BELGIUM.

In the Middle Ages the area that is now Belgium had a small Jewish population, but in the fourteenth century the existing communities were liquidated. In the sixteenth century, Marranos (Jews concealing their Judaism) from Portugal settled in the Belgian cities, and by the seventeenth century a more or less overt Jewish community had come into being in Antwerp. During the eighteenth century Ashkenazi Jews also settled in Belgium, and by the century's end they had achieved equal rights. In 1830, when Belgium became an independent country, its Jewish population was a little over 1,000; by the end of the nineteenth century that number had greatly increased. During that period, however, Belgium was primarily a transit station for Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe on their way to overseas destinations and, as a result, the Jewish community's size and institutions were not of a stable character. It was only from the early 1920s that Belgian Jewry steadily grew in size, with Jews arriving from the multinational countries that had been broken up (Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and, in the 1930s, from Nazi Germany. On the eve of the Nazi invasion Belgium had a Jewish population of 66,000 (out of a total of 8.3 million), but only 10 percent of the Jews were Belgian citizens.

The Jewish population was concentrated in four cities, Brussels, Antwerp, Liege, and Charleroi, but mostly in the first two. The official Belgian Jewish community was organized into a central Consistoire, but many of the immigrants formed their own communities, congregations, and associations, outside the Consistoire framework. The immigrants spoke Yiddish, but especially among the younger generation, French became the predominant language. All the shades of Jewish political opinion that had developed in Poland in the interwar period were present in Belgium, most prominently the socialist trends - Zionist and non-Zionist, including the Bund - and other, more radical leftist ideologies. This situation led to the development of very close ties between the Jews and the Belgian leftist movements, a factor that proved

of great importance in the rescue efforts and the resistance during the Holocaust period.

German Occupation.

German forces invaded Belgium on May 10, 1940, and on May 28, on the orders of King Leopold III, the Belgian army surrendered. The king stayed in Belgium, but the Prime Minister and some of the cabinet members fled the country, their first stop being France. After a great deal of internal discussion and controversy, a government-in-exile was established in London on October 31, 1940. As a result, two centers of official Belgian authority were now in existence, each with its own policy and objectives. The king, recognizing the new balance of power in the country, was inclined to cooperate with the Germans, and on one occasion even met with Adolf Hitler, but he refrained almost totally from overt activity. The government-in-exile supported the Allies, and neither of the two sides recognized the authority of the other. Hitler had no definite plans for Belgium's ultimate political status in the "New Order" that was to be established in Europe after a German victory, and the absence of such plans had a marked effect on the administration that the Germans installed in the occupied country.

The first four years witnessed a military administration (Militarverwaltung), under Gen. Alexander von Falkenhausen. In July 1944 a civil administration (Zivilverwaltung) took its place, the Germans now planning to turn Belgium into two Reichsgaue (territorial units) annexed to Germany: Reichsgau Flanders and Reichsgau Walonia; Josef Grohe was appointed Reichskommissar for Belgium. Under the military administration, a complex set of relationships existed between the administration and the other branches of the German government and Nazi party that had a foothold in Belgium: the Foreign Ministry and the SS in general, especially the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office; RSHA). The latter’s two bodies, which were both under Heinrich Himmler's authority, made strenuous efforts to expand their influence, while the military administration

tried to curb them. The Belgian administration continued to function on a regular basis under the secretaires generaux (principal secretaries), who held regular meetings to coordinate their activities and constituted a kind of mini-government; from time to time, personnel changes took place among the secretaires generaux.

In early September 1944, Brussels and Antwerp were liberated by Allied Forces, and by early November all of Belgium was set free. However, in the winter offensive that the Germans launched in the Ardennes in December 1944, they reoccupied areas in the southeast, and it was only in January 1945 that the last German troops were driven out.

According to data published in 1980, the Jewish population of Belgium at the time of the German invasion was 65,696 (not 90,000, as claimed in earlier studies); 34,801 Jews were imprisoned or deported, and of these, 28,902 perished, representing 44 percent of the total Jewish population. This was a lower percentage of Jews murdered than in the Netherlands, mainly for three reasons: (1) the different kind of administration established by the Germans; (2) the different mentality of the Belgian Jews; and (3) the attitude of the local population.

