

The Jewish Question in the New Republic: 1919-1924

Danile Wilson

Seminar Paper  
Presented to the Department of History  
Western Oregon University  
In partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in History

Spring 2009

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

HST 499: Prof. Max Geier

## The Jewish Question in the New Republic: 1919- 1924

In light of the possibly vindictive and crippling reparations which would be imposed on the Weimar Republic by the Treaty of Versailles, prominent members of the German-Jewish community encouraged the Weimar leadership to revisit the Jewish question in March 1919. For although the Weimar Constitution spelled out the rights of German citizens, the leadership of the new republic held a conference in which they discussed how and whether those rights would apply to immigrants, who, because of the new territorial boundaries of the peace conference, now found themselves outside of Germany. The immigration and the fear of a major influx of Jewish immigrants flooding the borders, required the Weimar leadership to analyze how they would respond and deal with the Jews, both within and without Germany. This paper will analyze the early years of the Weimar Republic through historiography and mainly three primary sources: the Treaty of Versailles (as it pertains to the reparations and the territory adjustments of Germany), the Weimar Constitution (as it pertains to the rights of the German citizens as well as minorities, and finally the March 1919 conference which was meant to discuss the Jewish question. Prominent members of the German-Jewish community seized the opportunity afforded them by the imminent reparations of the Treaty of Versailles to get the Weimar government to take action in regards to the Jewish questions and stopping the discrimination against Jews.

The Jewish question has referred specifically to how governments, in this case: Germany, would respond to the Jews in the laws and rights that governments would award to the Jews, but also particularly in the limiting of the discrimination which had been so rampant throughout Europe toward the Jews. The Weimar Republic, like much

of Europe had many citizens who were Jews and had to decide whether to expand the rights of minorities to equal those of German descent. To the Republic's credit, the government did grant full citizen's rights to the long-denied Jews, but only those who now lived within the new borders of the state.

So leading figures in the German-Jewish community grasped the moment when the German government was still reeling from the lost war and the upcoming harshness of the Treaty of Versailles, the German-Jews called for a conference to discuss six points which made of their wish list, their deepest desires. They did not necessarily believe that the points would be accepted but they presented it in such a way that the Weimar government could not refuse. The leaders of the Jewish community in Germany stated that if the government formulated a plan, which the government could then present to the League of Nations, then perhaps, as a result of their intuitive action, the League of Nations would be more lenient in the upcoming treaty and reparations which were to be imposed upon Germany alone.

The Weimar Republic was established in 1918 after the German Revolution and thus ended the German Empire. It was the first democracy in Germany and, according to Detlev Peukert's *The Weimar Republic*, it struggled to prove its legitimacy and claim to power. The beginning of the Republic was not made obvious by an event that could be used as a political unifying symbol of a pivotal moment in the country's history such as the American Declaration of Independence, or the Sedan Day after the creation of the German Empire in 1870-71.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of having such a momentous event, Philip Scheidemann, the deputy leader of the Social Democrats, gave birth to the republic quite by accident and only to prevent

the Soviet-style revolutionary, Karl Liebknecht, from taking power as he marched toward the Reichstag with his forces.<sup>2</sup> Scheidemann decided that the development had to be prevented and quickly so he impulsively declared the formation of the new republic. However, when Scheidemann proclaimed the republic, there was no constitution and not even a plan for one.<sup>3</sup> Scheidemann, as deputy leader had no authority to declare a new government and Friedrich Ebert “banged his fist on the table and yelled at [Scheidemann]... ‘You had no right to proclaim the republic.’”<sup>4</sup>

However, the commotion which the proclamation had caused could not be halted as the army did not know whom they should obey, so the impulsive proclamation of the deputy leader of the Social Democrats could not be taken back. A republic had to be formed.

