

THE JEWS IN PLANS FOR POSTWAR GERMANY

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Many of the Anti-Nazi political exiles who prepared plans for postwar Germany believed that it would not be easy to remove the Nazi anti-Semitic laws. While the postwar projects of socialists included the full restoration of citizenship to all German Jews, the planning of other exiles was based on prevalent stereotypes of Jewish "otherness" and rejected the return of Jews to Germany. They basically approved, on pragmatic grounds, legal discriminatory measures against the Jews, and articulated them in schemes which were similar to those drawn up by the German conservative opposition in the Third Reich. In the postwar plans of both of them—the exiles and the conservative opposition—the Jews were considered a foreign body which should not be reintegrated in a future German society, but given a territory beyond the borders of Europe.

I

As the Third Reich was rapidly moving towards a debacle, the future of postwar Germany began to be discussed by the parties involved in the conflict. In plans drafted by the Allies there were those who preached generosity and forgiveness at one extreme and those who advocated a punitive revenge policy on the other. Some proposed that by depriving the Germans of sovereignty they would be relieved of the burdens of statehood for which they were

Jewish Political Studies Review 14:3-4 (Fall 2002)

not prepared. Others recommended that the Germans be permitted to function as a nation, but their weapons be taken away from them, their education supervised and they be placed under political guardianship. Once Germany was to reform she would be restored as an equal member of the international community of nations. The differences notwithstanding, the chief goals of all the Allies' arrangements were Germany's disarmament, demilitarization, denazification and democratization.¹

As to the return of the Jews to Germany, postwar planning of the Allies foresaw that Nazi anti-Semitism would continue to be an important factor after Hitler was gone. For example, a study conducted by the Foreign Policy Association in the USA assessed that the anti-Semitism instilled by the Nazis, was bound to rise even further in the wake of Jewish repatriation. Not only because of the inroads made by Nazi propaganda, but also because the appropriation of Jewish possessions and jobs created a large group of people with vested interests in Jews not returning.

The estimation that anti-Semitism would not disappear with Hitler's defeat was based on the views expressed by ordinary Germans when asked how they viewed postwar Germany. For example, interrogated in April 1945 by American intelligence on the future of democracy in Germany, a former high official of the Weimar Republic and outspoken opponent of anti-Semitism remarked: "Without discriminating against Jews, it is unwise to put too many German-Jewish refugees into leading positions in the German administration, because even people who were not anti-Semitic have been infected by anti-Jewish propaganda."² Similarly, the US Joint Intelligence Collection Agency from the North African Branch wrote, on 12 April 1945, a report on the views of a group of German refugees from the Rhineland placed in Algiers. The report stated that the refugees reacted unfavorably when information from the Rhineland tended to confirm the allegation by German radio that the Allies had installed Jews as mayors of most liberated Rhineland cities. A leading Catholic lay member of the refugees, whose views, in the American intelligence assessment, represented the considered opinion of the group, affirmed that the imposition of an overwhelming number of Jews could lead to negative repercussions among the population.³

Dissenters with Hitler's policy in Germany who realized that the Nazis would eventually lose the war, also began planning the postwar era, and traveled to neutral countries to put out feelers towards the western Allies and to negotiate Germany's future. Some of these attempts were in vain. Prince Max Hohenlohe, for

example, tried unsuccessfully to meet the British in Madrid. Equally fruitless were Hitler's personal surgeon Ferdinand Sauerbruch's attempts to contact Allied representatives in Bern. Others, however, reached their objective. A case in point was the talks held in Sweden at the end of May 1942 between the German clergyman Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who actively opposed the Nazis, and George Kennedy Bell, the bishop of Chichester. As the purpose of the meeting was to give information on the opposition movements inside Germany and give assurances for postwar policy, the fate of postwar Jews was included in the discussions. Bonhoeffer pledged the immediate repeal of the Nuremberg laws and cooperation in convening an international conference on the Jewish question.⁴

