

**A Conversation with Henri (Hans) Theil: His Experiences in the Netherlands during
the Second World War**

by William Barnett

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It has long been rumored among European economists that Theil had a difficult time in The Netherlands during the Second World War, but few, if any, economists knew what actually happened to him. Following Theil's retirement from the U. of Florida, I visited with him in St. Augustine, where Hans and his wife were living. I asked him about his experiences during the Second World War, and he told me the following.

He was a student at a university in the Netherlands, while the country was occupied by the German Army (the Wehrmacht). The Wehrmacht required that all students and professors sign a loyalty oath---to Germany. As is well know to everyone who was close to Hans, he was a very patriotic Dutchman. What few, if any, of his friends knew, was that Hans refused to sign the loyalty oath. The penalty was deportation to Germany to work in forced labor in a military factory. To avoid that fate, he went into hiding in the crawl space under his parents' house.

He wanted to have a radio in that crawl space, so that he could listen to the BBC. But the Wehrmacht was confiscating all radios, so that no one could listen to the BBC. The Wehrmacht assumed that every home had one radio. More than one radio was considered an unreasonable luxury in the Netherlands in those days. So the Wehrmacht was satisfied if each home gave one radio to the German authorities. Hans's parents gave their radio to Hans to use in the crawl space and bought a used radio from a pawn shop to give to the German authorities.

This worked for a while, but Hans told me that as the weeks past the Wehrmacht became increasingly hostile towards his parents about Hans's disappearance. He told me that he was sure that he would be caught sooner or later, and indeed he was caught. He was then sent into forced labor in a factory in Germany.

His parents evidently had some influence with the German authorities and after some time managed to get Hans out of forced labor and back to the Netherlands. As I recall, Hans told me that there was a financial bribe involved, but I don't recall the details of how he said his parents managed that. But once back, Hans continued to refuse to sign the loyalty oath, so he had to go back into hiding.

He told me he was in and out of forced labor in Germany and in and out of hiding in the Netherlands---three times. He never agreed to sign the loyalty oath. At the end of the war, he was back in forced labor in Germany. He told me that he was nearly dead when freed by the allied forces from a factory in Germany.