In Belgium, German rule had all the attributes of Nazi anti-Jewish policy: eliminating Jews from all positions of influence, depriving them of their possessions and livelihood, putting them on forced labor, isolating them from the rest of the population, and, finally, deporting them to their death. Here, however, the German administration served as a restraining factor on the volume, intensity, and tempo of the anti-Jewish measures.

In the first two years of the occupation, before the deportations began, eighteen anti-Jewish decrees and regulations were issued, at relatively long intervals, creating the impression that the measures were on the whole quite moderate. On October 23, 1940, ritual slaughter was prohibited. Two decrees announced October 28 defined who was to be regarded as a Jew under the

law, ordered the Jews to conduct a census and draw up a list of all their enterprises and occupations, and eliminated Jews from the public administration, the legal and teaching professions, and the media. On May 31, 1941, two decrees were issued, ordering Jews to display signs identifying their enterprises as Jewish and to declare their capital and other assets (including real estate), and restricting withdrawals by Jews from their bank accounts to a fixed monthly amount. On August 29 of that year Jews had their freedom of movement restricted; they were permitted to reside only in the four major cities, and they were subject to a nightly curfew, from 8:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.

A decree issued on November 25, 1941, established the Association des Juifs en Belgique (Association of Jews in Belgium; AJB), to which every Jew had to belong. Within a week, another decree ordered the expulsion of all Jewish children from the public-school system, and the AJB was required to set up its own elementary and secondary schools (the order was implemented only four months later). On January 17, 1942, Jews were forbidden to leave the country. A general labor draft issued on March 3 of that year was amplified by a decree dated March 11 that imposed special forced labor on the Jews. At the bidding of the RSHA, a decree was issued on May 27 ordering the Jews to wear the yellow badge (see badge, Jewish). These orders and regulations were implemented by the military administration, which tried to restrict the influence of the SS and the RSHA and to stay in control. It was only when the "Final Solution" was initi ated, in the spring of 1942, that RSHA and its various divisions became the predominant force controlling Jewish affairs. The differences of approach to the Jewish question are reflected in the reports submitted by Eggert Reeder, head of the military administration staff in the early stage of the occupation. They state that "Jewish influence in the economy is generally quite small, except for the diamond industry" (April 1941) and "the Jewish question . . . does not play the same role as in most other European countries" (July 15, 1941).

Deportation.

In the summer of 1942 the deportation of Jews from Belgium was launched, in coordination with the deportations from the Netherlands and France. The preparations had been made by Adolf Eichmann's section in the RSHA. At a meeting held in Eichmann's office in Berlin on June 11, 1942, the SS officials in charge of Jewish affairs in the Netherlands, Belgium, and France were ordered to prepare for the deportation of the Jews, to begin within a few weeks. Differences of opinion among the various branches of the regime delayed the beginning of deportations in Belgium, and they were begun only on August 4. On July 15, the AJB was ordered to set up a special bureau for coordinating the "labor draft" (Arbeitseinsatz) of the Jews. The deportations continued for over a year, coming to an end in September 1943 with "Operation Iltis," in which Jews of Belgian nationality were dispatched to the East (until then their deportation had been deferred).

The deportations were handled by a small staff in the Bureau of Jewish Affairs on Avenue Louise in Brussels; the roundup of Jews and their actual deportation was carried out, for the most part, by the German Feldgendarmerie (field police). By far the greater number of the deportees perished in Auschwitz; some small groups were also sent to Buchenwald, Ravensbruck, and Bergen-Belsen. By an agreement between Himmler and Albert Speer, the minister of armaments, groups of men were taken off the transports in late August and early September of 1942, to be put to work in Kozle (Cosel), a sub-camp of the Auschwitz complex. The Belgian Jews in these groups manifested a better ability to survive under the horrible conditions than did the Dutch Jews.

Economic Measures.

