

About the Concept and Implementation of Annihilation

NAHMAN BLUMENTHAL

PERSECUTION of and violent attacks upon the Jews have not been infrequent in our history. We need but recall the verse of the Passover Hagada, "In every generation they rise up to destroy us." But the fate that overtook our people during the Second World War in the countries occupied by Hitler's legions by far exceeded anything the Jews had ever experienced in the course of their long history. Persecution by the Nazis took place in the very heart of Europe, among developed peoples with a high standard of culture, together with whom we had lived for centuries, even enjoying equal rights on a par with all other citizens in the latest period. Moreover in the years after the First World War, the humanitarian movements and pacifist aspirations which distinguished these countries tended to obliterate the memory of the dark and evil eras we had known in the past.

Jew Hatred—An Outlook and the Plan of a State

The main new feature distinguishing the Hitler era was the fact that for the first time in human history Jew hatred was adopted as an official State programme. More than this: it became the central pillar of a new outlook, avowed vociferously by statesmen, scientists, writers and intellectuals in the press, over the radio, from diverse platforms, both in their own country and elsewhere,



In this letter, dated 9 March, 1942, Eichmann requests the consent of the German Foreign Ministry to action he proposes to take in France: the despatch of one thousand Jews "of French nationality or stateless" to Auschwitz, in "reprisal" for an attack in France on members of the Wehrmacht.

From other sources it is clear that the German Foreign Ministry did not oppose the proposed course of action nor other operations in this category.

It should be noted that the mass deportations of the Jews of France had not yet commenced in March 1942. They were launched in the summer of that year.

who strove to establish some sort of new "International", an organization of all nations founded, upon Jew hatred.

This hostility, prompted and distended largely by artificial means, because of patent political and social motives, the politicians and statesmen sought to establish—contrary to previous generations— not upon any mystic beliefs or religious prejudices, nor even upon the baser instincts of the masses, but upon reason, upon the basis of modern science (particularly the natural sciences) and upon a special sort of "ethic". Jew hatred became a subject of study in German schools, from the kindergarten to the institutions of higher learning.

Another characteristic distinguishing this period from those which had preceded it was the fact that the "ideology" of Jew-hatred was developed by scholars, some of them of international reputation, who did not confine themselves solely to teaching the theory, but endeavoured to put that theory into practice. For example—Professor Six, Head of an Einsatzkommando, one of the units the function of which was to kill every Jew they could lay hands upon. Professor Clauberg sought and found a method for the sterilization of Jews whose turn for slaughter had not yet come as their labour was needed for war production. The list can be continued *ad nauseum*. In Lublin, for instance, a number of students who had come specially for that purpose from the fatherland, took part in practical details of the various projects and experiments,—in order to write their doctoral theses.¹

Race Doctrine

What was the "scientific" basis of Jew-hatred? The Nazi hypothesis was that mankind is made up of higher and lower races. The for-

¹ See facsimile of a letter written from Berlin by SS Hauptsturmführer Helmuth Müller, on 15 October 1941, to Head of the Chief Office for Racial and Settlement Affairs, published in Vol. 13 of *Biuletyn Główniej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce*, page 37.

mer are culturally creative while the latter are sterile and are nourished by the strength and effort of others. Transition from the status of lower race to that of higher race is impossible. The contrary is true. Miscegenation leads to bastardization, producing degenerate offspring inferior to the elements from which it springs. This inferior race cannot be improved, and indeed may lead to the decline of the superior race. The supreme race is the Aryan, the Nordic race, and within this racial group the Germanic is paramount. Among the lower races (which include the Negroes, the gypsies, etc.) the Jews are the lowest. Racial defects are inherent and cannot be remedied.

