

# American Consul Samuel Honaker's Description of Antisemitic Persecution and of *Kristallnacht* and its Aftereffects in the Stuttgart Region (November 1938)

## Abstract

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During its first years in power, the Nazi regime sought to avoid criticism from both the international community and the general German population. To this end, it tried to contain street violence and other excesses against German Jews. Instead, Hitler directed National Socialist antisemitism into legal channels, using discriminatory laws to isolate the Jews socially and economically and to force them to emigrate. By 1938, this approach had prompted 250,000 Jews to leave Germany. Still, Hitler's policy frustrated the most radical elements of the party and the government, who demanded an immediate solution to the so-called Jewish Question.

With antisemitism on the rise in Germany, the Polish government began to fear that Polish Jews living in Germany would want to return home. Thus, in March 1938, the Polish government announced that all Polish citizens living abroad who failed to renew their passports by October 31 would lose their citizenship. The new policy had serious implications for the roughly 70,000 Polish Jews living in Germany, for failure to comply threatened to prevent them from either returning home or emigrating elsewhere. As a result, in the fall of 1938, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop ordered police action against Polish Jews living in Germany. On the night of October 28, 1938, the Gestapo arrested about 17,000 Polish Jews with the intention of deporting them to Poland. But Poland closed its borders on October 31, leaving the majority of the deported stranded in the no-man's-land between the German and Polish borders near the town of Zbaszyn. Since the Polish government initially refused to admit them, they had to endure extremely harsh living conditions for several weeks until their situation was finally resolved.

After seventeen-year-old Herschel Grynszpan (also written as "Grünspan" in German), then living in Paris, heard that his parents were caught up in this action, he decided to commit a spectacular assassination to draw the world's attention to the suffering of the Nazis' Jewish victims. On the morning of November 7, 1938, he entered the German embassy in Paris and shot Legation Secretary Ernst Eduard vom Rath, who died of his injuries two days later. The SA and SS responded with immediate excesses against Jewish persons and institutions in Germany. When Hitler was informed of the diplomat's death, he authorized Goebbels to stage a pogrom throughout all of Germany. It was to be sold to the world as a spontaneous eruption of the German people's outrage over the so-called Jewish crime. That same night, the SA and SS unleashed a wave of violence and destruction over the entire country: thousands of Jewish synagogues, shops, factories, apartments, and houses were looted and vandalized. As the following eyewitness report by American Consul Samuel Honaker reveals, the Nazi regime was not able to maintain the fiction of the spontaneous people's uprising against the Jews in the eyes of the world.

## Source

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### I. Letter to Hugh R. Wilson, American Embassy, Berlin

American Consulate

Stuttgart, Germany, November 12, 1938

No. 307

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Subject: Anti-Semitic Persecution in the Stuttgart Consular District

The Honorable Hugh R. Wilson, American Ambassador, Berlin

Sir:

I have the honor to report that the Jews of Southwest Germany have suffered vicissitudes during the last three days which would seem unreal to one living in an enlightened country during the twentieth century if one had not actually been a witness of their dreadful experiences, or if one had not had them corroborated by more than one person of undoubted integrity. To the anguish of mind to which the Jews of this consular district have been subjected for some time, and which suddenly became accentuated on the morning and afternoon of the tenth of November, were added the horror of midnight arrests, of hurried departures in a half-dressed state from their homes in the company of police officers, of the wailing of wives and children suddenly left behind, of imprisonment in crowded cells, and the panic of fellow prisoners.

These wholesale arrests were the culmination of a day of suffering on the part of the Jews. The desecration and burning of synagogues started before daylight and should have proved a warning signal of what was to come during the course of the next few hours. At 10:30 a.m. about twenty-five leaders of the Jewish community were arrested by a joint squad of policemen and plain clothes men. The arrested persons ranged from thirty-five to sixty-five years of age and were taken from their community officer [*Israelitischer Oberrat*] to the police station in two motor vehicles. As the victims passed from the building to the motor cars, bystanders cursed and shouted at them.