The Jewish issue in post-Hitler Germany was also raised in off-the-record talks of German diplomats and third parties. For example, in mid-August 1944, a member of the staff of the German legation in Stockholm, pointed out to Ignas Scheynius, a Lithuanian author who was acting as an intermediary between the Nazis and the Allies that: "the greatest obstacle against a settlement between Germany and the Western Allies is the Jewish question." The German diplomat warned that it would be unwise for the Allies to compel Germany to take back all the expelled Jews. Should this occur, the latter would undoubtedly feel that they were great victors and react defiantly. Furthermore, he said, "one must reckon with the fact that the intensive and protracted persecution of the Jews has left its impression on the German population. Their over-hasty return could have a highly irritating effect. Patience and discretion are necessary in this respect."⁵

Even before Germany's defeat was in the offing, anti-Nazi political exiles also began preparing plans for postwar Germany. Suffice it to mention just a few of them. In December 1942, the former Reich Chancellor Joseph Wirth, exiled in Switzerland, handed over an unsigned memorandum to the British and American legations in Bern. It is not clear whether his memorandum was an initiative of German opposition circles who used Wirth as an intermediary—for he had apparently been contacted by an emissary from Berlin in early December 1942—or Wirth acted on his own account.⁶ Whatever the case, the document analyzed what had led to Germany's misfortunes. Without admitting the responsibility of the Germans for what had happened, it attributed the calamities to impersonal historical forces. Wirth suggested that after the war Germany should be reorganized along strictly democratic and federated lines with a high degree of local autonomy. The main motif of Wirth's memo was increased federalism

to counterweigh prussianism; the establishment of a government similar to the one in Switzerland and abolition of the Reich's presidency. At the end, the memo stated briefly that freedom of religion would be reestablished and race discrimination and anti-Semitism abolished.

Half a year later, Frederick Proewig, a conservative Bavarian, living in New York, presented a memorandum to the American Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles. This memo boasted to represent the views of democratic Bavarians who had found refuge in the USA. These criticized the centralistic German Reich of the past and suggested a reconstruction program for the future Germany.⁷ The memorandum planned a home-rule for Bavaria and recommended that victims of racial and political discrimination be granted reparations from a fund created from money which would be levied from the Nazis by compelling them to continue their former Nazi party membership fees. Not a word was said in this program on what would be done with the Jews in postwar Germany.

A third plan was formulated by Erich Koch Weser. Weser, who left for a settlement in the state of Parana in Brazil in 1933, had been the chairman of the Democratic Party for ten years and served his country during the early 1920s as vice-chancellor, minister of the Interior and minister of Justice. In May 1944, a few months before his death, he composed a study which carried the title *Wie konnte es geschehen?* [How could it happen?].⁸ This attempt to explain the factors that led to Nazism and to plan on how to treat Germany after the war failed to mention the fate of the Jews in the postwar years.

Finally, a group of German political refugees in Sweden, mainly socialists, presented, in August 1943, a memorandum with different plans for postwar Germany to Hershel V. Johnson of the American Legation in Stockholm.⁹ This communication, like other socialist postwar projects, ignored the postwar Jewish issue. Those that did not ignore it, referred only briefly to the future of the Jews. For instance, the programmatic declaration of January 1934, given by the Executive Board of the SPD in Prague and its condemnation of the extermination issued in December 1942, stated that after Hitler's fall, the SPD will demand the revocation of all forms of discrimination and the abolition of all specific and exceptional laws against the Jews. Furthermore, inasmuch as the new democratic Germany will be in a position to indemnify the victims of Hitler's dictatorship, the exiled SPD committed itself to compensate those who were persecuted on the grounds of their religion, political convictions or racial origin. This principle, it

said, will also prevail with regard to the restoration of their former German citizenship to all political refugees or German Jews, unless the concerned persons will voluntarily relinquish such a restoration of German citizenship. It is noteworthy, however, that SPD politicians admitted on several occasions that to remove completely and without compromise the Nazi policies of discrimination against Jews would not be an easy task in view of the effects of the Nazis' anti-Semitic propaganda.

