KARL A. SCHLEUNES

The Twisted Road to Auschwitz

NAZI POLICY TOWARD GERMAN JEWS 1933–1939

Foreword

SINCE the publication of Karl Schleunes' *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz* in 1970 an almost inconceivably broad variety of scholarly books and articles has dealt with why and how the Holocaust came into being and what kind of mechanisms lay at the bottom of the unimaginable cruelties committed by the Nazi regime against the Jews. Schleunes demonstrated that the fanatical anti-Semitism that guided Hitler and his chiefs cannot in itself provide a sufficiently coherent explanation of the genesis of the Holocaust. At least partly because of his analysis, the internal structure of the regime, the role of its bureaucracies, and the rivalries between competing power groups became the focus of research. In conjunction with this, anti-Jewish policy during the prewar years has been the object of further analysis. Additional evidence was also made available that had been partly ignored or was disclosed only in local and regional studies. In the light of our extended knowledge of the history of the Nazi system generally, as well as anti-Jewish policies in particular, Schleunes' study stands reaffirmed in its effort to trace the early stages of discrimination against the Jews and their exclusion from public life that led ultimately to their deaths. Moreover, the specific methodological approach displayed in Schleunes' book has proved indispensable for an adequate interpretation of Jewish persecution in the Third Reich.

At the time Schleunes' book appeared its pioneering quality was appreciated by only a minority of scholars, and it took a couple of years before the perspective from which it was written gained a wider currency with historians in the field of Holocaust history. It has remained a controversial contribution ever since. For the great majority of historians there was not the slightest

doubt that the course of the Nazi persecution of the Jews had been preconceived in the minds of the Nazi leaders, and they had steered the anti-Jewish measures deliberately from step to step until the conditions of World War II permitted the systematic implementation of a long-cherished ambition: the annihilation of all Jews under German rule. Most observers took their lead from the theory of totalitarian dictatorship and assumed that from the start to the very end anti-Jewish policy was deliberately planned and put into practice because of Hitler's personal involvement.

Schleunes, however, broke the narrowness of the previous interpretive patterns by analyzing Nazi Jewish policy as a political process driven not only by the ideological prejudices and Jew hatred of the Nazi leadership but at least as much by the social dynamics inherent in the Nazi movement and the self-induced pressures to preserve the unity of the Nazi party. Starting from the assumption that racial anti-Semitism served as a means to integrate otherwise incompatible targets, Schleunes argues that in the long run, Hitler felt he could not afford to accept any retreat from anti-Semitism. Simultaneously, the German dictator was not, as many historians maintained, continuously at the center of the anti-Semitic escalation. On the contrary, Hitler usually avoided official involvement in anti-Jewish policies. Though Hitler's anti-Semitism was obviously insatiable, he frequently delayed anti-Jewish measures requested by party radicals, and he was often only indirectly involved when the escalation of anti-Jewish policy started anew in November 1938.

From this proposition Schleunes arrives at the crucial conclusion that the acceleration of anti-Jewish persecution was due less to the ideological pressure from the rather restricted group of fanatical anti-Semites in and outside the Nazi party than to the empire building and the never-ending struggle between competing public and party agencies for control over anti-Jewish policy. Schleunes was the first historian to show that from the Nazi point of view the different strategies against the Jewish population appeared as failures because neither the boycott in

April 1933 and the early anti-Semitic legislation that replaced "wild" actions nor the so-called voluntary Aryanization effectually reduced the increasing number of Jewish inhabitants in the expanding German empire through voluntary or forced emigration. Hitler's inability to accept setbacks together with his extreme anti-Semitic prejudices explain why the failure of the various efforts to achieve or postulate "final" solutions of the Jewish problem did not lead to indifference and passivity, as was the case in other areas of policy.

By analyzing the political decision-making process, Schleunes concludes that even in Jewish policy Hitler was uncertain about the strategic choices and that this uncertainty allowed a decision-making vacuum to emerge. The actual process, Schleunes points out, frequently turns out to be the exact opposite of what the *Fuehrerprinzip* would lead one to expect. Not until November 1938 did Hitler decide in favor of a centralized and coordinated procedure in the Jewish question by vesting Goering and, indirectly, Heydrich with the requisite powers. Hitler himself lacked a clear-cut concept of how to achieve his visionary goal of getting rid of the Jewish population. Schleunes argues that a long, drawn-out process of trial and error was needed until enforced emigration could be replaced by systematic deportation and annihilation of the Jewish victims.

Originally, Schleunes' interpretation met with strong apprehensions from many historians who stood under the prevailing influence of the Hitler-centrist approach. Even today *The Twisted Road* is still occasionally accused of revisionism and a hardly intentional exculpation of the dictator. Despite this, many of Schleunes' conclusions were taken up by ensuing researchers and developed further. For instance, Martin Broszat, in "Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung des Nationalsozialismus," took up Schleunes' observation that in certain conditions Hitler would act mainly under pressure from Nazi hardliners. Broszat argued compellingly that Hitler's rhetoric was taken literally by his fanatical supporters who then put him under the pressure of a self-fulfilling prophesy.

