

# THE SECRET PASSAGE: HOW AMZALAK AND SALAZAR HELPED LUDWIG VON MISES ESCAPE THE NAZIS\*

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World War II was marked by the persecution and forced displacement of millions of people. Among them was Ludwig von Mises, one of the most brilliant minds in economics, whose ideas challenged the growing totalitarianism in Europe. Although there are few written records of his escape from Europe, this article provides several previously unpublished details, based on rare and never-before-published documents.

These documents, discovered in Swiss and Portuguese archives, reveal a previously unknown side of Mises's journey. They show not only his elaborate escape plan, but also the crucial support of figures such as Moisés Amzalak, president of the Jewish community in Lisbon, and Oliveira Salazar, the well-known President of the Council of Ministers of Portugal. In a journey marked by countless risks and the need for discretion, Ludwig von Mises became "Louis Mises"—a name that, as we will see, was both a strategy and an enigma for historians. This article is therefore a rediscovery, exploring Mises's journey in a new light, revealing how Portugal served as a safe haven for one of the greatest intellectuals of the twentieth century.

## **The Crossing in the Name of Louis Mises: A Veiled Identity**

When Ludwig von Mises fled Vienna following the growing wave of instability and anti-Semitism influenced by the Nazi party in his Austrian counterpart, he knew that his Jewish status and opposition to such regimes made his presence uncomfortable and

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dangerous. In Geneva, Switzerland, Mises temporarily lived in apparent safety. However, as the Nazi threat expanded and the secret services intensified their presence in Geneva, he was forced to consider escape plans to avoid capture. It is at this stage that one of the first unrevealed facts of his escape emerges: his use of the name "Louis Mises."

Swiss residency documents show that Mises used "Louis Mises" as his official identity in Geneva, and it was under this name that he obtained exit visas, including visas to enter Portugal. But what was the reason behind this decision?

One possibility is that the name was simply (and conveniently) "Frenchified" by the Swiss authorities, since Geneva is a French-speaking canton. However, another hypothesis is even more intriguing: Mises could have intentionally chosen a "French" name to reduce the visibility of his Austrian connections and to stay "out of the radar" from Nazi intelligence agencies.

This choice, regardless of the reason, made it impossible to obtain more information about him in subsequent research beyond what is known to date. For decades, the use of "Louis" prevented interested parties from locating some records and details of Mises' life in Geneva. It was only with the discovery of Portuguese visas issued in the name of "Louis Mises" associated with the real Ludwig Von Mises that a connecting thread was created with the Swiss documentation. This paved the way for a series of new discoveries, including correspondence and other documents that help to explain in greater detail Mises' steps to escape this threat and leave Europe.

This previously unknown aspect of Mises' story adds a layer of complexity to his escape. This was not just a renowned economist leaving Europe, but someone who, while unable to completely escape his identity, managed to alter circumstances to ensure his survival.

### **In Search of Neutral Documents: Swiss Identity Certificates**

With the Nazi threat looming over Switzerland, Ludwig von Mises knew that his identity as an Austrian citizen converted to German

nationality could complicate his exit from Europe. German passports, imposed on Austrians after the annexation, were treated with suspicion by Allied authorities, including the United States. For Mises, who repudiated the Nazi regime and everything it stood for, relying on a German document for his travel meant carrying a symbol he wanted to distance himself from.

Mises therefore sought a neutral alternative. In an exchange of correspondence that began in March 1940, he contacted the Swiss authorities to request a certificate of identity that would allow him to travel abroad. This document, issued by Switzerland, would offer Mises a form of identification not tied to a German passport, facilitating his entry into the United States without the complications associated with the nationality imposed by the Third Reich.

The request was urgently received by the Swiss authorities, who understood the imminent danger. Finally, on May 31, 1940, Mises received the identity certificates, which represented a small bureaucratic victory amid the complexity and diplomatic difficulties of the time. This unknown detail sheds light on the complex arrangements that Mises and his wife, Margit, had to organize to ensure a safe exit from Europe. These documents allowed him to circumvent the obstacles that his German nationality imposed on him, giving him another legal basis for action.

### **Ease of Portuguese Visa: Moisés Amzalak and the Support Network in Lisbon**

For many refugees, obtaining a transit visa in Portugal was a matter of life and death. The country, although officially neutral, had strict entry and exit policies, and visa approvals could take days, weeks, or be denied altogether. In the case of Ludwig von Mises, however, the visa was issued with extraordinary speed—in less than 24 hours. This remarkable detail indicates a behind-the-scenes intervention, and the central figure in that intervention was Moisés Amzalak.

