

## “I AM NO ANTI-SEMITE, BUT I AM ALSO NO JEW”: GERMAN LIBERALISM AND THE “JEWISH QUESTION” IN THE THIRD REICH

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### I.

In the introduction to his seminal volume on Jewish life in the Third Reich, Peter Pulzer stresses the degree to which Jews and Germans alike viewed Nazi anti-Semitism as part of “a cyclical phenomenon that flared during crises but would normally lie fairly dormant . . . [T]he principal reason why German Jews underestimated the significance of Hitler’s coming to power was . . . their familiarity with prejudice and discrimination.”<sup>1</sup> In short, 1933 was hardly a decisive caesura, before which “liberal” attitudes toward German Jewry predominated and after which a new paradigm of racial exclusion prevailed. Instead, German liberals, like Germans in general, had always maintained a close but fraught relationship with German Jewry.<sup>2</sup> This was a product of the liberals’ equally ambivalent relationship to the *völkisch*-nationalist creed that called into question the prominent role of Jews in German society after 1870.

Most liberals hoped to resolve this “Jewish Question”—namely, what to do with Germany’s increasingly visible and influential Jewish minority—through assimilation. But this seemingly “universalist” perspective did not preclude underlying anti-Semitic assumptions similar to those on the radical right.<sup>3</sup> Since the role of anti-Semitism defines current debates on the origins of the Holocaust, the attitude of a party with such close and contradictory ties to German Jewry provides a unique perspective on the evolution of the “Final Solution” to the “Jewish Question.”

For many years, the so-called functionalist explanation has dominated historiography on the “Final Solution.” Functionalists, of course, reject the traditional (“intentionalist”) notion that Hitler and the Nazi leadership, motivated by fanatical anti-Semitism, planned the Holocaust from the moment they took power. For functionalists, Hitler’s anti-

Semitism, not to mention the highly variegated anti-Jewish sentiments of the German people, was a necessary but not sufficient cause of the cumulative radicalization that led to the "Final Solution."<sup>4</sup> This view has been challenged in recent years by a modified version of the "intentionalist" argument that incorporates elements of a functionalist approach but refuses to discard the central role of anti-Jewish ideology. While much of this work reinforces the view that the Nazi leadership played a decisive role in pushing forward measures against the Jews, some proponents of this new "intentionalism" insist on the active complicity, indeed enthusiasm, of "ordinary" Germans in eliminating Jews from German society.<sup>5</sup>

Hence the question: Did German liberals embrace the anti-Semitic assumptions of their Nazi colleagues? What were their reactions to the initial wave of anti-Jewish legislation, the Nuremberg Laws, "Crystal Night," or the Final Solution? Were liberal attitudes toward official anti-Semitism characterized by a pattern of growing indifference and eventual acquiescence, as the new "intentionalism" argues? This article will address such questions through brief case studies of three prominent Weimar Democrats: the German Democratic Party [DDP] co-founder and later Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht; the DDP Chairman Hermann Dietrich; and the Jewish Mayor of Berlin, Fritz Elsas.<sup>6</sup> But first a word about liberalism and anti-Semitism before 1933.

## II.

From the moment in 1879 when the liberal historian Heinrich von Treitschke declared, "The Jews are our misfortune," German liberalism has possessed a Janus-faced relationship to the "Jewish Question." Indeed, Treitschke's infamous statement would later bedeck the arena at Hitler's annual Nuremberg rallies. We should nonetheless remember that Treitschke concluded his original polemic by urging the Jews to assimilate into, not leave, the German Reich. Even Theodor Mommsen, Treitschke's main adversary in this so-called "Berlin Anti-Semitic Controversy," claimed to agree with Treitschke in principle.<sup>7</sup> That is, while German liberals always combated state-sponsored racial or religious discrimination, many tended to encourage Jewish assimilation in return.<sup>8</sup>

In discussing liberalism and the "Jewish Question," it is consequently important to distinguish between "anti-anti-Semitism" and "philosemitism." "Anti-anti-Semitism" connotes a typically liberal resistance to discrimination against individuals on a racial or religious basis. Outright "philosemitism" endorses what we might anachronistically call a "multicultural" paradigm, fostering the existence of German Jewry as a distinct cultural and religious entity.<sup>9</sup> Right-wing insinuations to the con-

trary, very few liberals, even Jewish liberals, embraced “philosemitism.” Among “anti-anti-Semites,” one might differentiate further between *völkisch* liberals, who publicly defended the Jews’ equal right to participate in society but privately denigrated their “alien” national character, and universalist liberals, who saw little point in preserving religious or racial particularism of any kind.<sup>10</sup> Despite these subtle ideological differences, all liberal “anti-anti-Semites” wished the “Jewish Question” would soon be resolved so they might stop spending time and energy defending their party against accusations of “philosemitism.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet erroneous allegations of “philosemitism” only multiplied after the First World War, as right-wing parties tried to exploit the fact that Jews tended overwhelmingly to support the left liberal Democrats. The DDP faced a dilemma. On the one hand, Jews provided a significant reservoir of financial support, political talent, and intellectual dynamism. On the other hand, in many constituencies, a reputation for “philosemitism” meant political suicide.<sup>12</sup> Hence the DDP party secretary Otto Fischbeck openly dissuaded Jewish liberals, including Weimar’s brilliant foreign minister Walther Rathenau, from running.<sup>13</sup> And in 1930, the Democrats merged with the racist paramilitary organization known as the Young German Order, which had its own Aryan clause opposing Jewish membership. Though the Young Germans eventually agreed to delete this clause, many cosmopolitan and Jewish liberals withdrew from the new German State Party in protest.<sup>14</sup>

