

# Echoes of Nazi Propaganda in a Collaborator Diary: The Case of Dutch Police Investigator Douwe Bakker

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## ABSTRACT

The diary of Douwe Bakker, a 3,600-page, 18-volume diary is the longest document in the NIOD Institute for War Holocaust and Genocide Studies's 2,100-diary collection. It is a very rare piece of collaborator ego-documentation that gives an intimate, daily record of his life, work and thoughts. Douwe Bakker read, quoted and echoed N.S.B. propaganda, and clipped articles and pasted them into his journals. How did Bakker interpret this material? How did it help him develop personal beliefs and justify his work with the *Sicherheitsdienst*? How did reading and writing down this propagandistic information foster the formation of his identity as a "comrade" in the Nazi "movement?"

**Keywords:** Douwe Bakker, Nazi propaganda, Collaborator diaries, Dutch Police.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During World War II, Dutch society was in a state of epistemic instability, as occupying German forces took control of mainstream news sources, banned international media, and segregated media by "race." Concurrently, both propaganda and clandestine resistance papers proliferated. This epistemic oppression had an impact not only on persecuted minorities, but also on those who perpetrated discrimination and violence.

Wartime diaries, for all their failings as reliable "news sources," do tend to accurately reflect how citizens received and processed information from the news sources available to them. Diarists often echoed information they received. Much has been written about the impact of the Dutch underground press in wartime on shaping the activities of the Dutch resistance; the aim of this paper is to examine the other side of the coin: How did Nazi propaganda in the Netherlands, as conveyed both through mainstream news organs and explicitly propagandistic Nazi newspapers impact Nazi sympathizers?

The rare diary of Dutch collaborator Douwe Bakker, an Amsterdam police detective and N.S.B. member, provides us with an opportunity to explore this question on a minute basis. Using his diary as a kind of scrapbook, Bakker clipped articles from propaganda sources, and often echoed the language of these "news reports" in his diary, helping to shape his self-identity while he adapted to the Nazi's "New Order."

## 2. WHY DOUWE BAKKER?

It is difficult to find original source material from the World War II era that brings us directly into the mind of a "ordinary" Nazi collaborator during the time when he was under the thrall of Adolf Hitler's ideology. Much of what we know about the beliefs, knowledge and intentions of Nazi followers

comes from post-war testimonies given during criminal trials. Several diaries written by Nazi figures such as Heinrich Himmler and Alfred Rosenberg, Nationalism's chief ideologue, give us a top-down view of Nazi belief systems. But it is rare to find a contemporaneous source that helps us understand how an "ordinary" Nazi collaborator in the Netherlands thought about his work on a daily basis, over a prolonged period of time during the war.

Christopher R. Browning pioneered the study of perpetrator inculcation in 1992 with his groundbreaking work, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, which has since opened up the whole field of academic research known as Perpetrator Studies to explore the motivations and behaviors of non-combatant Nazi collaborators who were involved in the genocide. Douwe Bakker's 18-volume, 3,292-page diary is a unique and rare document that is a valuable document for this area of study, allowing us a glimpse into the mind of a Dutch police officer who worked for and with the German occupying forces.

Bakker, an adherent to the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging*, or N.S.B., the largest Dutch fascist party, began keeping a diary on January 3, 1938, and wrote in it for five years, until October 24, 1943. During the occupation he became chief of the *Inlichtingendienst*, the Investigations Bureau of the Dutch police department, under the supervision of the German *Sicherheitsdienst*.

In his diary, Bakker indicated a strong pro-German stance and he also noted actions he took to support the regime's goals. By reading his diary, we can understand the perspectives and views that shaped his belief systems in a relatively good way. Because he frequently clipped newspaper articles and pasted them into his diary, we can see how some of his ideas and values were shaped by Nazi propaganda materials of that time.

Bakker's diaries were discovered by police investigators after war, in 1946, and used as evidence in Bakker's post-war collaboration trials. During the trial, he disavowed the beliefs and rhetoric that he had used in his diary, and said that he could not understand how he came to such ideas. At his trial he said, "I must have been hypnotized." Indeed, in some ways Bakker was "hypnotized" by the Nazi ideology and propaganda that supported his behavior. In this paper, we will explore how his own words indicate his self-identification with the fascist regime, and how he was impacted by Nazi media propaganda.