Economic measures against the Jews were introduced toward the end of 1940. In the early months of the occupation, no such measures had been taken, and for a while it even seemed that the Jews would be able to carry on a reasonable level of economic activity. Some Jews who had fled to France

(mainly to southern France) when Belgium was occupied even returned to Belgium and resumed their economic activities there, especially in the diamond industry in Antwerp. But in November 1940 Hermann Gring ordered the Belgian economy to be "Aryanized," and as a result various German enterprises showed interest in acquiring Jewish businesses. In practice, "Aryanization" was launched only in late 1941, its "legal" basis being decrees of October 28, 1940, and May 21, 1941. The rate at which Aryanization proceeded was accelerated in March and April 1942, when the systematic liquidation of Jewish businesses in the textile, leather, and diamond industries was set in motion. The process of Aryanization, however, was never completed; according to a comprehensive survey drawn up by the Germans, the large Jewish enterprises stayed in existence and kept their assets intact. A similar situation prevailed with Jewish-owned real estate.

In 1942, several decrees dealing with economic affairs were enacted, requiring the confiscation of property owned by German Jews (decrees of April 22 and August 1), placing severe restrictions on the practice of medicine (June 1), and forbidding the sale of real estate without special permission (September 29) during the period when Jews were being deported to the camps.

German plunder of Jewish property also took the form of confiscation - of the property of Jews who did not return to their homes or were deported, and of Jewish institutions and art collections. This form of plunder was in the hands of Einsatzstab Rosenberg (Operational Staff Rosenberg). When the deportations were in full swing, Einsatzstab Rosenberg handled only art collections and items of "ideological value" (such as Jewish religious and folklore objects and libraries). The confiscation of the contents of expropriated Jewish apartments "for the good of the German people" was left to the Reichsministerium fur die Besetzten Ostgebiete (Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories), also under Rosenberg, and to the military administration in Belgium. No estimate can be made of the value of the property seized by the Germans when they emptied the Jewish apartments of

their contents. According to a figure given in August 1944, the sheer bulk of the furniture confiscated by the military administration was 3,531,450 cubic feet (100,000 cu m). Another stage in the theft of the Jews' possessions took place in the Mechelen assembly camp, where they were stripped of any valuables still in their possession, such as watches and jewelry, just before boarding the deportation trains.

Forced Labor.

The removal of the Jews from economic life was followed, beginning in June 1942, by their exploitation as a cheap source of manpower. There was no direct connection between the drafting of Jews for forced labor and the deportations (they involved different authorities), but because the drafting of Jews for forced labor and the deportation of Jews happened to coincide, they were seen as parts of the same operation. Actually, the forced-labor draft of Jews in Belgium was part of a drive that the Germans were carrying out in all the occupied countries of Europe. The Belgian Jews put on forced labor were employed primarily in the construction of fortifications along the coast of northern France, of which Organisation Todt was in charge. A total of 2,252 Jews from Belgium were put to work there, setting out from Brussels, Charleroi, and Liege from June through August 1942, in seven groups. Other sources of employment for Jews on forced labor were German army construction projects and clothing factories in Belgium. Several groups of Jews also worked for short periods in the Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre (F.N. Arms Factory) at Herstal, in stone quarries, and on soil amelioration. Forced-labor workers were given wages that were deposited in their name in a Brussels bank. This pay, however, was left in the bank up to the end of the war, either because the Jews in the forced-labor camps were deported to extermination camps (by way of the Mechelen or Drancy camps) or because the Jews were afraid to claim it.

Relations between the Jews and the General Population.

Relations between the Jews and the various components of the Belgian population were complicated, even before the German occupation of the country. There were a number of negative factors in this relationship: most of the population were Catholic; there was a language war between the Flemings and the Walloons; and most of the Jews were recent immigrants whose mentality was quite different from that of the native population. These factors, however, were balanced by the democratic character of the regime and by the rapid integration of the Jews in the economic life of the country and in some of its political movements. During the occupation, an important positive factor was the stand of the government-in-exile, which on January 10, 1941, issued a statement that declared all the decrees of the German military administration null and void and committed itself to restoring the stolen property to its rightful owners and to punishing Belgians collaborating with the Germans.