Other arrests took place in various parts of Stuttgart. While this city was the scene of many anti-Semitic demonstrations during the course of the day, similar events were taking place all over Württemberg and Baden. Jews were attacked here and there. So great had become the panic of the Jewish people in the meantime that, when the consulate opened after Armistice Day, Jews from all sections of Germany thronged into the office until it was overflowing with humanity, begging for an immediate visa or some kind of letter in regard to immigration which might influence the police not to arrest or molest them. Women over sixty years of age pleaded on behalf of husbands imprisoned in some unknown place. American mothers of German sons invoked the sympathy of the Consulate. Jewish fathers and mothers with children in their arms were afraid to return to their homes without some document denoting their intention to immigrate at an early date. Men in whose homes old, rusty revolvers had been found during the last few days cried aloud that they did not dare ever again to return to their places of residence or business. In fact, it was a mass of seething, panic-stricken humanity.

### **Burning of Synagogues**

Early on the morning of November 10<sup>th</sup> practically every synagogue—at least twelve in number—in Württemberg, Baden and Hohenzollern was set on fire by well disciplined and apparently well equipped young men in civilian clothes. The procedure was practically the same in all cities of this district, namely, Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, Freiburg, Heidelberg, Heilbronn, et cetera. The doors of the synagogues were forced open. Certain sections of the building and furnishings were drenched with petrol and set on fire. Bibles, prayer books, and other sacred things were thrown into the flames. Then the local fire brigades were notified. In Stuttgart, the city officials ordered the fire brigade to save the archives and other written material having a bearing on vital statistics. Otherwise, the fire brigades confined their activities to preventing the flames from spreading. In a few hours the synagogues were, in general, heaps of smoking ruins.

### **Devastation of Jewish Shops**

Practically all the Jewish shops in the Stuttgart consular district are reported to have been attacked,

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ransacked, and devastated. These actions were carried out by young men and half-grown boys. It was easy to recognize, under the civilian clothes of the former, trained and disciplined S.A. or S.S. men, while in the case of the latter the Hitler Youth uniform was evident in some instances. The young men set about their task in most cases quietly and efficiently. They first smashed windows, destroyed furnishings, and then began to throw merchandise into the street. Throughout these actions the police looked on, either smilingly or unconcernedly.

Most of the Jewish shops in Stuttgart are situated in the main business section of the city. On the Königsstrasse, the principal business street, no looting was observed, but in the side streets looting was noticed in a number of cases. In front of one shop people were seen trying on shoes which had been thrown into the street. Before the Café Heimann was demolished, people helped themselves to cake and so forth.

The following is a list of Jewish shops in Stuttgart which were badly damaged:

<b>Name of Firm</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Principal Business</b>
Bamberger & Hertz	2 Poststrasse	Clothing
Bloch	1 Rotbühlstrasse	Restaurant
Jacobs	32 Hauptstätterstrasse	Radios
Katz	6 Leonhardsplatz	Shoes
Rober	8 Marktstrasse	Clothing
Salberg	56 Königstrasse	Photographer
Scheinmann	45 Königstrasse	Shoes
Speier	58 Königstrasse	Shoes
Speier	4 Marktplatz	Shoes
Tanne	6 Tübingerstrasse	Department store
Ika	21 Königstrasse	Lingerie

### **Arrests and Other Persecutive Activities**

It has been learned from reliable sources that practically the entire male Jewish population of the city of Stuttgart, ranging from the age of eighteen to sixty-five years, has been arrested by authorities representing the police. In most cases the arrests are reported to have been effected by two policemen wearing civilian clothes. These arrests included many prominent Jewish businessmen and several consuls of foreign states, among whom the most notable is the Danish Consul General for Württemberg. All of the arrested persons were immediately conducted to police headquarters and then placed in cells. During the course of November 11th some of the persons arrested were transported to Welzheim, which is the most important concentration camp in Württemberg. Arrests were also made as late as 10 a.m. on Saturday, the 12th of November. It is understood that the latter arrests consisted very largely of young men living in rural districts, who have since been brought to police headquarters in Stuttgart.