With their physical, spiritual and moral (or rather, for the Nazis, immoral) qualities, according to this doctrine, the Jews degrade other peoples with whom they come into contact, leading them gradually to extinction. Therefore,—and hence these theorists embark upon "moral" and practical conclusions—in order to save the German people and all mankind (thereby, indeed, Hitlerism pretended to be a world movement, the aim of which was to bring "salvation" to all nations, or rather to those who are racially significant), it is vital to liquidate the Jews. Thus the human race will be rid of all evil and an avenue for free development will be opened for it. To emphasize the magnitude of the danger represented by the Jewish race, these theorists—and later the men of action, the propagandists—presented the Jews as parasites, as a virus which must be destroyed. It is not without significance that in the Nazi period the term "Todeswürdig", that is "worthy of death" was coined and came into use.

The Nazi theorists reached the stage where they regarded themselves as "warriors in the cause of human progress", heaping contempt on concepts like religion, liberalism, Marxism, preaching compassion for the weak and the sick. On the contrary, according to the Nazis, the example presented by Nature in the survival of the fittest, involving the destruction of the weak (perverted Darwinism), must be followed. Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi theoretician, coined a term to unite the scientific and moral principles, viz. "biological humanity": discrimination between the strong and the weak; the former must be fostered and advanced, the latter must be destroyed.

The seeds of these "ideas" can already be found in "Mein Kampf".

The author of this work and the father of these ideas, Adolf Hitler, was regarded by his followers as a "Messiah", and given the title of "Führer", leader of the German people. His ideas could be enlisted not only on behalf of the Germans but wherever a superior and an inferior (Jewish) race lived together. Hitler, the "messiah," was destined to redeem first of all the German people, and through the German people all the "Aryan" world. Hitler, it seems, believed in his "mission" and on more than one occasion he made use of the term "Providence", which had imposed upon him a special mission.

Hitler and his henchmen expounded these theories before they seized power in Germany. Hostility to the Jews became an element of his political activity from the day the programme of the German National Socialist Party was published, namely on February 24, 1920. He began to act in keeping with this plank in his platform immediately after entering upon the office of Prime Minister of Germany.

Background to Nazism: Germany's Defeat in World War I

This Jew-hatred sprang from political soil and served political ends. Hitler's public activity developed in the early years after the First World War (1914-1918), in which Germany was defeated. Germany was cast into a series of economic crises and political depression. Its territory contracted. Instead of the hoped-for victory came defeat and international decline.

The German nationalists sought an explanation, an excuse, for this downfall. They found no fault in themselves, but in others. Germany had lost the war, not because of the victories of her enemies, since the German armies had been consistently triumphant, but because of treachery in the rear. When the war came to an end, the German armies, both in the east and in the west, were still far within their enemies borders, (in Russia and in France), but in the distant fatherland the Jews and the Socialists had generated revolution—thereby stabbing the victorious German armies in the back. Because of these traitors Germany lost the war. This view was expressed by the army commanders, among them one of the leading generals, Erich Ludendorff. Had it not been for the collapse of the home front, they claimed, Germany would have emerged victorious. Hitler accepted this view which was so much in consonance with his vanity exploiting it

in his propaganda against the Versailles Treaty (which he termed the Dictate of Versailles). In view of the widespread dissatisfaction against this Treaty in Germany, Hitler's unremitting attacks upon it won him an increasing number of supporters.

Hitler regarded the Versailles Treaty as the source of all evil, and upon seizing power utilized all means, both legal and illegal, to disavow it. From the very outset it was clear to him that total abrogation of the Treaty could only be secured by War, and thus decided that two things were necessary for this purpose: the training of a strong army, and removal of the main obstacle, the "internal enemy", the Jews.

Methods of Removing the Jews

In the beginning, while peace still reigned, "light" measures were adopted against the Jews: they were forced by law to leave the Reich; by legal measures they were forced out of the economic, social and cultural life of the country; they were deprived of their sources of livelihood. These measures proving insufficient, they were subjected to terror and acts of violence, forcing them to flee Germany, without the necessary documents. The rulers of Germany did not stop short of casting the Jews out by sheer force (the method known as "the green frontier") into a neighbouring country (the Zbonshin affair).

At this time the question arose in the international arena—where were the Jews to go? The Jewish question was the subject of diplomatic exchanges. The Jewish problem was becoming more and more acute in all countries in which there was a Jewish community, as a result of the virulent Nazi propaganda and local anti-Jewish propaganda influenced by that of the Nazis.

