

The American Jewish Committee Assesses the Situation of the Jews in Germany (March 1, 1935, and June 1, 1937)

Abstract

The American Jewish Committee (AJC), first established in 1906, is a leading Jewish advocacy organization in the United States. Over the course of the twentieth century, the organization lobbied the federal government on behalf of America's sizeable Jewish population—dealing with a swath of issues, including immigration and the advancement of civil rights. After the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany, the AJC took a keen interest in the treatment of Jews abroad, particularly in Central Europe. The organization lobbied on behalf of German and other European Jews as they tried to flee Nazi persecution.

These reports by the AJC show the attention that American Jews paid to the growing persecution of Germany's Jews. The first report was written in 1935, before the passage of the Nuremberg Laws; the second dates from June 1937, almost a year before the state-sanctioned pogrom of November 9, 1938 (also known as *Kristallnacht*). The reports reveal initial optimism over small acts of resistance, but this optimism devolves over time into growing skepticism about whether Hitler and his government would rein in their antisemitic policies. With each subsequent report, the antisemitic attacks broadened and deepened: Nazi racism reached from the popular press to the education of children. Germany's Jews were subjected to discrimination in most areas of life. Few found protection in Germany's legal system, and as emigration increasingly became the only option for survival, it was proving to be a difficult path to pursue. These were the realities of Jewish life in Nazi Germany—and they are reported not from within Central Europe but from across the Atlantic Ocean.

Source

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
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NOT FOR PUBLICATION

The Situation of the Jews in Germany

I. LEGAL STATUS

Although the depths of brutal discrimination against the Jews in Nazi Germany have been reached, there is no end to the rumors that the more radical members of the National Socialist Party are pressing forward for dis-enfranchisement of non-Aryans by forcing them to accept a formal second-class legal status. However, this question is considered under the present regime, of slight importance because in effect the Jews of Germany have already second-class position.

[...]

III. ANTI-JEWISH PROPAGANDA

The press campaign continues to be led by the larger Nazi papers which are stressing with great vigor the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" as proof of an international Jewish conspiracy. These papers seem to have been stimulated to activity by the growing independence and confidence of such "liberal" journals as the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which in rather mild terms attempt to counter-balance propaganda by an effort of impartiality. For example, when some weeks ago a gathering of Nazi doctors in Nuremberg, after a speech by Herr Streicher, passed a unanimous resolution demanding the death penalty for any Jew having sexual relations with Aryan women, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* dared to raise a very careful protest. It was immediately attacked by Goebbels "Angriff" and other Nazi journals. Despite this fact, the first protest against Streicher's rabid policy came forth on February 14th from health officials and the German Medical Society. The protest consisted of a letter to Chancellor Hitler, signed by the President of the Reich Health Office and the State Health Commissioners of Bavaria, Baden, Saxony, Thuringia and Wurtemberg, followed by a public statement from Dr. Gerhard Wagner, the leader of the German Medical Society. Although they expressed approval of Streicher's "fight against Judaism," they condemned his attempt to do away with vaccination and the use of other serums made by Jews.

But the patience of the Jews in Germany has been exhausted by the insults constantly disseminated in *Der Stuermer*, and circulating especially in the schools. A new feature of Streicher's newspaper is a section called "Jewish Want Ads," which contains such shameless vulgarities as advertisements for "a blond Aryan *shiksa* for a sexually ripe eleven-year-old boy." Another announces the sale of "good Jewish wine mixed with Jewish blood." A third advertises that an "unemployed rabbi wishes to give lessons in the Talmudic lore of homosexuality." As a result of the Saar plebiscite, also, the false allegation has been made that Max Braun, the Social Democratic Saarlander leader, is a Jew. The *Reichsvertretung* of German Jews issued an official statement signed by Rabbi Leo Baeck and Otto Hirsch repudiating this allegation. Meanwhile, the Jewish organizations in Germany are quietly attempting to combat some of the grosser libels cast upon their name. For example, the Central Verein für Deutschen Juden [sic] published a new edition of its pamphlet refuting the blood-ritual murder accusation.

IV. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

However, Jewish pupils in some public schools still are subjected to the most intense humiliation. At some institutions, they are required to have a students' card differing in color from those carried by non-Jewish students; in some they are required to sit apart from the other students; in many, they are excluded from student dining rooms and libraries. Happily this is true of only a small proportion of the public schools. But, Nazi "racial science" has now become a compulsory study in all schools throughout Germany. As a measure of mercy, classes in racial science are to be held on Saturdays, and Jewish children are to be allowed to remain at home.

V. LEGISLATION AND THE COURTS

Until the present, the Jews of Germany have had but one recourse — prevented as they were from retaining their professional positions and from emigrating, kept out of agriculture and the Labor Front. They have, despite the boycott, been permitted to begin new small businesses. However, a new decree has just prohibited the opening of new retail shops without a special license from the government. The Aryan clause will undoubtedly be applied in this connection also.