The merger did not turn liberals into Nazis. Jewish Democrats like Fritz Elsas and Erich Koch-Weser, the party’s first chairman, continued to play a leading role. But even Democrats who resisted National Socialism proved notably ambivalent regarding Nazi anti-Semitism.<sup>15</sup> After the State Party organized an assembly in defense of the Republic, the Democrat Marcel Mitschke wrote party co-chairman Hermann Dietrich to complain about the *Berliner Tageblatt*’s coverage of the event. The *BTB* devoted only “twenty-six lines” to the assembly, “including a wholly misleading title and entirely petty complaints . . . that really don’t interest anyone” except that “1 percent Jewish minority that is supposedly ‘oppressed’ in Germany!!!” It was obvious, Mitschke added, that “the State Party could thank these repugnant ‘Weltblatt’-methods for its going to the dogs; that is not only my conviction, but that of many who still stand by democracy!”<sup>16</sup> Another left-liberal conceded various Nazi transgressions, but implored his party to recognize Nazi achievements in diminishing “the destructive role of the Jewish tabloids.”<sup>17</sup> Equally revealing is the explanation of a long-time Democrat for leaving the DStP in 1933: “If I soon leave the party it is not because I’m changing with the wind . . . but because I really do not want to be alone in one party with the pariah [*verscheuchten*] Jews. Politically I am no anti-Semite, but I’m also no

Jew."<sup>18</sup> Such statements hardly clinch the case for an "eliminationist anti-Semitism." But to borrow from Chinua Achebe in his criticism of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, while Democrats "saw and condemned" the Third Reich's grossest anti-Jewish transgressions, "they seemed strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth."<sup>19</sup>

### III.

Ever since Hjalmar Schacht was acquitted at the Nuremberg trials, historians have debated the "Old Wizard's" assertion that he always tried "to prevent the worst excesses of Hitler's policies," anti-Semitism in particular.<sup>20</sup> Initially at least, most scholars agreed with the verdict at Nuremberg, arguing that the "business world was . . . a so-called refuge in which . . . the Jews were able to continue comparatively unmolested until the second half of the thirties, almost until Schacht stepped down as Minister of Economics." More recently, historians have begun to revise this assumption, claiming that Schacht was never as sympathetic toward Jews as he claimed. Though a founding member of the Democrat Party, for example, Schacht left the DDP in 1926 and joined the conservative opposition in 1931. Only two years later, he took over as Hitler's Reichsbank president, and in August 1934, he was named finance minister.<sup>21</sup> The historian Albert Fischer even blames Schacht, in restoring the German economy and facilitating the expropriation of Jewish property, for Hitler's long-term popularity and, to some extent, the Holocaust.<sup>22</sup>

This revisionist approach ignores essential aspects of historical context, however. Before Auschwitz, moderate anti-Semitism was acceptable even among "anti-antisemitic" liberals. Thus Schacht saw no contradiction in befriending and mentoring Jewish colleagues like Gustav Stolper while simultaneously propagating anti-Semitic stereotypes.<sup>23</sup> Schacht's position on the "Jewish Question" prior to 1933 is perhaps best exemplified in a letter he wrote to a colleague regarding the decision of the Socialist Reich President Ebert not to invite a representative of the Jewish religious community to speak at a celebration in honor of the new Weimar Republic. The Jewish community's repeated insistence on "equal" representation with Protestants and Catholics, Schacht explained, was one of the reasons for the rise in anti-Semitism after the First World War. "No one denied the Jews human or political equality," Schacht concluded, "but their religious values were certainly not worth fifty or a hundred times those of other beliefs."<sup>24</sup> This letter indicates the struggle of many Democrats between a liberal view that Jews deserved equal rights as individuals and a lack of patience, verging on anti-Semitism, with the influence ostensibly demanded by Jews as a collective ethnoreligious entity.

There are superficial continuities between Schacht's (liberal) insistence on Jewish equality as individuals and not an ethnoreligious community, and Nazi policies toward the Jews in the first months of the Third Reich. Early on, Schacht countenanced a reduction of Jewish influence in finance and the professions, including a moderate level of Aryanization. More controversially, he endorsed the 1935 Nuremberg Laws. Although he disagreed with stripping the Jews of their citizenship, Schacht reasoned pragmatically that the laws might finally resolve the eternally nettlesome "Jewish Question."<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, when these expectations proved illusory, Schacht increased his public exertions to prevent anti-Semitic excesses and private efforts to assist individual Jews. He began to complain more frequently about the economic consequences of anti-Semitic prejudice and condemned the use of violence by SA stormtroopers against Jewish shopkeepers. For a leading Reich official to work against Nazi Jewish policy, particularly after Nuremberg, was no easy task. Nor did Schacht's opposition to anti-Semitic terror assist Goering in "Aryanizing" Jewish businesses or Heydrich in fomenting emigration.<sup>26</sup>

Some historians nonetheless argue that Schacht advocated Aryanization, citing examples where he did not utilize his power to protect Jewish banking interests.<sup>27</sup> But what was the point of resisting the expropriation of Jewish property in the wake of the Nuremberg Laws? The Jews were stripped of their citizenship rights and Germany was in the midst of the Great Depression. Why expend political capital protecting the financial interests of individuals who were no longer citizens and who possessed, on average, considerably more assets than the average German? This would have been politically self-defeating and utterly futile to boot. Conversely, even Schacht's most prominent critics note that Schacht did nothing to accelerate the process, and may in fact have prevented some of its worst excesses.<sup>28</sup>