In some respects Schleunes cleared the road for later research by describing the anti-Jewish policy of the Nazi regime as a multifaceted process with its ups and downs and as a series of shortcomings rather than a chain of successful operations, though the victims certainly viewed these measures differently. Schleunes argues correctly that the actual course of events leading to the Holocaust can only be explained by a combination of events. Ideological fanaticism was a precondition, while the cumulative radicalization of rivaling agencies worked as the motivating force behind anti-Jewish policies. He stresses the interaction between divergent interests and influences, including foreign policy that in his view deserve even closer attention than the ideological factors. Schleunes traces the developmental stages up to the pogrom of November 9 and 10, 1938, which he regards as a crucial turning point. His specific approach, however, induced functionalist historians to demonstrate that Hitler's rather responsive attitude toward anti-Jewish activities did not change qualitatively even during the ensuing implementation of the genocide. The extent to which Hitler interfered directly in the extermination procedures and whether he in fact delivered a formal order to start the systematic annihilation program will remain controversial, but it is by now universally accepted that the process as such was strongly dependent on the empire building of the competing Nazi subleaders.

In recent years several authors have tried to describe the process of Jewish persecution in Germany. None of them has succeeded in presenting such a well-balanced account of its early stages as Karl Schleunes. Schleunes' contention that "the Final Solution as it emerged in 1941 and 1942 was not the product of a grand design" still is controversially received, but has not been convincingly refuted in spite of the opposing view of several Israeli scholars, especially David Bankier, who regards Hitler as the central promoter of the individual anti-Jewish actions throughout the course of the Third Reich. The general picture as presented by Karl Schleunes still seems convincing to me. His book remains an indispensable contribution to our understand-

ing of the origins of and the preconditions for the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Moreover, Schleunes' contribution paved the way for a tremendously productive debate that contributed decisively to a better understanding of the destructive and inhuman nature of the Nazi regime.

Hans Mommsen

Introduction

THERE IS no single phenomenon in our time so important for us to understand as the one which identified itself in Germany during the 1920's, 30's and 40's as National Socialism. By the time this movement was swept from the stage it had destroyed the lives of at least thirty million and perhaps as many as forty million people. Violent death accompanying war in an age of industry and technology, by the 1940's, had its precedents. The institutions which most appropriately symbolize the Nazi era—Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka, and some fifty other concentration and extermination camps—had none.

These factories of death are now permanently cataloged in the darkest annals of the human story. Their existence casts a long shadow over the hopes for our own future. The realization that some men will construct a factory in which to kill other men raises the gravest questions about man himself. We have entered an age which we cannot avoid labeling "After Auschwitz." If we are to begin to understand ourselves we must somehow come to grips with the reality of Auschwitz.

The study which follows is an attempt to come to grips with a part of that reality. It is not an attempt to analyze the functioning of Auschwitz or what the Nazis chose to call "The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem." Since Raul Hilberg's impressive study of this period such an effort has become unnecessary.[1] It is instead an examination of the period which immediately precedes Auschwitz, the period from 1933, when Hitler came to power, until late 1938 and early 1939, when the machinery which eventually administered a Final Solution was established.

1 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1961).

It was during these first five years of Hitler's rule that the Nazis stumbled toward something resembling a Final Solution to the Jewish Problem. The Final Solution as it emerged in 1941 and 1942 was not the product of a grand design. In fact, when the Nazis came to power, they had no specific plans for a solution of any sort. They were certain only that a solution was necessary. This commitment carried the Nazi system along the twisted road to Auschwitz.

* * *

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I. The Jewish Problem in the Second Reich

On April 29, 1945, twenty-four hours before his suicide, Adolf Hitler dictated his final testament. It was an extraordinary document created in extraordinary circumstances. Outside his underground bunker the Soviet Army was grinding Berlin into total submission. The Third Reich was choking in its own ashes. In these last moments of his life Hitler was displaying a remarkable calm. The towering rage to which Hitler had become so susceptible in times of crisis was absent. With the destruction of his last bastion raging above him, Adolf Hitler, once the dictator of an empire ranging across Europe from Le Havre to Leningrad, contemplated the future.

After expelling the traitors Himmler and Goering from the party and after naming a successor government, the Fuehrer ended his testament with his most important message: "Above all, I charge the leadership of the nation, as well as its followers, to a rigorous adherence to our racial laws and to a merciless resistance against the poisoner of all peoples—international Jewry."[1] That Hitler should deliver a warning about international Jewry as his final and most significant message to the future is a chilling reminder of the role played by the Jew in the Nazi world view. Such reminders are hardly necessary, however. From the very outset of the Nazi movement, Hitler and his henchmen had expended untold energies making clear their antipathy for the Jew. The Allied armies had, upon invading Hitler's fortress Europe, uncovered during the last months of the war death camps in which the Nazis had attempted to manufac-

[1] See the facsimile of "Hitler's Last Will and Testament" in Joseph Tenenbaum, *Race and Reich: The Story of an Epoch* (New York, 1956), following p. 238.

ture what they chose to call the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem."

No single aspect of Nazi policy proved to be more permanently successful than this Final Solution. By the time of its collapse the Nazi death machine had managed to destroy an estimated five to six million Jews, roughly sixty to seventy percent of European Jewry. It is doubtful that Hitler was aware of precisely how successful his Final Solution had been. His final warning shows, however, that in his view the policy had failed. How else could he have explained the Nazi defeat, now that even he had finally to accept it? All his efforts had been brought to ruin by international Jewry. This was the only explanation his intellectual and psychological makeup allowed. The Soviet, American, and British armies were no more than another manifestation of international Jewry's power, whose ultimate aim had always been to bring Germany to its knees. Now that it had finally succeeded, the only thing left to Hitler was the strength to give one last warning and, then, suicide.

