The Boycott of Jewish Businesses

In 1933, about 500,000 Jews lived in Germany, less than one percent of the total population. Most Jews in Germany were proud to be Germans, citizens of a country that had produced many great poets, writers, musicians, and artists. More than 100,000 German Jews had served in the German army during World War I, and many were decorated for bravery.

Jews held important positions in government and taught in Germany's great universities. Of the thirty-eight Nobel Prizes won by German writers and scientists between 1905 and 1936, fourteen went to Jews. Marriage between Jews and non-Jews was becoming more common. Although German Jews continued to encounter some discrimination in their social lives and professional careers, most were confident of their future as Germans. They spoke the German language and regarded Germany as their home.

When the Nazis came to power, the lives of German Jews changed drastically. On April 1, 1933, the Nazis carried out the first nationwide, planned action against them: a boycott of Jewish businesses. Nazi spokesmen claimed the boycott was an act of revenge against both German Jews and foreigners, including US and English journalists, who had criticized the Nazi regime. On the day of the boycott, Storm Troopers stood menacingly in front of Jewish-owned shops. The six-pointed "Star of David" was painted in yellow and black across thousands of doors and windows. Signs were posted saying "Don't Buy from Jews" and "The Jews Are Our Misfortune."

The nationwide boycott was not very successful and lasted just a day, but it marked the beginning of a nationwide campaign by the Nazi party against the entire German Jewish population. A week later, the government passed a law restricting employment in the civil service to "Aryans." Jewish government workers, including teachers in public schools and universities were fired.

Key Dates

MARCH 1933
SA REIGN OF TERROR AGAINST JEWS THROUGHOUT GERMANY
The SA (Storm Troopers) attack Jewish-owned department stores in German cities in an attempt to segregate Jews from the rest of society. Local police, not yet under Nazi control, unsuccessfully attempt to stop the attacks. Members of the SA continue the rampage and enter courtrooms, dragging Jewish lawyers and judges into the streets where they are subjected to humiliating public acts. These attacks are publicized by international Jewish organizations and the press, which urge a boycott of German goods. In response, the Nazis organize a nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses in Germany, blaming

Jews for anti-German tone of the international press.

APRIL 1, 1933
NATIONWIDE BOYCOTT OF JEWISH-OWNED BUSINESSES
At 10:00 a.m., SA and SS members stand in front of Jewish-owned businesses throughout Germany to inform the public that the proprietors of these establishments are Jewish. The word "Jude," German for "Jew," is often smeared on store display windows, with a Star of David painted in yellow and black across the doors. Anti-Jewish signs accompany these slogans. In some towns, the SA marches through the streets singing anti-Jewish slogans and party songs. In other towns, violence accompanies the boycott; in Kiel, a Jewish lawyer is killed. The official boycott ends at midnight.

APRIL 7, 1933
LAW DISMISSES JEWS FROM CIVIL SERVICE
The Nazi government enacts the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. This law seeks to exclude those considered to be opponents of the Nazi state—Jews and political opponents. As a result, civil service employees are forced to prove their "Aryan" descent by documenting the religion of their parents and grandparents. If unable to do so, they are dismissed from service. Hitler reluctantly concedes to President Paul von Hindenburg's demand to exempt from dismissal those civil servants who are veterans of World War I or whose close relatives had fallen in that conflict. Similar laws passed in the following weeks affect Jewish lawyers and doctors.

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