Of course it is critical to distinguish between purely pragmatic policies designed to serve the German economy and genuinely magnanimous efforts to curb Nazi policies. But while much of what Schacht pursued before 1935 fits into the former category, it is hard to maintain that Schacht maintained a utilitarian course thereafter.<sup>29</sup> He castigated Julius Streicher and the SA for their arbitrary and violent anti-Semitism, most famously in a speech at Königsberg, which received multiple warnings from Nazi officials.<sup>30</sup> Schacht's open disputes with Hitler over tempering anti-Jewish measures were not always pragmatic, either. Goering's resulting appointment as plenipotentiary for the Four Year Plan in September 1936 signaled the decline of Schacht's power and influence. Still, he persisted in questioning Nazi policies, not only toward the economy but also the Jews, while actively purging Nazis from his Economics Ministry

and employing former Democrats whenever possible. Even the Jewish businessman Hans Robinsohn, always contemptuous of Schacht during their time as party colleagues, acknowledged that it was far easier for Jewish businesses to avoid Aryanization under Schacht than Funk or Goering.<sup>31</sup>

For all these reasons, it is difficult to accept Albert Fischer's contention that "there was no discord between Schacht and Hitler."<sup>32</sup> When the Führer relieved Schacht of his duties as president of the Reichsbank in January 1939, Hitler justified his decision in a curt letter: "You simply do not conform to the general National Socialist framework," and "you have refused to allow your civil servants to be evaluated by the party."<sup>33</sup> As Robinsohn noted, there was a palpable "strengthening of the political opposition" in the wake of Schacht's dismissal.<sup>34</sup> Suspected for obvious reasons of complicity in the 20 July conspiracy, Schacht spent the last ten months of the Third Reich in different concentration camps—ten months more than most of his Democratic colleagues.<sup>35</sup> Whether Schacht could have done more than he did is a matter of speculation. But there is no doubt he preserved an uncommon degree of liberal moderation and compassion in an otherwise virulently anti-Semitic Reich.

#### IV.

As we have seen in the case of Hjalmar Schacht, the experience of Jewish persecution could turn even the most ambivalent "anti-antisemites" into active opponents of National Socialism. Like Schacht, the State Party chairman Hermann Dietrich was hardly known for his "philosemitic" views during the Weimar Republic. Indeed, he had endorsed the DDP's merger with the *völkisch* Young Germans and voted for the Enabling Law along with his State Party colleagues. Yet Dietrich would become one of the most active "anti-antisemites" in the Third Reich, doing more than most to insulate Jewish colleagues from the "Final Solution."<sup>36</sup> Throughout the 1930s, we find letters from Jewish colleagues, sometimes once or twice removed, requesting financial assistance, employment, or legal advice.<sup>37</sup> Rarely did he disappoint. Already in 1933, as the major Jewish-owned publishing firms were forced to release scores of Jewish Democrats, Dietrich was there to aid them in transitioning into other jobs.<sup>38</sup> And in 1934, always on the lookout for Jewish employment opportunities, Dietrich instructed a colleague to investigate a rumor that "a paper will appear in the Mosse Verlag that is supposedly produced by non-Aryan people."<sup>39</sup> In 1936, a former Ullstein employee, Alexander Weinstein, contacted Dietrich about helping him to obtain a visa. Encouraged by the fact that Weinstein spent three years training to be a mechanic, Dietrich promised to mine contacts to find him a job abroad.<sup>40</sup>

Dietrich represented Jews frequently in cases of Aryanization and emigration. Neither was terribly remunerative. According to the Aryanization laws, any money made by representing Jews was taxed an *additional* 40 percent over the usual income tax.<sup>41</sup> Yet Dietrich devoted considerable time assisting Jewish acquaintances in selling their businesses and financing emigration. Even after the war began, Dietrich managed to help at least a dozen Jewish men and women emigrate to Great Britain, America, or Palestine.<sup>42</sup> Dietrich's motives weren't purely magnanimous. When a former DDP colleague Ernst Mayer wrote Heuss looking for employment, Dietrich helped Mayer purchase a soon-to-be Aryanized real estate business. Mayer probably paid a more generous price than that offered by the Nazi government.<sup>43</sup> But he still obtained an exceptional deal, and Dietrich subsequently used Mayer as his real estate agent.<sup>44</sup> Dietrich was also cautious. He does not appear to have defended Jewish firms *against* Aryanization, for example, something that garnered his Democratic colleague Waldemar Koch three weeks of Gestapo interrogation.<sup>45</sup> We should nonetheless remember that most gentile lawyers refused to defend Jews, or at the very least exploited their vulnerable circumstances.<sup>46</sup> By contrast, Dietrich treated his Jewish clients with the utmost respect, sometimes offering counsel without requiring payment.<sup>47</sup>