The Jew had given form and structure to Hitler's world since his years in Vienna, just prior to the outbreak of the World War in 1914. It was here, Hitler later claimed, that he met the Jew for the first time and learned of the real nature of the Jewish problem. From that time forward the world made sense to Hitler because of the Jew and his inherently evil nature. All that was evil, be it the German defeat in 1918 or the collapse of his own Reich in 1945, could be laid at the feet of the Jews. When after 1918 he became involved in the jumbled world of Weimar politics Hitler assigned to the Jew the ultimate responsibility for all the difficulties Germany faced. The hated republic itself was the product of a Jewish seizure of power; the building of divisive parliamentary factions only the means through which Jews could weaken the German fiber. During the years of the Weimar Republic Jewish malevolence, according to Nazi pronouncement, reached unprecedented proportions. Jews had captured control of the government, the press, the professions, the arts, economic life, and worst of all, through intermarriage, had made

great inroads in corrupting the biological purity of Aryan racial stock. This was the Jewish problem to which the Nazis incessantly referred and to which they gave unqualified promise of finding a solution.

That unqualified promises should ultimately yield attempts at an unqualified solution does not appear illogical, at least not in retrospect. Perhaps one should not be surprised that a movement which writes a segment of humanity out of the human race should eventually give birth to a policy of physical extermination. The fact remains, however, that the world was surprised when the full extent of the Nazi atrocity was made known. It was surprised first at the extremes of inhumanity which the Nazis had reached and, upon reflection, it was surprised that this had happened in Germany.

It is often noted that anyone who listened seriously to Hitler or read *Mein Kampf* carefully might have expected something approaching a Final Solution if Hitler ever came to power. But then is not a politician's bark usually worse than his bite? Especially when that politician is as erratic as was Hitler? Hitler, whether in *Mein Kampf* or in his last testament, was not, after all the only observer of the German-Jewish relationship. To dwell solely upon his reflections would lead to a serious misreading of the traditional relationship between Germans and Jews. Jews themselves had for decades been optimistic about their future in Germany. It is illuminating on the one hand to consider the importance of Hitler's reflections upon the Jews, and on the other the observations of a German Jew, Professor Hermann Cohen, the renowned Kantian philosopher, who during World War I noted that:

> Despite the universal contrary prejudice I venture to assert that in Germany equal rights for Jews have deeper roots than anywhere else. Everywhere in the world Jews may win a higher share of political rights and government. We German Jews seek this share on the grounds of participation, inwardly recognized, in German morality and religiosity. Hence our road to liberation is harder and more erratic, for it is bound up with the fluctuations of social

feelings; but it has deeper historical and cultural roots. And our limited Jewish rights in Germany are of higher value for religious survival than the apparently absolutely equal rights of Jews abroad. . . .[2]

In the light of Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau, Cohen's observations seem tragically naive. At the time, however, his confidence in Germany seemed well placed; at least it was widely shared. The Germany with which Cohen and his contemporaries were familiar hardly seemed to forecast disaster. Jews had rallied to the defense of the Kaiser's empire in 1914 as enthusiastically as any other Germans. There was legitimate reason for hoping their contributions to the war effort might quell the lingering anti-Jewish resentment which occasionally stirred. But even these stirrings had subsided during the last prewar decades. The enthusiasm of most Jews for being or becoming German was rarely dampened by the anti-Semitic attacks from the fringes of German society. When a Zionist movement was born in eastern Europe following pogroms in Russia and Poland, it found very few adherents in Germany. Zionism failed to make deep inroads here because it seemed an answer to a problem German Jews did not see as their own. The Jews of Poland or Russia might need a homeland; German Jews had one.[3]

If there was a Jewish problem in Germany, said some of Judaism's leaders, it was the quite different prospect of complete assimilation. Since 1880 the percentage of Jews to the total German population had been in decline. By 1900 the 497,000 Jews comprised less than one percent of the total population in Germany. In the larger cities, where most Jews lived, marriage to German Gentiles was becoming increasingly common. Germany, more than any other country at the time, seemed to have gone furthest in destroying the reality and the memory of the

2 Quoted by Emil L. Fackenheim, "Hermann Cohen: After Fifty Years," Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture 12 (New York, 1969), p. 9.

3 See Richard Lichtheim, *Die Geschichte des deutschen Zionismus* (Jerusalem, 1954).

medieval ghetto. So noticeable were the trends that leaders in the German Jewish community feared the complete assimilation or fusion of their community into German society by the end of the twentieth century.[4]

The promulgation of the Bismarckian constitution in 1871 brought to legal fruition the process of Jewish emancipation begun during the Prussian reform period early in the century. Emancipation heralded the new day of full and equal participation for Jews in a united and dynamic new Germany. A Jewish member of the Prussian lower house rejoiced that "finally after years of waiting in vain we have landed in a safe harbor."[5] Jewish energies turned to taking advantage of the new opportunities. An expanding economy based upon capitalist and liberal principles occasioned opportunities unheard of to previous generations of Jews. For the first time the business and learned professions were fully open to them. The economy demanded new business and professional services as well as an increase in the quantity of older services and Jews were quick to answer the challenges.[6] By World War I Jewish contributions to the various dimensions of German life had become rich and varied. The names of Eduard Bernstein and Rudolf Hilferding were central to the development of German socialism. Emil Rathenau's *Allgemeine Elekricitäts Gesellschaft* (General Electric Company) had, by around 1900, literally illuminated Wilhelmian Germany, and Emil's son, Walther, through allocating resources, probably contributed more than any other single person to Germany's war effort after 1914. A new marketing technique, the chain department store, was introduced during the 1880's and 90's by Oskar Tietz and, because its volume sales enabled it to undersell competitors, allowed the German consumer to

