Baschwitz’s third book for a wider audience was to be a reflection on how the Nazis and other new authoritarian parties exploited mobs, crowds, mass events, and mass movements to suggest broad popular support. It looked back at both earlier historical examples and at existing theories about mass derailments.

Baschwitz and the wider exile community in The Netherlands were transfixed by the unfolding disaster in Germany. He received help from Jewish networks and came to successively work for two outfits documenting the growing persecutions and helping the victims. The first was a vaguely named ‘information bureau’ – an early forerunner of one of the largest present-day collections on Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, in fact. The other was a newly founded institute for social history, which smuggled the archives of major leftist leaders and groups of great historical significance out of Germany.

Wider historical context: Nazi rule, terror, and refugees

The First World War had triggered high hopes for an end to excessive privilege, and the furthering of social equality. Both soldiers and civilians had shared the misery. In its wake, then, there was a rise in violent mass movements to try and force destiny. The 1917 Russian Revolution seemed promising, and there were immediate attempts to copy it abroad. But after the new Soviet Union experienced civil war, famine and collectivization, the incapacitation and death of Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin’s elimination of Leon Trotsky, and the show trials of political dissidents, many initial international sympathizers gradually lost their illusions.

In Italy, Benito Mussolini had started out as a socialist, but had shown the true face of his fascism in his 1924 March on Rome. In Germany, Hitler tried to copy this feat, but only broke through later – when the deep economic crisis returned with a vengeance. All three of these movements seemed to have been brought to power by the spontaneous revolts of mobs, crowds, and masses, but the new regimes soon subjected and regimented the unleashed forces in true military style. There seemed to be no way back.

Within a month of Hitler becoming chancellor, the Reichstag parliament burnt. A Dutch communist was accused of arson. But this also provided an ideal pretext for the introduction of emergency rule, a further ban on both
communist and socialist parties and unions, the end of civil liberties and the rule of law, and then the integration of all of the supposed ‘national’ forces with the Nazi party to form one giant bloc. This new conglomerate established its headquarters in the city of Nuremberg, and held impressive annual crowd gatherings there.¹

The omnipotent Nazis now braced for the further persecution of the Jews. Julius Streicher’s notoriously anti-Semitic paper Der Stürmer had long campaigned for this. The new Nuremburg race laws defined a ‘Jew’ as someone with at least three Jewish grandparents, or with only two Jewish grandparents if he or she was also married to a Jew or practiced the Jewish religion. Jews were gradually excluded from the civil service and other professions, as Baschwitz had been. Their businesses and possessions were confiscated. They were also further stigmatized and molested.

Many people tried to get away from this political and ethnic persecution. Many of the Germans and Austrians who fled Nazism had academic degrees, and had been university teachers and researchers.² They included brilliant physicists and many other top-rank natural scientists, who would later play a key role in developing new and superior allied weapons. But they also included psychologists like Sigmund Freud and many other social scientists, who contributed to the development of entirely new approaches to man and society.

Many of the latter immediately began to try and crack the secret code of the mysterious appeal of Hitler, Nazism, and Anti-Semitism. For instance, various strands of the Freudo-Marxists – ranging from the early Wilhelm Reich to the ‘Frankfurt School’ of social research (with studies by Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, Franz Neumann, Siegfried Pollock, and others) – suggested a variety of theories. But these ideas could not be published inside Germany, and only received wider circulation after the Second World War. Baschwitz was apparently not aware of them when he wrote his own pre-War book Du und die Masse.³

¹ There is of course a huge literature on this subject, as well as telling audiovisual materials. These range from Laurence Rees’ compelling recent documentary trilogy The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler made for BBC television in 2012 to Leni Riefenstahl’s spellbinding 1934 Nazi movie The Triumph of the Will.
³ For the relevant analyses of Freud, Reich, and the Frankfurt School, see my Mass movements. Further overviews of relevant approaches are given in Ayçoberry and Stuart Hughes; Kitchen, Fascism; Hamilton.
Many refugees with limited means and contacts initially fled to Germany’s smaller neighbours in Western Europe: Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, Switzerland. It was harder to cross the seas to more secure Great Britain or the United States. From 1933 to 1939, The Netherlands were governed by four centre-right to right cabinets led by Hendrikus Colijn and his so-called ‘anti-revolutionary party’, or ARP. They always had one protestant party as well as the major catholic one, and sometimes the coalition was extended to include the liberals. While these governments allowed some political and ethnic Jewish refugees, they always tried to limit the flow.

During the first six months of 1933 alone, the first wave of 15,000 refugee Germans is said to have fled to The Netherlands – including Baschwitz. Throughout the 1930s and until the invasion in 1940, this number swelled to a cumulative total of 50,000 or 60,000. But there are often disparities in such estimates, depending on how exactly they are calculated.4

The Jewish support networks in The Netherlands

In the first few weeks after Baschwitz arrived in The Netherlands, he read a Dutch interview with a ‘top expert’ of the German Ministry of the Interior, which provided a first outline of the Nuremberg race laws – then still to be proclaimed. It was published in the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant, with which he was familiar from his earlier stay. The clipping is still among Baschwitz’s papers. The ‘top expert’ boasted: ‘In this work, my collaborators and I feel [...] purely as men of science, as racial experts’. He clarified: ‘I am just about to design a questionnaire’. But he also added threateningly: ‘The answers can be verified, if necessary’.5

He further elaborated: while ‘Aryan’ is a broad category, ‘of German stock’ is ‘a much stricter notion’. (Baschwitz’s wife Erika was considered ‘of German stock’.) And ‘non-Aryan[s] are those who have at least one Jewish grandparent. We are looking at race, not at religion. But the original religion is [also] proof of race. So the baptized Jew is considered a Jew’. The fact that Kurt himself had been educated as an Evangelical Lutheran, had been baptized a Christian, and was entirely assimilated, would thus not necessarily exempt him.

Baschwitz needed to start procedures to get a residence permit, and possibly a work permit as well. People in The Netherlands probably quickly told him that it was best to seek expert help. Jewish networks had long before

4 See the chapter by Alexandra Paffen in Boterman & Vogel, p.149.
5 N.R.C., 2 May 1933, file 129.
established international organizations to help Jews fleeing the pogroms in the East. They helped the refugees settle in Western Europe, move onwards to other continents, or, of course, settle in Palestine. These networks were now re-mobilized to assist those fleeing the Nazis.⁶

By far the largest Jewish population in The Netherlands, with some 100,000 people, lived in Amsterdam, but traditionally there were also smaller communities in several provincial towns (such as Groningen and Enschede). The major coordinating body was the newly founded Comité voor Bijzondere Joodsche Belangen, or CBJB (Committee for Special Jewish Interests), which was described as ‘created by the Israeli churches in The Netherlands’ – although many members felt more or less secular.