On October 10, 1940, the Germans asked the director generals of the Belgian governmental departments to take appropriate action to remove the Jews from the economic life of the country, but these officials refused to comply, citing legal grounds. The Germans did not press further, and published the anti-Jewish decrees on their own, with the Belgian administrative staff cooperating in the implementation of the decrees. Generally speaking, the reaction of the Belgian public to the anti-Jewish legislation in the first two years of the occupation was one of apathy. But there were exceptions: the anti-Jewish decrees of October 28, 1940, especially the one that ordered the elimination of Jews from public administration, aroused a negative reaction among the population; some official protests were even lodged. Prominent among these were the protests made by three senior Brussels jurists and by the Free University of Brussels, which had the largest number of Jewish lecturers. The Germans responded by reprimanding the university, but they took no further action; neither, of course, did the protests have any effect on German policy. Several radical right-wing Belgian organizations cooperated with the Germans - for ideological or economic reasons, or because they felt that there was no choice and that Nazi hegemony had to be recognized.

These organizations included the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (National Flemish Movement; VNV), headed by Staf de Clerq, and the Rexist movement, made up mostly of Walloons, and headed by Leon Degrelle. They also provided 400 volunteers for the SS, organized into two legions. These volunteers spread anti-Semitic propaganda and helped the authorities to implement their policies. In addition, Radio Bruxelles broadcast anti-Jewish propaganda quite often. The total effect of these organizations and institutions was not large, but it appears to have been enough to deter people, in a number of cases, from protesting the anti-Jewish policy. In 1941, a VNV member, Gerard Romsee, was appointed director general of the Ministry of the Interior, a post in which he helped apply the anti-Jewish legislation. On April 14, 1941, during Passover, a small group of Flemish anti-Semitic nationalists staged what came to be known as the "Antwerp pogrom" (apparently at the instigation of one of the local German agencies), in the course of which two synagogues and the house of Rabbi Marcus Rottenberg were damaged.

The introduction of the yellow badge, in a decree issued on May 27, 1942, led to a number of protests. The Greater Brussels city council refused to distribute the badge, and the AJB too declared that it was unable to undertake this task, but the councils of other cities with a Jewish population (such as Antwerp) did not react in the same manner. Most of the underground newspapers sharply denounced the decree and called upon the population to express its solidarity with the Jews. There was indeed much sympathy for the Jews among the population, and a number of people expressed their solidarity by wearing badges similar to the Jewish yellow badge. This reaction had no immediate effect on the situation, but some have seen it as a turning point, as a result of which the Belgian population was more inclined to help the Jews when the deportations were launched.

The stand taken by the Belgian population when the deportations began, in the summer of 1942, was of great importance. The Belgian resistance movement was not united and consisted of several groups, but there was

wide support for resistance as such, and it was this general mood that made it possible, for example, for as many as 80,000 persons (non-Jews) to go into hiding and thereby avoid the forced-labor draft. An illegal press existed with a wide circulation. Some 70,000 people are estimated to have been organized in the resistance, out of a total population of 8 million. The Communist party played a central role in the resistance operations, despite its small size, and it was an important factor in the establishment, in March 1941, of the Front d'Independance, which became the largest resistance organization. The various resistance groups also had many Jews among their members. With the help of large sectors of the population, especially leftist party activists and church institutions (as well as individual Belgians not affiliated with any group), some 25,000 Jews were concealed from the Germans. Belgian Jews and Jews from the Netherlands passing through Belgium were helped to escape to France and Switzerland.

Concerning the participation of the Catholic church in providing hiding places for Jews, special mention must be made of Father Joseph Andre of Namur, of the regional seminary in Bastogne, and Bishop Louis-Joseph Kerkhofs of Liege; the bishop of Mechelen also provided refuge to many Jews. Cardinal Joseph-Ernst van Roey, the highest ecclesiastical authority in Belgium, took action on behalf of the Jews in several instances, although he was very careful about it. In the early phase of the deportations, van Roey intervened on behalf of Jewish converts and the Jewish partners of mixed marriages, as well as on behalf of Jews who were Belgian nationals, and obtained their release. A few weeks later van Roey acted similarly on behalf of Rabbi Salomon Ullmann and the AJB leaders who had been arrested and imprisoned in the Breendonck camp. On the other hand, van Roey's critics claim that by abstaining from a general protest and confining intervention to certain groups of Jews, the cardinal actually facilitated the deportation of the rest of the Jews. The queen mother, Elizabeth, also intervened on behalf of the Jews of Belgian nationality. On August 1, 1942, she met with three of the AJB leaders, and following that meeting she appealed to Hitler himself, through General von Falkenhausen.