4 Arthur Ruppin, *Soziologie der Juden*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1930), pp. 319-320.

5 Quoted by Jacob Toury, *Die politischen Orientierungen der Juden in Deutschland, von Jena bis Weimar*, Schriftenreihe Wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts 15 (Tübingen, 1966), pp. 138-139.

6 The extent to which Jews came to participate in German economic, professional, and cultural life is examined in Chapter II.

buy an increasingly wide variety of goods more cheaply.[7] In all fields—medicine, the physical sciences, philosophy, literature, the arts as well as business—Germany benefitted from an impressive Jewish contribution. More important than the quantity of the Jewish contribution, however, was the recognition that it was German, not Jewish life which was being enriched. Albert Einstein was not dealing with Jewish physics (later Nazi allegations notwithstanding) any more than Franz Werfel was producing Jewish literature or Kurt Weill, a few years later, was composing Jewish music.

To most observers the Jewish problem did not seem to have a serious German dimension. Nowhere did the promise of the modern world seem more secure. Elsewhere in Europe the situation of Jews appeared to be much more precarious. For the decade spanning the turn of the century France was torn apart by the Dreyfus Affair. In eastern Europe the final decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the most massive Jewish persecutions of the pre-Hitlerian age. The situation there made it appear as if anti-Semitism were primarily an east European phenomenon. In Russia, where Jews had traditionally been restricted to the western Pale of Settlement, a policy of "Russifying" ethnic minorities was accompanied by one aimed at driving Jews into pauperism. When a Jew was implicated in the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II a series of "spontaneous" police-initiated pogroms erupted. The following year a succession of regulations—the so-called May Laws—established limits to the number of Jews allowed into Russian schools and restricted Jews from entering the learned professions. Such measures served as the prelude to the spectacular Kishenev pogrom of 1903 during which Jews were hunted down and murdered in the streets by the czarist police.[8] The anti-Jewish legislation and actions of czarist Russia resemble the Nazi persecution of a later

[7] Kurt Zielenziger, *Juden in der deutschen Wirtschaft* (Berlin, 1930), pp. 206-220.

[8] Howard Morley Sacher, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (New York, 1963), pp. 240-260.

day—with one striking exception. Unlike the Nazis, the czarist regime halted its anti-Jewish activity when in 1904 it became involved in war. For the Nazis war was the signal to accelerated persecution.

Poland was second only to Russia in the size of its Jewish population with about three and one-quarter million Jews, or ten percent of her population. Jewish life in Poland was rooted in the general backwardness of the country, a backwardness which nurtured a richly religious, but largely exclusive life, greatly influenced by the Hasidic movement of the eighteenth century. Those Jews who had not entered into secular Polish society were closely tied to the pietism and emotionalism of Hasidism, and consequently less prepared to enter into the secular ways of modern Europe when persecution drove them westward. This Jew was known to western Europeans as the *Ostjude*, or eastern Jew, whose mannerisms and bearing came to be so bitterly despised by the anti-Semites. In Poland clerical alarm at a growing atheistic socialism and the customary fear of "Jewish capitalism" gave birth to an anti-Semitism as vigorous as any pre-Nazi variety. Anti-Semitism proved to be the only force able to fuse the conservative political factions in Poland during the turbulent latter years of the nineteenth century.[9]

The closest parallel to the eventual German experience with the Jewish problem is to be found in Romania. Like Germany, Romania did not become unified and independent until the latter part of the nineteenth century. The principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia which made up Romania had long been the battlefield for Russian, Turkish, and Habsburg armies, a function German territory had performed for centuries in central Europe. Romanian nationalists of the nineteenth century, like their German contemporaries, often pointed to their ethnic exclusiveness. Culturally and racially they claimed themselves to be of Latin origin, the descendants of Roman settlers, and therefore distinctly different from their Slavic neighbors. To

[9] Raphael Mahler, "Antisemitism in Poland," in Koppel S. Pinson, ed., *Essays on Antisemitism* (New York, 1946), pp. 145-172.

protect this exclusiveness alien influences had to be extirpated. Since the most immediately available alien influence in Romania was a Jewish one, the government quickly instituted repressive measures which soon threatened the continued existence of Romanian Jewry. Jewish children were excluded from the schools; Jewish religious observances were curtailed; Jews were barred from business and professional pursuits; at election time the regime instituted anti-Jewish riots—all in the name of promoting Romanian purity.[10]

Similar patterns of anti-Jewish activity emerged throughout eastern Europe. A process of "Magyarization" in Hungary worked to exclude Jews from the national identity developing there. In Russia Nicholai Danilevsky added scientific substance to the Pan-Slavic movement by stressing the blood ties between the various Slavic peoples,[11]—an observation which served to emphasize the differences between the emerging Slavic nationalities and the Jewish minorities living in their midst. The new sense of national identity emerging in eastern Europe, whether it was Russian, Polish, Romanian, or Hungarian, appeared inevitably to exclude the Jew. If the basis of nationality was race, as an increasing number of people seemed to believe, the only prospect for Jewish assimilation was through intermarriage, the mixing of the races. Given the obvious manifestations of growing anti-Jewish resentments, however, the likelihood that "race-mixing" would offer a solution to the Jewish problem appeared increasingly remote.