When the war was lost, the League of Nations stipulated that a new government be set up. The Treaty of Versailles also contained a guilt clause, in which Germany had to take sole responsibility for the war and the reparations that had to be paid in order to see the rest of Europe to get back on their feet. The guilt clause entailed the loss of 10% of Germany itself to outside forces, causing a massive 12.5% of the population to suddenly find themselves out of the new borders and in different countries.<sup>5</sup> Germany was forced to concede territories to Belgium (Eupen-Malmedy), Czechoslovakia (the Hultschin district), and Poland (Poznan [German: Posen], West Prussian, and Upper Silesia). The high reparations caused severe resentment in the Weimar Republic government and among the German people toward the League of Nations. Although the French, who were the ones who really pushed the “War Guilt Clause,” knew that there was little chance that Germany would be able to pay back such a large debt, the hope was

that Germany would be so limited in its ability to regain its economic superiority that it would be unable to initiate a new war with France.<sup>6</sup>

With the upheaval of the lost war and the struggle to establish a new government, the first years of the Republic were turbulent. The reparations also caused severe economic turmoil in Germany, leaving Germans with critical inflation and a lack of jobs, and looking for someone to blame and that was frequently the government.<sup>7</sup> With the original main source of employment, agrarianism, declining and the secondary source of industrialism rising, the economy was upset and from 1919 to 1924, it was in a crisis and the instability and the lack of legitimacy made people think more fondly on the days of the monarchy.<sup>8</sup> As the Republic labored to stabilize the nation and the economy, the officials turned toward a matter they could improve: the Jewish question and what further rights they would be granted.

As previously mentioned, the Jewish question had become a renewed issue in the new republic, but it had been an issue in much of Europe but especially Germany, since the time of the Enlightenment. It was due to the Enlightenment's arguments for the toleration of the various religions "on the basis of their shared ethical principles" and the desire that states ought to "make full use of their human resources instead of excluding some groups from unrestricted participation in social life."<sup>9</sup> The Jews received their full civil rights in Austria in 1867, however, in Germany; they did not receive them until four years later and there were still many prejudices and laws in place against them. The government of the Weimar Republic "completed the process of Jewish emancipation in Germany."<sup>10</sup> Until that time, Jews had been excluded from obtaining higher positions in the public service and academic world, but those barriers were removed in the Weimar

Republic, and the Jews found themselves capable of playing an important part in the “post-war public life, in the liberal parties and the parties of the left, in universities and the mass media.”<sup>11</sup>

However, despite the new mobility and cultural influence which that Jews had gained under the Weimar Republic, old sentiments still held strong and the German Jewry often found themselves facing a rise of anti-Semitic discrimination. Other problems which faced German Jewry were the fear of the loss of their cultural identity and faith. Many Jews assimilated into the German culture, which surrounded them, forgetting their roots and traditions. The Orthodox Jews and the Zionist attempted to combat this assimilation through different methods.<sup>12</sup>

Martin Buber was a Jewish philosopher best known for his philosophy of dialogue. He also assisted Franz Rosenzweig set up a school to instruct the third generation Jews on their heritage and culture, he proclaimed cultural Zionism, which emphasized the need to live culturally as Jews and that it was more important to be a Jew, who lived as a Jew, than it was to have a national home; dedicated only to Jews as the political Zionists wanted.

A challenge to the German-Jewish identity was the immigration of the *Ostjuden*, or the Jews from Eastern Europe. These immigrants had very different ways and traditions than the German Jewish community. The *Ostjuden* differed from their German counterparts socially, culturally and in their forms of worship and these dissimilarities caused conflicts within the Jewish community itself. Also due to their strange accents and unfamiliar forms of behavior, the *Ostjuden* became a particular focus for anti-Semitic prejudice between the Jewish communities in Germany. Because of the crises that the

economy of the Republic was suffering, the foreign migrant workers were unwelcome and were regularly deported by the German authorities. Although the Jews suffered a terrible fate in the Holocaust, the early years of the Weimar Republic are not solely responsible for the events which allowed for and defined the Holocaust. The Republic's instability and inability to establish political legitimacy facilitated a need to work the system and try to find stability and to promote human rights.

The historiography of the plight of the Jews in Germany is extensive. Even in pertaining only with the Weimar Republic, there are several excellent secondary sources. As this is a short thesis and not a book, this paper will only address the secondary sources of Paul Mendes-Flohr, Karen Schoenwaelder, Detlev Peukert, and Eric D. Weitz.

In Paul Mendes-Flohr's book, *German-Jews: A Dual Identity*, (1999), he argues that the German-Jews fostered two distinct sources for spiritual relief—between Judaism and European (in this case German) culture. In other words, they found themselves spiritually fulfilled by being both a Jew and a German. The most crucial part, he states, is the “and” between the two cultures to protect the integrity of each while keeping an exchange of ideas.