II

Not all anti-Nazi exiles shared the stand of German socialists. The postwar planning of some of them was based on accepted assumptions of Jewish "otherness" prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s and rejected the return of Jews to Germany in a postwar arrangement. They were indeed against Hitler's anti-Semitic policy, but to oppose it was one thing and to have a selective perception of Jews and attribute them negative traits as a group, quite another. Their criticism of Jews was not religious or political, but rather a sociological anti-Judaism. They defined the number of Jews in the intellectual world in negative terms; they were apprehensive about what they considered Jews' excessive influence, considered disproportionate to their numbers; they affirmed that Jews as a community cannot be absorbed in organic societies to which they are alien in some way. Consequently, if the Jews were not to disappear through assimilation—and their reception was conditioned by improvement—then they should be segregated from national bodies and considered as a minority, or leave Europe.

Some of these anti-Nazi exiles basically approved, on pragmatic grounds, legal discriminatory measures against the Jews. Sharing the image that, in many fields of German life, the number of Jews was much higher than their relative percentage in the population, they concluded that the real source of anti-Semitism was the Jews themselves, who foment animosity against them by seeking power and being too conspicuous. A case in point of an anti-Nazi émigré who held these views is Wilhelm Abegg, a former member of the German Democratic Party (DDP) and of the Republican paramilitary organization Reichsbanner. Abegg had also been a secretary of State in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior for 12 years, and in this capacity was head of the police until his resignation in 1932.

In January 1944, a correspondent of the Associated Press met a group of German émigrés who had found refuge in Switzerland.

He then confidentially gave the American consul general in Zurich a general transcript of his conversations with them.¹⁰ Among those interviewed were the above mentioned Wilhelm Abegg and Joseph Wirth, the former minister, president of Prussia and labor leader, Otto Braun, and the Bavarian former member of the Reichstag, Wilhelm Hoegner.

When asked on the Jewish question not much was said. Otto Braun expressed the common stereotypes that the *Ostjuden* (Jews from Eastern Europe who had settled in Germany) were the source of anti-Semitism in Germany. He emphasized that Germany and German Jewry had always lived happily together and it was the infiltration of a large number of Eastern Jews that had made Hitler's anti-Semitism succeed.

Abegg, though, was much more outspoken in his views. He expressed his total opposition to an indiscriminate return of Jews to Germany and suggested an international action to find permanent haven for them outside Europe. In his opinion, the Jews suffered from such a world prejudice that they developed a unique cunning, at least in financial questions. What is more, the Jews were not only sly, but also aggressively pushy. Events such as Kurt Eisner's Soviet republic in Bavaria, and the corresponding experiences of Bela Kun in Hungary and Leon Trotsky in Russia, fully proved to him "that they had pushed themselves forward and conquered many of the best positions, but they had failed practically everywhere because of their arrogance."

Labeling Jews with negative collective traits was not exceptional in German society, but what is notable is that such uncritical acceptance of these prejudices on irritating Jewish practices and on the pernicious effects of "Jewish" traits found fertile soil in anti-Nazi circles as well. To be sure, Abegg did not attach racial peculiarities to Jews, but definitely ascribed them harmful behavioral characteristics. It is immaterial that he attributed their negative traits to socio-economic factors, rather than to the Jews' inherent makeup, as a Nazi would have done. By the mere attempt to explain the behavior of Eisner, Bela Kun and Trotsky, by reference to group properties, Abegg was stereotyping them, and from there it is a short step to the argument that the Jews are themselves to be blamed for their persecution since they provoke it by their behavior.

Abegg cautioned in his interview that a return of the Jews would be fatal for themselves and for the world's peace, despite the greatly reduced number of Jews through the extermination policy conducted by the Third Reich. A few prominent and, in every respect, pure Jewish families, he conceded, should be per-

mitted to return if they desire to come back. A mass return would, however, result only in bringing real anti-Semitism into Germany, which so far had merely been—except for a fanatic minority—“ordered attitudes.” The reason, Abegg said, was apparent: the impoverished Germans abruptly disillusioned from plans of world domination would tend to conclude from a mass return of the Jews that Jewry was Germany’s great adversary and victor.

What should be done then, with those who would survive the Holocaust? Abegg suggested that “the countries which accepted refugees will be unwilling and unable to keep the refugee Jews and therefore a new League of Nations will have to open up means for an organic migration and shelter.” In his view, “there were large and beautiful territories available for settlement including some specially favoured regions of the world. And it must be considered that numerous countries, for instance in South America, so far hardly had Jews and that they have a really Christian attitude and lack of prejudice against the Jews. In these countries the problem is not that of religion or race, but that of white or colored, and the strengthening of the white element could become of great importance.”

