

EHRI Online Course in Holocaust Studies

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Persecution and Deportation in Western Europe – General Instruction

Translation: *II12 Letter written by the SS Colonel regarding Final solution of the Jewish question in France*

12 February 1943

To the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt)

Bureau IV

Berlin

SS Group Leader Müller (SS-Gruppenführer).

Re: Final solution of the Jewish question in France

Case file: Consultation with SS Lieutenant-Colonel Eichmann (Obersturmbahnführer) in Paris.

The announcement made by SS Lieutenant-Colonel Eichmann on the evacuation of all Jews of French nationality has moved me to briefly comment on this question and to highlight with a description of the current situation those points necessary for an implementation that will ensure as little trouble as possible with the French government.

1. As mentioned in various reports, in response to German pressure the French government has declared itself willing to have Jews of non-French nationality, including stateless Jews, arrested and handed over by the French police to the German police for deportation to the Reich.
2. The French government, i.e. foremost Marshal Pétain, defies however every attempt to extend the scope of measures against the Jews to include Jews of French nationality. The introduction of the yellow badge for Jews by the French government was rejected. The yellow badge was introduced in the old occupied territory through German decrees. It has yet to be introduced in the newly occupied territory because the French government continues to refuse to adopt for this territory the same decrees which the German military administration are applying in the old occupied sector. The French government is still sovereign on the territory of the newly occupied sector.
3. All attempts to change the standpoint of the French government have failed. The attempts made by the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, Darquier de Pellepoix, have also yielded no result. Even when President Laval states that he personally would be prepared to implement the measures against all Jews, this statement is not to be taken seriously because at the critical moment he always talks his way out of doing anything, observing that
 - a) the Italians do not even permit restrictions against Jews, but on the contrary ensure the protection of Jews of all nationalities in the territory occupied by Italy, and even forbid the French government from implementing measures against Jews of French nationality.
 - b) Marshal Pétain would declare his fierce opposition to rounding up Jews of French nationality or having them deported. Pétain would even threaten to resign.
4. The attitude of Marshal Pétain becomes obvious when consideration is given to how the French police – the Chief of the French Police Bousquet personally – does everything in its

power to prevent the deportation of Jews of French nationality. The following example is typical:

Jews of French nationality arrested for not wearing the yellow badge or other breaches were to be deported from the Jewish camp. Bousquet explained that one could deport these Jews but the French police would not be available to carry out any action. In response to the local answer that the deportation would then be carried out by German forces, the French police stated that they had conducted a raid and immediately arrested 1,300 non-French Jews. These Jews were handed over to the German police with the notification that they were to be deported in place of the Jews of French nationality. It is clear that in this case both categories of Jews will be deported.

5. If large-scale measures against all Jews of French nationality are to be taken now, then political setbacks have to be expected. As in other territories the case because of the military situation, the view that Germany will lose the war is one that is particularly strongly held in France, where it is expected from the Americans that they will enable France to regain North Africa and guarantee a strong France. Due to this currently pronounced attitude of “wait and see”, France will attempt to prevent any further measures against the Jews so as to show the Americans that they are not simply following the orders of the German government.

To the Germans they always argue against the measures by referring to the Italians. They explain that the Italians – and these are facts relayed on and emphasised by, first and foremost, the agencies of the Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei) as well as other German departments – stand up for the Jews everywhere eastward of the Rhône. Not only that the official Italian agencies send notes to the French government forbidding the badging of the Jews and that they stand up for Jews of all nationalities in this respect, but also that amicable relations exist between the Italian occupation troops and the Jewish population. Italians live with Jews and gladly accept that Jews invite them out and pay for them, so that the impression arises that the German and Italian view is fundamentally different. The French point out that through the Jewish influence instances of pacifist and communist disintegration of morale is appearing among the Italian soldiers, generating an American-friendly mood. Through these Jewish intermediaries a very good relationship is being created between the Italian soldiers and French population, with it being said that as Latin races the French and the Italians understand one another much easier than Germans and French or Germans and Italians. Every attempt is being made to methodically and strongly criticise the German-Italian relationship and, on the other hand, to back French-Italian understanding, thus simultaneously disintegrating the will of the population, claiming that, should the Americans attack, then the Italians would not fight, and that the Americans would finally bring peace.

Due to the military situation, this is giving the French government a double boost, firstly to behave forcefully vis-à-vis the Italians, because they have always considered themselves superior to the Italians, and secondly, to resist German demands in the Jewish question.

6. If the final solution of the Jewish question in France is ordered now, it can be expected that

a) Pétain opposes it, i.e. forbids that the executive measures be carried out by the French police, or he threatens to resign. (Given the overall situation in Africa and the fact that French nationals are constantly trying to arrive in North Africa without Pétain moving against this or undertaking any measures, it is doubtful whether it is still of any advantage today for the German Reich that Pétain is French head of state, or whether Pétain, once a symbol for German-French rapprochement, but at the same time is symbol of all Frenchmen follows events in North Africa in the hope of a good ending for France,

b) Laval would approve of the measures against the Jews were he to receive from Germany some kind of promise for the French people. At a meeting held on 12.2.1943 Laval stated that the American had already assured France that France would receive all of the Italian colonies, would be given back all the French colonies and in Europe would be given more than just the Rhine border. The German side has yet to make any kind of promises for the post-war period. In my view, Laval would accept the Jewish measures if he is given some form of political assurance.

7. The involvement of the French police is required to carry out the measures against the Jews in the newly occupied territory. This would be guaranteed by Laval given the conditions outlined in 6.

8. It is a prerequisite for carrying out the measures for the whole of France that they are also able to be carried out in Italian-occupied territory, otherwise the exodus of Jews to Italian-occupied territory already discernible today will certainly increase and only half measures eventuate.

Signed Dr Knochen
SS Colonel (SS Standartenführer)

Translated by Paul Bowman