

## The Nuremberg Laws

From the moment the Nazis came to power in 1933, the Jews of Germany were subjected to a never-ending series of discriminatory laws. There would be, during the twelve years of Hitler's Reich, over 400 separate regulations issued against Jews prohibiting everything from performing in a symphony orchestra to owning a pet cat.

In the Reich's early years, anti-Jewish regulations were drawn up by a Nazi bureaucracy that included both radical and moderate anti-Semites. None of the bureaucrats had any moral qualms about being anti-Semitic. However, the moderates were concerned with foreign reaction and the possible disruptive impact of anti-Jewish prohibitions on Germany's still-fragile economy.

Of the 503,000 Jews living in Germany in 1933, about 70 percent lived in big cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt and Breslau. Many of the young Jews in these cities married non-Jewish Germans.

Although Jews made-up less than one percent of Germany's overall population of 55 million, Hitler considered them by nature to be the "mortal enemy" of the German people. But within Hitler's bureaucracy, radical and moderate anti-Semites strongly disagreed as to what legal (or illegal) actions should actually be taken against the Jews. This bureaucratic in-fighting resulted in complete stagnation concerning the development of a coordinated Reich policy of anti-Semitism.

Local Brownshirts, upset by the bureaucratic bungling, often took out their frustrations on local Jews in their neighborhoods, and by mid-1935 there had been dramatic rise in the number of street incidents.

Ordinary citizens, encouraged in part by Goebbels' anti-Semitic propaganda, also took part in spontaneous demonstrations. One such incident in the summer of 1935 was recorded by the Bavarian political police:

"...there were anti-Jewish demonstrations in the swimming pool in Heigenbrücken. Approximately 15-20 young bathers had demanded the removal of the Jews from the swimming bath by chanting in the park which adjoins the bath...A considerable number of other bathers joined in the chanting so that probably the majority of visitors were demanding the removal of the Jews...The district leader of the NSDAP [Nazi Party] who happened to be in the swimming baths, went to the [pool] supervisor and demanded that he remove the Jews. The supervisor refused the request on the grounds that he was obliged to follow only the instructions of the baths' administration and moreover, could not easily distinguish the Jews as such. As a result of the supervisor's statement, there was a slight altercation between him and the [district leader]...In view of this incident, the Spa Association today placed a notice at the entrance to the baths with the inscription: Entry Forbidden to Jews."

Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess ordered a halt to spontaneous anti-Jewish actions, not out of consideration for the Jews, but to prevent "...bringing Party members into conflict with the political police, who consist largely of Party members, and this will be welcomed by Jewry. The political police can in such cases only follow the strict instructions of the Führer in carrying out all measures for maintaining peace and order, so making it possible for the Führer to rebuke at any time allegations of atrocities and boycotts made by Jews abroad."

By late summer 1935, the street violence and demonstrations had diminished. But the bureaucratic in-fighting only escalated and would soon come to a head at the annual Nuremberg Rally

At this year's Rally, held from September 9 to 15, a special session of the Nazi Reichstag (Legislature) was scheduled for the last day at which Hitler planned to deliver a major foreign policy speech concerning the League of Nations and Fascist Italy. However, Hitler wound up canceling the speech on short notice upon the advice of his Foreign Minister, Constantin von Neurath.

The abrupt cancellation left a void as to just what the Reichstag would do during its special Nuremberg session. Radical anti-Semites at Nuremberg seized the opportunity and suggested to Hitler that the special session would be an ideal opportunity to announce some kind of big new law concerning the Jews.

Hitler accepted their suggestion and settled on the idea of a law forbidding intermarriage and sexual relations between Jews and Germans, which he knew the radicals had been wanting for some time. On September 14, the night before the Reichstag's special session, Nazi legal officials presented Hitler with four drafts of the new law. Hitler chose the fourth version, which happened to be the least militant, although he crossed out one important line stating: "This law applies only to full-blooded Jews."

Around midnight, Hitler told the same legal officials he also wanted an accompanying law concerning Reich citizenship. The officials, scrawling on the back of a hotel food menu, hastily drafted a vaguely worded law which designated Jews as subjects of the Reich. Hitler (a night owl) approved the draft around 2:30 a.m.

At the Reichstag's special session held later that day at 8 p.m., Hitler delivered a short speech in which he characterized the new laws as an attempt to "achieve the legislative regulation of a problem which, if it breaks down again will then have to be transferred by law to the National Socialist Party for final solution."

The laws were then read by Reichstag President Hermann Göring as follows:

### **Reich Citizenship Law of September 15, 1935**

**I. 1.** A subject of the State is a person who belongs to the protective union of the German Reich, and who therefore has particular obligations towards the Reich. **2.** The status of

subject is acquired in accordance with the provisions of the Reich and State Law of Citizenship.

