

This is the speech given by Salomon Jean René de Monchy, Mayor of The Hague, to honor a Jewish city council member who committed suicide on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1940, the day after the Netherlands surrendered to Nazi Germany. Mayor de Monchy gave the speech during the meeting of the City Council of The Hague on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1940:

How incredibly far we have come from the moment we left this hall last, only ten days ago.

Our army has been taken prisoner, our land occupied by foreign troops; our city is no longer the Royal residence; an unknown number of our soldiers and sailors have been killed or wounded or are missing, their names still not known to their relatives; the heart of our sister-city [Rotterdam] has been destroyed; the political as well as economic future of our Fatherland a question mark.

I should like now to attempt to somehow express what we all feel right now. Let me begin with one solitary symptom of these difficult times and one presently close to home: the empty chair that only two weeks ago was honorably occupied by our fellow [city councilman M.] Joëls.

Unfortunately, like so many he could not bear these oppressive times. I shall not describe what he did for our city. I will say only this: he was a good patriot and a good citizen of The Hague. Member of an ancient people [i.e., Jewish], he devoted himself with energy not only to [representing] those of his faith, but equally and reliably with true patriotism for Christians.

I received his final letter to me only after his irrevocable decision. I should like to read what he wrote, after some introductory considerations and after an affectionate parting word to me: Please convey my best wishes to the aldermen, the Secretary, and the Members of the Council. Likewise my final salute to the Directors and senior officials of our city who always treated me most kindly. In my will I have bequeathed to the City of The Hague my collection of paintings for the City Museum, subject to selection by Dr. van Gelder. I do this in appreciation to those who have given me a fine city in which to live my life. It is my hope that this

bequest will make our museum that much more appealing. With best wishes for our royal house, our country, our people and our city. JOËLS.

The splendid gesture of this gift reminds us of how much his loss means to us. Joëls' example shall remain engraved in our hearts. We will remember him with honor and gratitude.

Yet no matter how deep our bereavement, I am compelled to move on. There are too many and terrible things which demand our attention at this moment.

Those armed services that serve the Queen exist only in our overseas territories.

The first words spoken by the [German] officers who arrived at The Hague's city hall to announce the entry of German troops to the Mayor declared the German Army's sincere and profound admiration of the matchless bravery and absolute loyalty of our troops. We still know as much as nothing about the specifics of the heroic struggle our men have waged, but what we hear here and there – from cavalymen and marines, from gunners and foot soldiers from members of every branch of the military who I shall not name – is enough to convince us that within our people there still lives the best qualities of that Netherlandic race which centuries ago provided our people its independent national existence and did so against overwhelming superior strength. Nobody today can say how large the monument which will soon stand here in this town as a memorial to those from The Hague who died for their country will be, but whether dead or alive I – and I know I speak for us all – offer a deeply respectful salute to the patriotic, dedicated spirit they have shown during these five horrific days.

Our armed forces were not defeated. When the Supreme Commander of Land and Sea Forces agreed to capitulate he was guided only by the knowledge that, after the destruction of Rotterdam, continued resistance would only lead to the pointless destruction of even more of our beautiful, well cared for, shining cities and villages which, thank God, now remain untouched, free to bathe in this stunning May's golden sunlight.

In addition to our Armed Forces, our thoughts at this time turn above all to our much loved and respected Queen who was persuaded only at the very last moment by Her advisors to leave Dutch soil. That her departure would certainly

have a crippling effect upon everyone's resilience, including the Armed Forces, is something She understands better than anyone. We are no longer comforted by the thought that our country stands around the throne of the House of Orange in tight defense. This is difficult to understand and we are confused.

For many this gave pause for reflection. They recalled how for the more than forty years of her reign Queen Wilhelmina had never failed to be a paragon of sensible wisdom, of infinite dedication, of deep concern for her people. One realizes that there was no choice and that our Queen was motivated solely by national interests.

Quiet consideration makes these motives clear quickly. One understands that if we want to continue to call ourselves and feel like Dutchmen, and that so long as our overseas territories remain under royal authority this can have an international effect, and in those places to which the name of the Queen is linked, that everything is a consequence of the fact that She decided to withdraw from a predicament which threatened the bearer of sovereignty before it was too late. Far from Her people and not in a position to provide immediate leadership to the course of events in this country, I am certain that our Queen will be experiencing the most difficult days of Her eventful life.

Let us remain one with Her and Her House, let us continue to remember Her in our prayers, and let us take strength from the hope that a day will come when she will return and hear the happy voices of children on the Soestdijk [the Dutch royal residence], and that the cherished Prince's family will once again be in Her midst.