Moisés Amzalak, president of the Jewish community in Lisbon and a close ally of Salazar, played a crucial role in obtaining a visa for Mises. Records indicate frequent meetings between Amzalak

and Prime Minister Salazar to discuss a variety of issues, including the protection and assistance of Jews. This level of cooperation was unusual and indicated the influence and trust that Amzalak enjoyed at the highest levels of influence in Portuguese politics. Additionally, as a long-time member of the selection board for diplomatic careers at the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amzalak also had an intimate knowledge of the Portuguese diplomatic corps. This strategic position gave him privileged access to consular processes and a unique ability to intervene on behalf of Jewish refugees, with Salazar's approval and without compromising Portuguese neutrality.

In addition to being granted quickly, Mises' visa faced another obstacle when he arrived at the border between France and Spain: the visa had expired. To resolve the situation, Mises had to travel quickly to the Portuguese Consulate in Toulouse, left his wife at the border and managed to renew the visas and return on the same day. The visas for other Portuguese passports, under the same conditions, were not renewed. According to the director of the Archives of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it would have been impossible, at that historical moment, to renew an expired visa in such a short time without direct approval from the Prime Minister. This action demonstrates the level of influence and support that Amzalak was able to mobilize to ensure that Mises and his wife could continue their journey to Lisbon.

Amzalak's intervention allowed Mises to make his way safely to Lisbon. This rarely documented and little-known support shows how Portugal served as a safe haven for Mises and so many other refugees.

### **In Lisbon: The Protection and Guardianship of Moisés Amzalak**

Lisbon, at the height of World War II, became an active hub for exiles, diplomats, and spies. In the midst of this network of activities, refugees from various parts of Europe found in the Portuguese capital a safe last stop before leaving for other countries

outside the continent, especially the United States. For Ludwig von Mises, arriving in Lisbon represented much more than a simple stopover: it was the last safe haven before a new life in American exile. However, in Lisbon, Mises was no longer alone.

As soon as Mises arrived in Lisbon, it was Moisés Amzalak who took care of his schedule and accompanied him. Amzalak, besides being president of the Jewish community and a figure of great political influence, proved to be a true protector of Mises, trying to make his stay as pleasant as possible. This was no less important, especially considering that Mises' health was somewhat weakened by age and the stress of his escape.

During the 17 days he spent in the city, Amzalak organized an intense agenda for Mises that included, among other commitments, a meeting with Prime Minister Salazar himself. It is not known whether this meeting actually took place. However, according to Margit's accounts, Mises had the opportunity to connect with some important figures in the Portuguese intellectual scene and to participate in a seminar on statistics and liberalism. One remains curious to know in what context this initiative was organized at a time when corporatist ideas dominated the construction of economic doctrine in Portugal.

### **The Rediscovery of an Invisible History**

Ludwig von Mises' time in Lisbon is more than just a stopover on his journey to the United States. It is a chapter that reveals Portugal's unique role during World War II as a safe haven for intellectuals and dissidents. Thanks to figures like Moisés Amzalak, who used his influence and connections with the Salazar government, many Jewish refugees and thinkers like Mises were able to find safe passage and support in an increasingly hostile continent.

The unprecedented detail in the use of the name "Louis Mises" on Swiss documents and visas issued in Portugal, as well as on Swiss identity certificates, sheds new light on the complexity of Mises' escape. At the same time, they reveal the ingenuity and support network that was formed to protect those who fought for intellectual and personal freedom.

In Lisbon, albeit briefly, Mises found not only safety but also an opportunity to share his ideas, even in an environment less receptive to liberalism. His time in Portugal, mediated by Amzalak's silent protection, demonstrates that even in the darkest times, cooperation between people of different beliefs and cultures can ensure the survival of ideals and lives.

Today, reflecting on this story not only sheds light on an important moment in Ludwig von Mises' career, but also highlights Portugal's role as one of the last strongholds of neutrality and humanity in Europe during the war. This episode was not only a milestone of intellectual resistance, but a lasting example of how solidarity and the discreet action of individuals can influence the fate of figures who would change the course of economic and political thought in the 20th century.

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