In the law courts Jews seem to have fared somewhat better, especially in the Higher Courts. The "Frankfurter Zeitung" was able to publish several cases where the rights of Jews were upheld by the judges. This seems to be evidence of a change of attitude among the members of the upper middle class, to which the judges belong, toward the Nazis. Apparently, this class is beginning to realize the plebian manner and crude ways of so many of the Nazi leaders. The "Peoples' [sic] Court," also, meets with the resentment of those judges who still attempt to preserve certain principles of justice. Although the judges cannot openly express their political opposition to the Nazi party, they do so indirectly in this

manner: by attempting to safeguard the rights of Jews whenever possible.

[...]

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The Jews in Germany Today

A Survey of the Current Anti-Jewish Campaign Conducted by the National Socialists

The deadly monotony of relentless persecution that has characterized the plight of the German Jews in the past few months was smashed recently when the Nazi regime suddenly descended on the German branches of the B'nai B'rith, dissolved the organization, and took over its sanatoria and homes for the aged, flinging their Jewish inmates into the street.

The mass arrests and expropriations that followed marked another new twist in the tortuous Nazi policy toward the Jews in Germany. It ended the period of "cold pogrom," and brought home once again the day-to-day brutality in the life of the nearly 400,000 Jews still remaining in Germany.

La Guardia Incident Marks New Trend

The new and vigorous trend was made dramatic in typical Nazi fashion following the curious German press attack on New York's mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia for a remark no more vigorous than many others he has uttered. The acrimony that marked the Nazi attack on the American mayor was the signal for the renewed anti-Jewish outburst in the Reich. As has been their practice before, the Nazis insisted that they were insulted. They ended by revenging themselves—upon the Jews.

In recent months there has been a paucity of news concerning persecution of Jews in the Reich. It appeared as though the Hitler government was satisfied that the Nuremberg laws of 1935 had gone as far as any anti-Jewish program could go, short of physical terror, to accomplish the Nazis' aims—as though a *status quo* had been established under which the complete elimination of the Jews from German life was to become a routine affair.

But this routine, which had grown so commonplace that it no longer aroused special comment in the world outside, involved the continued boycott of those Jewish businesses which still existed in the German Reich; the continued stirring up of mob hatred against a tiny minority; the unceasing attacks on the morals of the German Jews; and the continuation and enforcement of all the systematic laws, decrees, regulations, and promulgations which have emanated from the Brown House in Munich.

Routine Persecution Too Slow for Nazis

The more recent events in Germany indicate, however, that the Nazis have decided to abandon this routine as too slow and that they will no longer abide even by their own laws in the conduct of their anti-Jewish campaign. Any law, no matter how harsh, the Nazis have apparently decided, offers some measure of protection to their victims; therefore the methods of "legal procedure" against the Jews are to be abandoned.

Thus, the recent raids on the B'nai B'rith lodges, the banning of Jewish meetings, the closing down of Jewish institutions, and the dissolution of Jewish clubs, all mark a new shift in Nazi tactics. The

extermination of German Jews is to be speeded up. The job has been turned over to the Gestapo, the Secret State Police.

Secret Police Try Hand at Jew-Baiting

The Gestapo's major task is to eliminate all Jews from the economic life of Germany. Until now, Jewish businessmen have been afforded some measure of protection by the fact that no "Aryan clause" was even enacted in the economic field. But the Gestapo knows no law. Its activities are carried on without regard for legal procedure and there is no appeal for its decisions.

[...]

Emigration Becomes More Difficult

Slowly but surely, German Jewry is being reduced to a state of utter helplessness. The few avenues of escape open to them formerly are now gradually closing against them. Even emigration, the one solution to the Jewish problem of which the Nazi regime seemed to approve, is made increasingly difficult. The Gestapo has closed up a number of Hachscharah (training) colonies where hundreds of young Jewish men and women were being trained for new occupations before leaving Germany. They have also closed most of the schools where Jewish youth were learning the Hebrew language preparatory to emigration to Palestine.

There appears to be no logical explanation for the Gestapo's activities. Some of them are in fact directly contradictory to the expressed policy of the Nazi regime. Until now the Nazis have maintained that it is their purpose to exclude Jews from German life. On the other hand, the Jews were to be permitted and even required to develop their own cultural and communal life. The Gestapo, however, is utter contemptuous of such legalistic attitudes. Its goal is the complete ex-termination of German Jewry, and its methods are not bound by any legal measures.

Thus, the Gestapo closed down, without warning, the only sanatorium in Germany for tubercular Jews. Since Jews are not admitted into "Aryan" institutions, this malicious action deprived Jewish sufferers of the only means of obtaining relief. Another recent measure was the eleventh-hour ban of the conference of the Reich Federation of Jewish Youth, which was scheduled to be held in Berlin. No reason was given for either of these two acts.