In contrast to eastern Europe the situation in Germany seemed much more promising. Rather than closing off secular life to its Jewish inhabitants, the Bismarckian empire was opening the way for fuller Jewish participation. German Jews were not alone in regarding Germany as a safe harbor. Talented young Jews from eastern Europe regarded Germany as the one hope for their future. German universities, for example, offered them educational opportunities which their own governments

10 Sacher, *Modern Jewish History*, pp. 255-259.
11 Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism* (New York, 1966), pp. 190ff.

had just closed off. One of the many east European Jews to receive his university education in Germany was Chaim Weizmann, later to become one of Judaism's foremost Zionists and the first president of Israel. Born in the Russian Pale of Settlement in 1874, the young Weizmann, finding Russia's restrictions on Jewish students impossible to circumvent, joined what he called the "educational stampede" of Jewish students to Germany.[12]

The oppressed Jews of eastern Europe came to view Germany as a haven from pogrom and persecution. Thousands fled their homes at the turn of the century, many of them coming to Germany hoping to acquire citizenship or at least to use Germany as a way station in their emigration to the United States.[13] If there was a worldwide Jewish problem it did not appear to have an important German dimension.

That there was to some extent a Jewish problem even in Germany was, of course, undeniable. Even Professor Cohen in all of his optimism noted limitations to Jewish rights in Germany, but only to conclude that these limited rights were of more value "than the apparently absolutely equal rights of Jews abroad . . ." Presumably German Jews would eventually gain these absolutely equal rights as well and then enjoy the additional advantage of having them rooted deeply in the German tradition.

German Jews had not been shielded from the currents of anti-Semitism spreading across Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While they did not suffer the pogroms or persecutions of eastern Europe, or even the degrading spectacle of a Dreyfus Affair, the Jewish question was very much alive in many German circles. Even outside the most vigorous anti-Semitic circles the Jewish question was a much discussed issue. It had become part of the larger question of giving meaning and identity to the Germany created by developments of the 1860's.

12 Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (New York, 1949), pp. 29-30.
13 S. Adler-Rudel, *Ostjuden in Deutschland, 1880-1940*, Schriftenreihe Wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Instituts (Tübingen, 1959), p. 112.

It was under Bismarck during the 1860's that Prussian power finally achieved a German political unity. In a succession of quick victories against Denmark, Austria, and France, Prussia's army and Bismarck's wile forged a German Empire—a Second Reich—declared at Versailles in 1871. The new Reich excluded many Germans living on its fringes in Austria and Bohemia and was therefore based on the "small German" or *kleindeutsch* conception of German unity. There were those who were disappointed, but Bismarck nonetheless looked upon his work of a decade and declared it to be good. Germany, he announced, was a satisfied power. Her task now was to solidify the gains of the past decade and convince her jittery neighbors that she had no further designs on their territory. Bismarck's commitment to turn away from further expansion brought with it a rather arbitrary geographical definition of the new Germany. To the east the Germans living in Bohemia and Austria served as a reminder that the geographical definition could still be enlarged.

The problem of precisely defining Germany assumed immediate importance when early in the nineteenth century German sentiment developed the aim of unifying the German peoples into a single sovereign political unit. When the revolutionaries of 1848 saw the opportunity for unification the question of defining Germany was one of the most crucial questions they faced. Two basic attitudes emerged at the Frankfurt Parliament where German nationalists struggled with this question. The *Kleindeutschers* were willing to accept a small Germany, one which excluded Germans living within the legitimate boundaries of neighboring states. They based their thinking upon the political and power realities of the day. The *Grossdeutschers,* less mindful of these realities, envisioned a large Germany which would incorporate all Germans into the new state regardless of who presently ruled over them. Failure of the two groups to resolve their differences largely precluded adoption of a strategy sufficiently realistic to achieve unification of any kind. For the next decade and a half both the constitutional and national aspirations of German nationalism foundered. Until the Bismarckian

solution resolved the issue in favor of the *Kleindeutschers* the question remained largely academic.

Those who had championed the *grossdeutsch* approach to unity were for a time neutralized by their own exhilaration at Bismarck's achievement. If German power could achieve this, could it not achieve even more? The exhilaration wore off, however, as it became clear that Bismarck, true to his word, would not use German power to effect a *Grossdeutschland.* Unwittingly the Iron Chancellor had also kept *grossdeutsch* hope alive through the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine from France in 1871. Here was a territory populated in part at least by German-speaking peoples, one which had been part of the German Holy Roman Empire until gobbled up by the wars of Louis XIV and his *Chambres de réunion.* Its incorporation into the new Reich served as a constant reminder that *grossdeutsch* aims were only partially realized.[14] Germany, Bismarck's pronouncement notwithstanding, was not complete.

