

THE WIESENTHAL REPORTS

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In 1998, in my capacity as Historical Consultant to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Los Angeles, I was commissioned to prepare two reports on the Swiss Government's official attitude toward Jewish refugees arriving in neutral Switzerland, from the late 1930s through 1945. The initial Report dealt with the slave-labour camps--which were in fact created specifically for Jewish refugees, along with legislation passed to enact them and further supporting measures. The public outcry resulting from the subsequent publication of my first report in January, 1998, and then from its sequel in June of 1998, crescendoed into a wave of self-conscious national outrage against the American historian who had dared publish Switzerland's long kept dark secret at last. For the first time the official wartime policy of anti-Semitism invoked by elected Swiss national leaders was exposed for all the world to see. With the release of this fully documented historical reality, Swiss public opinion once again closed ranks, forming a textbook national consensus controlled and orchestrated by the Swiss national press, radio and television, their frenzied patriotism protesting this uncomfortable revelation of their hitherto carefully buried national "patriotic" past and close support of the Third Reich. In particular Swiss national media denied the well documented historical facts, blaming everything as usual on a non-existent "international world Zionist plot" (just as Hitler had done decades earlier). There was during World War II, as there remains to this day, no room or respect for individual thought or belief in Switzerland. Switzerland was, and remains, a nation ruled by "consensus." Everyone had to be a loyal unquestioning patriot. No one is allowed to deviate from the State doctrine as dictated by Bern. Those few courageous citizens who did acknowledge the nation's wartime guilt were intimidated, harrassed and silenced by neighbours, and at Swiss universities, by fellow

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students or colleagues. Neither Dr Schom nor the Simon Wiesenthal Center was given independent access to the Swiss national media. “I have never seen such a complete media blackout,” Rabbi Marvin Hier, Dean of the Los Angeles Wiesenthal Center, told Schom. Only a handful of Swiss leaders spoke out against this anti-Jewish campaign, one of the courageous few, Professor Jean Ziegler, of the University of Geneva (author of *La Suisse Lave Plus Blanc*; and *La Suisse, l’Or et les Morts*) was isolated from Swiss society and threatened by the Federal Police who intercepted his mail and all communications (while also tapping my telephone calls and faxes to and from Switzerland in the course of our work on these reports, the Federal Police later, faxing me a ten-page denunciation at my unlisted/ex-directory Cambridge, England telephone number. One Carla del Ponte was the Attorney General at that time).

This is a good time to clear up another Swiss propaganda diversion. In 1998 that government made the inaccurate claim that 1.5% of that country’s electorate voted NAZI (for Hitler and Hitler’s National Socialist Democratic Party), the vote of course not yet having been granted Swiss women, however, until many years after the war. As the spouse of a NAZI household, she would have had to vote for the same party, thus bringing the NAZI electorate in Switzerland to 3%. But as the children of an officially registered NAZI household would automatically be designated NAZI as well, in those still well disciplined days, the real composition of the *Swiss NAZI population* would have been between *six and eight per cent (and not the misleading figure of 1.5%)*. But even the correctly adjusted figures are misleading, for as our own survey of Swiss media, radio, and the press in particular, demonstrates, close to 99% were pro-NAZI and super-patriot, supporting some three dozen such right-wing groups (also listed in my second Wiesenthal Report).

Given this background then, it hardly comes as a surprise to learn that the

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historically documented facts presented in my two Wiesenthal Reports were denied by Bern and official Swiss representatives. Swiss ambassador to Washington, D. C. and scion of the dominant wealthy ruling financial oligarchy, Thomas Borer, called the Wiesenthal Reports, outrageous “Swiss bashing!” To the contrary, Ambassador Borer protested that “the [wartime] refugees accepted [by Switzerland] . . . were never divided by race or religious faith. . . . All refugees were treated in the same manner,” he firmly attested in the *Los Angeles Times* of January 18, 1998. In reality, however, for the first time, the tenaciously guarded dark secret was out for all to see—*Switzerland’s State-directed policy of anti-Semitism.* 20,000 Jewish refugees were detained in forced-labour camps expressly created just for Jews, while most of the 300,000 Christian refugees lived and worked freely wherever they wished amongst Switzerland’s civilian population. And yet in January 1998 Ambassador Borer still insisted that the wartime “refugees [in Switzerland] . . . were never divided by race or religious faith. . . . “

“I attempted to make it clear to the gentlemen [Waffen SS officers during a recent official visit to Germany’s Oranienburg Concentration Camp],” Swiss Federal Police Chief Heinrich Rothmund reported to the Swiss Minister of Justice and Police in September 1938, “that the people and government of Switzerland had long since become fully cognizant of *the danger of Judaization [Verjudung]* and have consistently defended themselves against it. . . .” On October 4, 1938, the Swiss Foreign Office notified Swiss legations and consulates throughout Europe that henceforth, as a result of the official request of the Swiss Government, Berlin would stamp all German, and soon, Austrian, Jewish passports with a large “J [Jude = Jew] “in order to ensure as complete a control over all . . . Jewish emigrants [attempting to enter Switzerland].” As for “Jewish applications [for Naturalization] the utmost reluctance is practise, even if they have been born and raised in

