the Université de Bruxelles.

The CDJ's efforts to help adults primarily consisted in providing fake papers first to Jews, then to Dutch citizens looking to visit or transit through Belgium and lastly, to dissidents. Official inscriptions were entered into the population registers of certain municipalities to reinforce these efforts. Roughly 30,000 people benefitted from this service.

To help adults hide from the occupant, the department tried to find places for them, oftentimes in jobs as domestic servants.

The pecuniary assistance required by the Jews who were being persecuted grew larger and larger. This assistance was

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provided to approximately 10,000 people and was distributed in different ways, most often by direct delivery to the places where they were hiding. This assistance increased after Mr. Nykerk's trip to Switzerland – which we described in a recent issue – and then in 1944, when a finance committee was created. The committee was staffed by Ms. Nèvejean, Mr. E. Allard, Mr. D. Ferdman and Mr. J. Pels.

Overall, during the occupation, the budget of the Committee for the Protection of Jews – whose activities were centralized for all of Belgium in July 1943 – reached 48 million francs. –

While cash assistance did not reach the levels hoped for by the committee because of the large number of people concerned, it was supplemented by other efforts, in particular packages (thanks to the Belgian Red Cross and the Winter Help) and food stamps.

This second CDJ department was also responsible for intercepting Gestapo, Feldgendarmarie and Werbestelle informants and alerting the victims.

Additionally, it actively contributed to the attack on the Mechlin train, which we described in a previous issue.

Individuals who provided watchful assistance on committee initiatives include Mr. Bartz, the Polish Chargé d'Affaires in Belgium, Mr. Orbach, Mr. Wolman, Mr. Bolle and Mr. Van Praag. The latter two were arrested and imprisoned at Fort Breendonck and then at Buchenwald.

The Committee for the Protection of Jews received active support for its work from different Jewish relief organizations, including Mutual Aid, Popular Aid, Zionist Aid and Jewish Solidarity.

It would be difficult for us to list all of the people who directly participated in the committee's different activities as there were over 300 of them. The individuals who provided indirect or temporary assistance number in the thousands. In fact, people of all social classes felt a close connection to the persecuted Jews and made every effort to ease their burden. Thus, this vast fraternal undertaking found clergymen, agnostics, bourgeois, workers and peasants working side by side.

It is time for us to conclude.

When we started the column "The Oppression Period" in our first issue, our goal was not – and could never be – to distinguish among all of the organizations, men and women who demonstrated their commitment to their fellow man by helping the Jews.

We have only been able to publicly recognize some of them, by way of example. We hope that everyone else will forgive us. Their actions and accomplishments have been collectively described and recognized in the series of articles that we

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dedicated to this topic.

We have just one wish that we would like to express.

The government is currently compiling a list of all of the individuals who distinguished themselves through their patriotic acts under the occupation, in order to provide them with honors and awards.

We hope that this list will include all of the individuals who worked particularly hard to thwart the enemy's racial determination and persecution measures. To this end, we request that the competent authorities consult a specially qualified organization that can provide them with the names of the citizens who sacrificed and endangered themselves in order to save the Jews from deportation, torture and death.

In a country that is emerging from a period of extreme suffering, the purge process is a great civic duty. No less important is the civic duty of rewarding all those who, in many different ways, proved themselves worthy of their homeland and of humanity.

translated by Nina Fink

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