1940-1945: Hiding From Mass Persecution

Baschwitz’s fourth and further books for a wider audience all concerned the fourth ‘P’: mass persecution. They explored the universal social and psychological processes involved. They were inspired by the emerging Nazi persecution of ethnic Jews, from which Baschwitz himself was forced to hide in The Netherlands, after very narrowly escaping deportation to the east and certain death. However, the books nominally focused on a historical study of witch-hunts, which had plagued Europe centuries earlier.

Wider historical context: The run-up to the war

Soon after Baschwitz had fled Germany, the Führer had given his first elaborate public statement about future foreign policy before the Reichstag. At that point, he still tried to dampen the rising alarm in neighbouring countries by solemnly declaring that he would respect all existing obligations and international treaties. But as soon as he became well entrenched in power, he began to openly tear up one previous agreement and pact after another. In the end, he retreated from the League of Nations, which he labelled an allied instrument for the enforcement of the Diktat of Versailles.

He also began to build foreign alliances with like-minded outcasts, like Duce Mussolini in Italy. He chose to support the coup of the fascists of Generalissimo Francisco Franco against the legitimate republican government during the Spanish Civil War, so as to acquire an ally on the southern French border. This was followed by the Anschluss of Austria, then the grabbing of the Sudetenland and the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Through all this, he continued with a plan to build an unprecedented national network of Autobahn motorways and favoured the car and truck industry – both useful for rapid and changing military deployments. He also rejected the limitations imposed upon the size of the German Wehrmacht army on land, and began to rebuild a Kriegsflotte navy for the sea and a Luftwaffe airforce as well. Weapons expenditure soon skyrocketed from 0.7 billion marks in 1933 to 10.8 billion in 1937, reaching a sum total of 90 billion for the pre-war years. With the effects of the previous crippling British
maritime blockade in mind, he strived for increased self-sufficiency – by further priority development of synthetic oil and synthetic rubber, for instance.¹

Fear of another future blockade also reinforced his fixed idea of conquering more Lebensraum or ‘vital space’, through a Drang nach Osten or a push to the largely less developed east, to gain raw materials through agriculture and mining. He would somehow clear out the ‘inferior’ Slavs and communists, and replace them with Aryan settlers. It would be much more difficult for the Allies to disrupt supply lines over the vast landmass of the Eurasian continent.

Yet he and Stalin initially decided to postpone their inevitable clash, for the time being, by dividing Poland among themselves. This then led to the ‘phony war’ with Great Britain and France, which was mostly limited to a declaration, without actual fighting (yet). It was only in April 1940 that he launched the war in the west with an attack in Scandinavia ‘to prevent British landings’. This was followed in May 1940 by an attack on the three Benelux countries and France. They had seen it coming, but proved unable to fend it off.

### Invasion of the Netherlands, flight to the coast

Just before sunrise on 10 May 1940, German divisions crossed the border and invaded The Netherlands. They made rapid progress. The traditional defence approach had been to inundate a strip of the polders east of the western part of the country where the major cities were located, and to make a stand at the Grebbeberg hills in the centre – on only slightly higher ground. But, on the one hand, a new pumping station was not yet ready; and on the other, the introduction of transport planes and parachuted troops had made this approach obsolete. It soon became clear that the Dutch army was ill prepared and would not be able to hold out very long. So the royal family and cabinet fled to Britain to prevent their capture.

The Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB) had been only a small political party. At its peak during the mid-thirties, it claimed 60,000 members and 8 percent of the electoral vote. But as a ‘fifth column’ behind the Dutch defence lines, it still presented a grave danger. So the Dutch authorities put many in preventive custody. They reportedly also found a range of secret files recounting who could or could not be trusted to go along with Nazi

rule. Baschwitz had apparently been identified as a potential opponent because of his new critical 1938 book *Du und die Masse.*

Baschwitz’s daughter Isa recounted:

On the evening of the 14th of May, the doorbell rang. It was a constable from the aliens police: ‘Can I come up?’ The whole family stood around him, in the corridor. He said: ‘You must leave at once! Tomorrow, the Netherlands will capitulate. You are on an NSB-list of adversarial [anti-fascist] Germans in The Netherlands’. There was no mention of him being Jewish. So it was clear: my father had to leave the house without delay.2

I had a friend in Heemstede [a southern suburb of Haarlem, close to the coast]. I stayed over regularly, and knew there was an extra room there [possibly to rent out to tourists]. Nothing was running anymore [buses, trams]. So, with the little money we had, we left in a cab, in the middle of the night. I still see the burning petrol harbour – the red glow, the clouds.

The 20-kilometre ride took a long time. ‘The road was crowded with people, who still tried to flee to England’ via the small seaport of IJmuiden.

We rang the doorbell, and the lady opened, sleepily. So I asked if my father could stay over. She was stunned. We said: ‘Tomorrow there will be a capitulation – the queen has already left’. She would not believe us. [But] of course she did not leave us outside, [she] put on a housecoat, served us a drink. So that is where he stayed, briefly. The expression [of going into] ‘hiding’ had not yet been invented. I went back the next day, by train. He had to pay board and lodging.

The Germans had felt that their progress was too slow, however, and risked British forces landing on the coast. They sent airborne troops to capture the government centre of The Hague, but failed. Then they issued an ultimatum: capitulate, or the inner city of your major port will be bombarded. The Dutch gave in, but their answer was delayed, and the centre of Rotterdam was destroyed anyway. Some 800 people were killed; 80,000 lost their homes.

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2 I have tried to translate as well as I could, from my compacted notes. But the transcription is neither entirely literal nor entirely complete. (Appr. minute 40 a.f., from the 3-hour video interview kept at the JHM). Another qualifier is that Isa’s recollection tends to be stylized and/or embellished at points; which is not surprising forty years later. Experts I consulted doubt that such personalized warnings were given; at most, there were only very general ones.
It was one of the biggest attacks on a civilian population in the West at the beginning of the Second World War.

The Nazis had won, and could begin to impose their rule. More than two thousand Dutchmen had died during the invasion: half soldiers, half civilians.

Return to Amsterdam, half in hiding

When it turned out that the occupier had not come looking for him, Baschwitz left Heemstede after two or three weeks and returned to Amsterdam. But altogether, he was to stay at almost ten different addresses throughout the following period. He mostly stayed in the new Rivierenbuurt neighbourhood in the South of Amsterdam, where many middle class Jews now lived: first voluntarily, then forced.

Most of the new streets and houses there were built in the characteristic modern ‘Amsterdam School’ style. Ample streets, many with trees, alternated with small squares with lawns and flowerbeds. Long blocks, with three or four storeys of individual apartments, the final one with spare ‘attic’ rooms on top. Mostly yellow-, red-, or brown-stone bricks on the outside, with some variations: the occasional piece of granite here and there. No elevators, but high stairs, both outside and inside, to the upper apartments. Wooden front doors in brown, with transparent varnish, copper handles and letterboxes. A natural look, in fashion during those days, not unattractive.

The eldest daughter Isa claimed that her father remained in hiding in Amsterdam from this early point onwards, but this seems to be incorrect. They stayed together at the Weissenbruchstraat until the summer, when the family did indeed break up, and everybody went their separate ways. Her version of further events sometimes differs from that of her younger sister Rody. Their adolescent personalities already contrasted, and their further experiences during the war and occupation drove them further apart. They were often embroiled, and largely remained so after the war.3

3 Ebels-Dolanová spoke to the youngest daughter, who was unable to provide the address of her elder sister at that time. So Ebels privileges the youngest daughter’s version of events. When the eldest daughter saw the final master’s thesis, however, she protested that it was ‘full of mistakes’, and demanded that her letter be displayed with all distributed copies. Anschlag later received a detailed note from the eldest daughter, and his thesis tends to give more room to her version of events. I have been able to draw on later even more elaborate statements by the
Isa: ‘My mother rented a room from a landlord in the [nearby] Leimuidenstraat, third floor behind. She cooked her own meals, but it was so sad’. She reportedly got some relief through their Church. ‘The furniture was sold, except [a few pieces] for my father. He took them everywhere, with his books. Because he had to keep writing, to earn some money’.

