

## NO NEED TO APOLOGIZE, JUST PAY US

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More than fifty years after the Holocaust, the Dutch government is still having serious problems honestly confronting The Netherlands' attitude toward the Jews during and after the war. The gap between benign image and real past behavior is probably wider for Holland than for any other country. Nathan Durst, a Holocaust psychologist now living in Israel, says: "Most people forget to read the 'last page' of Anne Frank's diary: those who betrayed her were Dutch, as were the policemen who arrested her."

On March 21 the Dutch government sent a concluding document to parliament on the post-war restitution issue. This dealt with the looted Holocaust assets of the Jews and the small gypsy community of The Netherlands, but also with post-war restitution in the former Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). By grouping Jewish claims together with those of colonists who had suffered under the Japanese occupation, the government *de facto* denied that Dutch Jewry had been targeted in a totally different manner.

The combining, in a single document, of incomparable problems in very different circumstances and territories – a typical example of Holocaust relativism – reflects the questionable manner with which the Dutch government has handled the restitution complex over the past three years and its continued efforts to sanitize Dutch history. Another example is that the report of the main commission of inquiry was published one day after the Stockholm Holocaust Conference, rather than before it.

In its newest document, the government apologizes to those who suffered after the war, stating explicitly, however, that this does not presuppose those responsible of having 'wrong intentions'. The latter untruth is contradicted, *inter alia*, by the document itself.

According to a recent commission of inquiry, the Dutch Stockbrokers' Association had "acted shamefully during the war". In addition, the post-war governments frequently allowed the interests of the Dutch Stockbrokers' Association to "prevail over appropriate, effective measures to restore the rights of victims of persecution." A few days before the Dutch parliament reconvened after the war, the government rushed through a change in the existing law for this specific purpose.

During the war the brokers' association offered the German occupiers the opportunity to sell securities looted from the Jews on the Amsterdam exchange, thus obfuscating the identity of their true owners. After the war, the Dutch judicial authorities tried to put most of the blame on a German broker, but backed off when it emerged that the dominant players had been important Dutch financial institutions.

With respect to these post-war attitudes, the commission concluded: "The government undermined the legal procedures enshrined in the restitution legislation. For this and other reasons, even where it could be proved that Jewish-owned securities had been bought in bad faith, virtually no securities were restored to their rightful owners until 1953."

The untruth in the government's excuses repeated those of the apology Prime Minister Kok had been forced by other cabinet ministers to make at the end of January. Two days earlier, at the Stockholm Holocaust conference, he still claimed that there was no basis for such an apology. During his stay in Israel, earlier this week, Kok denied both in a radio interview and in a meeting with Platform Israel, the roof organization of Dutch immigrant bodies, any government responsibility for the fate which befell the Dutch Jews during the German occupation. This despite the major help Dutch authorities and institutions gave the Germans in isolating, looting, arresting and deporting the Jews.

With respect to the post-war authorities' "wrong intentions", Dr. Yozeph Michman, former director of Yad Vashem and a Dutch Holocaust survivor, relates that, in a meeting between the secretary of the Dutch Zionist organization and the first post-war Dutch Prime Minister Schermerhorn, the latter had commented that one could not expect him – as a socialist – to help restore money to Jewish capitalists.

The government's recent recommendation to pay the Dutch Jews 400 million guilders in restitution is far below a realistic contemporary value of the monies illegally and immorally withheld from their Jewish owners. This sum represents about 5% of the real, current value of the assets looted and not restored. It is probably between 35% and 40% of the monies the Dutch Jews should have rightfully received from the government on the basis of the commission reports, which established only the nominal value of what was withheld.

In light of the government's attitude, one can now understand better some remarks made to a gathering of Dutch Jews in Israel by Como van Hellenberg Hubar, ambassador of The Netherlands in Israel until this year. He argued that one should not destroy the myth of the 'good Dutchman': "The positive norm which this myth contains is part of the norms and values of The Netherlands. If one attacks the myth then the danger exists that the norm, in this case tolerance, is also affected."

As telling the truth about the Holocaust more than fifty years later still seems problematic to the Dutch authorities, it may take a few decades more until The Netherlands can face a balanced view of its past, where image and reality overlap. It is up to the survivors to try to shorten the amount of time needed.

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