A few of the primary sources used include a postcard written by Franz Kafka, Franz Rosenzweig's beliefs on the Jews' ability to become Germans also, the words of rabbi and a cultural coding called *Deutschtum*. The Jews held firms to the *Deutschtum* which said that they were “German by the grace of Goethe.”<sup>13</sup> This in and of itself is interesting since in the middle ages the Jews were viewed by the Germans as a “people apart”<sup>14</sup> from the general public. As a result of this exclusion, the Jews, however, Jews

rushed to join the emerging middle class or the educated class, whereby they participated in a form of cultural assimilation.

In the words of a liberal rabbi, Benno Jacob in 1927, the German Jewry were assimilated in the cultural values of German society but not into the German society.<sup>15</sup> Although the German Jews longed to be accepted as Germans and Jews, they could not assimilate fully into the German society because of the discriminations against them.

Although they were not fully accepted into German society, Franz Rosenzweig, who was a Jewish philosopher, who desired the Jews to become both German and Jews, believed that the Jews could flourish as they had in Babylon when the two cultures had merged. He believed that German Jewry would reach a cultural maturity, when it had that it could learn to be both German *and* Jewish. The importance landing on the “and” which made it seem possible.

The final primary source is a postcard written by Franz Kafka in 1916. After a review of one of his literary works, one critic found it “quintessentially German” while another found it “the representative of Jewish document of [the] time.”<sup>16</sup> In response, Kafka wrote a postcard to a friend and asked, “Am I a circus acrobat riding astride two horses? Sadly I am not. Rather I lie flat on my back!”<sup>17</sup> Kafka illustrated the impossible task which met the German Jews at nearly every turn. Many wanted the Jews to choose one or the other; to be Jewish or to be German, but even if the latter was chosen the Jews were frequently not fully integrated into the German society. However, Franz Rosenzweig believed strongly that the Jews could do remain Jewish and become German, if only, they would just focus on both cultures instead of one or the other.



In her analysis of the Constitution, “The Constitutional Protection of Minorities in Germany: Weimar Revisited,” Karen Schoenwaelder states that the constitutional rights, which the Weimar government granted to minorities were more likely a reaction to the possible loss of territories rather than of a concern for the rights of the minorities. In the Weimar Constitution article 113, it stated that “the state respects the identity of ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities.”<sup>18</sup> However, the independent Social Democrat Oskar Cohn proposed that the wording of the constitution was “insufficient.”<sup>19</sup> He also stated that “minorities could very well adopt German as their mother tongue, but nevertheless retain their foreign nationality.”<sup>20</sup> He also wanted Jews to be included, as far as they saw themselves as a nationality, as a minority. Schoenwaelder believes that Cohn was possibly the only member of the National Assembly who was seriously and constantly concerned for the protection of the rights of minorities. She states that although members of the National Assembly pointed out that the Poles had been oppressed by the German occupation of the Eastern Marshes, they were quick to point out that the Poles were no more oppressed than Germany was by its enemies.<sup>21</sup> Despite the introduction of the article 113 protecting minorities’ rights, assimilation still remained the predominating perspective for the betterment of Germany.

In *The Weimar Republic*, Detlev Peukert also argues that with the establishment of the Weimar Republic, the German Jewry was fully emancipated.<sup>22</sup> However, despite new-found influence that the German Jews enjoyed, there was a rise in anti-Semitism. However, this hostility, according to Peukert was directed more toward the *Ostjuden*, than to the German Jews themselves.<sup>23</sup>

In *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, Eric D. Weitz also provides a lot of in depth context of the Weimar Republic's rise and decline. Unfortunately, he does not touch too much on the Jewish question but the context itself makes this secondary source invaluable to this discussion. This paper has made use of many of the facts about the Weimar Republic.

The main primary sources which are analyzed in this paper include a conference held within the Republic, discussing the Jewish question and in particular the policies of immigration toward the *Ostjuden*, reparations of the Treaty of Versailles, a letter from a German official, in response to the treaty, and finally a look at the Weimar Republic. The importance of the conference to the Jews was enormous. It represented the moment in history, in which the Jewish question could be brought to the attention of the government and make them discuss it. Despite the outcome or lack thereof, of the conference, the Jewish leaders had been heard and considered.