According to one version, Baschwitz first stayed with another family for a few months, as a paying guest. According to another version, he had already moved into an attic at a modest Jewish boarding house in the Niersstraat at this point, also in the Rivierenbuurt neighbourhood, and he was able to stay there during the entire first half of the war. On the side facing the street, the building has a row of four small square windows, just half a metre high. It must have been stuffy up there.

I found that this address was noted in the surviving population register, and was therefore known to the German authorities. He was on the fourth floor, had his own entry and toilet, and was isolated from the rest of the house. But they brought his meals up. He got to work on the theme of persecution, meaning to complete the first of his trilogy of subsequent studies on witch-hunts.

The eldest son, Hans (born 1920), had already left several years earlier to work on a farm, and reportedly stayed there during a large part of the war. The eldest daughter, Isa (born 1922), ultimately went to live with Baschwitz’s historian friend Jacques Presser and his wife, a bit further down in the same Rivierenbuurt neighbourhood, to finish her grammar school. (I return to her story below). The youngest daughter Rody (born 1923) could not finish school under the circumstances. For the time being, she moved to Blaricum, in the rural Gooi area southeast of Amsterdam.

She became a household help staying with neighbours of Baschwitz’s other author friend Mozes (later Maurits) Mok. He was to translate Baschwitz’s first book on witch-hunts from the original German manuscript the next year, and his father-in-law even offered to pose as the original author (if a pen-name did not suffice to shield Baschwitz). Pressers’ historian friends Jan and Annie Romein also had a little house nearby. Rody turned 18 in the autumn of 1941, and apparently rented a room in Amsterdam to live on her own and to further train in childcare.4

eldest daughter, particularly a 1995 three-hour video interview made for the Spielberg Holocaust Survivors project, available at the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.

4 Her birthday was October 29. A note in the population register says she checked out of Blaricum in mid-November. But it sounded a warning that she had not yet declared a new address. Ebels-Dolanová (p. 171) reports she worked for the family of Mr. Frits Grewel, and for Mrs. Van Steenbergen in Amsterdam, among others.
Baschwitz’s belated registration as a Jew

In hindsight, the persecution of Jews proceeded in accordance with a perverse plan applied from day one, consisting of 101 successive little steps of increasing segregation and mounting discrimination: forced registration, stigmatization, banning from ever more everyday activities; dismissal from jobs, leading to unemployment; work camps; transit camps for so-called ‘migration’ and ‘resettlement’ in Eastern Europe. To the Jews and to the outside world it seemed as if every extra little step was not necessarily catastrophic in itself, but we all know how it ended.

Nevertheless, the Baschwitzes’ friends the Frank family went into hiding. Daughter Anne was to write in her diary:

Anti-Jewish decrees followed each other in quick succession. Jews must wear a yellow star. Jews must hand in their bicycles, Jews are banned from trams and are forbidden to drive, Jews are only allowed to do their shopping between three and five o’clock and then only in shops which bear the placard ‘Jewish shop’. Jews must be indoors by eight o’clock and cannot even sit in their own gardens after that hour. Jews are forbidden to visit theatres, cinemas, and other places of entertainment. Jews may not take part in public sports. Swimming baths, tennis courts, hockey fields, and other sports grounds are all prohibited to them. Jews may not visit Christians, Jews must go to Jewish schools, and many more restrictions of a similar kind.5

These measures had begun immediately after the occupation, when the ‘Aryanization’ of the civil service had forced Jews to declare themselves; they were soon to be suspended and then fired. Next came the various recognized professions like lawyers and doctors: they could no longer deal with non-Jewish clients, and thus lost part of their income. By late 1940, Baschwitz was already fired as an unpaid private lecturer at the university and as a paid researcher at the Institute for Social History – as were his Jewish colleagues.

Next came general registration. In early 1941, all people with ‘some Jewish blood’ were told to register. Almost 160,000 people throughout the country did, of which 140,000 were labelled as mostly Jewish, the rest (like Baschwitz’s children), ‘half- or quarter-Jews’. According to a note left in

the administration, Baschwitz reluctantly registered on March 21: just two weeks before the (already extended) deadline finally ran out.6

This also meant that he was forced to accept the additional first name ‘Israel’ as further identification (for women it was ‘Sarah’). The 15.5 percent of foreigners among the Jews were singled out, two-thirds of whom were Germans like Baschwitz himself (although they were also deprived of their nationality and thus became technically stateless).7 For the time being, he probably decided to lie low and not attract undue attention to himself.

The battle for exemptions

When one discriminatory measure followed another, Baschwitz and others began to realize that this might lead them ever further down a path toward certain trouble. This is when many began procedures for a Sperre (exemption), and Rückstellung (redefinition) as only a partial Jew or a non-Jew. If one declared four or three ethnically Jewish grandparents (‘J4’ or ‘J3’), one was considered mostly Jewish. If one declared belonging to the Jewish religion and being married to a Jew, things were worse. By contrast, if one declared only one or two Jewish grandparents, one was classified as Gemischt or of ‘mixed blood’ (‘GI’ or ‘GII’) and let off the hook for the time being.

Ever since his book about masses and crowds, Baschwitz had been in touch with Berthold Stokvis, a Dutch psychiatrist teaching at the University of Leiden, who shared his interest in the social process of ‘suggestion’. His brother Benno was a progressive writer and lawyer. A member of the communist party before the war, he was noted for his defences of the famous international revolutionary Henk Sneevliet and of homosexuals, and as a board member of the Nederlandse Vereeniging voor Sexuele Hervorming NVSH, the association for sexual reform.8

Stokvis was Jewish, and thus limited to Jewish clients. But after his mother was re-classified, he was as well. He was one of only 25 lawyers who got involved in helping Jews deal with the complicated new regulations. People later reproached him for having ‘dealt with’ the occupier. But he

6 Population register files, now held at the Central Bureau for Genealogy (CBG), at the National Archives in The Hague.
7 Presser, Ashes, p. 38.
8 See the entry by Hans Warmerdam in the Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland. After the war, Stokvis became an MP for the Communist Party, but later left, joined the Labour Party, and published a brochure on the contrast between the two.
replied that he had been able to help save a number of people who would otherwise have been deported and killed. Baschwitz was one of them.9

A key question is how exactly Baschwitz survived. The testimony of his eldest daughter and the master’s thesis by Anschlag seemed to have solved this enigma, but upon closer inspection their answer is not entirely correct or complete. When I began to delve further into this, staff at the Institute for War Documentation in Amsterdam initially suggested that I look at the so-called ‘Calmeyer list’ of exemptions in The Hague. But in this context, the label ‘Calmeyer list’ is often used in a wider sense for the entire population register now kept at the Central Bureau of Genealogy (CBG), and in a narrower sense for certain specific categories of revisions.

There were several ways to try to get a revision. One pertained to religion. An individual could claim that he or she had been falsely registered as member of a Jewish religious community, and show that he or she had been registered as a member of a Christian church.

The other way pertained to ethnic descent (‘race’). One method was by claiming to have been born out of an extra-marital affair with an Aryan; another was by claiming that a purely religious label had falsely been interpreted as an ethnic label. This second method was used by a number of Sephardic Jews (ultimately descending from Southern Europe, i.e. the Iberian peninsula, specifically Portugal), who contrasted themselves with the Ashkenazi Jews (mostly from Central and Eastern Europe).