The connection of the *grossdeutsch-kleindeutsch* issue to the development of anti-Semitism and racism later in the century is by no means a simple one. The important element here is, however, that the issue raised the question of who belonged to Germany, and more critically, who did not belong. The essence of the Jewish problem as it developed in Germany (and elsewhere) ultimately reduces itself to that question.

The question of belonging was particularly important to the *Grossdeutschers* who were anxious to include all Germans in Germany. *Grossdeutsch* attitudes had their intellectual roots in an organic concept of nationhood which had developed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The organic concept was a response to the peculiar political situation of central and eastern Europe and therefore in sharp contrast to the predominantly mechanistic concept of nationhood developed in western Europe. In France and England, for example, there already existed by the eighteenth century a relatively high de-

[14] Walter Lipgens, "Bismarck, die öffentliche Meinung und die Annexion von Elsass-Lothringen, 1870," *Historiche Zeitschrift* 199 (1964): 31-112.

gree of uniformity in ethnic composition (some ethnic groupings having merged, others having been assimilated) as well as general conformity of language and religion. This relative homogeneity, fostered and often demanded by central state authority, allowed these countries to develop the idea of nationhood within the political matrix of the state.[15] Consequently nationality developed as a political concept. The connection of the individual to the nation was a legal one; he was the citizen of a distinct and sovereign political entity—France or England. Theoretically an individual could change his nationality by moving to another state and declaring allegiance to its government. For him, the nineteenth century French philosopher, Renan, that the existence of a nation rests upon a daily plebiscite of its citizens was perfectly applicable. There was nothing inherent in his makeup which would prevent him leaving one nationality and deciding to become part of another one. The procedure was a mechanical one, in theory open to selection and choice if he was willing to subject himself to being assimilated into the ways of his new society, its language and its value structures.

In central and eastern Europe, in which Germany had been, according to Metternich, nothing more than a geographical expression, nationality perforce could not be tied to the state. There were no states in the western European sense, only the remnants of once great empires whose boundaries were ill-defined and which purportedly governed over peoples deeply fragmented by ethnic, religious, language, and social divisions. No authority—political, religious, or otherwise—could foster the bridging of these divisions. Indeed, the imperial structures oftentimes continued to exercise limited authority in the nineteenth century only because of these divisions.

The concept of nation which emerged in central and eastern Europe came to be tied to a recognition of the separateness of the various groups living in these regions. This separateness was

[15] See Hans Rothfels, "Grundsätzliches zum Problem der Nationalität," *Historische Zeitschrift* 174 (1952): 339-358; and Otto Pflanze, "Nationalism in Europe, 1848-1871," *Review of Politics* 28 (April, 1966): 129-143.

most evident in the various languages, but was usually reinforced by differences in religion and social status, both of which served to promote and reinforce mutual antagonisms. Out of this cultural separateness emerged an eastern European concept of nationality distinct from that of Britain or France. Rather than the mechanistic matrix of politics, it was culture which gave birth to the idea of nationhood. Each nation came to be considered the unique creation of a unique culture, an organic expression of that culture's intrinsic generative powers. Its literature, art, religion, and music were the various attributes of a distinct culture and the characteristics of a unique nationality. The result for eastern Europe was what the distinguished German historian, Friederich Meinecke, called the *Kulturnation,* to be distinguished from western Europe's *Staatsnation.*[16]

It was the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1774-1803) who gave shape to the ideas of culture and nationality in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Herder saw in each culture a *Volksgeist* or spirit which inspired the unique expressions of language, literature, and art of each nation. Nationality was for Herder a cultural organism, as much the product of nature as was a tree or a flower. The members of a nationality were joined to one another by inner spiritual bonds; together they comprised the *Volk.* Because of the spiritual bonds, the *Volk* was more than merely the sum of its parts; it was an organic entity, a creation of nature held together by shared culture. The implications of this organic conception of nationality are easy to see. Assimilation and acculturation, possible within the legal mechanistic concepts of western Europe, were more difficult when the differences of nationalities were seen to be resting on qualities inherent in the *Volk* itself. The law could be changed by an act of man's will; the spirit of the *Volksgeist* could not.

Herder scrupulously avoided assigning greater value to any one culture or nationality. There was only one race—the human

[16] Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat, Werke,* vol. 5 (Munich, 1962), p. 10.

VIII. Auschwitz in View

On July 31, 1941, a dispatch from Hermann Goering reached Reinhard Heydrich at the latter's Security Police headquarters in Berlin. It was a day of delirious excitement in the Reich capital. Five weeks earlier Hitler's armies had invaded the Soviet Union. At that very moment German troops were racing across the broad expanse of western Russia in pursuit of a disorganized and retreating Red Army. Smolensk was already in Hitler's grasp; Moscow and Leningrad, it seemed certain, would fall shortly. Never before had Hitler been so fully in command of events on the European continent. Within a few months at the most the grip of bolshevism upon Russia would be wrenched loose and Nazi Germany could go about the business of establishing its European New Order.