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Switzerland, “ Federal Police Chief Rothmund announced before a public political rally in Zürich on January 23, 1939. (One week later, On January 30th, Adolf Hitler addressed the Reichstag threatening “ *the annihilation of the Jewish Race in Europe*” (My italics) On February 20, 1939 Federal Policeman Rothmund next introduced *the first Jew Tax*. This automatically segregated Swiss Citizens of the Jewish faith. They, and they alone, were held responsible for maintaining the entire upkeep of Jewish refugees in the slave-labour camps, the shortfall made up by contributions from abroad. The alternative, should the Swiss Jews refuse, or find themselves unable to pay such enormous monthly sums, in addition to their regular full taxes?—To return those 20,000 Jews to the German frontier and hand them over to the SS. It should be noted that throughout my two Wiesenthal Reports, the term forced-, or slave-, labour is applied in designating the Jewish camps, because in the event the Jewish refugees declined the honour of working in those camps, or in the case of the girls and women, ordered to scrub Swiss floors and toilets (all this without regular pay), they, too, were automatically handed over to the Nazis, something else Herr Borer neglected to mention. In any event, not content with that special tax, however, on March 18, 1941 the Federal Council (Swiss Cabinet) introduced *a second Jew Tax*, this in the form of a gun pointed at their heads. Interned Jewish refugees were now ordered to reveal information about all their financial resources deposited in banks in Switzerland and the rest of Europe, *or face deportation*. Then on March 15, 1942 the influential newspaper, *Der Morgen*, echoing official Swiss government policy, informed its readers that “*the most meticulous control of the Jews is in place, along with punctilious observance of our military preparedness, and maintenance of the tightest borders: these are the order of the day.*” Rothmund next followed this up on September 26, 1942 with even stricter new orders for Swiss frontier guards:

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“French Jews are to be turned back, without exception.” Ten days later, some 15,000 uniformed Nazis marched triumphantly against a backdrop of red Swastikas in Zürich’s municipal Oerliken Stadium. On October 17, 1942, leaders of the pro-Nazi super-patriotic Swiss Fatherland Association (Schweizerischer Vaterländischer Verband) met with the office of Swiss Minister of Justice and Police, Edouard von Steiger, stressing that Jewish immigration and naturalization concerned *“a question of race”* for the Swiss people. A week later those same leaders of the Swiss Fatherland Association voted to send a “Declaration” to the Federal Council, the Swiss Cabinet, denouncing any further admission of Jewish refugees into Switzerland, concluding—“Humanity must not be placed above national interests.” On January 26, 1946, the Swiss Vaterland Association personally congratulated Minister of Justice and Police von Steiger on his able handling of *“the Jewish question [die Judenfrage]”* and his firm limiting of Jewish refugees during the war. In retrospect then, when all is said and done, what remains so remarkable in light of the series of wartime actions taken against Jews, foreign and domestic, by the Swiss government, is not that Swiss Ambassador Thomas Borer should have “forgotten” one or two of these historical facts, but, rather, that he somehow forgot *all of them, indeed an entire chapter*, and that the darkest one in Swiss National History.

(As a postscript it should perhaps be remembered that in April 2002 the Swiss Government fired Thomas Borer from his subsequent ambassadorship to Berlin, for unprofessional conduct, or as Foreign Minister Joseph Deiss put it, “Ambassador Borer is no longer acceptable as head of the embassy.” “My foreign Minister, Joseph Deiss, has completely abandoned me, “ Borer complained to the Press. “[Deiss] had been more ready to believe a popular [Swiss] newspaper and a doubtful witness, than to believe me.” At the same time foreign Minister Deiss was

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also obliged to recall Peter Friedrich as Swiss Ambassador to Luxembourg, who was arrested for alleged money laundering.]

During the preparation of these Reports, Simon Wiesenthal contacted me and asked me to suppress them. I was astonished, given his long courageous career in tracking down Nazis, and documenting their acts.. He protested that publication of my Reports “would just stir things up [anti-Seimitic denunciations in Switzerland] all over again.” Mr Wiesenthal was frail and ailing at that time, exhausted by his long arduous journey, and clearly was not up to another fight. I informed him that as a professional historian I felt it incumbent upon myself to publish the truth about the long-suppressed anti-Jewish acts committed by the Swiss Federal Government before and during the Second World War. I have simply carried out his own legacy of full disclosure, as I am sure he would himself have acted at an earlier stage of his own career. Subsequently a much embarrassed Swiss Government quietly asked the Simon Wiesenthal Center to suppress this second Schom Report, to suppress this entire chapter of Swiss World War II history,a request which the Wiesenthal Center refused to have any part of.

Before concluding I should like to point out another documented example of Switzerland’s World War II policy of closely supporting the Nazis and the Third Reich. During the war the Swiss Red Cross and Army *volunteered*, and dispatched—under the direction of the founder of the Swiss Fatherland Association, Army Corps Commander, Eugen Bircher, four complete army field hospitals to Adolf Hitler’s armies fighting the Russians. (Not a single Swiss doctor or nurse, indeed not a single bandage, was ever sent to the aid of the Anglo-American wounded in the field.) A fifth field hospital destined for the Third Reich in 1944, was cancelled when it became apparent that Switzerland’s German allies were losing the war.

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The documents found in the Swiss Federal Archives, Bern, and other citations from published Swiss sources are to be found in the footnotes of my two Wiesenthal Reports. Those Reports are available at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Los Angeles, California.”

(1) *THE UNINVITED GUESTS, SWISS FORCED-LABOUR CAMPS, 1939-1944*, published by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Los Angeles, January, 1998.

(2) *A SURVEY OF NAZI AND PRO-NAZI GROUPS IN SWITZERLAND, 1930-1945* published by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, June, 1998.