The German official in charge of sorting this all out was Dr. Hans Calmeyer, and Baschwitz’s lawyer also had to deal with him. The procedures often demanded loads of additional documentary proof for verification. But much of it was of course bogus, and the Dutch experts and authorities involved were sometimes well aware of this. One lawyer estimated that as much as 90 percent of the requests for exemption rested on some kind of deception.10

According to some who survived, Calmeyer often overlooked these deceptions and did what he could to help. (He was ultimately even honoured at the Israeli Yad Vashem Holocaust remembrance centre). According to others, however, he could and should have done much more. All this is important to illustrate Baschwitz’s worries during these days. But in his case, other details ultimately proved to be decisive.11

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9 In 1968, Stokvis published some memories about the ins and outs of this work as ‘Lawyer under the occupation’.
11 A hyper-critical January 2007 Ph.D. thesis on his role was made by NIOD staff member Carl Stuldreher (reviewed by Max Arian in the weekly De Groene Amsterdammer, 4 May 2007). A more nuanced analysis was provided in a 2012 master’s thesis by Petra Van den Boomgaard.
Lecturing at the Oosteinde refugee centre

As a refugee from 1933 onwards, Baschwitz had been helped by Jewish social workers. Later, a ‘home’ and support centre had been created on the Oosteinde number 16 (next to the Frederiksplein) to provide several administrative and logistical services to refugees. This was also where the Beirat, a special counsel for foreign refugees, had an office.12

This centre had a cultural department as well, which organized lectures and courses in arts and sciences. From 1937 onwards, Kurt Baschwitz had become a regular lecturer there, for a small fee, just like his Jewish colleague Jacques Presser. They probably already knew each other through the university history department, and their common Dutch friend Jan Romein – who was soon appointed professor there.

During the first years of the occupation, when there was still relative freedom of residence and movement, the Oosteinde centre continued to function as before. At one point there was even a classical concert benefit for it in the posh Amstel Hotel on the riverside. But the Nazi occupiers soon began to impose an entirely new organizational framework on both the foreign refugees and the local Jewish community.

In 1941, they created the ‘Jewish Council’ as a kind of large umbrella organization, to be headed by Ascher and Cohen – with whom Baschwitz was already familiar from the pre-war coordination and refugee committees. The new Council was lured into cooperation, and the illusion that things could largely stay as before. It played for time, thinking that the war would soon be over. It pushed back against successive steps, hoping to prevent worse from happening. It produced lists of people ‘indispensable’ to the council and to the larger community. But it was also blackmailed through Nazi hostage taking, and had to concede ever more ground.

The home at the Oosteinde also came to be subsumed under the Council, and was listed in the later printed overview guide of its various departments. Presser said he ‘kept a lively memory of the atmosphere on this small island of civilisation and humanity’.13 Lecturers like him were now given a special small green Ausweis or ID pass, which needed to be stamped for validity at the beginning of each new quarter. Baschwitz’s 1942 card turned up among materials recently added to his personal papers in

Estimates for the number of people Calmeyer saved run an extremely broad range, from 50 to 15,000. See Van den Boomgaard, p. 19-20.

12 Ebels-Dollanová, p. 150-151.
13 Presser, Ondergang, Dutch ed., p. 422.
the special collections of the Amsterdam University library. It had been validated for the first three quarters of that year, but not for the fourth. What happened?

Baschwitz’s personal papers contain the carbon copy of a typewritten post-war note showing that the number of suicides for Amsterdam and The Netherlands shot up dramatically in May 1940: half of those concerned Jews immediately after the invasion. It regressed during the next year, then shot up again in 1942, when mass deportations of Jews began in earnest. One prominent suicide had been that of the writer Menno ter Braak, who had headed the anti-fascist Vigilance committee before the war. Another was Baschwitz’s friend Bonger, the criminologist. There were also several other Jewish acquaintances, like members of the Keesing publisher family.

Presser had published an article on anti-Semitism on the eve of the invasion, and had few illusions. He and his wife panicked after the invasion. They tried to flee to the IJmuiden seaport. There were rumours that a special boat had been arranged for Jews to flee to England. But it was impossible to get through, and it proved to be a mirage anyway. The next day they reportedly agreed to slash their wrists together, while sitting in a lukewarm bath at home. But one of them hesitated or woke up and called a doctor and the emergency services, who then also reanimated the other. A few days later, Presser returned to the grammar school where he taught, his wrists in bandages. The pupils knew what that meant.

Presser as foster father of Baschwitz’s eldest daughter

Presser came from a very modest background. He was a somewhat reserved and shy person, but a great storyteller, popular with his pupils. By the end of the year, he and his Jewish colleagues were dismissed. The pupils mounted a protest strike, led by Lucas van der Land (later a lecturer in political science) and a friend. Van der Land even refused to return to school and instead took

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14 File 136. In his recent study Het creatieve brein (Amsterdam: Atlas 2016, pp. 271-272), neurologist Dick Swaab mentions that 317 people committed suicide in The Netherlands in May 1940 (210 of them Jewish), compared to an average of 71 in the years before. A more recent book by Lucas Ligtenberg mentions a Swaab family of five that committed suicide, and puts the total at 400 (NRC, 3 May 2017).

15 Accounts vary as to who sounded the alarm. According the obituary by his later boss Loe de Jong, it was Presser. According to Isa, and according to the 1988 biography by Nanda van der Zee (p. 112-113), it was his wife.
private lessons with the dismissed Jewish teachers – ultimately running one year ahead of those who had stayed.16

The next year, Jewish pupils were also expelled and sent to a special Jewish lyceum. Baschwitz’s eldest daughter Isa had been seventeen when the invasion occurred. She was defined as only half-Jewish, but had already lost a year in the Barlaeus grammar school because of her earlier illness and still had a year and a half to go. The Presser couple had remained childless, and in the summer of 1940 offered to take her in at their Roerstraat home in the same Rivierenbuurt neighbourhood. (This was the street next to where her father went to live at this point). She would help in the household; Presser would help her prepare for her final exam.

Ironically, Isa later remembered this as an exceptionally happy period in her life. She adored Presser, then 41, who was erudite and a great conversationalist. He also played the piano: Mozart, Schubert, Chopin. The melodies later continued to resonate inside her head. She also adored his wife Débora Appel, then 27, also called Dé or (diminutive) Dee’tje: his former pupil and much younger than him – closer to Isa’s own age. So she was more of an intimate friend than a foster parent.

Isa reminisced: ‘He worshipped her, and she him. As cold as it was at our house [of the estranged Baschwitz couple], so warm and delightful it was with them’, she said in her later video interview. ‘It was really a delight to live with them, fantastic!’, she added. With a sad look in her eyes, and biting her lip, even more than forty years later.17

She continued: ‘Both parents of Dee were Jewish. They lived on the Amstel [the riverside]. We had the habit of eating at their place on the Shabbat one week; they would come to us the other week. That is how I first witnessed the Jewish rites, first heard Jewish words I did not know’. The Pressers ‘gave me pocket money. I saved, to show my gratitude, and give them a beautiful vase from Focke & Meltzer [a well-known posh shop, selling Bohemian crystal]. But they were mad at me’. Pocket money was for little nothings, ‘every now and then a chocolate éclair or so’.

Dee’s mother concluded: “Well, she’s O.K., for a Shikse” [a non-Jewish girl]. I did not know what that meant. Everybody laughed, but they had to explain it to me. Afterward, we would walk back to the Roerstraat’. The three of

17 Appr. minute 1:24.
them, arm-in-arm, close together. ‘Very cosy, very convivial. It was always
interesting with them’.

At one point, there were all those new laws: no more radio, and all that.
‘They had it through the Jewish weekly [supervised by the Nazi regime].
But my father did not know those things. I said: “You should not read it.
Then you don’t know, that’s all there is to it”’. But soon those notes came.
‘I can still see them: those yellow cards. Where you had to declare all four
grandparents. Your Ahnen or ancestors’.18

According to a graduation list published in the local Algemeen Handels-
blad newspaper, on 19 May 1942 Isa finally got her final grammar school
diploma. She had to leave the Pressers.

