

Heroes



Henrik Wergeland

Henrik Wergeland's tireless efforts

Jewish immigrants first began arriving in Norway in 1851, after the Storting (Norwegian national assembly) voted to eliminate the paragraph in Article 2 of the Constitution that restricted Jews from entering the country. It was Henrik Wergeland (1808–1845), one of Norway's most famous national poets and a longstanding advocate of social justice and religious freedom, who led the way in the long and arduous struggle to repeal the ban against Jews in Norway. Wergeland died without seeing the success of his endeavours, but his efforts gained him the everlasting respect and admiration of Jews throughout Scandinavia and all of those who believe in tolerance and equal rights.

The Norwegian resistance movement

The sudden invasion of Norway in 1940 made it difficult for the resistance to organize itself. However, a number of anti-Nazi military units and civil groups rose to the occasion by improvising and later organizing the rescue of approximately half of the small Norwegian Jewish population and other targets of Nazi wrath over the Swedish border and by boat to Shetland. They also executed military strikes and sabotaged the German occupying forces' supplies.

Forty-one members of the Norwegian resistance have been recognized individually by Yad Vashem as Righteous among the Nations.

Thanks To Scandinavia is committed to having the world learn about the efforts involved in saving Jews during World War II. Our goal is to make sure these commendable stories are heard and never forgotten. Every year, dozens of Scandinavian educators and students are chosen to receive grants that enable them to study in the United States, Israel, and Europe.

Such is the enduring message of courage and humanity that our generation and every generation to come should hold dear to their hearts.

Laurie Netter Sprayregen, President

For more information, contact:

Rebecca Neuwirth, Executive Director

Thanks To Scandinavia

165 East 56th Street

New York, NY 10022

Tel (212) 891-1403

Fax (212) 891-1415

TTS@ajc.org

www.ThanksToScandinavia.org

Thanks To Scandinavia is an institute of AJC (www.ajc.org).

Norway's Quisling government cooperated with the Nazis and persecuted Norway's small Jewish community, sending half of them to their deaths in Auschwitz. Other Norwegian Jews were rescued thanks to the heroic effort of a small, brave resistance.

The Jews of Norway during World War II



(Norsk Folkemuseum)

The Oslo Holocaust Memorial designed by Anthony Gormley overlooks the site where Jews were loaded into ships and deported and attempts to reflect the idea of "absence."

Thanks To Scandinavia
An Institute of AJC

1933
1945

Hitler and his Nazi party came to power in Germany in 1933 and remained until 1945—only twelve years in total. And yet, by the end of Hitler's regime, the world had been plunged into global world war, Europe was in shambles, and nearly 30 million people had died. Among the dead were six million Jews—men, women, and children—who were systematically slaughtered because of the Nazis' racist ideology.

Some Jews were rescued throughout the Scandinavian countries and in other European countries by heroic actions of individuals and communities.

The following story focuses on the fate of the small Norwegian Jewish community.



Synagogue Choir of the Israelite Congregation Oslo, c 1921 (Norsk Folkemuseum)

The Destruction of Norway's Jews

Nazi domination of Norway

When Germany's armed forces attacked Norway in April 1940, there were some 2,100 Jews in the country, less than 0.1% of the population. Around 1,700 were members of the two organized Jewish communities in Oslo and Trondheim. There had been a Jewish presence in Norway since the 1850s, when the Norwegian parliament finally annulled the part of the Constitution of 1814 that banned Jews from the country.

The Nazis did not want to disturb Norway's economic integrity and hoped that the country would accept the Nazi presence with little resistance. However, after some initial hesitation, the government decided to oppose the Nazi domination. This changed the political situation. Hitler appointed a *Reichskommissar* to Norway, the *Gauleiter Josef Terboven*. By September 1940, all discussions between Terboven and the remaining Norwegian political establishment had ended. One of the obstacles to an agreement was the establishment's refusal to give Norway's miniscule Norwegian Nazi party (*Nasjonalsamlings*) and its leader *Vidkun Quisling* any power in a new government.

By September 21, 1940, Nazi plans were completed for a cabinet of new ministers responsible to Reichskommissar Terboven alone. Most of them were members of the Norwegian Nazi party, and Quisling was appointed political head of the cabinet. The political power stayed with Terboven. In February 1942, Quisling was allowed to form his own *pro forma* "national government" and appointed himself leader. He held this position until the end of the Nazi occupation in 1945.