But Old-Line Jew-Baiting Continues

While the Gestapo has now taken the lead in the anti-Jewish campaign, other Nazi organizations have not slackened their activities. And, even before the Gestapo's ax of confiscation and expropriation finally falls, the Jewish merchant is harassed by boycott, by the cutting off of supplies, by frequent arrest without cause and by the stream of incessant anti-Jewish propaganda. The various sections of the Nazi party and individual government bureaus are vying with each other for first honors in the drive against the Jews. Daily, new restricting regulations are put into effect, new boycott proclamations published. Some of these new regulations are astonishing in their pettiness. Example: The recent order of the Reich Press Chamber instructing newspapers not to publish notices concerning Synagogue service. Other examples: An order prohibiting Jews from playing the music of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and other "Aryan" composers; a Gestapo order permitting Jews to join the Jewish Automobile Club (the only motor club they may join at all) only if they sign a pledge promising to counteract anti-Nazi propaganda and promote German exports while travelling abroad in their cars.

Generally, however, these regulations fit well into the Nazi pattern. Most of them are aimed at those Jews who, while they own no property which can be expropriated or business which they can be forced to liquidate, still manage to eke out a livelihood. A recent order by the Minister of Education, Dr. Rust,

prohibited “non-Aryans” from giving private lessons or teaching in private schools. The Reich Ministry of the Interior announced that an unemployed German will receive no financial assistance if he consults a Jewish physician or lawyer. At the same time it declared that medical certificates issued by Jewish physicians will not be considered valid. The same Ministry also ordered Jewish employers to discharge all Jewish employees of foreign citizenship.

Streicher on the Rampage

Meanwhile, Julius Streicher, publisher of the pornographic *Stürmer* and Germany’s leading anti-Semite, has been increasing his activity. Shortly after the Nuremberg rally last September, Streicher summoned the tax collectors of Franconia and demanded that they rid the province of Jews. He instructed them to institute a new system of business licenses which resulted in the elimination of all Jewish rag dealers in his district, more than 2000 food merchants, and about fifty corn dealers.

Streicher’s special contribution to the 1936 Nuremberg rally was a special edition of his *Stürmer*, entitled “Jewish World Conspiracy,” which contained a condensed version of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” This was followed by another special edition in which Streicher announced the “discovery” of a “ritual murder” case in Germany. The *Stürmer* had been reprinting stories of historical “ritual murder” trials and, as a climax, Streicher decided to produce a “living example.” The case he trumped up involved the murder of a Christian girl in an East Prussian town more than eighteen years ago. Although the murderer, also a Gentile, had been apprehended and convicted immediately after the crime, Streicher presented “proof” that the real murderer was a Jewish butcher of that town. This “proof” consists of the statement of a young Storm-Trooper that when he confronted this Jewish butcher with the charge of having murdered a Christian girl eighteen years ago, the butcher’s face “became deathly pale.”

“Stürmer” Influence Increases

Streicher’s influence in Germany is increasing. The circulation of his sheet has risen considerably, and recently he announced that 131 “display boxes” for the *Stürmer* have been established in various cities all over Germany. These boxes have been placed in hospitals, schools and other public buildings. The Thuringia authorities, who ordered that all illustrations depicting Old-Testament subjects be removed from the school-rooms, accompanied this order with a request that the *Stürmer* be used for the purpose of religious instruction as much as possible.

No Schooling for Jewish Children

The introduction of the *Stürmer* and other anti-Semitic literature into the public school system apparently serves a double purpose. The first is, of course, to instill Jew-hatred from early childhood. The other is far more subtle and is designed to pull the Nazis out of a dilemma.

In September 1935, the Nazi government announced that in keeping with its plan to segregate the Jews it would establish special schools for Jewish children. This aroused the opposition of the extreme radicals among the Nazis who object to the building of permanent institutions for Jews, since that would imply permanence in the German Jewish status. This opposition has been strong enough to prevent the government from carrying out its original plan. At the same time, however, Nazi extremists insisted that Jewish children be removed from German schools. The introduction of anti-Jewish literature, causing the voluntary withdrawal of the Jewish children, accomplishes this purpose admirably. Today there are practically no Jews in the German elementary schools.

The Nazis have made remarkable progress in the field of juvenile anti-Semitic literature. A young Kindergarten teacher, Elvira Bauer, with the aid of the inevitable *Stürmer*, recently brought out a new Nazi fairy-tale book, with twenty-one brightly colored pictures showing horrible-visaged “non-Aryans,” cheating, seducing, and poisoning handsome “Aryans.” Most interesting is the section depicting German

children pointing a finger of scorn at these Jewish monsters and laughing joyously at their discomfiture.

Source: American Jewish Committee, “The Situation of the Jews in Germany” (March 1, 1935) and “The Jews in Germany Today” (June 1, 1937); reprinted in Francis R. Nicosia and David Scrase, eds., *Jewish Life in Nazi Germany: Dilemmas and Responses*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2010, pp. 190–94, 200–07. Reprinted with permission.

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