I would have liked to go study medicine, but at that point, half-Jews
[like me] were no longer allowed to. Through an acquaintance of my
father, I landed in a small private clinic, the Spinoza hospital. I was the
only one without a nurses’ diploma, so I had to become an intern [and
live there, as a trainee]. At one point, I had to sit next to a patient under
narcosis after an operation, and warn the female director as soon as
he woke up. It turned out he was an English pilot who had been shot
down. One had to be careful: there were also pro-German nurses and
housekeepers.

Baschwitz’s arrest and deportation to Westerbork

By mid-1941, Hitler felt strong enough to break the deal with Stalin, and to
launch his ‘Barbarossa’ offensive against the Soviet Union. In December,
Japan attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, and brought
the United States into the war. This upset the previous balance of power.

In early 1942, Nazi leaders discussed the logistics of the ‘final solution’ of
the ‘Jewish problem’ in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. To the outside world,
this was presented as a huge program to resettle Jews for labour in Eastern
Europe. (Poland had already had an estimated 10 percent of the population
or 3.5 million Jews before the war).19

Presser’s later authoritative overview on the persecution of the Dutch
Jews describes two of the earliest ‘regular’ razzias or raids in the South of
Amsterdam on 14 July and 6 August 1942. Presser was arrested in both of

18 ‘Heel genoeglijk, heel gezellig’. Video itw., min. 51 ff.
19 See ‘History of the Jews in Poland’ from the English Wikipedia.
them; Baschwitz only in the second, the so-called ‘raid of the two-thousand’, on ‘Black Thursday’.

They were herded into the open courtyard of the Zentralstelle of the main location of the Amsterdam police. Meanwhile, the first Hollandse (later Joodse) Schouwburg (first ‘Dutch’ then ‘Jewish’) theatre was being turned into a special collection centre for such purposes; it even made use of a pre-existing ‘nursery’ across the street, next to a teacher training college. These locations have now been turned into memorials and museums within the framework of the ‘Jewish Cultural Quarter’.

Verifications often took a long time; people had to sleep overnight on the pavement or on the floor. Baschwitz could not show proper papers, so he was transported to the wind-swept Westerbork transit camp in the northeast of the country, probably on the next day. The Germans had taken over the pre-war refugee camp there, and turned it into an internment and transit camp. They greatly expanded it, further surrounding it with barbed wire and sinister watch towers.

Misleadingly, the camp also had a large and relatively well-equipped hospital. Soon after Baschwitz, the journalist Philip Mechanicus also landed there and was able to stay on as an orderly. In the end, he did not survive – but his diary did, providing harrowing descriptions of everyday life in the camp. The departure of people to an uncertain destiny. Some thousand at a time. Once or twice a week, mostly on Tuesdays.

The train: a long dilapidated snake made up of filthy old wagons that divides the camp in two. The ‘Boulevard’: a desolate area, lined with O.D. men [orde dienst or camp police] to keep out overly interested onlookers. The deportees: loaded with a bread bag strung from one shoulder, resting on a hip, and a rolled-up blanket with a rope to the other shoulder, knocking about on their backs. Shabby immigrants who own nothing but what they wear and what they carry. Men, quiet, stone-faced; women, often in tears. The elderly: stumbling, faltering under their burden, tripping on the bad road, sometimes into pools of mud. The sick on stretchers borne by O.D. men.

Harrowing scenes, some of it captured on a surviving piece of film.20

20 Tuesday 1 June 1943; p. 11-12 in the English edition; 21-22 in the Dutch. The piece of film is shown at the memorial sites in Amsterdam and Westerbork.
Isa Baschwitz's rescue operation

There had been panicked phone call. Kurt's landlady had called his full-German ex-wife, who had called her eldest daughter. 'My father had once said: “If I ever get arrested, you must go to my house to fetch my papers – if I did not have them on me”’. She was to pretend that the couple had not divorced, and still had children to take care of. She later recounted how she had put on her nurse’s uniform, as it might help. She brought her German passport, stamped with a Nazi swastika. Travelled all the way to the little train station in the distant countryside of the northeast of the country, close to the camp.

The guard alternated between a Dutch SS-man and a Dutch military policeman [the former supposedly more fanatical than the latter]. I waited for the turn of the last one, went to say I wanted to speak to my
father, at the gate. He had him called up repeatedly [possibly over some kind of speaker system], but he did not turn up.

I slept at a farmhouse [a bit further down, employing camp labourers]. I stayed two days there, went to the gate three or four times. There had been a transport [to the east]. I was afraid he might have been included – in that case there was nothing I could do anymore. There was going to be another transport. The only thing I could do was go and see if he was there [...] But in the end, people were able to get hold of him. He was scared, and ashen-faced.

She handed over the papers. He said: ‘Thank God. Now I will probably be able to get out’. Isa: ‘One would say: he would prove extremely grateful to his daughter. But it was never mentioned. Never’. She bit her lip during the video interview, tears welling up in her eyes – more than forty years later. ‘But it was typical. Not only for him, but for others as well – Jacques [Presser] too’. The interviewer asked: How come? ‘I think it was shame, about his dependence. He was already old; I was 19’. (In fact, she was 20 at that point).21

Meanwhile, Baschwitz went to present his papers to the camp registration office. They were probably judged not entirely satisfactory and in order, but enough. He was told to immediately regularize his situation upon his return. He then got a release document, dated Sunday 9 August. Although it is missing from one microfilm overview file at the war documentation institute, it is still in a paper file. Anschlag found it and reproduced it in his master’s thesis, and I have seen it as well.22

The release document notes that he had been married to an Aryan woman (although it mentioned the wrong year 1915 rather than the correct year 1919), and had three children with her. The passport of the mother and the eldest daughter confirmed this. Although it does add that he had meanwhile divorced. The release document also notes that they had all been baptized Evangelical-Lutheran – an excerpt from the church register and a letter by a pastor apparently confirmed this. (The number of Jews married to gentiles, with children, was put at 6,008 that autumn; the number of ‘protestant Jews’ at only 1,156).23

21 So he was kept a few days, not a few months. Ebels-Dolanová (p. 169, n. 57), and her source Rody, apparently misunderstood.
22 Reproduced in Anschlag, opposite p. 59.
23 Schellenberg may have had a central function at the church; Presser (p. 208) mentions a former pastor of that name as later directly placed at Calmeyer’s department. Numbers:
The daughters later said some of the papers she brought had been falsified, and this claim is also mentioned in the master’s theses of both Anschlag and Ebels. But this leaves two unsolved problems. On the one hand, the papers mentioned here were probably more or less genuine, not blatantly falsified. On the other hand, I have consulted with experts who said they might not have been enough to let him go at that point. Although it is true that the ‘routine’ deportations had only just begun: the rules and regulations had not yet entirely crystallized, and there apparently still was some leeway for interpretation. So why the mystery?

**Through the meshes of the net**

Only in her belated 1995 video interview (available at the Jewish History Museum), did Isa finally reveal a secret that she had kept that far. Baschwitz had never mentioned it after the war, nor had most of the others in a similar situation. In his memoirs (p. 15), his lawyer Benno Stokvis calls it ‘an uncomfortable and neglected chapter in the historiography of the [anti-]Jewish measures in the occupied Netherlands’. Isa had also brought a confidential affidavit that her father was sterile or had been sterilized. This had apparently been shown, but was discreetly not mentioned on the release form itself.

