

The Impact of the Nazi Racial Decrees on the University of Heidelberg

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One of the first objectives realized by the Nazis during the years 1933-1935 was the "cleansing" (*Saeuberung*) of the German universities of their Jewish students and lecturers. This purge was connected with the attempt to "co-ordinate" (*Gleichschaltung*) German academic life with the tenets of National Socialism. Yet, while "co-ordination" and "cleansing" seem to us in retrospect to be interrelated processes, the Nazis considered them as two separate issues. The former was a long-range objective, which was never fully realized, while the ousting of Jewish academics was in fact one aspect of the Nazi "solution of the Jewish question."

The following is an attempt to describe the "cleansing" process and to analyze its implications¹. Although the research presented here is a case study of a single university - Heidelberg* - it also constitutes all attempt to

¹ For a description of the expulsion of Jewish academics from the Berlin-Charlottenburg T.H. see Hans Ebert, "The Expulsion of the Jews from the Berlin-Charlottenburg Technische Hochschule," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Vol. XIX, 1974, pp. 155-171.

*The University of Heidelberg, established in 1386 by the Elector Palatine of the Rhine, Ruprecht I, for several centuries played a significant role in the spiritual life of Central Europe. In May 1803, during the Napoleonic wars, Karl Friedrich, *Markgraf* of Baden, issued an edict for the re-organisation of the university. This edict effected a departure from the medieval tradition of *studium generale*, according to which education had been regarded primarily as a tool of the state. More important, it gave impetus to the modern concept of freedom in research and instruction, and thus to modern scholarship. The 1803 act of renewal was seen by as an event equal in importance to the foundation of the university in 1386. The event was perpetuated by naming the university after its two founders (the Ruprecht-Karl or Ruperto-Carola Universitaet). During the 19th century, as *Wissenschaft* and *Bildung* developed as the main concepts of German academic life, the gradual emancipation of German Jewry brought some Jews into the universities. (Discussion of the contribution of German Jewish academics to science in general and to German *Wissenschaft* in particular exceeds the bounds of this study.)

delineate the general characteristics of Nazi racial objectives as implemented in German institutions of higher learning.

The period of political and socio-economic crisis, which marked the decline of the Weimar Republic considerably affected the academic and social climate in several universities. The Nazis exploited the yearning for "national revival" (*Nationalerhebung*) to stir up social and political unrest, focusing primarily on the "Jewish Question." At Heidelberg the event which exemplified this development was the Gumbel Affair (*Fall Gumbel*), which rocked the University for two years and created a tense, antisemitic atmosphere, which was aggravated by similar "cases" in other universities, such as those of Hans Nawiski, Theodor Lessing, Ernst Cohen and several others.

Emil Gumbel, who was of Jewish origin, was a Socialist and pacifist who openly expressed his convictions. In the summer of 1930, as a result of his scholarly achievements in the field of statistics, he was promoted by the Baden Minister of Education to the position of "extraordinary associate professor." The radical nationalists among the students at Heidelberg, several nationalist professors, as well as the nationalistic parties and press vehemently opposed his appointment, claiming that it was unconstitutional. The Nazi and the nationalistic factions in the Student Union, as well as the right-wing political parties in Baden, attempted to turn this controversy into a political and ideological crisis, thus challenging a traditionally sacred principle of German academia - the complete separation of the State from academic affairs. These (developments proved the vulnerability of German scholars to the violence generated by the adherents of an anti-intellectual ideology. Finally, not only Gumbel's appointment but also his career at Heidelberg was terminated.

On November 7, 1930, at one of the first rallies against Gumbel, Dr. Vogel, a member of the Heidelberg Nazi Party, described Gumbel as a traitor to the German people who, being a Jew, infected the "historical Spirit" of the university. The next protest rally was intended to lay the groundwork for the

struggle of the nationalist Student Union in order to purify the university.'²

"The Affair" had political implications during the presidential election campaign of 1932, when 32 members of the university's teaching staff issued a call, in the pages of the local liberal newspaper, *Das Heidelberger Tageblatt*, to vote for Hindenburg. The Nazi newspaper, *Die Volksgemeinschaft*, in a malevolent attack, named Hindenburg's acclaimers as "Gumbel's supporters" and identified them as "Rabbi Pinkus's men."³

These examples are indicative of the virulent verbal attacks levelled against Jews. Jewish students were also subjected to physical violence at the height of the street demonstrations⁴. These manifestations of anti-Jewish animosity at Heidelberg cannot be separated from the general pressure exerted by the Nazis throughout the Reich prior to their rise to power. Moreover, *Fall Gumbel* was not an isolated case. For its provocateurs it was a means of achieving political and ideological ends. As far as its victims, professors and students alike, are concerned, it was a clearly sounded warning, which exposed the vulnerability of the university.