The CBJB had a board consisting of prominent citizens. Its president was Abraham Asscher, the scion of a world-famous diamond house. One

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⁶ Within the U.S., the umbrella organization became the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society HIAS; outside the U.S. it collaborated with similar British and German organizations in HICEM, with its headquarters in Paris.
noteworthy member was the liberal senator Samuel van den Bergh, the son of the founder of a margarine factory (which later merged with a competitor to form the Dutch ‘Union’, and then with the British Lever Brothers to form Unilever). Later his son George van den Bergh, a law professor, would also befriend Baschwitz.

Immediately after Hitler was made chancellor, and the first wave of refugees – to which Baschwitz belonged – arrived in The Netherlands, the Committee also formed a subcommittee, the Comité voor Joodsche Vluchtelingen, or CJV (Committee for Jewish Refugees). This subcommittee was headed by its secretary David Cohen, a professor of ancient history at the University of Amsterdam. Asscher and Cohen remained central figures in the overall organization, but they differed in both character and style.

Several committee members were active within the liberal and social-democratic parties. During these years, Baschwitz himself veered back from right-liberal to left-liberal sympathies. The Dutch Vrijzinnig Democratische Bond (VDB, Liberal Democratic Union) was comparable to the German DDP, and a consistent ally of the social-democrats (even merging with them after the next war). These largely secular intellectuals also had good academic connections, particularly at the (municipal) University of Amsterdam.

In a memoir, Cohen later explained the practical functioning of his subcommittee during these years. It was important to show the Dutch authorities, he wrote, that the Jews took care of their own. During the two and three-quarters years between March 1933 and December 1935, they helped a first wave of 5,837 refugees with a total budget of a million and a quarter guilders. A third of that ‘emergency fund’ came from abroad, but two-thirds was raised among both Jews and non-Jews through bequests of wealthy individuals, street collections, lotteries, performances, and lectures.

One campaign called on the various liberal professions (lawyers, doctors, dentists, accountants, etc.) to support their refugee brethren in need. There was an Academic Support Fund to get refugee academics temporary places at universities, after which they would preferably move on. There were also private initiatives to provide support, like the Oppenheim-Fischel Fund and

7 W.J. Reader, Fifty Years of Unilever (London: Heinemann 1980), Ch. I. A full biography of Van den Bergh was recently published by Pim Reinders (Amsterdam: Balans 2016).
8 See Schrijver’s 2000 biography of Cohen. More about the general situation in Blom et al.
9 Cohen, p. 73-74, 77 a.o.
the Gomperts-Springer Foundation. The former was also chaired by Cohen, and helped Baschwitz as well.¹⁰

A noteworthy role was played by Gertrude Cohn, the administrative secretary of the Refugee Committee who had completed an early feminist school for social work in Berlin. After that, she had moved to the U.K. But as a German, she had been forced to leave Britain for the neutral Netherlands during the First World War. She married the Dutch mining engineer Jacques van Tijn, with whom she travelled all over the world (and whose family name she kept after their return and divorce). She was to supervise Baschwitz’s case during his most difficult years.¹¹

Finding a neighbourhood and a house

Meanwhile, the other Dutch people were largely focused on their own problems. By the mid-1930s, unemployment had risen to half a million – over fifteen percent of the working population. A revolt in the working class Jordaan neighbourhood in Amsterdam had killed five and seriously wounded another 56. Rotterdam and smaller cities saw similar events. A mutiny on a naval cruiser was violently repressed. Some people expressed a reluctance to let Jews from Germany into the country.

In the beginning of his time in Amsterdam, Baschwitz still had some savings and the lump sum from his dismissal from the Zeitungs-Verlag. He found an apartment at Weissenbruchstraat 35: nominally in the western part of town, but quite close to the new southern part of town where many Jews had recently settled.

The old Jewish quarter near the Waterlooplein in the centre of town had become run-down and decrepit. So when a social-democratic alderman had pushed the development of the new and modern Plan South neighbourhood during the 1920s, the Jews who could afford it preferred to move there. The most middle class part was the Rivierenbuurt neighbourhood, which had

¹⁰ Mentioned in a written note from Baschwitz to Posthumus, 29 September 1939 (in the IISH files).
¹¹ During the Second World War she was further drawn into the work of the Jewish Council and its ambiguities (more in the chapter on the next war, Ch. 9). She became involved in exchanges with other countries and the settling of Jews in Palestine, ultimately including herself. See the article by Bernard Wasserstein, in the Vrouwenlexicon, included in the Huygens Resources, of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. (Also see: Presser, Ashes). Wasserstein also recently published her full biography in English: The Ambiguity of Virtue (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2014).
streets named after various Dutch rivers. Over the course of the single decade of the 1930s, the number of Jews in this neighbourhood more than quadrupled, swelling from a mere 4,000 to 17,000. There was even a new synagogue built.  

Quite naturally, middle class Jewish exiles from Germany tended to settle there as well. Sometimes, they seemed to form enclaves. In the streets, they stood out because of their slightly different demeanour, often speaking German amongst themselves. Some Dutch citizens frowned upon this. But the German children were faster to adapt. The Jewish Refugee Committee organized special Dutch language crash courses to help them integrate more quickly.

Baschwitz’s children joined these courses, too. His eldest daughter later remembered:

My brother was twelve, I was eleven, my sister nine and a half. It began with Part One, with *Aap, Noot, Mies* [the famous illustrated Dutch reading primer]. But I got special teachers, went much faster, and arrived at Part
Ten within only a few months. [Jewish social worker] Ms. Frijda helped get me into the Dalton school [then a brand new concept of freer education, co-inspired by Dewey and Montessori]. It was nice, one could follow one’s own pace.

They were mostly posh children, but they took one immigrant kid in for free. I did not even have the clothes. After that, I could get straight into the Barlaeus gymnasium [the oldest and best-known grammar school in the centre of town, next to the major Leidseplein square]. That is also when I changed my name from Gisela to Isa.13

Her brother and sister also changed their first names from overly German to more neutral sounding ones at this time.

Getting to know Anne Frank

In Amsterdam, the Baschwitzes re-encountered some friends and acquaintances they had already known in Germany, such as the Franks. Kurt had known Otto from Frankfurt, where he had been friends with his brother. Both had briefly studied in Heidelberg. Both had been among the first Jews to flee Germany in 1933. Both later contemplated trying to get a visa for the U.S., but in vain. (As a recent New York Times column reminded its readers, ‘94% of Americans disapproved of Nazi treatment of Jews, but 72% still objected to admitting large numbers.’)14

The Frank family came to live in a second floor apartment on the Merwede square, right behind the iconic, brand new twelve-story building with the somewhat grandiose nickname ‘The Skyscraper’. The Franks were the opposite of ‘ghetto Jews’, according to one female friend from those days: they were prosperous, cultivated, and integrated.