On a more personal level, Dietrich continued to employ his Jewish secretary, Ms. Käthe Zolki. When the Reich Legal Association first inquired as to why Dietrich still retained a non-Aryan secretary in 1937, Dietrich argued that he employed her to finish up a particular case, and then only at his home office in Berlin-Steglitz. It is obvious, however, that he was using her services for a great many duties.<sup>48</sup> After Dietrich moved permanently to his home office in July 1940, ostensibly for health reasons, Ms. Zolki took over *all* formal secretarial duties. Indeed, he retained her services even after dismissing his equally loyal "Aryan" secretary Charlotte Bein.<sup>49</sup> Dietrich likewise permitted Zolki to handle both delicate financial correspondence and most intimate personal matters. One might assume this opened his practice to Gestapo intervention and compromised friends and colleagues. Yet dozens of Dietrich's colleagues wrote Zolki back personally, wishing her happy holidays, thanking her for gifts sent on Dietrich's behalf and encouraging her "to remain brave," no doubt referring to the difficulty of being Jewish in wartime Nazi Germany.<sup>50</sup> Dietrich himself kept in close touch with erstwhile Jewish colleagues long after it was fashionable.<sup>51</sup>

Dietrich worked equally hard to help sponsor Jewish emigration. As the last chairman of the Defense League Against Anti-Semitism, Georg Gothein had more experience than any Democrat in dealing with Jewish persecution. But Gothein still turned to Dietrich to intervene in the case of the Hamburg Democrat Felix Waldstein. Dietrich reacted cautiously. In

the seven weeks since Kristallnacht, he had contacted the American consulate repeatedly on behalf of Jewish colleagues, but the conversation invariably “ended in a very depressing fashion.” Despite the serious situation, Dietrich complained, the Americans were hardly more favorable to Jewish émigrés than the Third Reich. Nevertheless, only a few weeks after Gothein’s missive to Dietrich, Waldstein managed to emigrate to London.<sup>52</sup>

Of course Dietrich could only do so much. He was neither a leading Nazi official, extraordinarily wealthy, nor exceptionally well connected. But that is precisely why his example is so illuminating. Dietrich’s co-chairman of the German State Party, Reinhold Maier, also a lawyer with a small practice, found himself in similar political and financial circumstances. The only real difference is that Maier had a Jewish wife instead of a Jewish secretary. Yet even after his wife and children emigrated to England in 1936, Maier was unable to muster the least resistance to National Socialism. Afraid that the Gestapo might take away his law practice, Maier finally divorced his émigré wife in 1943.<sup>53</sup> Dietrich, in contrast, managed to find employment for Jewish colleagues, help others sell their businesses, and facilitate emigration wherever possible, all the while protecting his Jewish secretary and refusing to participate in the Reich Legal Association in any appreciable way. While modest in its impact, Dietrich’s long-term ideological non-conformity indicates the substantial degree to which liberal “anti-anti-Semites” might assist Jewish colleagues without compromising their own safety or livelihood.

## V.

A legal scholar by training, Fritz Elsas entered politics during the First World War as a Progressive (FVP) member of the Stuttgart city council.<sup>54</sup> As a DDP *Landtag* representative and deputy mayor of Berlin, Elsas rose to become one of the most influential Democrats in the latter years of the Weimar Republic. Like many of his colleagues in the Robinsohn-Strassmann resistance group, Elsas was a left-wing, social liberal. But unlike Robinsohn, he joined the *völkisch*-inflected German State Party and supported a temporary “dictatorship of the center” as the most practical alternative to a dictatorship of the extreme right or left. He likewise co-founded the journal *The State is You* alongside Thomas Mann and Ernst Jäckh, *Vernunftrepublikaner* whose anti-Nazi antipathies were leavened by an ample dose of romantic, anti-democratic nationalism.<sup>55</sup>

Elsas himself never accepted the Nazi “equation of National Socialism with Germanness.” Nor did he cite his own “Jewishness” as crucial in shaping his resistance to the regime. To be sure, one reason for his ability to see himself as German and not a Jew was his exceptional status.

As a converted Protestant married to an “Aryan,” he was insulated from persecution through a so-called “privileged mixed-marriage” [*privilegierte Mischehe*]. Elsas ostensibly enjoyed the “protection” of leading Reich liberals like Hjalmar Schacht and Werner Stephan as well. Despite these “advantages,” he might have nonetheless retreated into inner emigration. But Elsas rejected the path of least resistance, joining the incipient Robinsohn-Strassmann group in 1934 and devoting himself to overthrowing Hitler. Surviving a pending Holocaust was the least of his worries.<sup>56</sup>

Among all liberal democrats—and certainly Jewish liberals—Elsas may have taken the greatest risks and had the greatest impact. Until 1937, Elsas’s main professional activity was advising Jews how to negotiate the complex currency controls, Aryanization laws, and other legal restrictions that stood in the way of emigration. In July 1937, the Gestapo appeared at his door and proceeded to rifle through his cabinets, finding nothing incriminating, but nevertheless sending Elsas to the Moabit prison for a month of interrogation.<sup>57</sup> Elsas subsequently lost his secretary and much of his clientele, and in the wake of Crystal Night he was evicted from his apartment. Though shaken by these events, he also seemed stirred to more active resistance [*Widerstand*]. For the duration of his life, he lived with his wife in a modest apartment in Berlin-Dahlem, studying history, working on his Romance languages, and plotting the coming of a post-Nazi Germany.<sup>58</sup>