As the Republic attempted to stabilize Germany in the wake of the unsuccessful First World War, members of the government met in the first of what was to be several meetings to discuss the Jewish question and to hopefully develop a program, which would help the League of Nations see that Germany could deal justly with human rights, and in hopes of preventing League of Nations from inflicting some of the harsh reparations. Because of the war and the following reparations, the economy, which the Weimar Republic stepped into was destroyed and the German people were losing faith in the government.<sup>24</sup> According to Juergen Matthaeus, a German historian, this conference was to be the first of many to determine how the new German government would handle the issue of the Jews particularly in Poland, who had previously been a part of Germany

but due to the Treaty of Versailles, were now a part of Poland. However, when it became clear May 1919 that the League of Nations would not let up on the reparations, the future conferences appear not to have taken place or at least there is no record of them occurring.<sup>25</sup>

In the record itself of the debate, there are several principle characters. Presiding is Johann Heinrich Graf von Bernstorff, who was a former ambassador to the United States, the presenter of the points of discussion is Professor Moritz S. Sobernheim, Eugen Fuchs brings the national Jewish view to the debate as a leader of the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*, Richard Lichtheim takes the stance of the Zionists, who hoped that sometime in the near future the Jews would acquire a national home and were in support of the Balfour Declaration, speaking for the *Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland*, Dr. Lenz of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, and others speaking more for themselves than for a particular party are Eduard Bernstein and Walther Rathenau.

Bernstorff begins the discussion by stating that the purpose of the discussion is to “face [their] enemies (the League of Nations) with a positive programme in hand, a programme that will solve the problem in principle, through which we will regain world-wide sympathy, and which will prove that a new spirit is at large in Germany.”<sup>26</sup> He states that the following points have been suggested by members of the German Jewish community to promote and to emphasize at the peace conference of the League of Nation.

- 1) Equality for Jews and Judaism in all countries of the world.
- 2) Abolition and prohibition of all laws, decrees and regulations containing restrictive measures applicable exclusively to Jews, especially bans on immigration and the closing of borders to Jews.

- 3) National and cultural autonomy within the new states to the extent demanded by the majority of Jews living in those parts, while safeguarding minority rights and arranging for the Sabbath to be taken into account within the legal framework.
- 4) Laying down of such political, administrative and economic conditions for Palestine that its development as an autonomous commonwealth, supported by all Jews, is ensured.
- 5) Compensation for victims of pogroms by the state concerned.
- 6) The setting-up of an international committee to watch over the enforcement of peace-conference principles and decisions that apply to Jews.<sup>27</sup>

The debate then went over points 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 in detail. Dr. Lenz states that since these points had not been sent to him previous to the debate he could not comment in detail about the Ministry's stance of the points. However, he does say that the reason for the immigration restrictions of Jews was due to an outbreak of typhoid in Poland. The restrictions of the immigration was an issue because of the fact that those Jews had originally been part of Germany in the pre-World War I era and then had been separated as a condition of the Treaty of Versailles. Dr. Fuchs states that unless the lice which carried the typhoid only preyed on the Jews then others should also have been excluded at the borders. He states that he would understand if Germany wished to shut themselves away from the world but that it should be done on a "national and not on a religious basis."<sup>28</sup> He finishes that that world would not understand Germany's inhumane treatment of the Jews in such a way.

Bernstein, who was a Social Democrat and a Jew only by descent, but he was still lumped in as a Jew by other Germans, states that he does not believe that this was a question of religious denomination and that it is about much more than Judaism. He states that it is ethnicity that is at the root of the problem. He also states the problem of immigration and the fear of, of the government, a flood of immigrants from the East were "vastly exaggerated."<sup>29</sup> He declares that the majority would be coming in search of work

and when they did not find it, they would return home. He declares that it is impossible for them to fight the discriminatory laws of other countries when they have some of their own.

On point 3, Sobernheim explains that there are places in which national and cultural autonomy have been granted and minorities have lived peacefully. His example is the town Czernowitz, Romania, in which Roumanian, German, Ruthenian and Jewish mayors take turns; they visit each other's festivals and take part in the national life of their various communities. He further explains that cultural autonomy would allow for Jews to observe the Sabbath and work on Sunday if they so desired. Dr. Rathenau presents the problem that if they advocate that part of a population in certain states become autonomous then the League of Nations may see it necessary to use it as against Germany. Dr. Fuchs argues that those concerns are only significant if Germany hoped to have a dominant position in the East. He states that as a good German (he is a Jew) he asked himself two questions: "should our Jews in the East have the right to demand autonomy?" and if they should not have that right "should they be Germanised or Polonised?"<sup>30</sup> However, he states that as a good German, he cannot allow them to be Polonised as that would remove support for his fatherland, but neither should they be Germanised, Dr. Fuchs states that they should keep their "national distinctiveness," and according to the principle of the right of self-determination, which was at the time in the world at large. He states that they should give them the "right to stay in the East with Jewish nationality."<sup>31</sup> He argues that if they do not want the Jews to be Polonised by force than it is in the interest of Germanness to grant them national autonomy, so that they may stand against the Poles and have a legitimate claim to autonomy. However, he