In several small places in Württemberg, notably in Rexingen, Bittenhausen, and Laupheim, Jews have been prohibited from leaving their homes since the 10th of November. They are not permitted to receive or send mail. Unconfirmed reports are even to the effect that these persons are having difficulty in securing food, and in some cases it has been reported that farmers have been slipping food to them through the back doors of their homes.

In Heilbronn an order was issued Friday (November 11th) prohibiting Jews from entering cinemas in that city. Early on the morning of the 10th of November a number of Jews who had been arrested were forced

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to march in the streets of Kehl two by two, reporting in chorus: "We are guilty of the murder in Paris and we are traitors to Germany." Among them were ex-servicemen, some of whom had been wounded during the Great War, and some of whom had received war decorations.

At the time of writing this report it seems as if arrests in rural districts have not been as widespread as in the city of Stuttgart. Many Jewish men, some of whom are of excellent business standing, are reported to have left their homes on Thursday and to have disappeared in the meantime. Their friends assume that they are wandering about, in the hope that possibly the storm will blow itself out and they will be left unmolested. It is reported that, in such cases, the police have left word with their families that the missing men should report to police headquarters as soon as they appear at their homes. Naturally, there are rumors of many suicides, especially of elderly Jewish men, but so far reports of this kind have not been confirmed.

Although the writer has spoken with the proprietors of homes which have been demolished in other parts of Germany during the last few days, no attacks on private houses and apartments occupied by Jews in Württemberg have been reported in the case of Stuttgart, with the exception of two isolated instances. It is known, however, that the Jewish State Orphans' Asylum in Esslingen, which is only about six miles from Stuttgart, has been forcibly evacuated and the children chased out into the streets. Many families, the males of which have been arrested, are without any money and are now being assisted by more fortunate Jewish families. Jewish organizations have not been able to extend aid during the last few days, for their offices have been closed and their funds sequestered.

After a period of three days during which persecutive measures against the Jews have been unprecedented in this part of Germany, depression among this section of the population has become indescribable. Many Jewish women are afraid that the worst is yet to be experienced. They look forward with dread to the day on which Herr von [sic] Roth will be buried. Apprehension is prevalent in Jewish circles that a large number of the Jews already in prison will be kept by the authorities as hostages. They are hoping that Jews in foreign countries and the foreign Press will not give occasion to the German authorities to make more severe their persecution and apprehension as regards the future.

### **Reaction of the People to the Events Described**

There is a strong belief among many conservative people in Stuttgart that the violent action against the Jews which has taken place during the last three days was planned and in practically no way spontaneous as the German Press would like to have everyone believe. It became quickly known in Stuttgart that action against the Jews in Württemberg and Hohenzollern had taken place more or less simultaneously. It was just as quickly known that three measures were being executed throughout this section of Germany:

- (a) the burning of synagogues;
- (b) the smashing of windows and the forced closing of all Jewish shops; and
- (c) the wholesale arrests of Jewish men.

These actions have caused a great part of the population to feel very uneasy and quickly to give expression to their lack of agreement with such practices. Reactions on the part of the populace have, however, shown a division of sentiment. The vast majority of the non-Jewish population, perhaps as much as 80 percent, have given evidence of complete disagreement with these violent demonstrations against the Jews. Many people, in fact, are hanging their heads with shame. On the other hand, possibly 20 percent of the population has shown satisfaction as a result of the application of radical measures.

Respectfully yours,  
Samuel Honaker  
American Consul General

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Original copy to Embassy, Berlin  
Copy to Department of State, Washington  
Copy to Consulate General, Berlin

## **II. Letter to George S. Messersmith, Department of State, Washington, DC**

American Consulate  
Stuttgart, Germany, November 15, 1938

The Honorable George S. Messersmith  
Assistant to the Secretary of State  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Messersmith:

Appreciating your keen interest in German matters I believe that you will wish to have a first-hand account of the reprisals which have been taken against the Jews in this section of Germany during the last few days. Therefore, I am enclosing for ready reference a copy of my report no. 307, of November 12, 1938, entitled "Anti-Semitic Persecution in the Stuttgart Consular District." After careful investigation and personal knowledge this report was very hurriedly written so that it could reach the Embassy at Berlin at the earliest practicable date. You may wish to have additional information on the subject.