### 3. BAKKER'S RADICALIZATION AND PRO-NAZI ACTIVITIES

Bakker became a member of the N.S.B. when it was formed in 1933, but in late December that same year, a ruling (*Ambtenarenverbod*) forbade members of the Dutch civil service (including police) from participation in the party. It is clear that Bakker nevertheless continued to be loyal to right-wing views. During the German invasion of the Netherlands, Bakker and two of his police-department colleagues, Bram Harribommée and Leo Ponne, were arrested and jailed by other police, as suspected traitors. They were among 21 such N.S.B.-sympathizing police officers throughout the Netherlands who were interned during the invasion.

On a superficial level, Bakker's attitude towards the Germans seems to have undergone a swift transition during the four-day Battle of the Netherlands. Initially, he seemed to support the Dutch army in fending off the German attack. On May 11, 1940, he wrote: "The army bulletin reports that our army managed to push back at various locations."

The use of the word "our" in this sentence, suggests that he felt aligned with Dutch forces. However on May 12, he was arrested and taken to police headquarters, where he was held with the other suspected collaborators. He described how he and the other policemen were "treated like ordinary criminal suspects," which he felt was unfair.

Two days later, however, after what he described as "hellish" treatment while he was jailed, his notes turned conspiratorial. On May 14, he wrote: "It seems we were all betrayed by anti-National Socialists and Jews. Someone apparently sent in an anonymous letter saying that I was a member of the N.S.B. That was apparently the only motivation for our internment."

Later that same day, he concluded: “We now sincerely hope that the German troops advance quickly, because in our current situation, they’ll be our liberators. At eight-thirty it’s bedtime, and we’re locked into iron cages. Someone will pay for this.”

Is it really conceivable that Bakker’s feelings changed so dramatically in a mere two days? Although the internment clearly made Bakker disturbed, his diary entries from 1938 onward indicate that the seeds of his N.S.B ideology seem to have been planted long before the German invasion.

Once Holland announced it would capitulate to the Reich on May 14, 1940, Bakker was released from jail and immediately contacted other police officers who had been interned. “For N.S.B. sympathizers in the Amsterdam police force, a new and surprising era dawned after capitulation,” wrote Dutch police historian Guus Meershoek. Their superiors treated them with greater caution, and granted them more freedom to express their beliefs, he wrote.

Within a few weeks, the fascist leaning members of the force had a different status, and they were openly identifying themselves as National Socialists. The Germans lifted the ban on civil service membership in the N.S.B., and Bakker became an official member on July 9, 1940. Along with Harribommée and Ponne, he also took the initiative to organize an N.S.B. group within the police department, which would be named *Rechtsfront*. They held their first meeting about this on July 26, 1940, and Mussert immediately approved of the idea and its first meeting was held in early August.

Bakker was appointed leader of the Amsterdam division’s “political” wing, setting him up in headquarters on the Reguliersstraat, where he worked with volunteers to publish the magazine *Recht en Orde*, and to organize “comradeship evenings” every fortnight with lectures and German propaganda film screenings; later on, it also offered a well-attended German course.

In February 1941, a series of events in the Jewish Quarter — the first pogrom in the Netherlands, street fighting between armed Jewish rebels and N.S.B. and W.A. men, followed by German Green Police Razzias and the closing of the Jewish Quarter, and finally a country-wide general strike — led to the occupier’s purging the city’s civil administration and replacing city leaders with pro-German elements.

Amsterdam’s new police commissioner was Sybren Tulp, a former lieutenant colonel from the Royal Dutch East Indies Army, a “convinced National Socialist,” with “internalized antisemitic ideas.” Tulp met with Willy Lages, head of the German *Sicherheitsdienst*, to set up a new Dutch police department that would receive and investigate public tips and complaints about any anti-German activities. Bakker was made the chief of this new intelligence agency, working directly under Lages.