Elsas subsequently developed intimate ties to high-ranking members of the 20 July Circle. After the war broke out, Elsas intensified his contacts, in particular to Carl Goerdeler. As an associate of Goerdeler, Elsas managed to meet the ardent Nazi general Walter von Reichenau, who apparently intimated Hitler’s plans for an invasion of the Low Countries. Through contacts in Copenhagen and Stockholm, Elsas forwarded this information on to Holland.<sup>59</sup> Elsas worked closely with the shadow chancellor Goerdeler on plans for a post-Nazi government and was ultimately designated to take over the Reich Chancellery. Interestingly, however,—and indicative of Elsas’s “German national” point of view—it was Goerdeler who insisted on a clear statement of principles against the “Final Solution,” promising to restore equal rights for German Jews and to support a Jewish state in Palestine for any Jews who wished to leave.<sup>60</sup> Given the profound trust that must have developed between the two men, it is hardly surprising that Goerdeler sought refuge with Elsas in the days after the failed assassination attempt.<sup>61</sup> But due to Goerdeler’s lack of discretion, both were arrested. Unlike Goerdeler, Stauffenberg, and Moltke, Elsas was not immediately executed. He was tortured and, after refusing to betray any accomplices, transferred to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. At some point in mid-January 1945, he was murdered by the Gestapo.<sup>62</sup>

Elsas's participation in the 20 July plot is compelling for three reasons. First and foremost, Elsas was apparently not arrested in 1937 and 1944 (or murdered in 1945) *because* he was Jewish, but rather due to his direct complicity in the 20 July plot. Equally astounding is the fact that Elsas, a left-wing Jewish liberal who composed the bulk of the plotters' proclamation to the German people and who occupied a leading position in Goerdeler's shadow government, would survive the initial wave of executions that took the lives of so many "Aryan" generals and politicians. While his marriage to a gentile no doubt protected Elsas prior to his involvement in the resistance, it cannot have played a major role thereafter. Finally, Elsas's close relationship with Goerdeler, Beck, and other notable conservatives suggests the simplicity of any assertions about the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism—much less its "eliminationist" variant—in German society. Many of Germany's leading generals, aristocrats, and businessmen clearly trusted Elsas with their lives, not to mention Germany's future. He is a unique example of the potential for active Jewish resistance, the skepticism of German elites toward Nazi anti-Semitism, and perhaps even the lingering *Rechtsstaatlichkeit* of the German justice system.

## VI.

During the course of their voluminous correspondence, Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt eventually turned to the question of German resistance against National Socialism. Arendt wrote Jaspers that his assessment was quite good, except that "you have completely forgotten about the Jews." The liberal philosopher responded matter-of-factly. Since the Jews were no longer citizens according to the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, it didn't make sense to include them in a discussion of "German" resistance. The fact that Jaspers was a putative "philosemite" whose own wife was Jewish makes his insensitive response all the more remarkable.<sup>63</sup> Yet, as another liberal "philosemite," Theodor Tantzén, put it after the war, "The murder of the Jews was for [members of the resistance] not the central problem. They viewed this crime together with other crimes."<sup>64</sup> Even Heuss, who made an immense effort as Federal President to raise awareness of the Holocaust, barely discussed the "Jewish Question" between 1933 and 1945.<sup>65</sup>

One cannot write off this seeming disinterest in the "Jewish Question" to liberal anti-Semitism. To be sure, some *völkisch*-inclined Democrats tacitly acquiesced to the 1933 laws restricting the Jews' supposedly disproportionate influence in the civil service, education, and the professions. But as Nazi persecution worsened, most Democrats did what they could to assist Jewish friends or colleagues who had been deprived of

their equal rights as individuals.<sup>66</sup> The case of Fritz Elsas does little to dispel the general impression of initial indifference toward “Jewish questions,” followed by growing political, legal, and ideological rejection of Jewish persecution as individuals.<sup>67</sup> Elsas was equally susceptible to the patriotic fervor of his Democratic colleagues and possessed few special insights as to Hitler’s “true” intentions.<sup>68</sup> As a liberal nationalist and converted Protestant, Elsas simply refused to see his marginalization as peculiarly “Jewish.” That he might persevere as well as he did, organizing discussion circles, helping colleagues escape, and even plotting the downfall of the regime, nonetheless indicates extraordinary Jewish agency in the midst of the Holocaust.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time we must remember that liberals faced enormous challenges in helping Jewish colleagues. Although collective action appears to have checked some Nazi measures—none more famously than the 1943 *Rosenstrasse* protests—in no aspect of the Third Reich was *individual* dissent more difficult than the “Jewish Question.”<sup>70</sup> As war ensued and the “Final Solution” developed its murderous logic, helping Jews became an increasingly perilous business. Reinhold Maier divorced his Jewish wife out of fear of the Gestapo. And when asked to hide a Jewish child for a few days, the humanitarian Anna von Gierke, herself part Jewish, confessed that “for the first time in her life, she was compelled to refuse someone in need of help.”<sup>71</sup>

These dangers did not dissuade Democrats from resisting anti-Semitism on a case-by-case basis.<sup>72</sup> But rarely did they contemplate challenging Nazi anti-Semitism at a conceptual level.<sup>73</sup> Even after 1933, liberals continued to view the right-wing (as well as Zionist) obsession with the *collective* fate of German Jewry as antithetical to individual equality before the law. Virtually all liberals, from Treitschke to Elsas, shared a general conviction that the “Jewish Question” would resolve itself through assimilation, not greater ethnoreligious differentiation. This reticence to privilege collective Jewish suffering over the problems facing all Germans in the war can hardly be equated with “eliminationist anti-Semitism.” To paraphrase the Democrat Mayer-Pantenius from the beginning of this article, however, the liberals were no anti-Semites, but they were also no Jews.<sup>74</sup>

Lacking the benefit of hindsight, preoccupied with survival, and distracted by larger questions of domestic and foreign policy, German Democrats reacted similarly to their colleagues in France, Great Britain, and the United States. On an individual basis, they expended substantial time, money, and energy helping Jewish colleagues. But they consistently failed to provide an alternative answer to Hitler’s “Jewish Question.” By the time these otherwise well-meaning German Democrats acknowledged the centrality of eliminationist anti-Semitism in Nazi ide-

ology, Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe was virtually extinguished.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Peter Pulzer, "The Beginning of the End," in *The Jews in Nazi Germany, 1933–1943*, ed. Arnold Paucker and Barbara Suchy (Tübingen, 1986), 22.