They even formed the hub of an active social life, according to another. They were well regarded. ‘There was this story that Mr. Frank made Sunday morning breakfast, and brought it to his wife’, she added. He was also seen as ‘An ideal daddy, because he was so much involved in his girls’ education’. The two families had daughters of somewhat similar ages: the Baschwitzes

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13 Video interview at the Jewish Historical Museum JHM, appr. minute 23, a.f.
14 Poll taken after the 1938 Kristallnacht, quoted by Nicholas Kristof, ‘Anne Frank today is a Syrian girl’, INYT, 26 August 2016.
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had Isa and Rody and the Franks had Margot and Anne, who were only a few years younger.15

Isa later remembered that occasionally ‘The families used to visit each other for afternoon coffee. I used to go around mainly with Margot, who was three years younger than I. Anne was a very vivacious girl who, because she had a heart condition, was rather pampered and spoiled and always got her own way’. She added: ‘That was a problem between the parents. Mother Frank said: “Now sit down!” But father Frank said: “Oh, leave the child alone, she’s so small”’. Father and daughter adored each other. We will later see that after the war, Kurt Baschwitz played a major role in encouraging the publication of Anne’s famous diary by her father.16

The Wiener bureau

Once the family was reunited and settled in Amsterdam, the next big question for Kurt Baschwitz was how to get some kind of job. Preferably something in journalism or writing, with which he was already familiar. Preferably something in German rather than Dutch. His Jewish contacts put him in touch with Alfred Wiener, a German Jew who had also just fled the Nazi regime. He was about to set up an ‘information bureau’ in Amsterdam, and needed assistance. This is where Baschwitz got his first Dutch job, beginning in early January 1934 – although it was probably paid for in large part by the aforementioned Jewish funds for social assistance to the refugees.

But what was the nature of this bureau and job? That long remained a great mystery. Kurt’s eldest daughter, who was only 11 or 12 then, later said he emphasized the humdrum nature of the tasks at the time, calling it ‘washing dishes’. But it may in fact have concerned something like reading, clipping, and filing German newspapers. Baschwitz mentioned it very briefly on his C.V.; Ebels’ masters thesis devotes one sentence to it. Anschlag’s masters thesis adds a note giving a further hint.17

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15 Quotes from friends Laureen Nussbaum and Hanneli Goslar, in the television documentary Anne Frank Remembered by Jon Blair (1995), made in association with the BBC and Walt Disney Pictures. It also contains the only seven seconds of live images of Anne Frank, which turned up in an amateur wedding video made by neighbours.

16 Record of an interview on Anne Frank and the diary with Mrs. H.G. Teske-Baschwitz (Gisela/Isa) on 12 January 1981 (at the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation); statements from the Blair documentary. Also see: Lee, p. 57.

Wiener was the same age as Baschwitz. After the First World War, he had become a high-ranking official of the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, who had marked Hitler and the Nazi party as a dangerous threat very early on. During the late 1920s, he had been instrumental in creating its civil rights group at the Wilhelmstrasse bureau, which documented the rise of anti-Semitism. After fleeing to The Netherlands, his ‘information bureau’ was meant to continue exactly that activity – albeit under cover.\textsuperscript{18}

Exiles like Wiener and Baschwitz were of course forbidden from engaging in any overt political activity, let alone creating problems with the (so far) ‘friendly regime’ in a much larger neighbouring country. Several refugees were expelled for such activities throughout the 1930s. The Nazi regime also kept a close eye on Dutch correspondents and the Dutch press.\textsuperscript{19} Baschwitz’s own C.V. and his earlier biographers suggest he stayed only very briefly at the bureau, but he may in fact have remained until late 1936.\textsuperscript{20} In the course of 1937, Wiener began to think about moving to Great Britain due to the rising risks of a future invasion of The Netherlands. In April 1938, he engaged Baschwitz’s successor to help transfer the whole accumulated collection to London.\textsuperscript{21}

As the war came closer, Wiener’s ‘information bureau’ became the Jewish Central Information Office (JCIO), later reporting to the Political Intelligence Department (PID) and partly financed by the British and later the American government services. At the end of the war, it assisted the prosecution at the Nuremberg war crimes trials. After the war, the bureau also began to record systematic interviews with the surviving eyewitnesses – foreshadowing Steven Spielberg’s later Shoah project in which Baschwitz’s daughter Isa was to participate. Today, the total files reportedly stretch 17.5 miles or 28 kilometres.

\textsuperscript{18} Wiener had done a doctorate in Arab literature at the University of Heidelberg, and had worked some years as a journalist and in the Middle East. He had fought in the First World War and been awarded an Iron Cross.
\textsuperscript{20} 13 January 1937 letter of Baschwitz to Posthumus, about ending his employment with Wiener and entering into the employment of the IISH.
\textsuperscript{21} Baschwitz’s successor was the much younger Louis (Wolfgang) Bondy (1910-1993), who had been the Paris correspondent for the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (where Baschwitz had been an editor), until he was also fired for being a Jew. (See his profile in Ernst Fischer, Verleger, Buchhändler & Antiquare aus Deutschland und Österreich in der Emigration nach 1933. Elbingen: VDA 2011, p. 26-7). The Wiener collection came to consist of photographs, letters, papers, periodicals, and books. The collection opened on 1 September 1939: the day the Nazis invaded Poland and the Second World War officially began.
The archive with Baschwitz’s papers at the Amsterdam university library also contains carbon copies of a concept plan for the post-war founding of a ‘Social Psychological Institute for Scientific Research into Anti-Semitism and Related Phenomena’. It may have been inspired by a similar American wartime project, which resulted in the famous study *The Authoritarian Personality*, for which German Jewish exile Theodor Adorno (Wiesengrund by his father’s name) is always credited as the (alphabetically) first author.22

Meanwhile, the ‘Wiener Collection’ in London found new patrons among wealthy Jews in Great Britain and the United States, but their funding was intermittent and halting, and at one point part of the collection was even shipped off to Tel Aviv University. In late 2011 it found an entirely new home in appropriate academic surroundings: a renovated Georgian townhouse on Russell square in Bloomsbury, flanked by the Birbeck College history department and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the university of London.