The Jewish problem became aggravated particularly in countries adjacent to Germany, because of the increasing influx of refugees seeking a haven. At the same time the German authorities did all they could to ensure that the refugees depart completely destitute. This was done by the Nazis deliberately so that the impoverished emigrants would constitute a burden in the countries where they had sought refuge, thereby intensifying anti-Semitism. The assets stolen from the Jews by "legal" and illegal means, remained in Germany, reinforcing the basis of the aggressive Nazi policy. This was in time of peace.

When war broke out, relations changed and the measures adopted

became more rigorous. In wartime, generally, methods become more radical, while during hostilities the problem of the "internal enemy" who once again could cause Germany's downfall, as in the First World War, became more real. Besides, growing fear of a British Blockade, which in the First World War had caused famine within Germany, starvation and shortages could decide the fate of the country. To anticipate this danger, it was resolved to implement Article 7 of the programme of the German National Socialist Party of 1920:

"... Wenn es nicht möglich ist die Gesamtbevölkerung Deutschlands zu ernähren, so sind die Angehörigen fremder Nationen (Nicht-Staatsbürger) aus dem Reiche auszuweisen". (If it is impossible to provide food for the entire population of Germany the members of alien nations (non-citizens) must be expelled from the country.)

And while it was necessary to have regard for the citizens of foreign countries for fear of reprisals on the part of their governments against Germans resident abroad, the Jews were without any protection or support. They could be driven out at will, as it was clear that in the storm of war little attention would be paid to such measures and no reaction need be feared. But it proved no easy matter to expel the Jews in time of War. First of all, there was nowhere to drive them to. Then, again, it was feared that the deportees would inform the free world of all that was being done to the Jews—and not only to the Jews—in Germany. Finally the Germans did not wish to drive out Jews who were physically fit, who could enlist in the armies of their enemies. These were the reasons which persuaded the Nazi authorities to seek some other methods of liquidating the Jews, the method defined in Nazi theory as "the final solution of the Jewish question." The original order of the Führer for the destruction of the Jews has not been found; it is not even known when it was given. But that such an order was given we have learnt from witnesses when destruction had already reached the stage of implementation.

Towards "The Final Solution"

When, approximately, was the first order given? As stated, up to the present it has proved impossible to determine the precise date. But it is reasonable to assume that it was given by the Führer to his close associates at the beginning of the War (in 1939), almost certainly it was

given orally. The lower offices entrusted with the carrying out of the order needed instructions in writing. Such procedure was normal in the Third Reich. The Führer's wish was the supreme law—this has been stressed even by judicial bodies. Any word he uttered was a command which had to be carried out without delay. In the Third Reich there was no lack of suitable candidates—trained for the purpose or even without such training—prepared to carry out the Führer's orders, even if they were of the most unexpected character.

This was the case with the Jews.

Already in the early days of the war the Jews were treated like outlaws. The occupation army authorities, and in their wake the civil authorities, were under no restriction whatsoever in their dealings with the Jews. The latter could be robbed and even murdered. No one was punished for such acts. Upon one occasion in September 1939 a German non-commissioned officer was tried for having murdered fifty Jews. He was given a light sentence and was immediately pardoned by the Führer. The Jews were persecuted and tortured by the special SS divisions and police units whose task was not to fight the external enemy but the "internal enemy," with a view to encompassing the liquidation of the latter. (This was particularly the task of the Einsatzgruppen, which entered Poland in the wake of the invading army in September, 1939). In a number of towns they organized official pogroms, in which hundreds were killed. After the initial period the collective murders stopped and a period of "tranquility" set in. This was the time of the implementation of the intermediate stage, the transition period before the final aim (namely the total liquidation of the Jewish population), dealt with in a secret order of Heydrich, the Head of the Security Police, dated September 31, 1939. Jewish Councils were set up, ghettos established, a spate of orders and ordinances dealing with the Jews were issued. But the latter dealt mainly with Jewish property and not with Jewish lives. First of all the Germans wished to secure the property, later to confiscate it. They must first learn from the Jews if they had any assets abroad, if non-Jews were not indebted to them, if they had not concealed some of their property. The Jews must gather in everything for transfer to the Germans. All this accounts for the fact that for almost two years until war was declared on Soviet