It had most probably been Baschwitz’s lawyer who had advised him to take this additional precaution. Out of 8,610 Jews in mixed marriages, with or without children, 2,562 had apparently chosen this road. Like Baschwitz, many already had children. For the 1,416 women, it could simply be a question of age. The 1,146 men sometimes claimed an earlier venereal disease, or a specially performed recent surgical operation.24

Stokvis says he has reason to believe that no more than ten women and a hundred men actually had operations – including fake ones (as some Dutch doctors cooperated). And that none of the thirty clients he himself had advised (including Baschwitz), had been turned down. Jews considered sterile got a special ‘open’ and red (rather than a solid and black) stamp of

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24 Presser, p. 202; Stokvis, p. 17. Stokvis had earlier published a related article in the Dutch law journal *Nederlands Juristen Blad NJB* on 29 June 1959. Three-and-a-half months later, Baschwitz sent a rather bland postcard, thanking Stokvis for having drawn his attention to it. According to the address, the latter’s office was then on the same Oosteinde, number 25.
the letter ‘J’ on their ID papers. Mixed marriage Jews considered sterile were then *excused* from wearing the yellow star in public.25

But in the same video interview, Isa also said there was still ‘something else’ that helped get him out, but for some reason refrains from specifying it. A letter in the surviving administration of Westerbork with the mention *Eilboten* (Courier or Express) may throw further light on this. It was addressed to Mrs. Dr. R. Pool: an earlier advisor of the Oosteinde support centre for refugees, then made a liaison person for the Jewish Council at the Westerbork transit camp.

The letter had the letterhead of the support centre, mentioning its link to the overall council. It was signed by its director Mr. Hermann Bier (himself a German refugee), and concerned five people recently arrested and brought to Westerbork. It says: ‘You can imagine that we are worried about our collaborators. I know you will do everything within your power’.

With regard to Baschwitz, it said: ‘He is over 50 years old [in fact he was 56], probably a [First World] War participant [he was not]’. It mentioned he had been a regular lecturer there since 1937, for a fee. It added: ‘He has nothing with him. We try to fill a rucksack for him. But I warmly hope he will not need it’. Meaning: I hope he will not be sent to the east right away.26

In retrospect, Baschwitz himself and his daughter Isa may have felt it somewhat embarrassing that the Jewish council (which was soon considered discredited) had intervened on his behalf. Yet Presser, who later wrote the most authoritative overview of the entire persecution and the increasingly questionable role of the council, had also twice been arrested in a street raid. He had also been liberated on both occasions. As a lecturer and teacher he, too, was probably on a list of people to be spared at that point.

**Going into hiding at his daughters’ place**

According to notes in the surviving population register, kept at the central genealogy bureau, Baschwitz spent until late September having the provisional release reconfirmed by various relevant authorities – probably again guided by Stokvis. Only a week later, the Nazis suddenly sent a huge number of Jews from work camps to Westerbork, however, overburdening

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25 Stokvis also refers to the first post-war report about this: M.N. Roegholt, *Ned. Tijdschrift v. Geneeskunde*, 6 October 1945, p. 318-9. Stokvis’s book seems to belittle the question somewhat; Presser’s overview study gives a much more dramatic account (p. 195 ff.).

26 Netherlands Institute of War Documentation, Westerbork archive, nr. 250 i, file 41.
it – with thousands sleeping on the floors. They arrested even more, and sent a huge wave of 13-14,000 for transport to the east.27

Thus after the tentative first few months during the summer, the pace of deportations suddenly accelerated during that same autumn. The number of exemptions was also reduced by no less than 15,000 over the next half-year. Ultimately, there were even special arrest raids to again round up those who had been liberated earlier: Protestant Jews, or those divorced after a mixed marriage – as in Baschwitz’s case.28

Toward the end of 1942, earlier rumours about the systematic extermination of those deemed unfit for forced labour had been succeeded by isolated reports from chance eyewitnesses to mass killings immediately upon arrival in the east. They had begun to seep back to the west, were brought to the attention of the Allied authorities, and reported by some major Allied media. But many continued to doubt them, and likened them to the hoax atrocity stories about German ‘corpse factories’ during the First World War. At first, Baschwitz himself was reportedly among them.29

Baschwitz’s mother now lived in a pension/guesthouse with a number of other Jews. Held by Mrs. Blog-Heilbron, on the Plantage Middenlaan 40. Just a few houses away from the Hollandse Schouwburg centre at number 24, where Jews were now held after raids. She, and many of the other tenants, were soon arrested as well. They were sent to Westerbork, where – at age 76 – Hedwig soon died from illness. Her urn was later buried at a Jewish cemetery in the outskirts of Amsterdam.30

**Isa as a courier for people in hiding**

Like Baschwitz, Presser had tried to set his mind to writing. Like Baschwitz and others, he dealt with historical subjects that had an obvious resonance with the tragedy of their day, but without openly saying so. When the invasion took place, he had just completed a study on Napoleon, the other

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27 Presser, p. 169-172.
28 Exemptions fell from 45,000 in late 1942 to 30,000 in spring 1943, according to a 2008 doctoral dissertation by Jan Willem Griffioen & Ron Zeller. Quoted by Van den Boomgaard, p. 4, n. 4. Specific categories are mentioned in Presser (English), p. 313 and elsewhere.
30 The whole area is now part of the larger Jewish Cultural Quarter, with synagogues and museums and remembrance sites. For both Hedwig Bikard and the guesthouse, see: www.joodsmonument.nl.
hubristic leader who had wanted to rule the whole of continental Europe. It could not be published.

Thereafter, the big publisher Elsevier had asked him to write a book about the earlier Dutch independence war. Like Baschwitz, he published it under an alias (the name of a Dutch colleague), but a reprint was soon forbidden as well. The same publisher then asked him for a history of the U.S., but this too could only be published after the war.

Isa said about the Pressers:

there was someone who offered to bring them to Switzerland [for a fee]. But I felt he made an untrustworthy impression. They would go with four people: together with Sal de Jong [the twin brother of Loe de Jong, who was already in London and worked for ‘Radio Orange’ there]. They were irritated when Jacques and Dee decided not to do it, because of misgivings inspired by a young rascal, a 19-year old [in fact 20 …] But the couple were betrayed and never came back. They had two boys, who became orphans.

In March 1943, Baschwitz’s eldest daughter Isa was to turn 21. The Pressers had insisted: Celebrate it at our place! ‘Dee’tje had saved ration coupons. So I could invite some friends. I had a wonderful birthday. Four days later, I went back to thank them. There was a desperate Jacques – alone’. It turned out Dee’tje had removed her yellow star, braved the travel ban, and had gone to take the train, to go congratulate her stepmother on her anniversary.

She had brought false ID papers, very poorly made. He had not stopped her. He had not wanted to tell her what to do and what not, probably also because of their great age difference. It gradually dawned on him, however, that she had probably been caught. Isa said she could not keep herself from blurting out: ‘How could you have let her go, for God’s sake?’ Adding remorsefully, in retrospect: ‘I did not realize what I had just said’. According to several of his later memoirs, the fateful phrase kept echoing through Jacques’ head, for the rest of his life.

‘A little later, someone dropped me a little note from her, written in pencil’. Probably handed to an outsider at Westerbork, in haste. Dee joked she was a typical Schlemihl (Yiddish for someone bringing bad luck upon himself). She said she had tried to escape, which had made her a prisoner with a special (and even worse) “S” status (for straf or supplementary punishment). That she was treated badly, expected to be deported, and not to return. ‘She wrote: “Take care of Jacques, as I cannot any more. See to it that he never ends up here, he would not survive it.”’ Isa added: ‘It was a kind of last will, from someone who was very dear to me’.
She continued: ‘But Jacques would not leave the house, thinking that she might still come back’. He wrote poems for her. (It was only several years after the war that he received final confirmation that she had been gassed upon arrival at Sobibor). Only ten weeks later did he himself finally go into hiding. First in Lunteren (on the Veluwe, a thinly populated wooded area close to the centre of the country). Although he would be forced to flee further, after betrayal and in fear of discovery.