<sup>2</sup> See Andreas Gotzmann, Rainer Liedtke, and Till van Rahden, eds., *Juden, Bürger, Deutsche: Zur Geschichte von Vielfalt und Differenz 1800–1933* (Tübingen, 2001); also see Till van Rahden, *Juden und andere Breslauer: Die Beziehungen zwischen Juden, Protestanten und Katholiken in einer deutschen Großstadt von 1860 bis 1925* (Göttingen, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Eric Kurlander, *The Price of Exclusion: Ethnicity, National Identity and the Decline of German Liberalism* (New York, 2006), 78–85; also see Peter Pulzer, "Jewish Participation in Wilhelmine Politics," in *Jews and Germans from 1860 to 1933*, ed. David Bronsen (Heidelberg, 1979), 78–99; Jan Palmowski, "Between Dependence and Influence: Jews and Liberalism in Frankfurt am Main," in *Liberalism, Anti-Semitism, and Democracy*, ed. Henning Tewes and Jonathan Wright (Oxford, 2001), 76–101; Jonathan Wright, "Liberalism and Anti-Semitism in Germany: The Case of Gustav Stresemann," in *Liberalism, Anti-Semitism, and Democracy*, ed. Tewes and Wright, 102–126.

<sup>4</sup> See Hans Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz* (Princeton, 1991); Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide* (Cambridge, 1995); Ian Kershaw, *Public Opinion and Political Dissent* (Oxford, 2002); Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris* (New York, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1992); Michael Wildt, "Violence Against the Jews in Germany, 1933–1939"; Otto Kulka, "The German Population and the Jews: State of Research and New Perspectives," Alf Lüdtke, "German Work and German Workers: The Impact of Symbols on the Exclusion of Jews in Nazi Germany," in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism: German Society and the Persecution of the Jews, 1933–1941*, ed. David Bankier (New York, 2000), 181–212, 271–281, 296–311; Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler* (Oxford, 2001); Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II* (New York, 2006); Peter Longerich, "Davon haben wir nicht gewusst": *Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung, 1933–1945* (Berlin, 2006); Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton, 1992); Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York, 1997). According to Lars Fischer, even the Socialists possessed an essentialist and potentially eliminationist anti-Semitic impulse. See Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Anti-Semitism* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See Noel Cary, "Antisemitism, Everyday Life, and the Devastation of Public Morals in Germany," *Central European History* 35 (2002): 551–589.

<sup>7</sup> See Heinrich von Treitschke, *Unsere Aussichten* (Berlin, 1879); Karsten Krieger, *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit 1879–1881: Eine Kontroverse um die Zugehörigkeit der deutschen Juden zur Nation* (Munich, 2003), 699–753.

<sup>8</sup> See Pulzer, "Jewish Participation," in *Jews and Germans*, ed. Bronsen, 78–99; Jan Palmowski, "Between Dependence and Influence," in *Liberalism, Anti-Semitism, and Democracy*, ed. Tewes and Wright, 76–101; folder, A.S.V. *Reste vom Abwehrverein*, 101–104, in NL Gothein, BAK: N 1006, #54.

<sup>9</sup> Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Anti-Semitism*, 6–36; van Rahden, *Juden und andere Breslauer*.

<sup>10</sup> Kurlander, *Price of Exclusion*, 32–33, 51–65, 78–93, 192–203; also see Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism* (New York, 1972) and Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley, 1974); Georg Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York, 1998); Robert Gellately, *The Politics of Economic Despair* (London, 1974); Shulamit Volkov, *The Rise of Popular Antimodernism in Germany: The Urban Master Artisans, 1873–1896* (Princeton, 1978).