states that he would see cultural autonomy as an interference with the sovereignty of the German people. He then concludes that he has “always found that the well-understood interests of *Deutschtum* have never excluded the justified claims of the Jews. These well-understood interests, provided they are based on justice, truth and freedom, are unanimously accepted throughout the world.”<sup>32</sup> Later in the discussion, Fuchs clarifies that he does not accept the claim that the Jews should be recognized as a nation and that he sees a strong distinction between the *Ostjuden* and the *Westjuden*. He states that there are roughly 500,000 Jews in Germany, who have the will to belong to Germany [*Deutschtum*] as a people.<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Lichtheim then takes up the discussion, saying that from the Zionist point of view, he finds that national autonomy of a minority, if realized completely, could have very dangerous economic consequences for the minority. If a small group receives a special status in all areas within a larger group then that can lead to economic exclusion and cultural alienation. However, he states that Germany will not be forced to broach the question only to agree or disagree with a solution. If the minority demands autonomy, Dr. Lichtheim feels that it is necessary to give it to them but not to offer it.

With regards to point 4, it is merely defined and pointed out that it is a commonwealth under direction of England rather than defined as a national home. On point 5, they clarify that the compensations must be made by the country involved and not necessarily by the country, in which the victims live. Dr. Fuchs presents the example of Haller’s army, which perpetrated a pogrom in Danzig or elsewhere. In that case, it would be Haller’s country which would need to compensate its victims. In presenting point 6, Sobernheim explains that the question of humanity is of world-wide significant

and that the counsel would observe and police laws passed in countries to ensure that no inhumane treatment or exclusion occurred. Here once again, a Prussian minister speaks and states that since these points were not brought to his attention so he could not comment on them but he did ask that they not draw any conclusions from his silence. The chairman then ends the meeting by saying that the issue was submitted to the ministries today and they would be grateful if in the near future they received a written or oral response.

However, since no records have been found of subsequent meetings, it seems that the issue was dropped and not discussed further. And despite this meeting's occurrence, no conclusions were made at all in regards to the Jewish question. It seems that the Republic found more important matters to which they needed to attend.

Considering the fact that Germany did not lose the war, per se, the harshness of the Treaty of Versailles was surprising and quite unfair. Since no one had won the war, the treaty should have been more lenient of the opposite side. The treaty was a long document including 440 articles. It was began in early 1919 and finished in April of 1919 after several months of hard bargaining and it was presented to the German government on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1919. The German government was only allowed three weeks to accept the terms of the treaty, which it had not seen previously. The initial response to the treaty was astonishment. Several objections were made, and the government asked for a neutral commission to investigate the responsibility of the war and the culpable acts in conduct.<sup>34</sup>

However, despite the objections from the German government, which were largely ignored by the League of Nations, the Treaty of Versailles was signed on the 28<sup>th</sup>

of June 1919. In regards to the territory of Germany, the country was deprived of about 13.5% of its 1914 territory, including overseas colonies, which went mainly to England.<sup>35</sup> The long contested region of Lorraine-Alsace was returned to France and Belgium's borders were enlarged to the east. Other territorial adjustments include a portion of Prussia being handed over to Lithuania and the Sudetenland was given to Poland. These adjustments of the borders and territories of Germany not only deprived the country of a massive portion of land but it also deprived the country of some seven million people.

In regards to the economic reparations, although the Allies admitted that Germany could not possibly pay for all of the damage done, they did expect Germany to pay large amounts in an attempt to make it right. In addition, Germany had to "make reimbursement of all sums which Belgium has borrowed from the Allied and Associated Governments up to November 11, 1918, together with interest at the rate of five per cent (5%) per annum on such sums."<sup>36</sup> The amount of the sums would be determined by the Reparation Commission and it would be that Commission which would accept payment on behalf of Belgium. The Reparation Commission was also in charge of the payments for the damages and they would allow for the German government to have a "just" opportunity to be heard.<sup>37</sup>

The Commission was to examine the damage done to the various countries and then by or before May 1, 1921, they would inform the German government of their obligations. At that time, they would determine Germany's resources and capacities. The payments were to take place during 1919, 1920 and the first four months of 1921 in the equivalent of 20,000,000,000 gold marks.



