

Gershom Scholem on His Brother Werner (Retrospective Account, 1977)

Abstract

Arthur and Betty Scholem's four sons testify to the range of political inclinations among German Jews. Reinhold, the oldest (1891–1985), was a member of the national liberal German People's Party (DVP). Erich (1893–1965) joined the liberal German Democratic Party (DDP). Gershom Scholem, the youngest of the four (1897–1982), became a Zionist and emigrated to Palestine in 1923. Gershom's next oldest brother, Werner (1895–1940), took yet another path: after a brief flirtation with Zionism as a sixteen-year-old in the Young Judah Circle [*Jung Juda Kreis*], he joined the Social Democratic Workers' Youth [*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterjugend*] in late 1912 and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in 1913. In 1917, after the breakup of the SPD, he became a member of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD). Then, in December 1920, together with his party's left wing, he left the USPD and joined the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). However, as a member of the extreme left fraction, he fell victim to internal power struggles and was expelled from the Communist Party on November 5, 1926. In 1933, after the Reichstag fire, Werner Scholem was taken into "protective custody," and in 1935 he was sent to the Torgau concentration camp. From there he was transferred to Dachau (1937) and Buchenwald (1938), where he was murdered on July 17, 1940.

Source

With my brother Werner I had a variety of contacts again following my return from Berne. Right after the end of the war he had plunged into politics, at first still in the ranks of the USPD [Independent German Socialist Party]. On my way to Berlin I stopped off to visit him in Halle, where he was editing the local party newspaper. A discussion flared up on whether a man like himself could really appear as a representative of the proletariat (the Leuna Works near Halle were a stronghold of the USPD). I accompanied him to a rally at which he spoke and kept my eyes and ears open. My brother was not untalented as a demagogue. "Don't fool yourself," I told him, "they'll applaud your speech and probably they'll elect you a deputy at the next election [which was his ambition], but behind your back nothing will change." I heard one of the workers say to his colleagues: "The Jew [not 'our comrade'] makes a nice speech."

Source: Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem. Memories of My Youth*. Translated from the German by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, p. 144

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