The postponement of the deportation of Jews who were Belgian nationals, therefore, was achieved by a combination of intervention on their behalf by Belgian elements, a pragmatic approach on the part of the German military administration, and the consent, for the time being and for its own convenience, of the RSHA. Restricting protection to Belgian nationals, however, implied that the rest of the Jews (meaning most of the Jewish population of Belgium) could be abandoned. The Belgian Red Cross assisted many Jews by providing them with food parcels; in 1943, half the quantity of parcels earmarked for this purpose was distributed among the Jews who were in hiding. Side by side with many manifestations of aid to the Jews in the deportation period, however, there were also instances when Belgians informed to the authorities on Jews in hiding, and some radical right-wing organizations took up an active search for such Jews.

The Jewish Community.

During the fighting in May 1940, many Jews tried to escape to France and to Britain. Some made their way to southern France or even to Spain; many others returned to their homes in Belgium after weeks of wandering. In the early months of the occupation, when no anti-Jewish action was taken, the Jews tried to rehabilitate their communal life; the first step in this direction was the formation of aid committees in Brussels and Antwerp.

This was followed by the renewal of activities in the communities and in some organizations, political parties, and youth movements. The flight of veteran leaders and of persons prominent in economic affairs had affected in particular the work of the Consistoire Central, several welfare organizations, and the Orthodox communities of Brussels and Antwerp. It was the leader of the General Zionists, Itzko Kubowitzki - the dominant figure among the remaining leaders - who sought to reorganize Jewish life and in the course of this effort helped integrate many Zionists into the representative bodies of Belgian Jewry. The Chief Rabbi (Grand Rabbin) of Belgium, Joseph Wiener,

had fled during the fighting; in September 1940 he was replaced by Rabbi Salomon Ullmann, who in 1937 had become the chief Jewish military chaplain. (His father was the founder of one of the Orthodox congregations of Antwerp.) In addition to the existing organizations of Belgian and Eastern European Jews, a committee was formed of German Jews who had settled in Belgium before its occupation and who now constituted 20 percent of the Jewish population. All these organizations underwent a decisive change in their operations when the AJB was formed, in late 1941. Some of the old organizations were integrated into the AJB, and others kept up their independent existence, officially or unofficially; but all of them were affected by the predominant role that was now being played by the AJB.

For a while, the elimination of Jews from jobs in the public administration was of no great consequence, since only a few Jews had held such positions. The same applied, temporarily, to the initial anti-Jewish economic decrees. When the general economic situation deteriorated, however, and Aryanization was launched in the summer of 1941, the effect on the situation of the Jews was marked, and the Jewish organizations were hard pressed to meet the community needs, especially for welfare. Nevertheless, up until the time of the deportations, the Jews were able to maintain a tolerable standard of living. At that point, a wide gulf opened between the Jews who had Belgian nationality and were protected and all the other Jews. Some contacts were maintained with the American Jewish joint distribution committee, which transmitted financial aid to the AJB, and, later, to the Jewish Defense Committee (see below).

As a rule, the Germans did not interfere with Jewish religious life. The first anti-Jewish decree to be issued, however, outlawing shehitah (ritual slaughter) without first stunning the animal, discriminated against Jews observing their dietary laws; efforts were made to solve the problem by using electric stunning devices that the Dutch rabbis had sanctioned for this purpose. Orthodox Jewish families, more than the others, felt the impact of the worsening food situation, as of 1942. Jewish religious literary activity was kept

up, and one interesting project was the translation of the Talmud into Yiddish, so as to facilitate its study by young students (the project was not completed, but a part of the translation was published after the Holocaust).