Isa: ‘He still received a lot of mail, at his old address. I would go fetch it, and bring it to him. He prepared replies, which I would then post. He also needed ration coupons and papers, falsified as well as possible. He wrote to me, almost every [other] day’. His post-war overview book quoted calculations that for Aryans, it had proven five-and-half times easier to find such hiding places, and sixteen times easier to survive arrest after discovery, than for Jews. A difference of eighty-eight to one. Social class and education of course also played a role.31

Isa gradually went to act as a courier for more people. This was how she got ever deeper into resistance work. Whereas Kurt had shown moral courage, Isa also had physical courage. He was of course worried sick about the risks she took, time and again. With a broad laugh, Isa later recalled how he had told her: ‘That you are so reckless must be blamed on your stupidity’.32 But intergenerational psychology teaches us, that children (or even grandchildren) often somehow act out the unspoken dreams and forbidden fantasies of their parents – in their choice of activity.

Kurt Baschwitz had been labelled full-Jewish by the Nazis; his exemption from deportation was very fragile and provisional. There was little he could do about it. Through Jacques Presser, Isa had grown closer to the Jewish culture and community, but she still had full-German papers, with the Nazi swastika and all. Her long illness during adolescence had strengthened her character and her obstinacy. In a sense, she became her father’s proxy by joining the resistance. For better and for worse.

31 J.J. van Bolhuis e.a., Onderdrukking en verzet (Repression and resistance). Quoted in Presser, p. 382.
32 ‘Das Du so rücksichtlos bist, das halte Ich deine Dummheit zu gute’. She adds, ‘That was how he was with me’. (Video interview, JHM. Appr. 2 hrs. 39 min.).
Isa gets involved with the armed resistance

After his liberation from the Westerbork transit camp, Baschwitz had initially gone back to the boarding house in the Niersstraat. According to files in the population register, the authorities verified and approved his papers by the end of the same month. In theory, he could now move around freely, without a yellow star. In practice, however, the risks remained great. The rules on ‘exemptions’ like his were forever shifting and gradually being further restricted; their interpretation very much depended on arbitrary ad hoc decisions made by police officials.

Whenever house raids were feared in the increasingly ‘Jewish’ Rivierenbuurt neighbourhood, he often stayed with his ex-wife or youngest daughter Rody for one or more days, just to be sure. Later, he may have stayed a few months as a paying guest of acquaintances of the afore-mentioned Stokvis brothers.33

But in the summer of 1943, someone asked Rody to bring a little package to an address in the Corellistraat. It is not clear who did and why, but she walked right into a trap laid out by the police. It turned out that number 6 was the home base of a group dubbed ‘CS6’ – linked to recent assassinations, acts of sabotage, and the communist underground.

One of their leaders was Leo Frijda: son of the economics professor Herman. (He was also the brother of Nico – a later psychology professor of mine). A hundred people were arrested on that day. Leo was soon killed, with 17 others, at the notorious execution grounds in the dunes near Overveen. Meanwhile, Baschwitz was afraid that his daughter’s arrest might lead to him, so he hid for two weeks in an empty house in the Deurloostraat, sleeping on a mattress on the bare floor.

Isa: ‘I could not stay at that hospital. I had left just like that during my watch, and had stayed away for several days. So it was clear to me: I needed an ordinary job’ [where she would not be obliged to live as an intern]. She found one in a chemical laboratory. ‘So I rented at the Parnassusweg, where my father could also hide. I claimed he had been ill, [and] was staying over to get better. The landlady did not know he was Jewish. The fact that he never went out, she felt that was characteristic of such a bookish person, a recluse’. He never registered his new address, and was really in hiding now.

33 With the Schut family. One source (Rody/Ebels-Dolanová, p. 170-1) places this stay at this point, after the Niersstraat boarding house episode. Another source (Isa/Anschlag, p. 57) places it much earlier, before the Niersstraat episode.
Note that meanwhile the deportations had continued apace, and after merely fifteen months (!) were considered ‘ninety percent complete’. Amsterdam was declared *Judenrein*. The Jewish Council was dissolved, the Oosteinde support centre closed, most of their staff also sent to the east. Their efforts had mostly proven vain, or even counterproductive – as they had unwittingly facilitated the whole process. Similar things had happened in other countries.

**Family repercussions**

After some time, Baschwitz’s lawyer friend Benno Stokvis got the youngest daughter Rody out of jail. But she had contracted scurvy (linked to a lack of vitamin C) due to the poor food, and lack of fresh fruit and vegetables, in prison. So she reportedly spent three months in the countryside, on the farm of her elder brother Hans in Usselo, to get more varied nutrition before coming back to Amsterdam.

She then also moved into the Parnassusweg. But three people in a cramped space there was too crowded, and tensions soon arose. Isa:

> I took care of a growing number of people, for [falsified] papers and ration cards. At one point, there even was a civil servant in Enschede [close to where her brother lived and worked] who was able and willing to procure a whole batch of genuine, new, blank passports.

But then, someone had left a bag somewhere, with my address in it. So they [father and sister] urged me to get my stuff out of there. I brought the stuff to my mother’s place. Father said: ‘She endangers us’. Mother said: ‘This is my house. She will not move it again. It stays here’. She was much braver. But O.K., my father was persecuted, she was not. That was the difference.

So in March 1944 Rody became the official tenant at the Parnassusweg.34

Isa said she did not adhere to any resistance group in particular, but smuggled all kinds of genuine and false papers. She was in regular touch with a man at an Amsterdam distribution office who could get hold of ration cards. And with another who was good at copying all kinds of official stamps. To help people in hiding and/or in the resistance.

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34 Again, Rotraut’s story as related by Ebels, and Isa’s story as related by Anschlag, do not entirely run parallel. I have mostly followed the latter, as it seems to be more detailed.
Isa said Hans had continued to work at the farm. Yet finally,

my brother was called up for military service, in the German *Wehrmacht*. But they were [to be] sent straight to the Eastern front. Without training, as cannon fodder, for Russia. So he let himself fall out of a tree, on purpose. He broke his arm, was brought to the hospital. By the time it had been treated, his unit had already left. Later he simply bolted, came to me. I immediately put him to work, for my activities. The first job was the card tray [which was stolen from the population register and thrown into the canal].

The course of events seemed to accelerate after D-Day and the allied liberation of Paris, Brussels, and then the outskirts of Antwerp. In early September 1944, there were rumours they had already crossed the border to Breda in The Netherlands. The Dutch PM even made the mistake of confirming this over the London radio. People gathered close to a major roundabout near The Hague to welcome the Allied troops, some already raising the national flag. Collaborators began to flee, and the occupiers began to regroup closer to Germany, in the east. But this notorious ‘Mad Tuesday’ proved entirely premature. The southern provinces may have been liberated, but the western provinces were in for the harshest winter ever, and even a famine that killed 20,000.