As a final point, it appeared to Abegg that the first remedy against anti-Semitism would be a revision of the Jews’ names. He believed that the Jewish problem would become different in all the countries of the world if the names of families or personalities would not betray their religion and origin. The Jews, he said, should in every country be given free choice either to adopt customary general names or to remain a minority with the resulting dangers and disadvantages. The latter group would include Zionists and Orthodox Jews, who constitute a negligible fraction of the total of the Jews. The others, forming the majority, would, within a short period of time, become amalgamated in the other peoples and probably also accept their faith.

These views were not just private opinions given off record to a journalist. The same opinions were included in a memorandum entitled “Internal Reorganization of Postwar Germany” which Abegg handed over in January 1944 to the American consul in Zurich who, in turn, conveyed it to the US legation in Bern.¹¹ This document, which discussed the political administration of Germany and its political and social reorganization, contains an entire section on the Jewish question which basically reaffirms the same beliefs put forth in his interview. Furthermore, in the memo Abegg added supplementary restrictions to the return of Jews. For example, that the return of German exiled journalists, most of whom were Jews, to their former place of work should only be

permitted in special and isolated cases, and this because there was a manifest danger of allowing Jews to be active in this field.

Let us analyze what Abegg is saying. To begin with, it is clear that his opposition to anti-Semitism and support for pragmatic policies of discrimination were not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. By espousing the idea that in many fields of German life the number of Jews was much higher than their relative percentage in the population, he actually asserted that while the Jews certainly deserved state protection, the state must also protect itself from the notorious *Verjudung* (Judaization) and demanded of the Jews that they refrain from any act that would undermine the state's German character. From here there is also a short step to conclude that the real source of anti-Semitism were the Jews themselves who foment animosity against them by being too conspicuous.

How typical or widespread were these views among anti-Nazi exiles is difficult to establish. Nevertheless, the fact that they were the basis of a memorandum for the solution of the Jewish question in postwar Europe, composed in June 1945 by the Free Germany Movement in Switzerland, at least indicates that they were not eccentric, for this organization comprised anti-Nazis of different political camps. It included Catholic exiles, followers of the protestant theologian Karl Barth, former members of the German State Party, social democrats, communists and apoliticals.¹²

In August 1945, the Free Germany Movement handed over this memorandum, undoubtedly composed by Abegg, to the ambassadors of the USA, England and France in Bern, with a copy to the German consul in Zurich. On the one hand, a vigorous anti-Nazi line runs through the whole document. In no uncertain terms it denounces Nazi racial theory and unequivocally repudiates the Nazis' restriction of Jewish rights. The basic argument of this document, however, revolves around the concept that Jews are an alien element in Germany and in Europe. As in Abegg's aforementioned interview and memorandum of January 1944, it claimed that Jews have unpleasant characteristics, which are attributed not to racial traits but from the Jewish dealings with money, which brought them to clash with the host nation. For that reason, it affirmed, the Nazis simply fuelled pre-existing anti-Semitic feelings and strengthened existing attitudes.

Coming to the question of the Jews' return to Germany, the anxiety becomes apparent. A true democrat would have espoused a restoration of rights and a measure of financial reparation, and left the Jews' return to their native lands, should they so desire, as an open possibility. The author of the memorandum, however,

again demanded that, with the exception of a few unique cases of well-established Jewish families, Jews not be allowed to return to Germany. And since anti-Semitism was a significant phenomenon even in countries in which it did not previously exist, including the United States, the survivors of the Holocaust must realize that they have nowhere to return and should leave for Latin America.

It is also noteworthy that, while in 1944 Abegg recommended not to allow the return of Jewish journalists, the memorandum amplifies his recommendations of discriminatory steps even against those “few prominent Jewish families of demonstrably stainless reputation.” It now suggested that measures be taken to prevent them from climbing to leadership positions. Abegg’s rationale is plain—this arrangement would benefit the Jews as well, as in their attempt to penetrate places not meant for them they encourage anti-Semitism. Thus, it was imperative to allow many years to pass before Jews were allowed to reach important posts.