Goering's dispatch to Heydrich had to do with that business. It was brief and to the point. The time had come, he informed Heydrich, "to make all the preparations in organizational, practical, and material matters necessary for a total solution [*Gesamtlösung*] of the Jewish question in territories under German influence." Moreover, said Goering, "I am asking you to prepare and submit to me in the near future, a master plan for carrying out the final solution [*Endlösung*] of the Jewish problem."[1]

In the earlier order of January 14, 1939, Heydrich had been commissioned to arrange for the emigration or evacuation of Jews from German territory. The chain of command created in 1939 remained the same; only the orders had changed. For the first time the Nazi leadership had begun to think in practical terms of a total and final solution. Like so many of its earlier

[1] Reinhard Heydrich Personal Akten, H22/A, BDC.

policies, emigration too had failed to solve the Jewish problem in Germany. As early as June 1939, Heydrich's SD had reported that emigration was faltering, "first of all because of the failure to organize effectively the Central Offices for Emigration and a similar failure on the part of the Jewish *Reichsvereinigung;* secondly because of the growing tendency for other countries to lock their doors against immigration."[2] The report might also have made mention of the fact that with each of Hitler's foreign policy successes and conquests more Jews were being added to Germany's territory. The annexation of Austria, then the Sudetenland, and finally the takeover of Czechoslovakia had added at least 300,000 Jews who had to be dealt with. The Nazi conquest of Poland alone had added another 3,000,000, and eventually Nazi acquisitions brought the total number of Jews within the German grip to about 10,000,000.

An emigration policy which had not been able to keep pace with Hitler's peacetime acquisitions fell apart almost completely with the outbreak of war. Yet with each wartime acquisition the Jewish problem took on larger and larger dimensions. It was the Jewish problem on this new level to which Goering addressed himself in July 1941. The imminent collapse of Russia would bring another 4,000,000 Jews (there were no exact figures on the number of Jews in Russia) under Nazi control. If there was to be a solution to the Jewish problem, it would require a drastically new approach.

The spector of 10,000,000 Jews did nothing to weaken the Nazi commitment to finding a solution to the Jewish problem. Having arrived in 1941 at the pinnacle of its power and self-assurance, the Third Reich leadership could finally afford to think in terms of a solution which would be total and final. Questions of world opinion were now, of course, irrelevant, as were the earlier concerns with foreign exchange, immigration quotas, and Jewish Vaticans. A Germany at war with the world's major powers and fully confident of victory was for the first time

2 Report on the Jewish situation in Germany by SD Section II 112, dated June 15, 1939. Himmler File, T175 (411), 2936198.

in a position to define unlimited aims for its Jewish policy. "Fortunately," commented Goebbels on this new situation, "a whole series of possibilities presents itself for us in wartime that would be denied us in peacetime."[3]

From the summer of 1941, the problems of effecting a solution were to be, as Goering suggested to Heydrich, organizational and administrative. Questions related to transport and gas and the harnessing of technical and administrative talents had become paramount. Once these problems had been solved, the limits to any solution of the Jewish problem had to be imposed by the Nazis themselves. The limits became the unthinkable. To this Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau, and their sister camps are the grisly reminders.

We have traced in the preceding chapters the paths which led eventually to the gates of these extermination camps, paths which were by no means direct or, for that matter, charted far in advance. During the early years of the Third Reich no one in the Nazi movement, from the Fuehrer down, had defined what the substance of a solution to the Jewish problem might be. The biological premises of Aryan superiority and Jewish inferiority might logically have led to the conclusion that there was no real problem at all, but the Nazi Aryan was hardly satisfied to bask comfortably in the knowledge of his own superiority. Given the fashion in which the Nazis purported to understand the Jewish problem, one might have expected the biological separation of the races. Yet such a separation came into being relatively late, and even then rather haphazardly in the form of the Nuremberg Laws which were really the product of a Hitlerian afterthought. Only in the broadest sense are the anti-Semitic premises of National Socialism useful in explaining the course which a wide variety of Jewish policies eventually took.

The fact that there was no widespread agreement on what might comprise a solution to the Jewish problem rested ultimately on lack of agreement about the nature of the Jewish

3 Louis P. Lochner, ed., *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-1943* (Garden City, N.Y., 1948), p. 148.

problem itself. To many of those who supported Hitler before 1933 the Jewish problem was an economic one. The exclusion of Jewish competition would undoubtedly have been satisfactory to the vast majority of his lower-middle-class followers. But then Hitler did very little to satisfy the demands of the lower middle classes, the ones to whom he had made the most grandiose promises. To other groups, such as his own SA, the Jews offered a target for venting their addiction to violence. Even here, however, Hitler had to step in when SA violence interfered with the more nonideological aims such as strengthening the traditional economy in order to rearm Germany. By late 1934 it was becoming increasingly clear that a solution to the Jewish problem was not going to come about merely to satisfy the interests of pressures from inside or outside the Nazi movement. When a proposal to institute the formal separation of Jews and Aryans by preventing future interracial marriages crossed Hitler's desk in 1933, it received little if any attention despite the fact that such marriages lay at the heart of what Hitler proclaimed to be the Jewish problem. If there was a logic in the Nazi search for a solution it is not to be found in the premises or even the promises of Nazi propaganda.

The figure of Adolf Hitler during these years of search is a shadowy one. His hand appears only rarely in the actual making of Jewish policy between 1933 and 1938. One can only conclude from this that he occupied his time with more important concerns. In part the vagaries and inconsistencies of Jewish policy during the first five years of Nazi rule stem from his failure to offer guidance. A clear and consistent policy was virtually impossible without the Fuehrer himself making basic decisions or delegating to a subordinate the authority to make such decisions for him. The fact that he avoided both of these options until late 1938 encouraged the independent and often rival policies pursued by factions within the Nazi movement. It also made inevitable the trial and error approach to the Jewish problem which marked the period to November 1938. There were definite advantages for Hitler in such an aloof stance, of course. He could learn from the trials and disassociate himself from the errors.