Education, in the initial phase, remained unchanged. Most young Jews did not attend Jewish schools and remained in the public school system until April 1942, when the decree expelling Jews from the general school system, issued in late 1941, was applied. The community lost no time in meeting the new need and established several schools and kindergartens, using for this purpose the premises of the Brussels Central Synagogue, among other places. In the 1942-1943 school year, which opened after the deportations had started, the AJB-maintained school network shrank considerably in size. During the 1943-1944 school year, classes were held only in the AJB orphanages, which had the official sanction of the German authorities. Religious schools par excellence, such as the yeshiva (rabbinical academy) at Heide, near Antwerp, remained open until the beginning of the deportations.

Zionist youth movements in Brussels and Antwerp (Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir, Bnei Akiva, Maccabi ha-Tsa'ir, Gordonia and Betar) resumed their activities, albeit on a more modest scale, concentrating on educational training, cultural work, and mutual help, in cooperation with the official political parties and organizations. In their work they sorely missed the contact they had previously enjoyed with Palestine. The various youth movements cooperated with one another, the Antwerp religious Bnei Akiva and the Marxist Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir joining in obtaining food in the city's hinterland and distributing it, and in running an agricultural training farm in Bomal, south of Liege.

Rescue Operations and the Underground.

The Jews of Belgium were actively engaged in underground operations and efforts for their own rescue, often coming up with original ideas. It is a moot point among historians whether all actions in which Jews were involved can be classified as "Jewish," since many of these actions were initiated and

carried out by organizations belonging to the Belgian Left. By 1940 and 1941 the Germans were arresting Jews active in Communist organizations of German emigres. Numerous Communists were seized by the Germans in June 1941, following the German attack on the Soviet Union, and of these, a considerable number were Jews. Also arrested, in 1941 and 1942, were Jews who had worked in the general underground press. Jews played a dominant role in the Red Orchestra, the spy ring operating for the Soviet Union, and they were among the members of the Front d'Independance (a Belgian organization, representing various groups, that called for armed resistance).

Specific Jewish acts of resistance first took place in late 1941. Shortly after the AJB was formed, several Yiddish-language underground newspapers made their appearance, published by the Bund and Po'alei Zion, and as late as 1944 a Communist-sponsored Yiddish newspaper was still being published. Two other Jewish papers - one in Dutch and one in French - also appeared. In late 1941 and early 1942 the Jewish underground press expressed opposition to the AJB and its operations.

In July 1942, in view of the deteriorating situation of the Jews, a joint underground Jewish defense organization was initiated called the Comite de Defense des Juifs (Jewish Defense Committee; CDJ). It began its activities in September 1942. The initiative for its creation was taken by Ghert Jospa (who established contact between representatives of the Jewish Communists and the Front d'Independance) and various Zionist activists - Abusz Werber, the leader of Po'alei Zion-Left; Edouard Rotkel and Benjamin Nykerk of the General Zionists; and Chaim Perelman, who had a Revisionist party background. Eugene Hellendael, a member of the Brussels local AJB, also joined the founding members of the CDJ. The CDJ had important ties with the general resistance organizations as well as with the AJB, and it played a central role in the rescue and resistance operations during the period from 1942 to 1944. It also had contacts with the Catholic Church and various other bodies, and engaged in fund-raising. The organization's main purpose was to find hiding places for Jews; its children's section, in cooperation with the

Oeuvre Nationale de l'Enfance (National Children'sCommittee), headed by Yvonne n<d8sc;e>vejean,succeeded in hiding four thousand children. Large numbers of Jewish adults also had the CDJ's help in finding a place to hide.

Jewish armed resistance operations (some of which had no connection with the CDJ) had some impressive successes. On two occasions, in the summer of 1942, the target was the AJB. In one instance, the purpose was to seize the card index that the AJB maintained in its office, and in the other the attack was directed at Robert Holcinger, the official in charge of sending out the call-ups for deportation. The single most significant resistance operation carried out by the Jewish underground was the attack on a deportation train, on the night of April 19-20, 1943, containing a transport of Jews from the Mechelen camp (Transport No. 20) headed for Auschwitz. A recent exhaustive study has shed much new light upon this operation, the only recorded instance of an armed attack in Europe on a train taking Jews to their death.