In response to the treaty, the leader of the German Peace Delegation, Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau wrote a letter to President Georges Clemenceau, in which he explained that Germany was “firmly resolved to do everything in our power with a view of fulfilling the grave obligations which we had undertaken.”<sup>38</sup> He stated in his letter that Germany had agreed to the peace conference, “hoping for the peace of justice which had been promised to [them].”<sup>39</sup> Instead, however, the German government was given a draft of the treaty in which they were horribly and spitefully punished. He continued saying that the “exactions of this treaty are more than the German people can bear.”<sup>40</sup> He argued against the taking portions of Prussia for Poland since those territories were 100% German. Brockdorff-Rantzau also said that he could understand why Saar or Lorraine-Alsace must go to France, although he states that Germany owes the debts to France “in coal only, not in men.”<sup>41</sup>

One of the counter-proposals, which Brockdorff-Rantzau proposed was that Germany proceed with disarmament in advance of the other countries in order to “usher in the new era of the peace of justice.”<sup>42</sup> He also pointed out that Germany was willing to make reparation payments not exceeding 1,000,000,000 gold marks but without interest. To replace river boats which were destroyed in Belgium and France, the German government offered to replace the boats from Germany’s own resources. Germany wanted to be judged fairly and by an impartial judge, but the only problem was that the world had been involved and the League of Nations was clearly not impartial.

As previously mentioned the Weimar Republic was proclaimed before the constitution could even have been planned. As a result, the constitution followed closely the models which had preceded it. The first article of the state, much like the preamble of

the Declaration of Independence, states that the “the power of the state emanates from the people.”<sup>43</sup> In the second main part of the constitution, the basic rights and obligations of Germans are laid out. The constitution, like other democratic constitutions, ensured the individual rights such as freedom of speech and assembly to every citizen.

The national identity of foreign language communities in Germany was protected, maybe most importantly including the right to use their native language in education, administration, and the judicial system.<sup>44</sup> This article became important for the Jewish communities as they sought to be integrated as Germans but also to remain Jewish. The ability to retain their own national identity and still be considered part of Germany would have had an enormous impact and a cause for hope among the Jews.

There were other articles which guaranteed the freedom of belief and conscience. The free practice of religion was granted by the constitution and protected by the state. In this the Jews had to see the promise of a future in Germany, unified with the Germans without the discrimination of the Jewish religion and culture.

Despite the similarity of the Weimar Constitution with other similar documents it was described by historian William Shirer, in his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, as “on paper, the most liberal and democratic document of its kind the twentieth century had ever seen...full of ingenious and admirable devices which seemed to guarantee the working of an almost flawless democracy,”<sup>45</sup> However, with such high hopes, there could only be one certainty...that not all of those high ideals would be attained.

However, despite the seemingly fleeting perfection which the constitution seemed to promise, prominent leaders of the Jewish community grasped the moment in history so

that they might be able to might a difference in the aftermath constitution and in the prelude to the treaty. The Weimar government was willing to attempt anything to prevent League of Nations from dealing with them ruthlessly, but as it became apparent that that would not happen the matter was dropped in the halls of the government, but the issue continued to be an important topic for many people in the country, both Jewish and German alike.

Those persons include a rising Nazi, Alfred Rosenberg (1919); Martin Buber (1921); German-Jewish writer, Arnold Zweig (1922); S. Steinberg, (1922). There were those who lived in the Weimar Republic and were obviously anti-Semitic and were key characters to the future Nazi movement. Alfred Rosenberg was one of those people in particular. Rosenberg was known as one of the main authors of key Nazi ideological creeds, including its racial theory, persecution of the Jews, and opposition to degenerate modern art.<sup>46</sup> He presents the problem of the Jews as a threat to the German way of life in an article first published in *Auf gut Deutsch* entitled *Die Russisch-Juedische Revolution (The Russian-Jewish Revolution)*.<sup>47</sup> As in his example of the Revolution, he believes that the power of the “homogenous” race would diminish the power of the Germanic ideals. Rosenberg states that the problem is due to the Europeans wish to be tolerant and humanitarian and it gives the Jew so much of this power. They wield it cunningly and effectively to their own ends while spinning tales of benefits for others. He closes his article with the fact that now all of the people of Russia justly hate the Jews and when the current regime decays, all the Jews will be killed by the new government officials, and those who are not killed will flee and since Poland carefully guards its borders against

them, they will flee to Germany, and here with cynicism, Rosenberg concludes, where they are loved and “the warmest seats are kept for them.”<sup>48</sup>