**II.** 1. A citizen of the Reich is that subject only who is of German or kindred blood and who, through his conduct, shows that he is both desirous and fit to serve the German people and Reich faithfully.

### **Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, September 15, 1935**

Entirely convinced that the purity of German blood is essential to the further existence of the German people, and inspired by the uncompromising determination to safeguard the future of the German nation, the Reichstag has unanimously adopted the following law, which is promulgated herewith:

**I.** 1. Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden. Marriages concluded in defiance of this law are void, even if, for the purpose of evading this law, they were concluded abroad.

2. Proceedings for annulment may be initiated only by the Public Prosecutor.

**II.** Sexual relations outside marriage between Jews and nationals of German or kindred blood are forbidden.

**III.** Jews will not be permitted to employ female citizens of German or kindred blood under 45 years of age as domestic servants.

**IV.** 1. Jews are forbidden to display the Reich and national flag or the national colors. 2. On the other hand they are permitted to display the Jewish colors. The exercise of this right is protected by the State.

**V.** 1. A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of Section I will be punished with hard labor.

2. A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of Section II will be punished with imprisonment or with hard labor.

3. A person who acts contrary to the provisions of Sections III or IV will be punished with imprisonment up to a year and with a fine, or with one of these penalties.

**VI.** The Reich Minister of the Interior in agreement with the Deputy Führer and the Reich Minister of Justice will issue the legal and administrative regulations required for the enforcement and supplementing of this law.

**VII.** The law will become effective on the day after its promulgation; Section III, however, not until January 1, 1936.

The announcement of the Nuremberg Laws had the unexpected result of generating a lot of confusion and heated debate among Nazi bureaucrats as to how one should define a Jew, given that there had been widespread intermarriage up to this point.

As a result, two months later a supplemental Nazi decree was issued which defined a "full Jew" as a person with at least three Jewish grandparents. Those with fewer than three grandparents were designated as Mischlinge (half-breeds), of which there were two degrees: First Degree Mischlinge - a person with two Jewish grandparents; Second Degree Mischlinge - a person with one Jewish grandparent.

The Nazis also issued somewhat complicated [instructional charts](#) to help bureaucrats distinguish the various degrees of Jewishness. Generally, the more "full-blooded" a Jew was, the greater the level of discrimination. But much of the confusion remained. In many cases, the necessary genealogical evidence concerning Jewish family backgrounds was simply not available.

As it turned out, about 350,000 Germans could be classified as Mischlinge; with 50,000 having converted to Christianity from Judaism; 210,000 being half-Jews; and 80,000 considered quarter-Jews.

Nazi bureaucrats also disagreed on how strictly the Nuremberg Laws should be enforced. Moderate anti-Semites wanted to protect "that part which is German" concerning valuable civil servants in the government. Radicals, on the other hand, viewed all Mischlinge as carriers of "Jewish influence" and wanted them all dismissed. Much to their dismay, the moderates prevailed, and Mischlinge civil servants and others were allowed to keep their positions for the time being.

Surprisingly, many German Jews reacted to the Nuremberg Laws with a sense of relief, thinking the worst was now over - at least they finally knew where they stood and could get on with their lives even if they had diminished rights. And to some degree they were correct. Over the next few years, the Nazis moved slowly in regard to the Jews. This was the quiet time for Jews in the Third Reich, as Hitler began to focus his attention entirely on diplomatic affairs and military re-armament.

In diplomatic circles, Hitler was struggling to gain credibility. Over the past few years, international observers in Nazi Germany had witnessed an incredible chain of events including: the revolutionary-like seizure of power in January 1933; the mysterious Reichstag fire in February; the anti-Jewish boycott in April; book burnings in May; wild street violence by the Brownshirts; heard rumors of concentration camps; knew about the (already infamous) Gestapo; witnessed the blood purge of June 1934; and observed the emperor-like ascension of Hitler as Führer.

For the Nazis, it was now necessary to refrain from any further actions against the Jews that would serve to undermine Hitler's credibility on the world stage. The Führer had to present himself as someone who could be taken seriously, not as the leader of an anti-Semitic mob.

The turn of the Jews would come later. Presently, Hitler's goals were to rebuild the German Army and exploit any opportunity to expand the Reich. Early in 1936, he decided on a dangerous gamble and sent his soldiers marching into the demilitarized portion of Germany known as the Rhineland - the very first territory to be forcibly grabbed by the Nazis.

**Copyright © 2001 The History Place™ All Rights Reserved**