The museum opened with the telling exhibition ‘A is for Adolf’, about the Nazis’ indoctrination of children. This included the German board game ‘Jews out’ in which ‘the first player to chase six Jews out of the walled ghetto was the winner’. All this material had been collected from the late 1920s and early 1930s onwards, when Wiener (as well as Baschwitz) was still in Germany, experiencing the rise of Anti-Semitism first-hand.23

**German-Dutch ties during the 1930s**

Since the take-off of the German giant – first with the Wilhelminian Empire and then the Weimar Republic – ties with its smaller Dutch neighbour had grown ever closer. During the 1930s, Dutch Rotterdam was still the major harbour for the dense German Rhine-Ruhr concentration of mining and industry just across the border. The economies were closely intertwined in many other respects – as were the cultures.

The rapidly developing Germany had become a major reference over the preceding half-century, as much as France and England had been earlier.

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22 Presser’s later overview book *Ashes* mentioned that ‘the Antisemitism research group [in Amsterdam] disbanded before it could publish its results’ (p. 543). The title and text in File 136 are in German, but the proposed budget of twelve to fifteen thousand is in Dutch guilders.

Those three foreign languages were all taught in grammar or even high schools; most educated Dutch were supposed to speak and understand them, at least a bit.

A growing number of Dutch scientists had in turn studied or worked for a few years at one of the major German universities. In the natural sciences, for instance, the early Dutch Nobel Prize winners Van ’t Hoff and Kamerlingh Onnes had done so. In the sciences of man, the founder of Dutch psychology Gerardus Heymans had done so as well, as had several sociologists. There continued to be frequent exchanges, and it was thus not at all strange for Baschwitz to seek academic employment in The Netherlands.

Dutch periodicals claimed a total of seventeen correspondents in Berlin in 1933 (some probably part-time or overlapping), many of whom were appalled at what they saw unfold. Soon after Baschwitz’s arrival in The Netherlands, the liberal Amsterdam Algemeen Handelsblad, which was to become his favourite Dutch newspaper, expressed its bafflement:

When one will later investigate how it was possible that hundreds of thousands, that millions, believed and simply parroted historical and scientific untruths, one will surely find what made the minds ripe for this: the deceptions of the [First] World War.

The collapse after such high flourishing and such big dreams of the future; the foolish revenge of the victors; the rapid succession of periods of the deepest misery and apparent prosperity; hunger and despair; the vulgarities and abuses of which the upstarts of the republican regime made themselves guilty; corruption and decay within the civil service. But also the irresponsible and shameless smear campaign against a minority that was conveniently blamed for everything. A smear campaign that has been going on for ten years, and that still gets more fierce every day – most of all within the brown press.

Baschwitz wholeheartedly agreed.

After an early boycott against Jewish shops, the same Dutch correspondent called it: ‘Lame. Shameful. Infantile. Ridiculous. Also fear-inspiring, if one thinks where this will go if it is not stopped soon. It was a method of religious and race struggle, that one had supposed [to be] gone forever – within a civilized Europe’. A Jewish commentator from the Dutch social-democratic Het Volk even wrote: ‘The whole of Germany has become
a horror, a running ulcer on the body of our continent, a mockery of civilization, a shame for humanity’.  

A lively German and Jewish exile community

Exiles found it relatively easy to fit into The Netherlands. German books were widely sold and read; there was even a special Dutch magazine about them. After the Nazis came to power, almost 50 Dutch publishers began publishing exile books by famous writers in German: 300 until the war, two-thirds of them by only two of the biggest publishers. So Baschwitz’s next book, highly critical of the Nazis, was not only written in but also first published in German – by a Dutch house. There had also long been a Dutch-German friendship society, rather conservative at first, but later opening up somewhat.

By the mid-1930s, there was a lively exile community in The Netherlands – most importantly in the capital Amsterdam. A prominent example was the famous Mann family. The father, Thomas Mann, who had recently won the Nobel Prize for literature, disapproved of the Nazis. He visited The Netherlands several times, then settled first in Switzerland and ultimately in the U.S.

His eldest daughter Erika was also a writer and director, a major figure of the satirical Pfeffermühle (Pepper Mill) exile-run theatre company, which was also very critical of the Nazis. (We will see that one of their numbers identified Jews as the witches to be hunted in modern times, and may have further stirred Baschwitz’s interest in this connection). For several years, Erika and her group made Amsterdam their home base.

Thomas’ eldest son, Erika’s younger brother Klaus, ran the exile literary magazine Die Sammlung (The Collection) from Amsterdam, which published contributions of some 300 authors over 24 months. But it got increasingly political, and after a polemical piece by Klaus’s leftist uncle Heinrich, many

25 One was Allert de Lange, the other was Jewish publisher Emanuel Querido, who brought out 110 titles in German: mostly by Jewish and/ or progressive writers like Joseph Roth, Arnold Zweig, Klaus and Heinrich Mann, Ernst Toller, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Anna Seghers.
26 The German-Dutch ties of these years were reconsidered much later during several academic conferences, with the papers collected in books. See Boterman & Vogel. Study: p. 236. Publishers: p. 152-153. Books: p. 237-238. Also see the earlier collection edited by Dittrich & Würzner.
noteworthy German writers disengaged: Klaus’s own father Thomas, but also Herman Hesse, Robert Musil, and Stephan Zweig.

Klaus and his friends used to hang out at the famous Jugendstil Américain hotel and restaurant at the central Leidseplein Square. His friends included British writers Christopher Isherwood, E.M. Forster, Stephen Spender, and W.H. Auden (who ultimately married Klaus’s sister Erika Mann). The Nazis demanded that the activist brother and sister be expelled from The Netherlands, however, and they ultimately left.27

Employment at the new Social History Institute

Meanwhile, Baschwitz’s 1935 inauguration as private lecturer in newspaper history had led to another job in Amsterdam – although with more delay than his own C.V. and earlier biographers suggest. It was only later, in 1936, that it really took form. He was employed as a ‘special assistant’ to the history professor Nicolaas Posthumus at another newly founded institute in Amsterdam.

It is again useful to look into the wider background of this initiative. Baschwitz’s new boss Posthumus had studied law in Amsterdam, but had soon adhered to the Clio association of history students, did his doctoral dissertation on the Leiden cloth-making industry, and was then named professor at the Netherlands School of Commerce (which then evolved into Rotterdam University) from around the First World War onwards.