At no point did Hitler consider retreating on the Jewish issue, an option which his aloofness to the fray left open. There were numerous points at which a quiet retreat would have been possible. In fact there were times when it was feared by the radical racists that Hitler was doing just that. The Nuremberg Laws were followed by Hitler's announcement that the persecution of Jews was to be ended after the discriminatory measures had taken effect. While they were less explicit, the temporary retreats after the boycott of 1933 and the statement that an Aryan clause was not applicable to commerce had seemed to point in a similar direction. These turned out to be no more than tactical retreats, however, or tacit admissions of failure. Naturally these failures were always publicized as significant successes. That has been a politician's prerogative since politics began and Hitler was not the one to violate such a time-honored tradition. What made Hitler different was that he did not accept failure. Reluctant as he was to offer specific guidelines on Jewish policy, he was not looking for a convenient way to abandon the struggle against the Jews.

Each one of the failures during these first years of Nazi rule—whether of boycott, legislation, Aryanization, or emigration—was the signal for renewed effort. The failure of a specific policy or action might discredit a particular group; it did not discourage others from trying their own hand at finding a solution. Failure in these circumstances was relative, of course. The thousands of Jews who suffered from the legislation, who lost their businesses, or professional practices, or were forced to emigrate leaving behind their friends, families, and fortunes would have been hard to convince that Nazi efforts at persecution had failed. That the Nazis considered these efforts to have failed, however, indicates that failure was considered to be anything less than absolute success. If one Jew was boycotted, all Jews had

to be boycotted. If one Jewish business was to be Aryanized, all had to be Aryanized. The same held true for any other policy, be it emigration or finally murder.

The absolute objectives envisioned for these Jewish policies prior to the war virtually insured their failure. No Jewish policy could be pursued in the fantasy world created by Nazi propaganda. After January 30, 1933, this policy, like any other, had to be pursued in a world structured by unemployment, foreign currency shortages, a need for imports, German military weakness, pressures from outside Germany, and the very real fact of bitter intraparty rivalries. The search for a solution to the Jewish problem had been set into motion by the anti-Semitic energies which constituted the heart of Nazism; it was driven forward by the frustrations of each successive failure. A more extreme approach appeared to be the only alternative to the less-than-total solutions which had proved unsatisfactory or unworkable.

The manner in which these various Jewish policies were pursued is highly revealing of the nature of the Nazi movement itself. Both Nazi propaganda and the totalitarian model later used to explain the functioning of the Nazi system tried to make of it a monolithic structure. It was nothing of the sort. The gruesome efficiency of the wartime death camps came only after the voices of numerous contestants for control over Jewish policy had been silenced. It took violence and bloodshed to satisfy the SA. The lower party apparatus could be ignored, while those of the stripe of Rosenberg and Streicher could be shunted aside by allowing them to engage in essentially irrelevant propaganda or research. The party slogan, "Complete authority from above; absolute obedience from below," which supposedly gave substance to Hitler's *Fuehrerprinzip* was, as we have seen, rarely applied to Jewish policy until after the *Kristallnacht*.

The *Fuehrerprinzip* model, at least as it was understood by Hitler, does little to explain the workings of the Nazi system.

It has recently been suggested that feudalism serves as a more useful model for understanding Nazi authority relationships.[4] The suggestion that Hitler held and wielded power less as an absolute dictator than as a feudal lord helps to explain his peculiar neutrality to the bitter rivalries seething between party factions beneath him. Not until he had seen the direction these struggles were taking and assessed the advantage he might gain from them did he intervene. The factional struggle for control over Jewish policy was not resolved until late 1938, after the SS had clearly emerged with the most effective proposals for a solution. Then, and only then, did Hitler commission it to prepare a coordinated policy toward the Jews.

That Hitler was able to contain the rivalries and maintain his position at the top of this tangled and shifting hierarchy is testimony to his political acuity and charismatic power.[5] It was the Jew who helped hold Hitler's system together—on the practical as well as the ideological level. The Jew allowed Hitler to ignore the long list of economic and social promises he had made to the SA, the lower party apparatus, and the lower middle classes. By steering the attention of these groups away from their more genuine grievances and toward the Jew, Hitler succeeded in blunting the edge of their revolutionary wrath, leaving him freer to pursue his own nonideological goals of power in cooperation with groups whose influence he had once promised to weaken or even destroy. An ideological retreat on the Jewish issue in these circumstances was impossible. Even the tactical retreats served to remind segments of his following of a long list of unfulfilled promises. The continued search for a solution to the Jewish problem allowed Hitler to maintain ideological contact with elements of his movement for whom National Socialism had done very little. This situation, which Hitler had

[4] Robert Koehl, "Feudal Aspects of National Socialism," *American Political Science Review* 54 (December 1960): 921-933.

[5] See Joseph Nyomarky, *Charisma and Factionalism in the Nazi Party* (Minneapolis, 1967), pp. 9-15.

created for himself, made the Jewish problem and the promise of its solution a functional necessity. When such a necessity was supported also by the convictions of a Hitler and a Himmler there could be no retreat. The search had to continue, whatever the obstacles. Out of these circumstances emerged the logic of the boycott, and finally of the extermination camp.