The position lasted for about a year, and the department was dissolved; but Bakker continued to engage in pro-German police activities throughout the war. In 1943, he was named chief of the Bureau of Social Police, a job he held until October 30, 1944. He remained on duty in the Amsterdam police force until the Netherlands was liberated, on May 5, 1945. Five days later, he was arrested at the Heineken Brewery in Amsterdam, and subsequently taken into police custody.

#### 4. THE NAZI PROPAGANDA LANDSCAPE IN THE NETHERLANDS

As defined by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, propaganda is, “the dissemination of information to influence or control large groups of people.” Scholars such as Jeffrey Herf (2006), David Welch (1993), and Robert Herzstein, among others, have demonstrated that Nazi propaganda was an unparalleled tool for gaining followers to the cause of National Socialism.

Nazi propaganda was based on one, or several, linked conspiracy theories, including the idea that “International Jewry” controlled western powers, were bent on instigating the war, and were the driving force behind both capitalist degradation of society (Plutocracy) and the rise of communism (the Judeo-Bolshevik Conspiracy). Before World War II, Jews represented a mere 1 percent of the German population, and while many worked in trade, white-collar jobs and office positions, they were limited in what kinds of professions they could pursue.

“Antisemitic prejudice had kept to a minimum the number of Jews in the judiciary, civil service, diplomatic corps and, to a large degree corporations before 1918,” writes historian Jeffrey Herf (2006)

in *The Jewish Enemy*. “With few exceptions, Jews had no influence on boards of directors and leading executive positions in German big business.”

Hitler and his professional propaganda team led by Joseph Goebbels mounted a massive propaganda offensive against “the Jews” that brought home an antisemitic message on a consistent and sustained basis, and this message clearly crossed borders into all German occupied territories.

Just as Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry “injected far-flung ideas about an international Jewish conspiracy” at home in the Reich through print organs such as the *Völkischer Beobachter* (“The Racial Observer”) and *Der Stürmer* (“The Stormer”), which focused on the daily threat that Jews posed to Germans’ public and private lives, the Netherlands had its own homegrown propaganda newspapers, most of which were published by members of one of the country’s fascist political parties.

The largest Nazi party in Holland was the N.S.B., which reached its apogee of popular support in 1935 by winning 7 percent of the national vote in provincial elections, but its popularity declined thereafter until the occupation. “From its beginnings the N.S.B. looked upon itself as an integral part of the coming fascist revolution in Europe,” wrote Dietrich Orlow (1999). “Although like all fascist movements, the N.S.B. was fiercely nationalistic, the party presented no original ideology of its own; all of its program was adapted, or better copied, from the Italian fascists and the German Nazis.”

The party did not start out with an explicitly antisemitic agenda. The movement’s founder, Adriaan Anton Mussert, showed little interest in the movement’s racial doctrines in the first years of the party’s existence. However, as time went on, the party’s more radical *völkische* wing, led by Martin Marinus Rost van Tonningen, did emphasize *Germanentummelei* (Teutonic supremacy) and antisemitism.

The leading homegrown Nazi daily in Holland was *Het Nationale Dagblad*, published from 1936 to 1945 by the N.S.B. and edited by N.S.B. leader M.M. Rost van Tonningen as its official organ. A weekly paper called *Volk en Vaderland* (“People and Fatherland”) was also published by Anton Mussert’s publishing firm, *Nenasu* (*Nederlandsch Nationaal Socialistische Uitgeverij*). The Nederlandsche S.S., the Dutch S.S. organization, had its own weekly paper called *Storm*, considered a “radical battle magazine,” which contained some of the most rabid antisemitic language and ideology in the Netherlands’ press. Radio journalist and committed N.S.B. member Max Blokzij broadcast pro-Nazi shows on Radio Hilversum.