Only a few very distinguished professors, including Karl Barth, Albert Einstein, Toenis, Emil Lederer, and Gustav Radbruch - the last two were from Heidelberg - protested against the introduction of political considerations into the controversy and its racist overtones.

Official steps against Jewish scholars were first taken a few weeks after the March 1933 election. Events proceeded in accordance with the Nazis' plans for implementing "the cleansing process." The following study analyses the effects of the "cleansing" process within the context of the changes that occurred at the University of Heidelberg between 1933 and 1935. Both professors and students were affected by the application of National Socialist racial theories, but the dismissal of professors differed from the elimination of

² *Universitaetsarchiv Heidelberg* (hereafter – UAHD), III, 55b, No. 332.

³ Rabbi Pinkus was head of the Jewish community in Baden (*Bezirksrabbiner*).

⁴ UAHD, VIII, 1, records of the university's disciplinary court, No. 290.

students insofar as it had a different impact on the university. Therefore the two phenomena will be discussed separately.

"Cleansing" the Faculty

Besides the personal tragedies of several scholars who were forced to leave their academic positions, and ultimately their homeland, the purge of professors, almost a quarter of the entire faculty, was a tremendous loss to the university and its level of scholarship.

The dismissal of the professors was based on an official law; enacted by the State's highest authorities and signed by both Adolf Hitler and Wilhelm Frick. It established racial and political criteria for academic positions at universities. Consequently, the old ideas of *universitas litterarum* and *civitas academica* were violated even before new institutional patterns were formulated. The obvious outcome was a severe restriction of the individual autonomy, which had been fostered in order to implement the ideal of freedom in research and instruction. Even for those members of the faculty who were free from either racial or political prejudice, the respected traditional German concept of "*Wissenschaft als Beruf*" (education as vocation) had almost totally lost its meaning. The legal basis for the purging of the faculties of Jews as well as of "enemies of the Reich" was provided by "The Law for the Reestablishment of the Professional Civil Service" (*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*), enacted on April 7, 1933⁵. The following pretexts for dismissals were cited in the law:

1. Inadequate training (second paragraph 11),
2. Political unreliability, especially membership in the Communist Party (paragraphs 2a and 4),
3. "Non-Aryan" descent, unless the official was (a) in office before August 1, 1914, or (b) had fought in World War I, or (c) had lost a father or son in that war.

A series of supplements was appended to the law of April 7, 1933, the last of which was issued on January 26, 1937. According to the "First

⁵ *Reichsgesetzblatt* (hereafter – RGBl) I, 1933, p. 175.

Implementation Decree," dated April 11, 1933, a "non-Aryan" official⁶ was defined as anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent "especially if he adhered to the Jewish religion."

The Supplement to the Civil Service law of January 21, 1935 justified the removal and transfer of university teachers in order to effect a "fundamental reconstruction of the universities," the particular method used being the abolition of a professorship or a professorial chair (officially referred to by the euphemism *wegen Wegfall des Lehrstuhls*)⁷. The most comprehensive definition of the term "Jew" was set forth in the infamous Nuremberg Laws of September 15, 1935. University professors who had served in the German Army in World War I were not exempted from the anti-Jewish legislation. Thus, all those who had retained their chairs according to the Civil Service Law of April 7, 1933 were purged after the Nazi Party convention in September 1935. Moreover, marriage to a Jew was sufficient cause to withhold teaching rights (*venia legendi*) from a candidate⁸ but not sufficient to deprive those already in office of their positions.⁹

⁶ It should be noted that the definition was in no way based on racial criteria. The sole criterion for categorisation into the "Aryan" and "non-Aryan" was the Jewish faith of the individual's ancestors, regardless of his own religion. See Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, Chicago, 1967, pp. 45–51.

⁷ RGBI I, 1933, pp. 1333–34.