Posthumus also set up a Netherlands Economic History Archive in The Hague. It was initially meant to focus on the archives of companies and their organizations, but he soon included cooperative and trade union materials as well. By the mid-1930s, he decided to split off these latter parts and form a separate International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam, where he had gotten another university chair. The first IISH building, at Keizersgracht 264, was inaugurated on 11 March 1937.28

At the time, German socialist leaders had felt forced to flee to Vienna, Prague, and other nearby foreign capitals, trying to save their archives at

27 Chapter on Erika and Klaus Mann in Holland by Alexandra Paffen, in Boterman & Vogel, p. 149-163. Also see the preceding chapter on Thomas Mann and Holland by Léon Hanssen.
28 More on the IISH website. Posthumus received generous funding from Nehemia de Lieme, the liberal director of the Central Workers Insurance and Deposit Bank, who already paid for much of the cadre training for the social-democratic unions and party. He was also a Zionist who helped salvage the library of the Jewish Labour Bund from Eastern Europe. Since the Nazis had come to power in Germany, such collections were in immediate danger.
the same time. But as Hitler set his eyes on Austria and Czechoslovakia, it became urgent to move both people and papers elsewhere. In 1938, the IISH paid 72,000 guilders (640,000 in 2015 euros) for the archives of the German Socialist Party. Posthumus and his librarians travelled to meet various exiled leaders and acquired many of the papers of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, anarchists Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, Stalin's adversary Trotsky, socialists Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg, and many others.29

Just before the ‘phony war’ prelude started in 1939, the most precious parts of these newly purchased IISH archives were temporarily moved to Britain for safekeeping.30 After the war, the Institute continued to acquire archives of leftist unions and parties, including those from other continents. It came to house the archives of the international women’s movement, later NGOs like Amnesty International and Greenpeace, and much more.

Today it is one of the very largest collections of its kind in the world, and has been brought under the wings of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW). In recent years, it moved into a brand new purpose-built building with fifty kilometres of shelf-space in the Eastern docks area. It even digitized important parts and put them online: the complete Marx-Engels papers were made available to the general public by late 2015, for example.

Movement newspapers were of course interesting objects for this collection, and general newspapers as a record of social history. So Posthumus was immediately open to Baschwitz’s proposal of developing further initiatives with regard to a department or ‘institute for newspaper history’. The IISH still has some of the correspondence between the two at the time. It shows that Baschwitz first officially asked for a position in a letter dated 23 April 1936, and estimated the additional costs for books, journals, newspapers, etc. would be a mere ... 200 to 300 guilders. But again there was considerable delay before he was actually engaged.

The prospect of this new job also inspired Baschwitz to undertake a very elaborate study of how radical pamphlets and papers stirred revolutions, and even wars. He delved into the details of the role of the press in the American Revolution, and thereafter in the French Revolution and subsequent wars. He even looked into some of the Marxist literature on such subjects.

29 NRC De Week, 17 August 2015.
30 France and Britain formally declared war on Germany, but did not initiate actual fighting yet.
His article appeared in one of the first issues of the newly launched *International Review for Social History*, published for the IISH by the closely associated house of Brill in Leiden. The 35 pages can be seen as a first stab at the subject of his subsequent mass psychology book, *Du und die Masse* (*You and the mass*).31

**The first seeds of a press department**

Baschwitz said that he himself did not expect to be paid during the first year; he just wanted support for his work as a private lecturer, and the help of a secretary or assistant, for three half-days per week. At this point in time, he was probably still officially employed by Wiener, but in fact largely paid by the Jewish Committee. Posthumus answered on 6 May 1936 that he was very interested, but first had to consult the Board. He also contacted the Jewish Committee about possible ongoing complementary support for him. All this took time.

There was a proposal to raise Baschwitz’s eventual salary to 200 guilders per month, although only a quarter would be paid by the institute itself. The rest would still be supplemented by the Jewish Committee. In secret, a letter suggested that it would be better to spare his ego and not tell him about this. Baschwitz did not want to live from hand-outs, but to earn a normal salary in a normal academic position.32

The 1937 IISH annual report noted: ‘Because of the importance of his subject, a place in one of the cabinets was assigned to Dr. K. Baschwitz, private lecturer at the University of Amsterdam. He brought together all that the institute possesses about the history of the press and public opinion, and thus organized a more or less permanent exhibit in his office’. This exhibit sowed the very earliest seeds for the later press institute, which was ultimately only founded more than a decade later.

One of Baschwitz’s main tasks at the IISH was the further elaboration of plans with relation to the further study of the press. He wrote several elaborate notes on related subjects. One note was the aforementioned three-page outline of the development of ‘newspaper science at German universities’,

31 ‘Schreckenherrschaften und ihre Presse’, with a summary in English. *IRSH*, Vol. I, pp. 273-309. The article has elaborate footnotes, but it is noteworthy that he refers only sparingly to American and French sources directly, and mostly to German translations of them. Also see: Ebels-Dolanová, p. 148-149, 154, 207.

32 Letter to Posthumus, by the Committee for Special Jewish Interests, 21 April 1936 (in the files of the IISH).
with a list of nine existing chairs, their occupants, major overview books, and their common journal.

A second note gave the program for a nine-day course on three themes for journalists in Geneva, Switzerland. Not only a professor, but also various practitioners would act as speakers: from such dailies as the New York Times and the News Chronicle, press agencies such as Reuters and Havas, and the representatives of international organizations like the new radio union.

A third note spelled out aspects of the ‘economic changes’ in the newspaper world after the First World War (in six themes and 18 sub-themes), as well as aspects of the press as a source of ‘contemporary history’ (in four themes and 10 sub-themes). Think of Keesing’s Historical Archives, with which he was also involved. All of this was nominally in view of his writing possible papers for a historical conference.

A fourth note detailed a plan for a series of brochures to further introduce newspaper studies to The Netherlands. Each brochure would be 32 pages, with a production cost of some 90 guilders, and a thousand copies each. He added a list of a dozen possible subjects. He later mentioned that Elsevier had shown some interest in publishing these.33

In early 1938, Baschwitz was still expressing confidence that his entire pet project aimed at the founding of a separate press institute with its own funding was making good progress. In a letter to the Jewish Committee, he mentioned that his friends and colleagues, professors Van den Bergh and Hajo Brugmans, had visited Mr. Alex Heldring, the new director of the liberal Amsterdam daily Algemeen Handelsblad, to request that he convince the Association of Newspaper Publishers to provide financial support for the study of newspaper science at Amsterdam University, and thereby strengthen Baschwitz’s position.

But later in 1938 he suddenly seemed to realize that many such plans were now put on hold, in view of the persistent economic crisis and growing speculation about a possible new war. In a handwritten note to professor Posthumus, he conceded on the subject of an ‘Institute for Press History’ that ‘understandably, these days, nothing can be done for it’.34

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33 The third note, accompanying a letter dated 7 April 1936, was probably related to the Third Conference of Dutch historians, to be held in The Hague, on 30 May 1936.