Isa and Hans heard through their resistance contacts that collaborators had fled an apartment on the Zuider Amstellaan (after Liberation renamed the Rooseveltlaan): Number 260, close to the present-day RAI conference centre. The owners, or the intermediary, preferred to have Germans. Isa:

*We thought: You never know. My mother and brother went there, speaking their best German, to rent it. My mother officially registered there, not my brother. She even stayed there after the war, until her death.*

*So we told father: ‘You will now go into hiding at your [former] wife’s place.’ She preferred it that way, she was such a darling, a fantastic woman. She was fond of him, in spite of everything. Then my father said that a*
female friend with two daughters had been put onto the street overnight. So she also took them in, until the end of the war.\textsuperscript{37}

They reportedly survived the scarcity of the last, ‘hunger’ winter of the war because Hans could still arrange extra supplies from his former farm.\textsuperscript{38}

The final confrontation

In early May 1945, the Germans began to capitulate in one country after another. The Dutch government-in-exile in London had told the various resistance movements to merge into the Nederlandse Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten or ‘interior forces’, initially abbreviated as NBS. But they had not realized that the acronym closely resembled that of the fascist party NSB. So they dropped the ‘N’ again, and made the interior forces the BS. They were nominally put under the command of Bernhard – the son-in-law of the Queen. Now they began to manifest themselves in the streets of the capital.\textsuperscript{39}

Kurt was worried that his children took too many risks. In the end, Hans Baschwitz reportedly came to command a BS unit in Amsterdam, and Isa was still a courier. But since they were poorly trained and equipped, and sometimes undisciplined, they were told not to stage an armed uprising or carry out arrests themselves, and to wait instead until the regular troops arrived. This was to prevent a bloody Bijltjesdag day of reckoning and personal revenge, maltreatment of collaborators or even lynchings.

Yet in the chaos, things soon got out of control on 7 May. Celebrating crowds prematurely streamed onto the central Dam Square in the heart of Amsterdam. In the afternoon, skirmishes broke out with German troops who had entrenched themselves on the first floor of the nearby ‘Grand Industrial Club’, who then fired into the crowd, leaving twenty dead there – and more elsewhere.

Similar confusion occurred down the road at the key ‘CS’ square, in front of the Central Railway station. Shooting Germans retreated in that direction to evacuate the grounds, whereas armed SS-men had holed up next to the Victoria Hotel opposite the station. Part of the large station had already

\textsuperscript{37} Video itw, JHM, min. 2:07 a.f.
\textsuperscript{38} More in Barnouw, De hongerwinter.
\textsuperscript{39} According to the Wikipedia article on the BS, the number of active resistance fighters in 1943 was estimated at 25,000. In 1944-45 it had grown to 45,000, and with Liberation in view in May 1945 it had exploded to 150,000-200,000.
been taken over by the BS ‘interior forces’, while another part was still in the hands of the occupiers. The prolonged shoot-out killed two BS fighters and 17 Germans on that day.

Communication was difficult as the phone lines were down, and messages had to be carried in person across the firing lines. A BS commander at the station tried to send a courier to the Germans to tell them that a cease-fire had been reached, and that they would not be harmed if they gave up. But the messenger was killed in the crossfire. The BS commander then tried to summon a second courageous courier: Isa Baschwitz, in her nurse’s uniform, speaking German without any accent. She succeeded, and many lives were saved. She was later officially cited for her bravery.\textsuperscript{40}

The next day, Canadian troops finally entered the city, and then British ones. On May 9, they were officially welcomed on the same central Dam Square in Amsterdam by the prime minister and a resistance hero – who dramatically proclaimed: ‘Dutchmen, you are free!’ 500 people fainted in the dense crowd.\textsuperscript{41}

Baschwitz was happy to finally come out of hiding, go out into the streets again, and try to re-establish contact with old friends and acquaintances. But many proved to be missing.

**Liberation of the press**

Throughout these five years, Baschwitz had never stopped being a press historian and a press scientist. His personal archives are littered with unique newspapers, and there is even a special file with ‘historical copies’. Starting with his own preferred liberal Amsterdam daily *Algemeen Handelsblad* of 10 May 1940, with the front-page headline: ‘Netherlands at war’, followed by an early copy of the *Deutsche Zeitung* which the occupier soon imposed.

It also includes the newsheet *De Vliegende Hollander* (*The Flying Dutchman*) dropped by the Allied air forces toward the end, and the review *Buitenlandse Stemmen* (*Foreign Voices*) distributed by the Information Service of the provisional Dutch Military Authority. There are also copies

\textsuperscript{40} BS commander G.C. Rutteman later submitted a report on these skirmishes, in which the role of Isa is described. After this manuscript was completed, a detailed reconstruction of the Dam events was published in a book by Norbert-Jan Nuij and Ludmilla van Santen, *Drama op de Dam*.

\textsuperscript{41} van Liempt (2010), p. 314.
of most major Amsterdam newspapers on 8 May 1945, including the Catholic
*de Volkskrant* with a large front page headline in English, welcoming the
British and Canadian ground troops: ‘Liberated Amsterdam Greets You!’

From the outset, the Germans had imposed a *Gleichschaltung* to bring
the Dutch newspapers ‘into line’. They had immediately taken over the
national press agency and issued ‘general instructions’ and held daily press
briefings with ‘do’s and don’ts’ for editors. The Germans evicted Jews from
the journalists’ association and the newspaper publishers’ association.
They even introduced a first experiment with training for collaborationist
journalists.42 Writers, artists, and broadcasters who refused to join the
Nazi *Kulturkammer* or ‘culture chamber’ were fired, became unemployed,
and thus risked being sent to Germany for *Arbeitsdienst* ‘labour service’.43

One of the most noteworthy radio voices for the occupier was Max
Blokzijl, whom Baschwitz had known in the early 1930s as the Berlin cor-
respondent of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*. He had later developed into a
Nazi sympathizer. He was made a head of the press department at the
propaganda ministry during the occupation, and was notorious for his
virulent weekly radio talks. On 11 September 1945, his former newspaper
now reported he had been sentenced to death, and he became the first
collaborationist to be executed half a year later.

But from the outset, there had been a resistance press as well: with 40
titles in 1940, 400 by 1944, and then doubling again to 800 over the last year
(when electricity failures paralyzed short-wave radio sets that had received
news from London). One of the first regular pamphlets had been *De Geus;*
named after the famous privateers who had fought the Dutch independence
war. It was initially copied by hand, then stencilled/mimeographed. But the
actions of this resistance press had been improvised: soon hundreds of as-
sociated people had been caught, and fifteen shot at the Waalsdorpervlakte
execution ground in the dunes.

The Amsterdam Press Museum was revitalized upon Liberation and soon
began to prepare a special overview exhibition on the courageous under-
ground press, which opened at the outset of the following year. Baschwitz
joined its board, and devoted an additional chapter of the upcoming re-
edition of *De krant door alle tijden* to these heroic feats, claiming there

42 Consisting of lectures and weekends at the De Cannenburgh estate in Vaassen, Gelderland
province.
43 My father was fired as a classical music expert from Dutch radio and ultimately went into
hiding (even from his own young children) between the floors in our home, to escape from being
sent to Germany.
had been more underground papers in The Netherlands than in any other comparable country.\textsuperscript{44}

Toward the very end of the occupation, the top twenty underground newspapers were printing and distributing an estimated 100,000 copies \textit{per day}. They now turned into some of the largest and most influential post-war dailies: the protestant \textit{Trouw (Fidelity)}, the social-democratic \textit{Het Parool (The Watchword or Motto)}, the communist \textit{De Waarheid (The Truth)}. \textit{Vrij Nederland (Free Netherlands)} in turn became an influential leftist weekly.

