

The rescue of the Jews of Denmark by the Danish people

The German invasion of Denmark met with no substantive resistance on the part of Denmark. Germany declared that it would not interfere with Denmark's independent status. The understanding which the Danish Government reached with the occupying forces included a stipulation that Jews would not be harmed. In the face of German pressure on the Jewish question and activity by the small Danish Nazi party, the population of Denmark acted resolutely. This clear position which was expressed both by the government and by the public, persuaded the Nazis that they should temporarily not harm the Jews of Denmark. In the spring of 1943, Danish opposition to the occupation - which had been virtually non-existent in the early stages of occupation - began to increase. In late August 1943, a crisis began to emerge between the German and Danish authorities, after the Danish government refused to accede to the new German demands, and resigned in protest.

Information regarding the pending deportation of Danish Jewry was leaked to the Danish authorities by the German shipping attache in Denmark, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, and opposition emerged. The Danes warned the Jews and helped them to find hiding places. Some began to transport Jews to Sweden with the assistance of Danish fishermen and their boats. The reaction was initially haphazard and spontaneous. Shortly thereafter, however, this spontaneous reaction was transformed into organized activity, which was joined by the Danish underground, and the smuggling methods were improved. This was facilitated by the Swedish government's consent to accept the fleeing Jews. In Denmark itself, most public bodies organized to defend the Jews. The German authorities received dozens of protests by economic and social organizations. Among these were the protests of King Christian X, Church leaders, and others. The universities closed down for a week, and the students joined in the rescue activities. Thus, within three weeks, 7,200 persons constituting the

bulk of Danish Jews, along with 700 of their non-Jewish relatives, were transported to Sweden. The rescue campaign was funded in part by the Jews themselves, and in large part by donations from the Danish public itself. The

Danish police not only allowed the rescue campaign to continue without disturbance, but actually cooperated with it and participated in it.

The Danish population's staunch opposition to any discrimination against its Jewish population, including the refugees among them, along with the acts of rescue by transportation to Sweden, and protection of those already deported to Theresienstadt, stands out in the history of the period as an outstanding act of moral and political responsibility.