

Report on the Situation of Danish Jewry
and Public Opinion

Memorandum from the Reich Minister to Denmark, Werner
Best

Reich Minister to Denmark

Copenhagen, April 24, 1943

Re: The Jewish Question in Denmark

In response to Cable no. 537 of April 19, 1943, I hereby report the following, on the basis of my report of January 13, 1943:

1

As I explained in my report of January 13, 1943, Danish society regards the Jewish question above all as a legal and constitutional issue. If the German side were to demand special treatment of certain Danish citizens—that is, Jews who hold Danish citizenship—the Danes would regard this above all as an assault on their constitution, which assures equality of all Danish citizens under the law. They will be apprehensive about staying on their present path if the existing constitution is breached for the first time in a way that will constrain the personal freedom of all citizens of the country—hard labor, for example—and that totally revises the judicial and political status of the state.

Therefore, bringing up the Jewish problem would be resisted by all constitutional players in the Danish state, and—as Prime Minister Scavenius explained in one of our talks—it would also cause the Government to resign, after which the possibility of forming a legal Government would become unlikely.

2

The Jewish problem commands so little importance in Denmark, in terms of quantity and interest, that there is no practical need to take special action for the time being.

- a. The total Jewish population of Denmark is estimated at 6,000, nearly all of whom are gathered in Copenhagen.

- b. In public life, Jews have been removed from all main positions for decades, to a growing degree.

There are no Jews among members of Parliament or among leaders of political parties.

According to inquiries made by my office, there are thirty-one Jews in the entire Danish administration—including libraries, schools, and universities—and most of them hold unimportant positions.

Among the lawyers, we found thirty-five Jews countrywide.

Fourteen Jews were employed by the Danish press as editors and the like (none of them is an editor-in-chief).

Twenty-one Jews are known to be engaging in sculpture, painting, music, literature, theater, and cinema.

Throughout the economy, 345 self-employed Jews have been counted thus far, including four in banking, six on the stock exchange, twenty-two manufacturers, and 313 wholesale merchants, whose importance has decreased greatly as a result of the decline in commerce.

- c. The armaments center in Denmark, of which I demanded to exclude Jews from all arms orders forwarded to Denmark, stated that only six of 700 enterprises that have received orders may be defined as Jewish in the sense of the German Jewish laws. Of those, the center forced one plant to dismiss a Jewish member of the executive committee. Two other plants are no longer of interest because the orders they filled have not been renewed. As for the remaining three plants, efforts are continuing to bring about the dismissal of Jewish members of the executive committee and the like.
- d. In sum, it may be stated that neither political nor economic behavior in Denmark is substantively influenced by Jews; that German interests do not require measures against the Jews of Denmark at the present time; that since the Jews in Denmark are so few and so unimportant, summary actions against them would seem unfounded and incomprehensible; and that the small number of Jews in Denmark and their concentration in Copenhagen will facilitate at some later date a total arrangement, which my office is preparing by monitoring the situation.

3

There are 1,351 stateless Jews, former German citizens in Denmark at the present time (845 men, 458 women, and 48 children).

These Jews have given no reason thus far to take action against them.

In principle, all the points expressed in Paragraph 1 apply to them, i.e., if the Germans demand general actions against these Jews, the Danes will respond in all the ways described.

The situation would be different, not only legally but also psychologically, if the German citizenship of these Jews were to be restored. Then they could be dealt with under the auspices of the Reich, without the problem of Danish intransigence and infringement of Danish law.

Therefore, please look into the possibility of repealing the revocation of citizenship with respect to these Jews in Denmark and of restoring the stateless Jews German citizenship.

If this question is answered in the affirmative, I will present detailed proposals about the time on which the revocation of citizenship shall be reversed and about all other measures that should be taken.

Signed

Dr. Best

Source: Yad Vashem Archive JM/2216.