Anti-Jewish policies

Anti-Jewish policy in Norway can be divided into three different phases:

* An early "indecisive" phase from April 1940 to January 1942 dominated by indi-

vidual antisemitic actions and initiatives not necessarily part of a systematic anti-Jewish policy.

* A short middle phase from January 1942 to October 1942 when signs of a far more destructive goal were visible.

* The destruction phase from October 1942 to February 1943 when the Jews were deported and systematic measures were taken to confiscate their possessions.

Soon after the invasion of Norway, the Nazi occupants started imposing race-based exclusionary laws. In May 1940, radios belonging to Jews were confiscated by order of the German Security Police in Oslo. At the same time, impatient German officials made sure that Jewish shops and offices were publically identified in several cities. Local branches of the German Security Police also closed Jewish shops here and there and occasionally arrested Jews on trumped-up charges.

In 1941, the Norwegian Nazi party stepped up its anti-Jewish propaganda. In February, March and July the party's army carried out violent actions against Jewish shops and offices and against cultural venues where Jewish artists performed. These actions backfired, causing increased public sympathy to Jews.

In June 1941, a law was proposed prohibiting the marriage of persons of "Norwegian blood" with Jews and people from Lapland, who were also subject to Germany's racist policy. This law was never passed due to protests from the bishop of Oslo, Eivind Berggrav.

The Reichskommissariat in Norway showed no willingness to take the lead in anti-Jewish measures, as evidenced by a memo between the different branches of the Reichskommissariat in January 1942. Instead, it expected the Quisling-regime to reintroduce the part of the Constitution of 1814 that denied Jews entry into the

country. A law to that effect was signed by Quisling in March 1942.

At the same time, the German Security Police ordered all Jews to have their identification papers marked accordingly. The announcement was hardly commented on in the press, and there was no opposition. All in all, the police registered 1,536 Jews.

In September 1942, the German Security police confiscated homes belonging to Jews in Oslo. Due to a leak that seems to have originated from the German army, warning got out to some Jews to get to safety as soon as possible. Nevertheless, most male Jews above the age of 15 in Trondheim were arrested in late October.

As the end of October approached, a "border pilot" – a person in the Norwegian underground illegally guiding Jewish refugees to safety in neutral Sweden – shot a border policeman. This incident was used as propaganda by the government to attack the Jews in unusually ferocious language. It was the pretext the German occupation and Quisling regime needed, and the bureaucracy moved with renewed energy toward its goal of killing Norway's Jewish population.

On October 23, Hauptsturmführer Wilhelm Wagner met with the Chief of the Norwegian State Police Karl Alfred Marthinsen and the top echelon of the State Police to plan the arrest of all male Jews over the age of 15. All in all, some 340 Jewish men were arrested and imprisoned in a makeshift concentration camp outside the town of Tønsberg. In a move that was not coordinated with the Germans, the Quisling regime prepared a law to confiscate all Jewish property, taking control of it before the Germans could.

The pressure rose: organizations and employers sent letters to the State Police and even to Quisling personally to

Norway

Norway's resistance movement courageously defied the German occupation and the Quisling government and was able to rescue half of its Jewish population.



Sweden

Risking Nazi retaliation, neutral Sweden later in the war provided sanctuary for Jews escaping from Denmark, Norway, and other European countries.

Denmark

Although occupied by the Germans, Denmark saved nearly all of its Jewish population from the Nazis.

ask for the release of individual Jews. A blitz operation was prepared. Rather than concentrating the women and children in a transit camp before departure, the victims were to be brought directly to a ship in Oslo harbour. The operation took place on November 26, 1942. At 2:45 pm, the "DS Donau" left the Oslo harbour with 532 Jews on board. Another transport left Oslo on February 25, 1943.

In all, 772 Jews were deported from Norway, most of them to Auschwitz. Only 34 of them survived. In addition, 28 persons were executed or died as a

direct or indirect result of anti-Jewish actions in Norway. This brings the number of victims to 765, close to half of the 1,536 Jews registered by the Norwegian Police in early 1942. In Western Europe only the Netherlands and Germany had a higher percentage of murdered victims.

Over 1,000 of Norway's Jews were rescued by members of the resistance movement, who evacuated them over the border or by boat at the risk of their own lives.

Finland

Finland, though a cobelligerent of Germany, refused to deliver the Finnish Jewish community for Hitler's "Final Solution."