⁸ "Reichs-Habilitationsordnung," December 13, 1934, *Amtsblatt des Reichsministeriums fuer Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung* (hereafter – ABI), I, 12–14, ABI IXXV, 277, No. 340. Those dismissed according to the Civil Service Act of April 7, 1933, also lost⁹ some of the benefits ordinarily guaranteed by the State. They were not guaranteed pensions unless they had been in office at least ten years. Those "relieved of their official duties" by the law of January 21, 1935, were to receive their lawful salary but not tuition fees. Professors lost what was known as the *Kolleggeld*, which normally accrued to a professor according to his number of "listeners," in some cases "guaranteed" to a professor by the State as an equivalent for the tuition of a fixed number of students, whether he had them or not, and which normally amounted to about a quarter of his total pay. As for the salary itself, it was cut so that the "retired professor" (*beurlaubt*) received as a rule about half his former income. Eduard Y. Hartshorne, *The German Universities and National-Socialism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1937, p. 176.

The dismissal of professors at Heidelberg was not a single occurrence. There were dismissals over the course of four years, from the initial Civil Service Law until the last supplementary decree of January 1937. Tracing the course of these dismissals was one of the most difficult tasks of this research.¹⁰ From the data collected, however, a tentative assessment can be made. There are two secondary sources, which provide statistics on the faculty members who were dismissed from Heidelberg. According to the first, 60 professors or 24.3 % out of the 247 teaching staff who taught at Ruperto-Carola in the winter semester of 1932/33 were forced to leave their positions by the end of 1936.¹¹ According to the second source, 47 professors out of a teaching staff of 189, excluding the Faculty of Theology, had been dismissed by the beginning of 1936.¹² The following table, which lists the number of dismissals according to faculties, is from the latter source:

	No. in Faculty	No. Dismissed	Percentage of those Dismissed
Law	20	6	30
Medicine	71	20	28
Philosophy	52	16	30
Natural Sciences	46	5	11
Total	189	47	24.8

The names of 36 of those who were dismissed between 1933 and 1937 are known. Of these we know the dates of dismissal for 30. Those dismissed can be classified into four categories: 1) those dismissed after the Law of April 7, 1933, and before September 1933, the period during which all the dismissals were to have been implemented; 2) those dismissed after September 1933

¹⁰ The personal files of the Heidelberg professors were not made available to this writer. The data collected was gathered through interviews, foreign reports, and assessments made by investigations of other documents.

¹¹ Hartshorne, op. cit., p. 94, Table II – “Proportional Faculty Losses of the Various Universities (exclusive of assistants).”

¹² *Heidelberg and the Universities of America*, New York, 1936.

and prior to the Nuremberg Citizenship Laws; 3) those exempted from the first Law but dismissed according to the stipulations of the Nuremberg Laws; 4) those whose date of dismissal is not known.

1) From the Faculty of Law: the non-Jewish Socialist, Professor Gustav Radbruch, was dismissed in April 1933; and the non-Jewish Democrat, Professor Gerhard Auschuetz, one of the architects of the Weimar constitution, who was 65 years old on October 1, 1932, was forced to retire in the same month. From the Faculty of Medicine: Professors Siegfried Bethmann (April 28, 1933) and Willy Mayer Gross were dismissed due to their "Non-Aryan" descent. From the Faculty of Philosophy: Professor Leonard Olschki (April 28, 1933), Professor Herbert Sultan '(April 20, 1933), Professors Arthur Salz, Max F. von Waldberg (April 12, 1933)¹³, and Ernst Wahle (April 1933) were forcibly retired. Professor Alfred Weber, a non-Jew, who was 65 years old on August 20, 1933, was forced to retire on April 27, 1933, and Professor Hans von Eckerdt, a non-Jew, was also dismissed in April 1933.

From The Faculty of Natural Sciences: the Nobel Prize winner, Professor Otto Meyerhof (April 1933), Professor Arthur Rosenthal (April 1933), Professor Wilhelm Salomon Calvi (April 21, 1933)¹⁴, and Professor Gerta von Ubisch (April 28, 1933) were all forced to leave.

2) Two Jewish professors are known to this writer to have been dismissed after September 1933 and before the Nuremberg Laws: Professor von Baeyr of the Faculty of Medicine (November 1933) and the classical historian Professor Eugen Taeubler, who was an active member of the Marianne Weber Kreis (forced to retire on November 9, 1933, and dismissed in December 1933).¹⁵

¹³ Max von Waldberg, Professor of Modern Literature, was dismissed on July 7, 1933. He, as well as Prof. Friedrich Gundolf (also born a Jew), were the teachers of Dr. Joseph Goebbels.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Salomon Calvi, Professor of Geology, born to Jewish parents, converted to Catholicism on November 4, 1892, as an 11-year old boy.