The social democratic \textit{Het Volk}, which had been taken over by the occupier during the war, now re-appeared as \textit{Het Vrije Volk (The Free People)}. In the autumn of 1945, Baschwitz took his students to visit their headquarters. A group picture was taken when they entered the building, and a dummy newspaper with the photo had already been printed by the time they came out again. It also featured a front-page editorial by Baschwitz himself, emphasizing that a free press was ‘As vital as daily bread’.\textsuperscript{45}

When still in hiding, Baschwitz had already addressed a report on the need for an imperative post-war newspaper reform to his former colleague Anton Lievegoed, whom he expected to be re-installed as head of the Government Press Service (but who turned out to have become ill as a hostage in the Buchenwald concentration camp, and was soon to pass away).\textsuperscript{46}

Before the war, they had already participated in discussions about the ‘do’s and don’ts’ for official government information.\textsuperscript{47} Baschwitz now proposed to have paper and other scarce materials assigned upon Liberation to legitimate book and newspaper publishers by two separate commissions, with representatives of eight stakeholder groups each (including writers and journalists).\textsuperscript{48}

The post-war revelations about the unspeakable horrors of the massive persecutions and extermination seemed hard to fathom. But one book Baschwitz immediately favoured captured the individual tragedies behind it in a uniquely gripping and resonating way. That was \textit{The Diary of Anne Frank}.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{De krant door alle tijden}, p. 269.
\textsuperscript{45} Dated 9 November 1945, printed over the previous last ‘free’ dateline of 22 July 1940. (Copy in the Baschwitz archives, file 48). Other groups also paid such visits and received a similar royal treatment, as the newspaper was trying to recruit both new collaborators and readers.
\textsuperscript{46} Details in the article on him that Joan Hemels contributed to the \textit{Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland}.
\textsuperscript{47} Participants in the 8th Dutch Advertising Congress in Maastricht discussed a ‘pre-advice’ of Prof. Veraart on the matter, on the British, and other examples. See: coverage in the \textit{Algemeen Handelsblad}, 16, 17, & 18 June 1939. (File 107 in Baschwitz’s archives).
\textsuperscript{48} Twelve page note ‘Een poging tot “planning” van het eigen vak’. In the Lievegoed Archives, Press Museum.
Baschwitz and the first publication of Anne Frank’s *Diary*

Isa later recounted how her father had asked her to come and see him and Otto Frank. ‘That was the first time after the war I met him [again]. He cried when he saw me, and said that at least I was still there’. Unlike his own daughters and wife, who had been sent to concentration camps after they had all been put on the very last train from Westerbork to Auschwitz.

‘He had a little suitcase with him, in which he kept the diary, notebooks and separate pages from Anne’. They had been found by his Dutch assistant, after the family had been taken away. During the four months between October 1945 and January 1946, he had tried to organize these into a manuscript. With the help of a secretary who was married to a radio journalist, who also got involved.

Frank had come to Baschwitz for advice on their possible publication. Isa: ‘He came from a business environment. For him, my father was one of his few intellectual friends, who also wrote books. From me, he especially wanted to hear whether it would resonate with youngsters’. Her father had warned against commercial exploitation. She (later) expressed fear, that Otto Frank might have ‘abbreviated it too much, had entered elements of his own, and even fragments of the diary of [elder sister] Margot’.49 This later proved not to be the case.

Baschwitz also wrote a letter to his younger daughter Rotraut, with the date 10 February 1946. It said:

I have just been reading the diary of Anne Frank, the younger daughter of our friend Frank. You must have known her. They were, as you know, in hiding for 2 years. The girl, 14 and then 15 years old, kept a diary which got past the Germans as if by miracle. It is the most moving document about that time that I know, and a literary masterpiece as well. It reveals the inner experiences of a maturing girl, her impressions in close confinement with her father – whom she loved very dearly, her mother – with whom she clashed, her sister – whom she discovered to be a friend, and the other family that shared their hiding place, and with their son, with whom she began to fall in love. I think it ought to appear in print.50

49 Typewritten report of a conversation on 12 January 1981 with David Barnouw and Gerrold van der Stroom of the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation, kept there.

50 Typewritten report of a conversation on 23 February 1981 with David Barnouw and Gerrold van der Stroom of the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation. Kept there, as well as the letter in question. English from their critical edition of the diary, p. 64.
Yet three major publishers refused the manuscript, feeling that there were too many such testimonies around, and that the public did not want to look backwards anymore, but forwards instead. A fourth minor one offered to bring it out – after Baschwitz’s friend Jan Romein had drawn attention to it in the former resistance paper Het Parool, now a major Amsterdam daily. The article ‘A child’s voice’ was published on 3 April 1947.

It mentioned that the Institute for War Documentation had already collected two hundred such diaries, but he doubted there was another one ‘so pure, so intelligent, and yet so human as this one’ that also summed up the repulsiveness of fascism.\(^{51}\) After its publication, in mid-June 1947, one review was written by Baschwitz’s friend Jacques Presser. He wrote that he had read little after Liberation that was as ‘pure’ and ‘poignant’. The modest first print was gradually followed by others.\(^{52}\)

**Kurt & Isa’s reservations, and the further fate of the diary**

The first foreign publishers also turned the diary down, but successful translations came out from 1950 onwards. In German, French, and finally in English: with a preface by the U.S. wartime president’s widow Eleanor Roosevelt, and enthusiastically reviewed in the *New York Times*. This stirred further interest in it. Ultimately it came out in some sixty-five languages – with a total worldwide circulation estimated at seventy million copies to this day.

These translations were followed by the first adaptations for radio and later television, for a play and a musical, a feature film and a film documentary – which both won the Academy Awards.\(^{53}\) Loe de Jong, former spokesman for the Dutch government-in-exile and now director of the War Documentation Institute, gave its publicity a further push with an article in the Western World’s largest magazine: the American *Readers Digest*, with an estimated fifty million readers.

Foreign tourists later flocked to the original Amsterdam house, which was turned into a museum in 1960. After his death, Otto bequeathed the legal ownership of the diary to the Dutch state, but the royalties continued

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\(^{52}\) See Kuitert.

\(^{53}\) Otto had been a businessman with some marketing experience, who closely supervised deals. He had initially refused to sign the first contract, because the publishing house wanted to claim possible ‘derived’ rights for itself.
to stream into a charitable fund he had established for that purpose in Basel, Switzerland. So over the years, Anne grew into a forceful global symbol and even a kind of secular saint.

But some of the reservations initially expressed by both Isa and Kurt Baschwitz proved to be prescient. Isa had observed that the published version of the typewritten manuscript contained notably few grammatical errors and Germanicisms. When doubts about its full authenticity were first voiced in Germany, Baschwitz’s journalist nephew (who had recently visited him together with his mother) published an elaborate piece about the whole question in the most important newsweekly of the country, Der Spiegel. It quoted those who had seen and handled the original version(s) – including Baschwitz himself – who now pleaded for ‘the speedy publication of a bibliophilic edition’.54

Only when the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation brought out a scholarly edition in 1986, did the outside world become aware that first Otto and then others had repeatedly redacted the language and had scrapped supposedly embarrassing passages referring to menstruation, sex, and romance – as well as commentaries about the parents’ marriage. This then led to ‘extended editions’ that included some of such material previously left out.55

Kurt had in turn expressed unease that this very unique and intimate diary would inevitably have to become a commercial product. His fears proved justified by a succession of extremely unsavoury court cases about the possession of diary-related materials, about the various adaptation rights, and ultimately even about the royalties themselves.56

54 Peter Thelen, ‘Anne Frank – Was schrieb dat Kind?’ in Der Spiegel, 1 April 1959 (issue 14). Some in Holland interpreted the article itself as a substantial challenge to the authenticity of the diary, which it was not.

55 About the various successive versions and interventions, see Barnouw and van der Stroom. They suggest there may have been a number ‘0’ typescript, before the number ‘1’ typescript. During the various revisions, some incongruities had even crept in. (More in Barnouw, Het Fenomeen).

56 Kurt’s unease: Kuitert. Court cases: see the overview book on the ‘phenomenon’ of Anne Frank, by the foremost world expert Barnouw, Het fenomeen Anne Frank. Vera Ebels-Dolanová (who worked at the Amsterdam Anne Frank foundation for a number of years) reported about the first skirmishes with Basel in the daily NRC Handelsblad, 1 October 1999. When the diary was going to fall into the public domain seventy years after Anne’s death, the Swiss fund came up with a trick to try to extend copyright for another seventy plus years. They tried to make Miriam Pressler, the editor of the extended edition of 1991, the ‘author’. See Doreen Carvajal, ‘Another twist for Anne’s legacy’, NYTT, 14-15 November 2015.