Martin Buber, who was an advocate of cultural Zionism and the need for Jews in Germany to stay Jewish and German, explains the need and differences in nationalism and what it truly means to be nationalistic. He states that “people” is defined as a group with a unified fate. He then states that a people becomes a nation when they recognize that they are separate and unique from other peoples and then acts upon it. He states that true nationalism is expressed when a people become self-aware and that self-awareness translates into action.<sup>49</sup> However, Buber cautions that true nationalism is used to correct a deficiency, and when it is used beyond that it becomes a disease. He states that Jewry exists as a nation even without a particular plot of land. He suggests that the Jews belong to a community of faith and therefore have no need further of nationalism for a country, and indeed, that it is presumptuous of the Jewish people to strive for more than their community of faith. Hence furthering the gap, which had separated the Jews from others such as the German and made it more difficult for those outside of the community of faith to fully understand the Jews.

As a pre-cursor to heightening of problems in Germany, Arnold Zweig, who was a German-Jewish writer and an anti-war activist, writes about the treatment of the Jews in Lithuania in 1922. He describes the cruelties against the Lithuanian Jews, about the executions and murder, about the whip and the club. He explains that in the villages the atrocities still happen, it is just that there is not railroad and telegraph for it to be broadcasted. He would help the eastern Jews, but every word they speak is deemed to be a lie and German politics among those who have the power and authority to actually help.

He ends with “May the taste of blood on the tongue of the man-eating bull of Europe soon disappear.”<sup>50</sup> Sadly, and ironically, it would not disappear for many years and in some places it still lingers, and many more Jews have died.

In the First World War, Jewish soldiers fought alongside their German comrades-in-arms, S. Steinberg states that many Jews have died for the Fatherland of Germany. So why are they being so unjustly treated? They have sacrificed their lives to keep Germany strong. The Jewish soldiers “suffered death for the fatherland and slumber [still] in foreign ground.”<sup>51</sup> They have striven for the treasure of fatherland and faith. And now, after all the lives sacrificed, the Jews were still subject to anti-Semitism which called into question their Germanness. Yet when called to do so the Jewish front soldiers did not hesitate to lay down their own lives so that Germany might live.

“Die Deutsche Geist” (The German Spirit) was printed in 1924 in *Das Tagebuch*, a Jewish journal. The German spirit, which defined and motivated Germany to be German, would be severely lacking if it lost its “electrifying” Jewish element. The editorial goes on to quote an article in *Deutsche Zeitung* (German Newspaper), which was written about the ultra-German writer, Hermann Stehr’s sixtieth birthday. Most of the people who went to celebrate the birthday and who spoke in honor of Stehr were Jews, and the article in *Deutsche Zeitung* said that all the present Germans were “pained by the repetition of the same spectacle...” referring to the Jews speaking rather than more Germans.<sup>52</sup>

“The German Spirit” concludes with a reaffirmation of the fact that German culture and German society would be sadly lacking if not for the Jewish influence in both. The German nationalists could have listed still other examples as well as

Hauptmann and Stehr to prove that without German Jews the best minds of Germany would have gone without an examination. With all the contributions from Einstein, Freud, and others, the German culture flourished. The article points out rather humorously that “as soon as a German mind outgrew the realm of normal mediocrity, it was the German Jews, who first took note and applauded. The world of the German spirit, robbed of the Jews, would become sleepy and dull.”<sup>53</sup>

The future vindictive conditions of the Treaty of Versailles afforded the leaders of the German Jewish community the opportunity to bring before the government the discrimination and anti-Semitism, with which the Jews had to deal. Despite the fact that the Weimar government did not hold future conferences to further discuss the Jewish question, the Jewish population of Germany did receive full citizenship rights. The first taste of democracy in Germany, although it only lasted for a short fourteen years, granted more rights than had been enjoyed in the previous hundred or more years. The Enlightenment laid out the ideals of a society and the Weimar Republic, with the urging of the Jews, helped to see it come to pass. The conference is evidence that the democracy of Weimar Republic was an attempt at flawless perfection by which the leaders in the German Jewish community hoped to gain a less discriminatory world for the Jews.