Of all the places in this section of Germany, the Jews in Rastatt, which is situated near Baden-Baden, have apparently been subjected to the most ruthless treatment. Many Jews in this section were cruelly attacked and beaten and the furnishings of their homes almost totally destroyed. Practically all male Jews in that city were arrested and transported either to prisons or to concentration camps. Those that escaped arrest are hiding in the woods or have sought refuge with friends. Similar developments occurred in other places, and there were doubtless many outrages of which I have not yet heard.

Even Jews directing charitable organizations were seriously molested, although it must have been apparent to the authorities that these Jews could have rendered much necessary relief had they been allowed to remain at liberty and retain the use of funds which were immediately confiscated. In the meantime, Aryan doctors in Stuttgart have been refusing to render medical aid to Jews greatly needing their services, unless evidence is furnished that no Jewish doctor is available. An old Jew living in Bad Cannstatt, a suburb of Stuttgart, suffered a heart collapse on Friday (November 11th) and, when a member of his family called a well-known heart specialist in Stuttgart, the latter is reported to have replied that "as long as there is a Jewish doctor still at liberty I cannot come." So far as I have been able to learn, all Jewish doctors in Stuttgart, except Dr. Einstein, a child specialist of over sixty-five years of age, have been arrested in spite of the overwhelming demand for medical treatment on account of ruthless action most apparently inspired by the German authorities.

All Jewish automobiles are systematically being confiscated. As a rule, two men in civilian clothes with police authority visit the homes of Jewish owners of automobiles and demand the keys of their garages and cars. Upon request receipts are usually given for the automobiles, and these receipts are signed "by the Criminal Police."

A few Aryan people have been arrested for giving too open expression to their disgust over the events of the last few days. Many persons secretly sympathizing with the Jews or discountenancing such ruthless treatment of helpless people are becoming more and more afraid to give expression to their feelings. However, I have heard of many instances where Aryans are rendering secret service to afflicted Jewish families and are even providing them with money and food.

Even consideration of religion has not prevented the arrest of persons of the Jewish race who were born

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and baptized as Christians. A typical example of this character is the arrest in Stuttgart of Dr. Gabriel, who until 1933 was the head of the Bureau of Academic Information at the University of Cologne. It is understood that Dr. Gabriel, who is said to have collaborated for some time with Professor Sprague of Columbia University, has been placed in a concentration camp at Welzheim, Württemberg.

So far as Stuttgart is concerned, I can state confidently that these so-called reprisals against the Jews were not a spontaneous movement originating from the people as a whole. In any event, the movement clearly seems to have been well organized and planned and carried out by persons having the confidence of the authorities. For instance, the fire brigade was stationed in the vicinity of the synagogue in Bad Cannstatt before the building was ever set on fire. Again, on Thursday morning (November 10th) while the demolition of Jewish shops was in full swing at Stuttgart, a new 12-cylinder Mercedes automobile carrying high S.S. officials drove up in front of the shops under devastation. These men made an inspection of what was going on, and apparently after giving their approval drove pompously away while the destruction continued.

Dr. Max Immanuel, a member of the board of the Berlin Credit Investment Company, who is said to have collaborated closely in the past with Herr Schacht, has informed me that all the interior furnishings of his sister's home in Nuremberg were completely destroyed. Nuremberg seems to have been the scene of much destruction and ill-treatment.

Only yesterday (Sunday, the 13th of November) the wife of a prominent Jew in Nuremberg whom I have known well for several years, and who has been of much assistance to me in connection with certain reports, called at my home in the hope that I could render some assistance in obtaining the release of her husband who was arrested [at] about 3.30 o'clock on the morning of November 10th. This lady told me that she had been awakened [at] about 1 o'clock by rude knocking and [the] ringing of her door bell. Men in S.A. uniforms entered abruptly when the door was opened and immediately began to destroy the furnishings of the drawing room and dining room. Leather chairs were cut and stabbed with knives to such an extent that they are now practically worthless. China was thrown on the floor and broken. Not a piece of glassware was left unbroken in the apartment. When these men left, the interior of the building, except the bedrooms which they did not enter, were a mass of ruins.