Upon reading these documents, it is hard not to see the commonalities between Abegg’s schemes and the plans for the Jews of the German conservative opposition in the Third Reich, formulated by Carl Goerdeler and by Constantin von Dietze. For Goerdeler, the solution of the Jewish question after the war was the establishment of a Jewish state in parts of Canada or South America and granting German citizenship only to a small, elitist minority of Jews willing to assimilate completely. Likewise, Constantin von Dietze, of the Freiburg circle, made legal discrimination conditional on the number of Jews returning to Germany, and believed that discrimination was unnecessary because “the number of surviving returning Jews would be so small that they would pose no threat to the German people.”¹³

It is important to point out that people like Abegg, Goerdeler, and von Dietze were all anti-Nazis. Yet, when it came to the Jewish question, beneath their superficial formal opposition to Nazi anti-Semitism, they basically approved, on pragmatic grounds, legal discriminatory measures against the Jews. They would evidently not subscribe to the crude stereotypes that placed the Jews outside the universe of moral obligation, yet viewed them as a category that was separate from their realm, thus perpetuating the myths of Jewish otherness. Their solutions for postwar German Jews are typical of those who understood that since the state was to be both German-Christian and constitutional, Jews who wished to be citizens and maintain their Judaism would have to accept an inferior status.

There is no doubt that Abegg, Goerdeler, and von Dietze were sincerely horrified by Hitler’s extermination policy, but this did

not influence their planning or the postwar reeducation of the German population. Jews were a foreign body causing constant disturbance who should not be reintegrated in a future German society, but given a territory beyond the borders of Europe.

III

There is a temptation to take the facile, Goldhagenish point of view of imputing just anti-Semitic motivation to the postwar planning of the German opposition and exiles vis-a-vis the Jewish question. Their prejudices, however, have to be historicized and seen in the context in which the anti-Nazis operated. Firstly, these are not uniquely German views. Research has shown that similar distinctions were made in other European countries as well. Asher Cohen, for example, has convincingly shown that many Frenchmen classified the Jews of France into three groups: non-citizen immigrants and foreigners, naturalized Jews, which included their children born in France, and native Jews who had lived in France for generations. Only the latter were recognized as truly French. The clandestine journal *Les Cahiers*, which was published in Paris by the center-right underground group OCM (L'Organisation Civile et Militaire), advocated a similar distinction in its discussion of national minorities and the Jewish question. Like Abegg, the writers of the clandestine publication recognized the existence of anti-Semitism all over Europe and, while rejecting racism, advocated citizenship only to Jews who had lived for at least three generations in France, and even they, wrote the French resisters, would be given the status of a protected non-Christian minority.¹⁴ Furthermore, like the above-mentioned German diplomat who warned that a return of Jews could have a decidedly infuriating consequence and that therefore discretion was necessary, also in France underground circles were asking the Jews to be discreet. An article by Gabriel Marcel, in the *Cahiers du Témoignage Chrétien* for example, which touched upon the question of Jews' behavior after the liberation, strongly advised them to be "discreet in their demands."¹⁵

It is in this context that Abegg's opinions are best viewed. He was very pessimistic in his assessment of conditions in the postwar period. He believed that postwar conditions in Germany would be chaotic, and that the country would not be ready for party politics as the people would not know what to do in a democratic state. Following the years of Nazi dictatorship, he was

convinced that it would be necessary, for a certain period, to continue a dictatorial regime imposed by the Allies. He, accordingly, recommended a ruthless policy: a) to split the country, because it would, in his opinion, be disastrous to retain the historical political entities of the *Länder*; b) to completely purge the administration, police, and judiciary; c) to force Nazis—including the civil servants—to wear a badge and be sent as convicts to do reconstruction work in countries formerly under Nazi occupation; d) to expatriate ex-government and party officials and their families.