Individual escapes from the deportation trains originating in the Mechelen camp were quite frequent. Such an escape first occurred in Transport No. 16 on October 31, 1942. Of the 26,500 Jews who were deported from Mechelen, the total number of escapees was 571; of these, 539 escaped from transports 16 to 20. In the attack on Transport No. 20 itself, 231 Jews escaped, of whom 23 were shot to death by the train guards. Most of the escapees, some of whom were members of resistance groups, jumped from the train as soon as they could (a number had tried to escape from an earlier transport). One group of 17 Jews was saved by the outside help of three persons - none of them affiliated with any organization - headed by a Jew. This action was launched near the Mechelen camp, on the stretch between Mechelen and Louvain. The three tricked the train into coming to a halt and managed to open the door of one carriage; some of the Jews in the carriage jumped off, amid a hail of bullets from the train guards. This was not a large operation and it had only limited success, but it was linked to the other escapes and became a legend and a source of pride for the resistance movements. After the Holocaust, credit for this action was claimed by various elements.

In addition to offering resistance and going into hiding, hundreds of Jews attempted to flee to Switzerland and southern France, and from there to Spain. Many dozens of members of the Zionist youth movements succeeded in such attempts. In 1943, a few dozen Jews were saved from imprisonment and deportation because they were on the list of candidates for the exchange of Jews and Germans (see exchange: Jews and Germans). All in all, initiative on the part of Jews played a central role in the operations that enabled a relatively large proportion of the Jews of Belgium to be saved.

After Liberation.

The rehabilitation of Belgian Jewry was a difficult and painful process. At first, the Belgian authorities did not want the Jews who had not been Belgian nationals before the war to remain in the country. The restitution of Jewish property also ran into difficulties. Another problem was the guardianship of the war orphans and the kind of upbringing they were to have; this issue caused friction among the various Jewish organizations, and also between the Jews and the Belgian authorities. The first attempt at reorganizing the Jewish community was made by Jews who came out of hiding after liberation; one body formed at this early stage was the Comite Central Israelite pour la Reconstruction de la Vie Religieuse en Belgique (Central Jewish Committee for the Reconstruction of Religious Life in Belgium). An important role was played in the first few months after liberation by the Jewish chaplains in the Allied forces and by the Jewish brigade group, which was posted to Belgium in early August 1945, with bases at Tournai and Ghent. Soldiers of the brigade were involved in the renewal of Zionist activity and in the search for Jewish orphans and their return to the Jewish fold.

In the first postwar years the Zionist parties and youth movements were reestablished, amid a good deal of squabbling. The leftist Zionist parties gradually lost ground, and radical non-Zionist leftist parties did not make a comeback. Hundreds of war orphans and members of the Zionist youth

movements left for Palestine, while others emigrated to other destinations. In Antwerp and Brussels, Jewish community life was restored, although on a much smaller scale than in the past; in other places, such as Liege, restoration occurred on a negligible scale.

On April 19, 1970, a memorial for the murdered Jews of Belgium was unveiled at Anderlecht, and on October 16, 1987, a memorial was dedicated in the Valley of the Destroyed Jewish Communities at yad vashem in Jerusalem. Every year, survivors of the Holocaust and former resistance fighters hold a memorial march to the Dossin camp at Mechelen, the point of departure for the deportation of Belgian Jews to the extermination camps. Dozens of non-Jewish Belgians have been awarded the medal of "righteous among the nations" by Yad Vashem for saving Jews during the war years.

In early 1981 a court in Kiel, Germany, tried Ernst Ehlers, the man who had been chief of the Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police) and the SD (Sicherheitsdienst; Security Service) in Belgium and northern France in the period from 1941 to 1944. Also tried were his successor in that post, Konstantin Canaris, and the head of the Jewish section in the Sicherheitspolizei and SD, Kurt Asche. Ehlers committed suicide before the trial opened, and Canaris was set free because of his poor health. Asche was found guilty as an accessory to murder and was sentenced, on July 8, 1981, to seven years for his part in the deportation of the Jews of Belgium.