This destruction did not satisfy the people responsible for it, for at approximately 4 a.m. two men dressed in civilian clothes and representing the police again called at her home and rudely demanded that her husband dress immediately. Her husband was placed under arrest and transported to prison. Although this lady is a person of some influence and has contact with the police at Nuremberg, she has not yet been able to ascertain to what prison or concentration camp her husband has been transported.

During the course of the day two people reported to me that the Jewish Old People's Home in Neustadt, Palatinate, had been burned to the ground and that about sixty inmates, all of whom were old people, and some of whom were ill and crippled and some just merely infirm from age, had been removed to the Jewish Old People's Home at Mannheim. There was really no accommodation for them in the latter institution and apparently they have been lying on the floor here and there in the building.

There are many similar stories, but I feel that you will be sufficiently informed to wish me now to turn to the immediate experiences which I have had during the past few days as the officer in charge of the Consulate at Stuttgart.

In a figurative sense, my home has been bombarded by visitors and telephone calls giving evidence of the distressing circumstances in which many people are finding themselves. Hundreds are appealing for help and encouragement, and with husbands in concentration camps many are without funds. Late last night an American woman of over sixty years of age begged for assistance in ascertaining the whereabouts of her aged and sick husband who had been rounded up with the German Jews. I have

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strong hopes that he will be at her side again within a few hours. Many other Americans are appealing on behalf of their Jewish relatives.

The Consulate received almost one hundred telegrams yesterday and almost as many today. Many of these have been from the United States and have expressed the utmost interest in their relatives in Germany. In the majority of cases the male members of the families concerned were ascertained to be in concentration camps. Even up to this minute arrests have been made in Stuttgart and telegrams are constantly being received, although it is late at night.

For more than five days the office has been inundated with people. Each day a larger and larger crowd has besieged the Consulate, filling all the rooms and overflowing into the corridor of a building six stories high. Today there were several thousand. Each person has been handled with the greatest possible consideration and each person must have felt that he or she had been as courteously and sympathetically handled as the enormous crowd would permit.

The entire staff has responded most loyally and efficiently to the demands with which we have been faced. Of the officers, all of whom have worked well under trying conditions, I wish especially to mention, first, Consul L'Heureux, and secondly, Vice Consul Spalding. Of the clerks, Mr. Morton Bernath has been outstanding.

These situations are not entirely new to us at Stuttgart. While this one is on a much greater scale, we have been experiencing similar but minor situations during the past three years, some of which appear retrospectively to have been much more difficult and to have required much more ingenuity. In reality, I have handled many protection cases, with the able assistance of Morton Bernath, which have involved arrests for political offences, exchange infractions, et cetera, and I am glad to report to you that we have been uniformly successful. At the present time matters involving the transfer of money on behalf of American citizens in the United States are proving unusually difficult features of our work on account of the attitude of the German Government. Only a few days ago, however, we were successful in prevailing upon the German Government to release its claim on the entire fortune of an aged Jewish woman of American nationality.

I trust that the foregoing description will, in addition to the political reports of this office, with which the Embassy seems to be very pleased, give you a concrete idea of the situation which has been confronting us from time to time over the last three years, and will especially depict the conditions which are immediately confronting us.

Sincerely yours,  
[signed] Samuel Honaker

Enclosure: copy of report no. 307

Source of original English text: American Consul General Samuel Honaker's description of Anti-Semitic persecution and *Kristallnacht* and its aftereffects in the Stuttgart region (November 12 and November 15, 1938), State Central Decimal File (CDF) 862.4015/2002, Records of the Department of State in the National Archives, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State; reprinted in John Mendelsohn, ed., *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes*, vol. 3, New York: Garland, 1982, pp. 176–89.

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