34 Letter of Baschwitz to Ms. Van Tijn of the Jewish Committee, dated 26 February 1938 (in their archives, at the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation NIOD).
The wider historical milieu in 1930s Amsterdam

At this point we should note again that, in one sense, Baschwitz basically was, and always remained, a social historian. It is true that he was slowly turning into a pioneer of press and communication science, with a special interest in social and mass psychology. But all of his major books and most of their major spin-offs were basically historical studies, albeit with a journalistic touch, about the 4 P’s – first about propaganda and enemy images, then about the press and newspapers, soon about politics and mass movements, and later a trilogy about persecutions and witch hunts.

During the later 1930s, Posthumus and others introduced Baschwitz to the milieu of professional historians: in the Netherlands in general, and in Amsterdam, and at its university, in particular. It is useful to take a peek at some of this cast, because they will later return in key roles for Baschwitz’s professional and personal life – just before, during, and after the next war.

The ‘general history’ chair at Amsterdam University was held by Hajo Brugmans, who advocated contemporary history with a somewhat engaged style. He published major works about Amsterdam, the First World War, and leading Dutch personalities. But Brugmans would turn seventy in 1938, and thus retire. So there were already discussions about a possible successor. One good candidate was Jan Romein. Brugmans initially opposed him as too radical, but later changed his mind. Romein was indeed appointed the next year, and went on to become one of the most original, productive, and popular historians of his generation.35

Romein had studied with the famous Johan Huizinga in Leiden, then the ‘pope’ of Dutch historians. It was there that he met his later wife and co-author of many works, Annie Verschoor, as well as his friend Jef Suys. After the First World War and the Russian Revolution, the three initially adhered to the newly founded Communist Party Holland, and became collaborators with its journal the Tribune. When Stalin took over, they resigned, but retained their Marxist inspiration – and thus continued to be mistrusted by the influential Christian democrats (and later social democrats) who were in power in The Netherlands. Before and after the war, this was to frustrate their nomination as university professors.

35 The Amsterdam history tradition was discussed in Niek Graaf’s 2015 master’s thesis, and summarized in the alumni magazine Spui, January 2016. Major works by Romein (with his wife) ranged from The testators of our civilization (4 vols., 1939-40), about 36 of the most important Dutch personalities throughout the ages, to On the Watershed of Two Centuries, about 1900 as an international turning point in many different domains (2 vols., 1967, completed after his death; English version published in 1978).
So rather than seeking a regular job, Romein had initially chosen to become a freelance researcher, writer and translator – of huge standard works like the nine-volume *Harmsworth Universal History of the World* and many others. This was facilitated by the fact that he received a modest heritage, procuring him a regular rent as basic income. He also founded a private institute offering courses to prepare students for the ‘M.O.’ exam, which allowed one to become a history teacher in a grammar or high school.

He did this together with his aforementioned friend and colleague Jef Suys, who had himself become a history teacher. They were later joined by Jacques Presser, who had in turn become a history teacher at the newly founded Vossius Gymnasium in the South of Amsterdam – a spin-off from the overburdened Barlaeus Gymnasium in the centre. Just before the war, the History Section at the University of Amsterdam invited Presser to teach the ‘didactics and methodology’ of the discipline, but this position was terminated soon after the occupation. Meanwhile, the trio’s private institute had trained some one hundred history teachers in all – procuring them a significant network and some influence.

Romein, together with well-known writers Menno ter Braak, Edgar du Perron, and many others, also took the initiative to found a ‘Vigilance’ committee of intellectuals at the outset of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, like those in several other West-European countries. They were to warn against the dangers of a further rise in fascism and Antisemitism. Within a few years, this committee expanded from 80 to 1,100 members, including many influential authors, professors, and other intellectuals. But soon a heated discussion broke out about whether the committee should only warn against fascism and Hitlerism, or also against communism and Stalinism. Before a reform could be realized, however, the German invasion had already taken place.

In the meantime, Romein, Suys, and Presser had become a kind of ‘Young Turk’ triumvirate of contemporary history in Amsterdam, and Baschwitz had gradually grown closer to them. Romein wrote the introduction and recommendation of Baschwitz’s first book on witch hunts at the outset of the occupation – which was published under a pseudonym. Presser even became the temporary foster father of Baschwitz’s eldest daughter during the first years of the war.

With Posthumus and others, Romein then became one of a small group of professors that began to call for the university to break out of its ‘ivory tower’, to become more involved in society, and to promote a reflection about its own political significance. This demand gained strength just before, during, and immediately after the war, and would culminate in the
founding of a ‘7th’ political and social science faculty (PSF) at Amsterdam University.

When the PSF finally came about, Romein pushed proposals to nominate Suys, Presser, and Baschwitz as three key professors there. The former two proved controversial, as we will see; only the latter was not. This is how Baschwitz finally got his chair in press history and press science in 1948: at the advanced age of sixty, ten to twelve years later than he had initially hoped.

Further family problems

The Baschwitz children had been transplanted from Berlin to Amsterdam at the vulnerable ages of ten to thirteen. The ease with which they assimilated differed. They all changed their names from rather German-sounding to more neutral ones: Horst became Hans, Gisela became Isa, Rotraut became Rody. The daughters differed. In pictures, the eldest looks more like her father, the younger like her mother.

In a late 1936 letter to Jewish social workers, Baschwitz already was complaining that his son, then an adolescent of sixteen, was increasingly troublesome. A year later, the son was apparently sent to work on a farm at the Helmershoek in Usselo (today the municipality of Lonneker), on the outskirts of Enschede. Together with its twin Hengelo, Enschede formed a booming centre of textile and machine industries in the Twente region of Overijssel province, on the Eastern border of the country near Germany. Horst/Hans was apparently to stay there for the next six or seven years.36

Even more preoccupying were the grave health problems of Baschwitz’s eldest daughter Gisela/Isa. She was forced to spend some 11 months altogether in the main Amsterdam hospital named after Queen Wilhelmina. It turned out that she had osteomyelitis: a bacterial infection and inflammation of the bone marrow and bone, sometimes also leading to abscesses.