- <sup>11</sup> Pulzer, "Jewish Participation," in *Jews and Germans*, 78–99; Palmowski, "Between Dependence and Influence," in *Liberalism, Anti-Semitism, and Democracy*, 76–101.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Also see letter from Dr. Levy to Nathan, 8.12.20, in NL Nathan, BAB: N 2207, #18.
- <sup>13</sup> Pulzer, "Jewish Participation," in *Jews and Germans*, 78–99; Larry Jones, *German Liberalism and the Dissolution of the Weimar Party System* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 104; DDP minutes, 1.07.19, in BAK: R 45 III, #15,13–25, 40–53; Gothein to Nathan, 10.20.20, in NL Nathan, BAB: N 2207, #5; also see speeches by Gothein and Landsberg opposing anti-Semitism, 11.16.19, in NL Gerland, BAK: N 1010, #27. "Der Antisemitismus der Alledutschen." Der Volksstaat, 9.19.19. Dr. Ingemar Helmrich, "Die Verjudung des Ringes," in *Geschichte der Juden in Liegnitz* (Liegnitz, 1938), 90–92; *Breslauer Zeitung*, 7.25.32, 7.28.32; reports on speeches by Neumann in Trebnitz and Bayer in Prausnitz, 11.02.32, Minutes of the DVP in BAB: R 45 II, #53129.
- <sup>14</sup> See Kurlander, *Price of Exclusion*, 249–271; Palmowski, "Between Dependence and Influence," in *Liberalism, Anti-Semitism, and Democracy*, 76–101.
- <sup>15</sup> See Robinsohn Berichte [1934] in Horst Sassin, *Liberale im Widerstand: Die Robinsohn-Strassmann Gruppe, 1934–1942* (Hamburg, 1992), 257–258.
- <sup>16</sup> Mitschke to Schütt, 2.11.33, in NL Dietrich, BAK N 1004, #150.
- <sup>17</sup> Schnell to Dingeldey, 5.15.33, in NL Dingeldey, BAK: N 1002, #63.
- <sup>18</sup> B. Mayer-Pantenius to Dietrich, 6.16.33, in NL Dietrich, BAK N 1004, #150.
- <sup>19</sup> Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*, ed. Chinua Achebe (New York, 1990), 13.
- <sup>20</sup> Hjalmar Schacht, *Abrechnung mit Hitler* (Westport, 1956), 1–17.
- <sup>21</sup> Stolper, "Schacht," in NL Stolper, BAK: N 1186, #29; Bruce Frye, *Liberal Democrats in the Weimar Republic* (Dekalb, 1985), 48–57, 101–117.
- <sup>22</sup> See Albert Fischer, "The Minister of Economics and the Expulsion of the Jews from the German Economy," in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, 213–225; Albert Fischer, *Hjalmar Schacht und Deutschlands 'Judenfrage': Der 'Wirtschaftsdiktator' und die Vertreibung der Juden aus der deutschen Wirtschaft* (Cologne, 1995); Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York, 2006), 383–394.
- <sup>23</sup> Fischer, "The Minister of Economics and the Expulsion of the Jews from the German Economy," in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, 215; Fischer, *Schacht*, 104–125; Stolper to Schacht, 7.02.33, in NL Stolper, BAK: N 1186, #29.
- <sup>24</sup> Schacht to Kardorff 1.27.60; Kardorff to Schacht, 2.09.60, in NL K. v. Kardorff, BAK: N 1039, #65.
- <sup>25</sup> Fischer, *Schacht*, 126–191, 216–218.
- <sup>26</sup> Fischer, *Schacht*, 192–223; John Weitz, *Hitler's Banker: Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht* (New York: 1997), 186–88; Evans, *Power*, 343–358.
- <sup>27</sup> Fischer, "The Minister of Economics and the Expulsion of the Jews from the German Economy," in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, 215–219.
- <sup>28</sup> Fischer, "Expulsion," in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, 221–222.
- <sup>29</sup> Fischer, "Expulsion," in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, 223–224.
- <sup>30</sup> Schacht, *Confessions of the "Old Wizard"* (Boston, 1956), 284–285, 318–322; Evans, *Power*, 381–394.
- <sup>31</sup> Sassin, *Liberale*, 127–128, 162–166; Bajohr, 'Aryanisation' in Hamburg: *The Economic Exclusion of Jews and the Confiscation of their Property in Nazi Germany* (New York, 2002), 45–47.