The postwar planning of Abegg and people like him, was therefore sincerely motivated by a desire to prevent a recurrence of the reality which preceded the Nazi assumption of power. Their projects took anti-Semitism's political significance into consideration when formulating policies on the Jewish question and viewed this question as one of the issues to be solved in the quest for a stable and desirable post-Hitler German society. Consequently, he considered it politically unwise to force Jews on a hostile population, for "the miserable German population hurled from the dreams of world supremacy into the abyss, would conclude from a mass inflow of Jews that victorious Jewry was sending its emissaries to Germany as germs of disruption."

It is equally likely, however, that whatever the constructive motivation of Abegg, and the Holocaust notwithstanding, his analysis of the Jewish question and his recommendations on how to solve it, reflects widely accepted Jewish stereotypes which prevailed before, during and after the Holocaust. His suggestions for a postwar arrangement were well-intended, as they were based on the realization that the Nazis had aroused anti-Semitism to such an extent that, even if legal discrimination was revoked, Jews could not live in Germany for decades to come. However, they also express prejudices that had been circulating in the German nationalist milieu for decades. This is especially so in the recommendation to accept the return of a few prominent Jewish families only. Abegg's advice is not original at all, as it reflects opinions that had been common since the end of the nineteenth century. According to them, Jews were divided into two groups with differing legal status—a well-established elitist minority, which could be assimilated, and a majority of recently immigrated eastern Jews, which should be dissimilated. This is how assimilation and dissimulation of Jews could coexist in the solution offered for the Jewish question by German anti-Nazis.

Notes

1. See for example, Emil Ludwig, *How to Treat the Germans* (London: Hutchinson, 1943), p. 54; Louis Nizer, *What to Do with Germany* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1944).
2. Interview with Professor R. on 2 April 1945, National Archives, Washington (hereafter NAW), RG 226.
3. Entry 19, File XL-7971, NAW, RG 226/127164/box 1421.
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1958), pp. 372-73.
5. American Legation Stockholm, 31 August 1944, dispatch 4010, NAW, OS/740.0011 E.W./8-3144.
6. Harrison to State Department, 12 February 1943, *ibid.*
7. Frederick W. Proewig to Sumner Welles, New York, 13 July 1943, NAW, Lm 195/2.
8. American Consulate, Sao Paulo, Brazil to Secretary of State, Washington, 18 May 1944, NAW, Lm /2.
9. Hershel V. Johnson, Stockholm, to Secretary of State, 6 August 1943, NAW Lm 195/2.
10. US State department, Central files Germany, Internal Affairs, 862, NAW, Lm 195/3.
11. Leland Harrison, American Legation in Bern, 2 March, 1944 to Secretary of State, Washington, NAW, Lm 195/7.
12. Bewegung "Freies Deutschland" in der Schweiz, Betrifft, Judenfrage, August 1945, Nachlass Abegg-Gelpke, Bundesarchiv Berlin, 90 Ab 1/26.
13. Goerdeler's position was articulated in [Carl Goerdeler], "Das Ziel," *Beck und Goerdeler. Gemeinschaftsdokumente für den Frieden 1941-1944*, ["The Aim," Beck and Goerdeler. Community Documents for Peace 1941-1944] Wilhelm Ritter von Schramm, ed. (Munich: G. Müller, 1965), pp. 105-107; Von Dietze's recommendations were included in his memorandum, "The Polity. An Attempt at Self-Examination of the Christian Conscience in View of the Political Problems of Our Time," in *In der Stunde Null. Die Denkschrift des Freiburger "Bonhoeffer-Kreises": Politische Gemeinschaftsordnung. Ein Versuch zur Selbstbesinnung des christlichen Gewissens in den politischen Nöten unserer Zeit*, Ph. von Bismarck, ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979), pp. 146-51; For a discussion of this topic, see Christof Dipper, "The German Resistance and the Jews," *Yad Vashem Studies*, 16 (1984):41-76.
14. Asher Cohen, *Persécutions et Sauvetages: Juifs et Français sous l'occupation et sous Vichy* [Persecutions and Rescues: Jews and French under Occupation and Under Vichy] (Paris: Cerf, 1993), pp. 233-34.
15. Gabriel Marcel "Lendemain de persecution," *Cahiers du Témoignage Chrétien*, 21 October 1944, quoted by Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 135.