It had to be treated with antibiotics, but penicillin had only just been invented and was not yet mass-produced. Five operations over a year and a half proved extremely difficult and painful. Worse: they were not insured, so it cost a fortune that they did not have. The savings Kurt had brought from Germany had long evaporated. So they were forced to sell paintings, furniture, and later even the grand piano to which Erika was very attached

36 The local Twente Tubantia newspaper published lists of citizens moving in and out, and mentioned him several times in late 1937 (3 & 9 October, 10 November, 4 December).
because of her professional singing and possible lessons. ‘Everything went into my leg’, the daughter later used to sum up rather laconically.\footnote{Video interview, JHM, appr. minute 31 ff.}

She had to stay inside and/or in bed for prolonged periods of time: reading newspapers, illustrated magazines, and books. It was a sad period of hard struggle for her, but in her memories it became closely intertwined with the merriment outside that she partly had to miss. Because as a teenage girl, she was confronted with the romantic ‘fairy tale’ betrothal of crown princess Juliana with the handsome young prince Bernhard from the former small principality of Lippe-Biesterfeld in Germany, their glamorous marriage, and the happy birth of their eldest daughter Beatrix.\footnote{Successive queens Wilhelmina, Juliana, and Beatrix all married (former) aristocrats from various German states — as there was still a great supply of them. There had already been a spike of monarchism with the deaths in 1934 of Wilhelmina’s mother Queen Emma, and Wilhelmina’s Prince-consort Hendrik.}

After returning home, she had to be extra careful with her weak legs, and walked with crutches. This meant that she needed to be accompanied in the tramway streetcar when going to grammar school, often twice a day. So in the end she missed quite a lot of classes, and had to repeat her second year. She also missed a large part of the third year, but proved able to catch up. She could skip the German language class, of course. During her fourth year in school, her health stabilized — well before the war broke out.

But the illness recurred every now and then, and later in life she even had to be operated again. All of this may have helped build her headstrong character, however, which was to show during the war.

\section*{Begging for money to avoid bankruptcy}

Because of the huge costs of his eldest daughter’s illness, Baschwitz fell behind on his everyday payments. In the course of 1937, his calls for additional financial help became increasingly shrill. He deplored that someone like him ‘would look at money like a literary day labourer, and cry’. The same letter mentioned that sociology professor Steinmetz had approached the Amsterdam University association (AUV) to provide Baschwitz with a special contribution of 250 guilders — apparently repeated annually until the war. It was emphatically not meant to cover ‘living expenses’ in any way, however, and was thus booked as ‘travel expenses’.\footnote{Letters to Prof. Posthumus, 26 July 1937, and 1 June 1938 (in the IISH files). Decision AUV meeting 28 March 1938, reported in the daily \textit{Het Vaderland}, 2 days later. Also see Overman’s...}
But this help was not enough to solve his problems – by far. In early 1938, Baschwitz calculated the balance and concluded that he was sinking ever deeper into debt, and risked personal bankruptcy. He had probably long felt embarrassed about the earlier bankruptcies of his own father, and felt appalled at such a prospect. He approached his friend and colleague professor Van den Bergh, who also contacted his friend and colleague professor Brugmans, and told him to keep the faith (with a Dutch proverb: ‘When the need is highest, help is near’).40

A few weeks later, a Jewish social worker turned up to further gauge his situation, and make a report. The hospital fee had been 11x55, or 605 guilders – the last 180 of which he had simply been unable to pay. He also owed 72 guilders to the doctor who had treated Isa, needed 8 guilders a week for further injections and medicine, and more for the 16 radiation treatments she was still to have. All of this ate up the household budget.

He therefore owed 150 guilders in bank loans, a full quarter rent of 3x49 or 147 guilders, and 37 guilders in back taxes. They calculated that the extra money he needed immediately amounted to 348 guilders (the equivalent of well over three thousand 2015 euros): a considerable sum for him during those days, in relation to his very modest and partly irregular income.

This even included an advance of 40 guilders to buy mere ... food. The Jewish Refugee Committee wrote him that they would provide him a supplement of 10 guilders a week over three months, so a total of some 135 guilders. He answered that he felt 'ashamed' that he was forced to accept it. ‘Without your help I would be completely finished’. It had been a ‘horrible year, and I am still fearful about the near future’.41

Chasing after odd jobs

It is true that two of his major books were published that same year. But the Dutch one on the press had been endlessly delayed and the advance

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40 Letter, Van den Bergh to Baschwitz, 31 Jan. 1938. In the archives of the ‘Joods Maatschappelijk Werk’, now at the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation (NIOD). (A large part of the archives was sent to London for safeguarding before the war broke out, and returned afterward).

41 Financial calculations: Report of a Jewish social worker on a visit to Dr. Kurt Baschwitz, dated 18 February 1938; and letter by Ms. Van Tijn, dated 4 March 1938. Horror and fear: Letters of Baschwitz to Ms. Van Tijn of the Jewish committee, dated 26 Febr. 1938 and dated 20 March 1938, in the same archives of the pre-war Jewish Social Work, now kept at the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation. (The conversion rate of 1938 guilders to 2015 euros was 8.88).
had long been spent; whereas the German one on the mass would prove hard to distribute abroad and earn any significant royalties at all. In the end, the large Dutch publisher Elsevier had refused to get involved with the politically sensitive book, saying that it feared German reprisals if it did.

The smaller Dutch publisher Feikema, Carelsen, & Co. would have trouble reaching Germanophone audiences, however: the Anschluss or joining of Austria to Nazi Germany took place in March 1938, and the remaining German-speaking part of Switzerland was a rather small market. Du und die Masse was also translated into Dutch, but Baschwitz felt that the politically naive Dutch were ‘not ready for it’. Its publication, planned for 1940, was then held up by the German invasion.42

So Baschwitz was always looking for more freelance writing work in his field, to further supplement his limited regular income. Among the dailies, the liberal Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant had been his main reference in Rotterdam; the liberal Algemeen Handelsblad was his main reference in Amsterdam.

He had written about the Algemeen Handelsblad’s origins in both De krant door alle tijden and Du und die Masse, earlier about its centenary in the D.A.Z., and later about its 125th anniversary in the newspaper itself.43 Its bosses favoured and were to continue to favour his press chair and related institutions. Baschwitz later said he had published ‘a series of popular science articles’ in it before the war. But they may have been limited in number and were probably unsigned; they do not turn up in searches of the major Dutch press databank Delpher.44

Also in 1938, Baschwitz published a brochure that might be considered a further extension of De krant door alle tijden, a kind of additional chapter. It related how the spreading of newspapers had in turn contributed to the spreading of ‘general knowledge’ in Western Europe, and to a new type of ‘concise summary’ of it. As a result, the first encyclopaedia, by Pierre Bayle, had been published in French: again not in absolutist France but in the freer Netherlands. It had soon been followed by similar British and German ‘universal’ or ‘conversation’ dictionaries, also ‘for women and youngsters’.

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42 As quoted by Gisela/ Isa, in the JHM video interview.
44 Contributions of the 1930s mentioned in a letter with a somewhat embellished C.V. to the post-war press-purge commission, dated 16 April 1947.
Baschwitz noted that the first series of volumes of the most famous larger encyclopedia, by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, had been published in France, but the further series was again published in the freer Netherlands. Finally, the first edition of the major Dutch encyclopedia was later written single-handedly by Dutch Baptist pastor Winkler Prins during the 19th century; the fifth edition, with contributions by hundreds of scholars, came out between 1932 and 1938.