¹⁵ In 1924 Marianne Weber, Prof. Max Weber's widow, established a private circle for intellectual activities which met weekly in her house in Heidelberg. The participants in this circle were mainly the liberal professors of the university. In a summary of this circle's activities (Akademische Gesellschaft

3) After the Nuremberg Laws were issued, Professor Max Gutzwiller was forced to retire in 1936 and was deprived of his pension rights in October 1937; Walter Jellinek and Ernst Levy (January 15, 1936) were dismissed from their chairs in the Faculty of Law. The following professors were dismissed from the Faculty of Philosophy: Professor Herman Ranke (June 1, 1937), Professor Otto Regenbogen (September 19, 1935), Professor Plans Sachs (beginning of 1936), and the non-Jewish philosopher, Professor Karl Jaspers (June 19, 1937) ¹⁶ .

4) The following are the faculty members whose dates of dismissal are not known: Professor Heinrich Kronstein, Professor Helmut Hetzfeld, Professor Wafer Level, Professor Leopold Perels, Professor Hugo Merton, and Professor Richard Werner.

1924–1944; Gustav Radbruch zum 70. Geburtstag, November 21, 1948), Marianne Weber described the meetings held after Hitler's seizure of power: "Those attending the circle's meetings had to do so very carefully, particularly those people who – without the protection of the Party decorations – were vulnerable as suspected liberals and doubly so those who maintained connections with their Jewish friends. The debates in the circle's sessions over actual questions of the hour had to be concealed... One had to remain inconspicuous; despite all efforts the circle was constantly watched... [All those members who, after the take over] had reasons to demonstrate their loyalty to the new State, by joining the S.A. or other Nazi affiliates, had to resign [from the circle]... The circle consisted now essentially of old familiar friends... unified in their attitude to the new State and who had to trust each other." (Radbruch, Nachlass, Universitaetsbibliothek Heidelberg).

¹⁶ The information about Karl Jaspers seems somewhat confusing. The following assessments represent the various opinions gathered by this writer: Dr. Weissert of the *Universitaetsarchiv* of Heidelberg claims that his dismissal was on political grounds. Hannah Arendt said in an interview that Jaspers tried to maintain a distance from the Nazis. In 1935, according to Hannah Arendt, he taught Spinoza at the university. In an interview with Prof. Dolf Sternberger, who was once a student of Jaspers, as was Hannah Arendt, he asserted that Jaspers had to leave Heidelberg because his wife was Jewish. Finally, Prof. Daniel Penham of Columbia University, in 1945–1946 the chief officer in American counterintelligence, told this writer that Jaspers received permission from the Nazi authorities to leave Germany to attend an academic convention in Holland in 1937, on the condition that he gather some valuable information. Jaspers accepted the condition.

Jewish professors from all over the country left Germany following their dismissal. Several were absorbed by academic institutions in other countries,¹⁷ while others, hoping for better times, remained in Germany. Many of the latter were ultimately exterminated in concentration camps.¹⁸

The obvious outcome of the purge was that the university decreased in size. The data collected indicates that notwithstanding partial replacements the university lost some 23-25% of its teaching staff and ranked third among all German universities in the percentage of faculty dismissed. (The University of Berlin lost 32.4% of its teaching staff and the University of Frankfurt on Main 32.3%).¹⁹ Given the fact that no one was dismissed from the Faculty of Theology, it is obvious that the reduction of other faculties was even greater than the overall percentage. As indicated above, the faculties of Law, Medicine, and Philosophy suffered a loss of 28-30%, while the Faculty of Natural Sciences lost about 11 %.

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the fate of German Jewish academics, see Hartshorne, op. cit.