---

<sup>1</sup> Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*. Trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 5.

- 
- <sup>2</sup> Ellen Switzer, *How Democracy Failed* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 10.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid, 11.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, 11.
- <sup>5</sup> The United States Holocaust Memorial, "The Treaty of Versailles," <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005425>, 16 May 2009.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 13.
- <sup>9</sup> Ritchie Robertson, ed. *The German-Jewish Dialogue: An Anthology of Literary Texts 1749-1993*. (Oxford University Press) ii.
- <sup>10</sup> Peukert, *Weimar*, 158.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, 159.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 159.
- <sup>13</sup> Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German-Jews: A Dual Identity*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 5.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., 90.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 89.
- <sup>18</sup> Karen Schoenwaelder, "The Constitutional Protection of Minorities in Germany: Weimar Revisited," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 74 no. 1 (1996): 38.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 42.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, 42.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 45.
- <sup>22</sup> Detlev Peukert, *Weimar*, 158.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, 160.
- <sup>24</sup> The United States Holocaust Memorial, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005425>, 16 May 2009.
- <sup>25</sup> Moritz, Sobernheim; Juergen Matthaues, intro; Gabriele Rahaman, transl. "Tagesordnung: Judenfrage: A German Debate in the Early Stages of the Weimar Republic." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* (Great Britain: 2003) 87.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, 91.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 91.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 94.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 95.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, 103.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, 103.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid, 104.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, 105.
- <sup>34</sup> . Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau, "Letter to Paris Peace Conference President Georges Clemenceau on the Subject of Peace Terms, May 1919," *First World War.com* [http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/parispeaceconf\\_germanprotest1.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/parispeaceconf_germanprotest1.htm)
- <sup>35</sup> Treaty of Versailles "Article 119," *First World War.com* <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/versailles118-158.htm>.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid, Article 232.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid, Article 233.
- <sup>38</sup> Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau, "Letter."
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> "The Weimar Constitution," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994)
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid,
- <sup>45</sup> Wikipedia, "Weimar Constitution" [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/weimar\\_constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/weimar_constitution). 19 May 2009
- <sup>46</sup> Wikipedia, "Alfred Rosenberg," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred\\_Rosenberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Rosenberg). 20 May 2009

---

<sup>47</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, "The Russian Jewish Revolution," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 121-122.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 123.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Buber, "Nationalism," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 251.

<sup>50</sup> Arnold Zweig, "The Countenance of Eastern European Jews," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 257.

<sup>51</sup> S. Steinberg, "What We Strive For," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 258.

<sup>52</sup> Das Tagebuch, "The German Spirit," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 259.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 259.



---

### Bibliography

- Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau, "Letter to Paris Peace Conference President Georges Clemenceau on the Subject of Peace Terms, May 1919," *First World War.com* [http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/parispeaceconf\\_germanprotest1.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/parispeaceconf_germanprotest1.htm) 19 May 2009.
- Buber, Martin, "Nationalism," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 250-2.
- Das Tagebuch, "The German Spirit," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 258-9
- Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German-Jews: A Dual Identity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Moritz, Sobernheim; Juergen Matthaeus, intro; Gabriele Rahaman, transl. "Tagesordnung: Judenfrage: A German Debate in the Early Stages of the Weimar Republic." Leo Baeck Institute Year Book, Great Britain: 2003.
- Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*. Trans. Richard Deveson New York: Hill and Wang: 1987.
- Ritchie Robertson, ed. *The German-Jewish Dialogue: An Anthology of Literary Texts 1749-1993*. Oxford University Press.
- Alfred Rosenberg, "The Russian Jewish Revolution," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 121-3.
- Karen Schoenwaelder, "The Constitutional Protection of Minorities in Germany: Weimar Revisted," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 74 no. 1 (1996): 38-65.
- S. Steinberg, "What We Strive For," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 257-8

---

Treaty of Versailles “Article 119,” *First World War.com*  
<http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/versailles118-158.htm>. 19 May 2009.

The United States Holocaust Memorial, “The Treaty of Versailles,”  
<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005425>, 16 May 2009.

Arnold Zweig, “The Countenance of Eastern European Jews,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 255-7.