Press scientist Baschwitz had himself contributed an article on journalism to this encyclopedia. It said: ‘First of all it concerns the news of the day, so reports about events that have just taken place. One might also say: the first characteristic of journalism is topicality [actualiteit, in Dutch…] Next to topicality, publicity is a second necessary characteristic of journalism […] making public’.

Baschwitz’s 60-page brochure on the history of encyclopaedias was a kind of promotional gift for prospective buyers. But it was published without his name attached to it, and looked like a kind of commercial copywriting job – taken on to earn urgently needed extra cash. Over subsequent years, he continued to contribute to other reference works as a freelance writer, and later also to the first Dutch ‘systematic encyclopedia’.

**Darkening clouds on the horizon**

In late 1938, things got even worse. During the last days of September, Prime Ministers Neville Chamberlain from Britain and Édouard Daladier from France visited Hitler in the Bavarian capital of Munich, to make a deal with him. Joyful crowds greeted them upon their return home, but Baschwitz had no illusions. According to his eldest daughter, he was terribly upset by the news: ‘Now there will be a global conflagration’.

Britain and France did indeed pressure their ally Czechoslovakia to give territorial concessions to Hitler. Yet Germany was to occupy the whole of that country within half a year. Another half a year later, Germany and the

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45 Also see Ebels-Dolanová, p. 149, 207.
46 The ‘first Dutch systematically structured encyclopedia’, or ENSIE, published a dozen volumes on all scientific disciplines, between 1946 and 1960. His close colleagues Jan Romein and Hendrikus Josephus Pos were among the main editors. Baschwitz contributed the mass communication subjects ‘press, propaganda and public opinion’, as well as ‘advertising’ in volume VII, p. 325-344 (Anschlag, p. 75, n. 115)
47 Isa, video interview, kept at the JHM, minute 37 ff.
Soviet Union divided Poland between themselves and invaded it – thus triggering the first stage of the Second World War.

Baschwitz even announced that he was going to write a book about *Die Dummheit in der Politik* – about the stupidity of political leaders and their wishful thinking. It would also be aimed at those Dutch leaders who had long continued to believe in the viability of neutrality, and who had occasionally even shown some sympathy for the pacifist movement that carried insignias of a ‘Gebroken Geweertje’ or ‘broken little gun’.48

Yet military insiders had no doubt that the Germans would not only invade Belgium but The Netherlands, too, in a near-future war. This would be done partially in view of the country’s great harbours and long coast, which would help escape another crippling British maritime blockade. The Baschwitz archives contain a review from a 1938 Dutch opinion weekly, which he probably read at the time. It was about a newly published book by a former British military attaché in The Hague, and emphasized its particularly ominous first chapter.

It noted the near-completion of the reinforced new defence line in the French northwest, named after war minister André Maginot: an impregnable series of elaborate fortifications on top of multi-story concrete underground buildings connected by kilometre-long tunnels. The author added darkly that this only made it more probable ‘that Germany will try to make an evasive movement through The Netherlands’ the next time.49

So Kurt Baschwitz began to worry about his future safety, and that of his family. It would be better to try and emigrate again, to Great Britain or the United States, but his personal financial crisis had left him with no money to even start a procedure. Yet, as recent exiles, they might be among the first to be targeted by the invader. His wife was fully German, and it might be wise to begin to separate again. He himself was now considered an ethnic Jew, one who had also written and spoken critically about the Nazis. His children might be considered half-Jewish. All of this became ever more urgent.

48 In various publications, Baschwitz spoke about politicians and ‘The power of stupidity’. The latter also became the title of an interesting concise post-war overview article in *Wetenschap en samenleving*, a journal of progressive scientists, Vol. 6 (1952), Nr. 1, p. 197-200. (See the complete translation in the appendix). This article was not so much about leaders as about ordinary people. But the idea for a book on the stupidity of political leaders had originated as early as the 1920s, and was to persist until much later. It was mentioned again in an interview about his last book in the Amsterdam daily *Het Parool*, 25 April 1964.

On 7 November of the same year 1938, the angry student son of a Jewish-
Polish refugee couple expelled from Hannover shot a German diplomat in
Paris. The Nazis seized on the occasion to launch nationwide pogroms throughout Germany, on the so-called Kristallnacht or ‘night of broken
glass’. Thousands of men from the S.A. or Sturm-Abteilung, the uniformed
militia of the Nazi party, took the lead of anti-Semitic lynch mobs through-
out the country. 91 Jews were killed, 267 synagogues were torched, and some
7,500 shops were destroyed. After these events, 30,000 Jews were arrested
and put in the first concentration camps. This also triggered a new wave of
refugees, who flooded into neighbouring countries like The Netherlands.50

Citizens and commentators in The Netherlands were shocked and put
pressure on politicians and the authorities to enlarge the official quota of
refugees per year (only two thousand at the time). But when more came, the
numbers were again restricted the very next month, to a maximum of nine
thousand. Soon, the frontier was officially closed to them, although some
smugglers still helped people across. But these new ‘illegal immigrants’ were
then interned. During the next year, 1939, a self-sufficient camp was built
to hold them in a faraway corner of the country: Westerbork in Drenthe
province. After the invasion, the Germans further expanded and isolated
this into a huge ‘transit camp’ that would hold Jews before they were sent
east by train to an uncertain fate.51

Among the 1938 wave of refugees was Kurt’s own aging widowed mother:
Hedwig Bikard. Originally, the family had been relatively well off, but their
savings had completely evaporated. In a letter to David Cohen of the Jewish
Refugee Committee, Baschwitz reported that the alien police had demanded
that he guarantee her subsistence, and prove that he himself had sufficient
income to do so – at a moment when he was in dire need himself. She was
ultimately admitted, and for the time being went to live with others in a
pension or boarding house close to the Artis Zoo, not too far from the old
Jewish quarter. Until she was deported.52

51 Numbers from the instalment ‘Unwanted strangers’, in the television program series ‘Other
times’, broadcast on the second Dutch public channel on 6 October 2015, and accompanying
article in the Vpro TV guide Vrije Geluiden of that same week.
Prime minister Colijn claimed at the time that The Netherlands had already admitted 16 to
17,000 refugees (after subtracting those who had emigrated again), whereas Great Britain had
only admitted 11,000, of whom 4 to 5,000 had already left again. (Cohen, p. 267).
52 Baschwitz letter to Cohen, dated 14 December 1938, in the aforementioned ‘Jewish Social
Work’ archives at the NIOD. Her address was Plantage Middenlaan 40, close to the Hollandse
Schouwburg theatre on number 24 – which became a local ‘collection centre’ for people to be
deported during the war.