The following examples illustrate the fate of Jewish scholars from¹⁸ Heidelberg who found refuge abroad: Emil Lederer, who had courageously struggled on behalf of his colleague E. Gumbel throughout the entire Gumbel Affair, emigrated to the U.S. a short time after he had joined the teaching staff at the University of Berlin. In the U.S. he was one of the founders of the New School for Social Research in New York. Emil Gumbel emigrated to the U.S. and settled in New York after teaching for a few years in France, and after being deprived of his German citizenship by the Nazi authorities. On November 17, 1933, his colleague, the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at that time, Professor Herman Guentert, who later became a registered member of the Nazi Party, in a letter to the Rector, commended Taeubler's scientific activities as well as his achievements in seminars, and urged him to let Taeubler enjoy all his honorary pension rights. Taeubler emigrated to the U.S. and later taught in Cincinnati. Among others who also emigrated to the U.S. were: Leonard Olschki, Professor of Roman Philology who later taught at Johns Hopkins University; Arthur Salz, Professor of Economics, who later taught at Ohio State University; Herman Ranke, Professor of Egyptology, who joined the University of Pennsylvania; and Heinrich Kronstein, professor in the Faculty of Law at Heidelberg, who joined the staff of the Library of Congress. They all were aided by the Emergency Committee for the Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars. Herbert Sultan, Professor of National Economics, emigrated to England.

¹⁹ Hartshorne, op. cit. , p. 94.

Another quantitative loss resulting from the violation of the "*Wissenschaft als Beruf*" concept was caused by "transfers" (*Versetzungen*). Professors, especially those not affiliated with Nazi organisations, were frequently forced by the Ministries of Culture of the *Laender* to move from one university to another. This method was a means of forcing them into early retirement; some of the professors were "transferred" for only one semester²⁰.

In 1930 the total number of teaching staff at Ruperto-Carola was 237, and by 1936 their number had been reduced to 194. Given the fact that about 60 faculty members had been dismissed, this means that there were at least 17 new teachers at Heidelberg, and the "transfers" increased their number even more. A comparison between the list of the instructors at Heidelberg in 1932-33 and in 1936 reveals that many professors who were neither "non-Aryans" nor suspected of "political unreliability" were no longer teaching at the university in the latter year. Eighty-one of the 194 teachers in 1936 were virtual newcomers²¹. Thus the fluctuation in the number of teachers in Heidelberg between 1933 and the end of 1936 was extremely high, and of course this phenomenon had a significant impact on the quality of scholarship there. Moreover, since new teachers were appointed according to political criteria, it is conceivable that advancement in academic rank was also dependent on political affiliation. Hence, at least a few among the 1936 *Ordinarii* at Heidelberg, who filled the vacant chairs of the dismissed professors, were appointed due to political considerations. Since their ascent to the position of *Ordinarii*s was not subject to the customary regulations regarding promotions, they were much younger and less experienced. Dr. Hans Himmel, for example, a *Privatdozent* at the age of 33 in 1930, replaced his professor, Wilhelm Salomon Calvi, who was dismissed from the Faculty of

²⁰ Ibid. , p. 101 f.

²¹ Emil J. Gumbel, *Die Gleichschaltung der deutschen Hochschulen*, Strasbourg, 1938, pp. 9–10. (This material was placed at my disposal by the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.)

Natural Sciences. A member of the university's *Fuehrer-stab*²² since September 1933, Himmel was a full-fledged professor by 1936.

The combination of academic and political criteria in the nomination of professors replaced the traditionally unilateral procedure, which was based on purely professional considerations. Indeed, the rapid advancement of young scholars to the higher ranks of professorship introduced opportunism to the university. The young *Dozenten* had been born around the turn of the century, and most had not fought in World War 1. They attended universities during the first years of the Weimar Republic and it is likely that their political convictions were forged in the atmosphere of hostility toward the Republic displayed by the German student unions (*Studentenschaften*) during this period. Thus, after 1933, they were inclined to carry out their academic functions in the spirit of National Socialism.

The use of political criteria was not restricted to the process of filling vacant positions. Even after four years of purging there were still several "enemies of the Reich" at the university, hence additional steps were needed: the establishment of the "leadership principle", (*Fuehrerprinzip*) as the guideline for the university's administrative and constitutional structure; the drafting of new curricula, influenced by the Nazi ideology, both for academic disciplines and for students' extra-curricular activities; and the further implementation of the "cleansing" process.

Source: *Yad Vashem Studies XI* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 131-141.

²² While the *Fuehrerprinzip* constituted the new institutional framework for the university, the *Fuehrerstab* emerged as the body in which university matters were to be decided. During the period under investigation, it was comprised of the *Fuehrer*, Prof. Wilhelm Groh; the local *Studentenfuehrer*, Gustav Adolf Scheel, who later became the *Reichsstudentenfuehrer*, and was Hitler's nominee for Minister of Education in 1945; the *Kanzler*, Prof. Johannes Stein; and his deputy Prof. Hans Himmel.

