

## READING

## "Restoring" Germany's Civil Service

The boycott of Jewish-owned businesses set the stage for another step in carrying out Adolf Hitler's "racial" policies. People were whispering about the new plans for some time before they were made public on April 7, 1933. On April 4, soon after the rumors reached President Paul von Hindenburg, he wrote a letter to Hitler:

Dear Mr. Chancellor!

Recently, a whole series of cases has been reported to me in which judges, lawyers, and officials of the Judiciary who are disabled war veterans and whose record in office is flawless, have been forcibly sent on leave, and are later to be dismissed for the sole reason that they are of Jewish descent.

It is quite intolerable for me personally . . . that Jewish officials who were disabled in the war should suffer such treatment, [especially] as, with the express approval of the government, I addressed a Proclamation to the German people on the day of the national uprising, March 21, in which I bowed in reverence before the dead of the war and remembered in gratitude the bereaved families of the war dead, the disabled, and my old comrades at the front.

I am certain, Mr. Chancellor, that you share this human feeling, and request you, most cordially and urgently, to look into this matter yourself, and to see to it that there is some uniform arrangement for all branches of the public service in Germany.

As far as my own feelings are concerned, officials, judges, teachers and lawyers who are war invalids, fought at the front, are sons of war dead, or themselves lost sons in the war should remain in their positions unless an individual case gives reason for different treatment. If they were worthy of fighting for Germany and bleeding for Germany, then they must also be considered worthy of continuing to serve the Fatherland. . . .

On April 5, Hitler replied to Hindenburg.

Dear Mr. President!

In a most generous and humane manner you, Mr. Field Marshal, plead the cause of those members of the Jewish people who were once compelled, by the requirements of universal military service, to serve in the war. . . .

But, with the greatest respect, may I point out that members and supporters of my movement, who are Germans, for years were driven from all Government positions, without consideration for their wives and children or their war service. . . . Those responsible for this cruelty were the same Jewish parties which today complain when their supporters are denied the right to official positions, with a thousand times more justification, because they are of little use in these positions but can do limitless harm . . .

Nevertheless, . . . the law in question . . . will provide consideration for those Jews who either served in the war themselves, were disabled in the war, have other merits, or never gave occasion for complaint in the course of a long period of service.

In general, the primary aim of this cleansing process is only to restore a certain sound and natural balance, and, secondly, to remove from official positions of national significance those elements to which one cannot entrust Germany's survival. . . .

I beg you, Mr. President, to believe that I will try to do justice to your noble feelings as far as is possible. I understand your inner motivations and myself, by the way, frequently suffer under the harshness of a fate which forces us to make decisions which, from a human point of view, one would a thousand times rather avoid.

Work on the law in question will proceed as quickly as possible, and I am convinced that this matter, too, will then find the best possible solution.<sup>1</sup>

On April 7, the new law, known as the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, went into effect. The only Jews to keep their positions were veterans, their fathers, and their sons. Similar laws dismissed all Jewish prosecuting attorneys and Jewish doctors who worked in the national health system.

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<sup>1</sup> Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Abraham Margalit, eds., Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1987), 37–39.

## Connection Questions

1. What was Hindenburg's specific objection to the proposed civil service law? What does Hindenburg's letter indicate about who he believed should be protected as part of Germany's universe of obligation?
2. Many Germans hoped that Hindenburg would be able to stop Hitler from carrying out his most extreme and discriminatory policies. What does the exchange between the two leaders reveal about whether or not these hopes were realistic?
3. What effect does granting specific exceptions to a discriminatory policy like the new civil service law have on public support for the law? Do you think exceptions strengthen or weaken opposition?