Russia the Jews were "left in peace" (to die of starvation, of want, of diseases deliberately caused—hundreds of thousands died in this fashion—was regarded at the time as death from natural causes), until the time came for physical destruction—first of the Jews in the territories captured from Soviet Russia (from the day of the launching of the War,—June 22, 1941) and then of the Jews of Poland and other countries.

The Destruction of the Jews

In the Soviet Russian territories the murder of Jews was carried out by "special operations squads" of the SS, assisted by local Germans (Volksdeutsche) and foreigners, by the Wehrmacht and the local rabble. In the implementation of these mass murders use began to be made of technical means: gas vans and later permanent gas chambers. Introduction of such methods reduced the cost of murdering millions, and also — this is the explanation emanating from German sources—lightened the task of the German murderers, eased their tension and relieved them of the spiritual depression which might have resulted in collapse while "dealing" with their victims, who included women and children.

The Germans attempted to justify the use of poisonous gases in the massacre of Jews on the ground that it was a "humane" method. Death by gas was rapid and painless. Quite simply the victim fell asleep... These motives were emphasized after the War by Ohlendorf, a commander of one of the "special operations squads" in the occupied Soviet territories, and also by Hoess, the commander of the Auschwitz Camp, when they were arraigned.

The conferences of the representatives of the various Ministries and of the Reich Security Head Office, in Berlin (the first on January 20, 1942) were held—in the view of the present writer—primarily to give a legal basis to the "actions" against the Jews (this was the practice of Hitler, for example, in the murder of his opponents—Roehm and his associates—on June 30, 1936. The murders were "authorized" by the Reichstag in the beginning of July of that year). Secondly they sought to facilitate the task of the murderers by ensuring the cooperation of all Government Ministries in the liquidation of the Jews. (For example: the Ministry of Transport had to provide trains for the transport of Jews to the death camps; the Economic Ministry had to make

provision for the supply of the various materials required for the construction of the crematoria and other "special instruments." It also had to receive the personal effects of the victims, etc.)

The German Foreign Ministry's function was to ensure that both enslaved and friendly countries adopt the same policy towards their Jews as Germany, or that they transfer their Jews to the Germans. Prolonged negotiations were conducted between the Foreign Ministry (and other institutions) and the vassal states until the "material" for destruction was received.

At this time the techniques of the gas-poisoning of human beings and the efficient exploitation of their effects and even of their corpses (the ash of cremated bodies was used as fertilizer, women's hair was used in the manufacture of rope and mattresses, etc.) were steadily improved.

As the German Army suffered defeat on the fronts, as the fall of the Reich came closer, the pace of extermination of the Jews was accelerated and intensified. This unnatural urge to destruction, it seems, reflected a special ambition on the part of the Führer that at least his prophecy of January 30, 1939—that if war should break out again in Europe it would spell the end of the Jews—of all the Jews—of all the prophecies he had made to the German people, should be fulfilled.

False Negotiations for "The Rescue of a Million Jews"

The massacres did not cease even while the representatives of the Reich or the murderers themselves were negotiating with their victims or representatives of organizations abroad, regarding the "sale" of one million Jews for certain commodities and goods which the Jews abroad were required to supply (needless to say with the consent and aid of the Allies). In fact, however, these negotiations were no more than a ruse designed to deceive the last of the Jews, held by the Germans. Its purpose was also to lead astray world public opinion and to create a more favourable atmosphere among the Western rulers for both the representatives and those who had sent them, when Germany was conquered and they were brought to book for their crimes.

The negotiations had yet another objective. Hitler and Goebbels hoped until the very last day that the Western powers and Soviet Russia would clash. They did everything in their power to bring about such a clash. One of the means they adopted was

(Continued on page 23)