

Jehovah's Witnesses

Early during their development, the Nazis began to suppress several Christian minorities whom they felt were subversive to their goals. Even before the war, Jehovah's Witnesses had been considered heretics by other Christian denominations and individual German states sought to limit their activities. In the early 1930's, Nazi storm troopers broke up their meetings and beat up individual Witnesses. After the Nazis came to power, the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses intensified. On July 27, 1933, the Gestapo--the Nazi street police--closed the printing operation of the Watchtower Society, an organization of the Witnesses. The Gestapo ordered all state-police precincts to search regional Witness groups and organizations. The Witnesses, however, defied Nazi prohibitions by continuing to meet and distribute literature smuggled in from Switzerland. For defying the ban on their activities, many Witnesses were arrested and sent to prisons and concentration camps. They lost their jobs in both private industry and public service and were denied their unemployment, social welfare, and pension benefits. On April 1, 1935, Jehovah's Witnesses were banned by law. However, they refused to be drafted into the military services or perform war-related work and continued to meet. In 1935, some 400 Witnesses were imprisoned at Sachsenhausen concentration camp. By 1939, an estimated 6,000 Witnesses were detained in prisons and camps. Some were tortured by police to force them to renounce their faith. Few did so. The children of Witnesses also suffered. They were ridiculed by their teachers because they refused to give the "Heil Hitler" salute or sing patriotic songs. They were beaten up by their classmates and expelled from schools. The authorities took children away from their parents and sent them to reform schools and orphanages, or to private homes to be brought up as Nazis. In the concentration camps, Jehovah's Witnesses were required to wear a purple triangle to distinguish them from other inmates. Many of them died from disease, hunger, exhaustion, brutal treatment, and exposure to the cold. About 10,000 Witnesses were imprisoned in concentration camps during the Nazi period. An estimated 2,500 to 5,000 died.

Shulman, William L. *A State of Terror: Germany 1933-1939*. Bayside, New York: Holocaust Resource Center and Archives. Retrieved online 19 September 2014 <
<http://jehovah.to/gen/holocaust/>>