After the Occupation of the Netherlands began, all Dutch newspapers came under the control of the Germans almost immediately. One of the German’s first actions was to oust all Jewish journalists. As historian Rene Vos has argued, the Dutch legal press quickly fell in line with German demands and served as a “collaborationist press.” Germans did not need to censor the papers, because they largely engaged in self-censorship. Some Dutch newspapers, such as *De Telegraaf*, fell right in line with the German administration, and printed Nazi propaganda during the war. They published articles that were produced by the privately-owned news service *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (or D.N.B.), run and tightly controlled by Goebbels.

Other propaganda vehicles in the Netherlands included a black-uniformed paramilitary organization, the *Weerbaarheidsafdeling* (known as the W.A., similar to the German S.A.), which marched in formation and attacked Jews on the streets; there was also the Nazi youth organization, *De Nationale Jeugdstorm* for Dutch boys, modeled after the Hitler Youth, which had a traveling band that performed at major N.S.B. functions, including one at the Concertgebouw.

In sum, an ordinary person like Douwe Bakker had a great deal of access to pro-German, fascist and antisemitic reading material in Holland. Supporters of the fascist movement could also confirm and promote their ideologies by attending many of the events organized by the N.S.B., where these ideas were reinforced through Nazi rhetoric spoken in the Dutch language.

## 5. A NAZI SCRAPBOOK

Douwe Bakker’s first entry in his diary, which he titled “Kronyck,” came on January 3, 1938. His early entries were mostly paragraph-long entries about things he’d experienced that day — trips he’d

taken or jottings about his family life, or the weather. His second journal, this one a full-sized book, began in June 1939, and in August 1939, he added his first newspaper clipping, a photograph of Dutch people in The Hague mobilizing for war.

From that point on, Bakker frequently pasted newspaper clippings into his journals, typically taped in over the words he wrote about the same events, in such a way that they could be removed to read the text underneath. In this way, his diaries served not merely as a repository for his thoughts, but also as a kind of “scrapbook” of the Nazi era.

Bakker’s early clippings included many images of battle ships, sinking ships and sea battles; Bakker also clipped out many maps indicating the progress of the Reich’s interventions into other lands; on these, he often made his own markings, using a blue or red pencil, to suggest the important battle lines. After the German invasion the clippings often feature Nazi events or N.S.B. rallies; to a lesser extent, there are images of destruction caused by bombings.

Bakker also frequently included photographs of N.S.B. and German Nazi leaders, such as Mussert, Van Tonningen, Seyss-Inquart, Goebbels and Hitler. He recorded and “celebrated” their birthdays, and noted important events in their lives, like Mussert’s swearing in at the zoo in The Hague. On these occasions, he usually clipped a portrait of these Nazis from the newspaper.

For example, he pasted in newspaper clippings from Mussert’s visit to Apollo Hall in Amsterdam in 1940, his speech at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam on March 16, 1942, his enormous N.S.B. rally Dam Square in February 1943. He clipped images of Heinrich Himmler’s visit to The Hague, and Seyss-Inquart’s visit to Amsterdam, with a large rally behind the Rijksmuseum on August 2, 1940. He clipped and included in his diary an antisemitic poster reading “Yankee, Englishman, Bolshevichs, dance to the tune of the Jewish Pipe” (p. 1235). He also noted Hitler’s birthday each year, with photos. When he wrote of the new rule that Jews must wear a “badge” on their clothing, in late April 1942, he clipped a photo image of a man wearing the Jewish star.

Unfortunately (for historians), Bakker clipped photos out of newspapers without retaining the newspaper’s masthead or date, so it is difficult to know his sources. He also didn’t credit his sources in his written text. However, one can sometimes find references to the names of the newspapers he used on the reverse side of the clippings. Often these are *De Telegraaf* or D.N.B. news service.

Bakker’s language throughout the diary also indicates his support for what he calls, “de beweging,” or “the movement.” He writes of “onze kameraden,” or “our comrades,” when he is referring to other Nazis and he commonly uses “Kam.” (Com.), a shortened version of comrade, in place of an honorarium. For example, he refers to “Kam. Koot,” for Comrade Koot. He also refers to top N.S.B. figures as “Leider”; leader.