- <sup>32</sup> Fischer, "The Minister of Economics and the Expulsion of the Jews from the German Economy," in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, 225.
- <sup>33</sup> Ludwig Luckemeyer, *Wilhelm Heile 1881–1981: Föderativer liberaler Rebell in DDP u. FDP u. erster liberaler Vorkämpfer Europas in Deutschland. Politisch-zeitgeschichtliche Festschrift aus Anlaß d. 100. Geburtstags d. engsten Mitarbeiters Friedrich Naumanns u. Präsidenten d. FDP am 18. Dez. 1981*, (Wiesbaden, 1981), 111–114; Evans, *Power*, 360–363; Schacht, *Confessions*, 284–285, 318–322, 446–455.
- <sup>34</sup> See Robinsohn Denkschrift [February 1939] in Sassin, *Liberale*, 306.
- <sup>35</sup> Schacht, *Abrechnung*, 12–17.
- <sup>36</sup> Dietrich writes Jewish colleague, 9.29.33, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #148.
- <sup>37</sup> Schiffan to Dietrich, 7.26.39, 8.10.35, 8.12.35, 8.29.35, in NL Dietrich, N 1004, #155.
- <sup>38</sup> Dietrich to Bihler, 12.12.33; Birk to Dietrich, 7.06.33, 2.14.34, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #143; Steiner to Dietrich, 11.29.34, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #155.
- <sup>39</sup> Dietrich to Nuschke, 1.12.34, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #152.
- <sup>40</sup> Weinstein to Dietrich, 11.21.36, NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #157.
- <sup>41</sup> Dietrich to Berlin Treasury Department, 3.30.42, Treasury to Dietrich [April 1942], in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #365.
- <sup>42</sup> See folders in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #370, 384–386, 406.
- <sup>43</sup> Ernst Mayer to Heuss, 11.02.35; Heuss to Dietrich, 11.04.35; Mayer to Dietrich, 1.12.36, 3.17.36, 5.28.36; 4.23.36; Dietrich to Mundhenke, 1.13.36; Dietrich to Mayer, 1.04.36, 5.11.36, 5.15.36, 5.22.36, 11.09.36. NL 1004, BAK: Dietrich, #150.
- <sup>44</sup> Koch to Dietrich, 9.01.33, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #149.
- <sup>45</sup> Waldemar Koch, *Aus den Lebenserinnerungen eines Wirtschaftsingenieurs* (Cologne, 1962).
- <sup>46</sup> Joachim Scholtzky, *Robert Bosch und der Liberale Widerstand gegen Hitler 1933–1945* (Berlin, 1999), 271; Bajohr, 'Aryanisation,' 20–22, 41–47, 104–108, 142–143, 222–226..
- <sup>47</sup> Dietrich to Sander family, 11.22.37, 3.08.37, 3.15.37, 3.18.37, 12.13.38; Kaufmann to Dietrich, 11.19.38; also see folders marked 411–421 *Anwaltsakten betr. Wilhelm Lieberg u. Co. GMBH*, NL Dietrich, N 1004, #155, #'s 411–421; Dietrich to Berg, 3.02.36, NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #143.
- <sup>48</sup> Dietrich to Zolki, 6.10.37, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #364.
- <sup>49</sup> Dietrich to RVDA, 7.01.40; Dietrich to Bein, 6.01.40, in N 1004, #364, #143.
- <sup>50</sup> Troeltsch to Zolki, 7.30.41; Rita Troeltsch to Zolki, 9.07.41; Zolki to Troeltsch, 9.11.41, 9.17.41, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #172.
- <sup>51</sup> Dietrich to Heinemann, 6.28.38, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #146; Becker to Dietrich, 12.03.35, 6.06.37, 1.09.38; Dietrich to Becker, 6.08.37, in NL Dietrich, N 1004, #143.
- <sup>52</sup> Gothein to Dietrich, 11.27.38; Dietrich to Gothein, 11.28.38, in NL Dietrich, BAK: N 1004, #145; also see Waldstein Family Holocaust claims proceedings, [http://www.crtii.org/\\_awards/\\_apdfs/Waldstein\\_Felix\\_and\\_Gertrud.pdf](http://www.crtii.org/_awards/_apdfs/Waldstein_Felix_and_Gertrud.pdf).
- <sup>53</sup> Paul Sauer, ed., *Reinhold Maier: Briefwechsel mit seiner Familie 1930 bis 1946* (Leipzig, 1989), 15–168.
- <sup>54</sup> Manfred Schmid, ed., *Fritz Elsas: Ein Demokrat im Widerstand. Zeugnisse eines Liberalen in der Weimarer Republik* (Gerlingen, 1999), 17–18.
- <sup>55</sup> Schmid, ed., *Demokrat*, 31; Jörg Thierfelder, "Fritz Elsas," in *Zeugen des Widerstands*, ed. Joachim Helhausen (Tübingen, 1996), 96–99.
- <sup>56</sup> Sassin, *Liberale*, 19–21, 35, 47–67, 92, 116, 162–167, 249; Schmid, ed., *Demokrat*, 18, 34.
- <sup>57</sup> Schmid, ed., *Demokrat*, 37–38; Thierfelder, "Fritz Elsas," in *Zeugen des Widerstands*, 102–103; also see Viktor Klemperer, *'I Will Bear Witness': A Diary of the Nazi Years, 1933–1941* (New York, 1999).

- <sup>58</sup> Schmid, ed., *Demokrat*, 36–37.
- <sup>59</sup> Schmid, ed., *Demokrat*, 40–42; Thierfelder, “Fritz Elsas,” in *Zeugen des Widerstands*, 104–107.
- <sup>60</sup> Konrad Kwiet, “Resistance and Opposition: The Example of the German Jews,” in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, 65–69; See Berichte Robinsohns [ca. November/Dezember 1941] in Sassin, *Liberale*, 369; Hoffmann, “The German Resistance to Hitler and the Jews,” in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, 466.
- <sup>61</sup> Sassin, *Liberale*, 78; Schmid, ed., *Demokrat*, 7–8.
- <sup>62</sup> Sassin, *Liberale*, 78; Schmid, ed., *Demokrat*, 40–43; Thierfelder, “Fritz Elsas,” in *Zeugen des Widerstands*, 108–110.
- <sup>63</sup> Martina Neumann, *Theodor Tantzen: Ein widerspenstiger Liberaler gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Hanover, 1998), 176.
- <sup>64</sup> Neumann, *Tantzen*, 356.
- <sup>65</sup> On Heuss’s tireless effort to repair German-Jewish relations, see Jay Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1933–1945* (Cambridge, 2005), 190–196, 264–265.
- <sup>66</sup> Margit Göttert, “Gertrud Bäumer und Marianne Weber: Kampfgefährtingen im Bund deutscher Frauenverein,” in *Marianne Weber: Beiträge zu Werk und Person*, ed. Bärbel Meurer (Tübingen, 2004), 150.
- <sup>67</sup> Cary, “Antisemitism,” in *Central European History* 35 (2002), 551–589.
- <sup>68</sup> Marie Baum, *Rückblick auf meinem Leben* (Heidelberg, 1950), 291–292; Bankier, *Public Opinion*, 140–152.
- <sup>69</sup> Bryan Rigg, *Hitler’s Jewish Soldiers* (Lawrence, 2002).
- <sup>70</sup> Nathan Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart: Intermarriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany* (New York, 1996).
- <sup>71</sup> Baum, *Rückblick*, 309–310; Lauterer, *Parlamentarierinnen in Deutschland 1918/19–1949* (Königstein, 2002), 226.
- <sup>72</sup> Kardorff to Weizmann, 5.03.55, 7.22.55, 9.10.48, 5.07.56, in NL Kardorff, BAK: N 1039, #60, 67; Koch-Weser, *Hitler and Beyond* (New York, 1945), 105–106.
- <sup>73</sup> Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (New York, 1947).
- <sup>74</sup> Baum, *Rückblick*, 297.