## 6. THE DEATH OF HENDRIK KOOT

In early February 1941, when Dutch Nazis from the W.A. paramilitary group entered the Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam, breaking shop windows and shouting antisemitic slogans, men and boys from the district armed themselves and fought back. A week of violent fighting in the neighborhood’s streets ensued. Although these fights were investigated by Dutch Nazis (see Loe de Jong, Bob Moore, Guus Meershoek, Ben Braber), Bakker cast the battle in his diary as Jewish aggression: “It now seems that there was a disturbance last night in the Jewish Quarter,” Bakker wrote in his diary on February 12, 1941.

A few hundred Jews stormed Comrade Linssen’s paint shop on the Oudeschans and got in, even though it was heavily barricaded. They used cleavers, hammers and axes. The door was bashed down with an iron-studded wooden post. Old Linssen himself was beaten unconscious, but then help arrived. W.A. and German Schutzpolizei intervened.

The [Dutch] police did not show up. A group of more or less forty W.A. men was attacked by hundreds of mad Jews by the playground, so near the police bureau, on J.H. Meijerplein at around seven. A fierce fight ensued. Without the police even raising a finger, the W.A. and the Jews



battled for about twenty minutes. Someone hit comrade Koot from the W.A. on the head with an iron bar. He will probably die. A Jew sat on top of him and hit him anywhere he could manage to hit. W.A. men have beaten this Jew to a pulp.

Where did Bakker get his information? Naturally, as a police officer he had access to information about the events through people in the police department, and probably through rumors as well. But it is also notable that Bakker's language in his diary echoes sentiments expressed in Nazi propaganda papers.

Bakker clipped an article and pasted it into his diary. The headline was "Sergeant Koot," and although the masthead is cut off, I was able to find the original article (using *Delpher*) on the front page of *Het Nationale Dagblad* from Saturday, February 15, 1941.

The 42-year-old Amsterdam W.A.-man Hendrik Evert Koot died on the 14th day of the month. Abused to death by Jewish scum from a chaotic mob, the blood of this valiant bearer of the National Socialist philosophy flowed through the capital of the country, which at an unlucky moment opened its gates to these base outsiders.

This newspaper was one of many that "reported" on the death of Koot at the hands of "mad Jews." *Volk en Vaderland* printed a front-page story on Koot's death under the headline, "JODEN-MISDAAD," or "JEWISH CRIME." It featured several images of Koot, and his funeral. The text described his killing: "Murdered? Nay, trampled with sadistic lust! Crushed under the clumsy paws of a nomadic people -- who are not of our blood."

*De Zwarte Soldaat* also featured a front-page story with the headline, "Jews to the Ghetto; The Police Must Be Purified." It wrote that Jewish residents of the quarter had, for no reason, attacked shops and homes of comrades, including the "shop of Comrade Linssen on the Oude Schans."

"Jews and other underworld figures formed a mob that came rushing from every corner and alley of the district. Without exception, this ring was armed with axes, maces, long iron bars, and the like. In addition, shots were fired from different directions."

On February 14, 1941, Bakker wrote in his diary: "W.A. sergeant Koot has died. He was so badly beaten by the horde of Jewish beasts that he was unrecognizable. So the umpteenth victim on our side. Where are the victims among our opponents?"

## 7. CONCLUSION

The Dutch fascist movement used the death of W.A. man Koot as a way to galvanize the N.S.B. movement, and it was extremely successful. The series of events in the Jewish Quarter in February led to the closing of the district, the creation of the Jewish Council, and the reorganization of the Amsterdam civil administration to persecute Jewish people and to crack down on resistance efforts.

Bakker read, absorbed and mimicked the language of Nazi propaganda, including antisemitic rhetoric voiced in the right-wing newspapers that voiced these views. Such echoing of sentiments expressed by these media organs of "the movement" allowed Bakker to connect with the Nazi cause, to identify with his slain "comrade," and to feel justified in his future actions as a police officer against the Jews and anyone who supported them, or opposed German regulations.

Although this is just a single example of the use and repetition of Nazi propaganda, and much more needs to be done on this score, this is the beginning of a larger examination that I will do into the diary as an expression of collaborator identity formation.

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