

# Essay:

## Hitler's Dilemma: Anti-Jewish

### Propaganda in the Third Reich by John Rich

During the 18th Century, the Enlightenment promoted human rights in western civilization, emphasizing civil liberties placing the individual above the state, equality of all mankind, and international brotherhood. Hitler's movement later challenged these popular values with its own; the individual subordinate to an authoritarian state, leadership of the strongest personality, ranking humanity based on race, and a nation defined as the bond between an ethnic group and its native land. Hitler considered French-American democracy and the Bolshevism of Soviet Russia political expressions of the Enlightenment and controlled by Jews. In America, he said, "The Jews already have all key positions in their hands."

In America, he said, "The Jews already have all key positions in their hands." According to Nazi propaganda, "Bolshevism is a typically Jewish phenomenon."

Becoming German chancellor in 1933, he thereupon considered the Jews beaten in his own country. The regime boasted in 1940 that 90,000 had already left Germany. He still felt that Jewry represented an external threat. The western powers were supposedly indebted to Jewish banks that had provided loans in World War I. These financiers, together with Jews in the communications industry, influenced foreign nations against the Third Reich. Hitler said, "Jewish power in the world appears unassailable, ultimate, and total."

In 1936, propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels told an audience in Nuremberg, "Bolshevism is a pathological criminal insanity... led by Jews for the purpose of destroying European civilized nations and establishing international rule over them." The foreign press chief, Karl Bömer, wrote this in 1934: "The Jew personifies all the characteristics that stand diametrically opposed to National Socialist thinking, especially the fundamental principle of blood and soil... the power of world Jewry is great and its propaganda against National Socialist Germany knows no bounds."

Anti-Jewish propaganda nonetheless comprised a surprisingly small percentage of German media coverage in the 1930s. Hitler told a subordinate that "Jews living in Germany should not be expelled and not be disenfranchised. We shouldn't touch a hair on their heads... to avoid rousing the rest of the Jews in the world against us." To minimize negative repercussions abroad, in 1938 "Goebbels had so muffled anti-Jewish propaganda that it was scarcely noticeable... In public and in official guidelines at this time Goebbels always mentioned the 'Jewish question' in passing." He permitted 320 performing artists of Jewish ancestry to continue working in the entertainment industry.

When war broke out in September 1939, Hitler said nothing about Jews in his first wartime speech. In his parallel national proclamation, he briefly referred to "that Jewish-capitalist and democratic ruling class that wants to see all the peoples of the world only as obedient slaves." Coverage of combat operations dominated the media during campaigns in Poland, Scandinavia, and the west. The Battle of Britain was waged against London's "balance of power" politics. The 1940 motion picture *The Rothschilds* reaffirmed the contention that "the power of Jewry rests in the stupidity of other nations." The film's premier was not, however, coordinated with an anti-Jewish media campaign.

In June 1941, the German armed forces invaded the Soviet Union.

The media identified Jews occupying prominent positions in the Soviet government and the secret police. German propaganda, however, mostly devoted itself to justifying the invasion. The Nazi party's national newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, reported on June 23, 1941, that Stalin had planned to let Germany and the west weaken one another in a war to enable the USSR to then invade Europe. Other articles detailed massive Red Army troop concentrations along the Reich's frontier.

With America supporting the Anglo-Soviet war effort, the German Reich confronted a diverse yet powerful coalition. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had already emphasized that a leader must "make even quite different opponents appear as though they belong to just one category." This was necessary, he explained, so that the people would not begin to question their own cause because so many enemies were fighting against them. Rather than defaming the populations of Britain, Soviet Russia, and the United States, Berlin targeted the respective Jewish manipulators that allegedly generated public hostility

against Germany. In a May 1941 editorial, Goebbels discussed this theme: "That Mr. Roosevelt has it in for so-called Nazism is pretty well known.

His Jewish advisors like Baruch and Morgenthau, Frankfurter and all the other Hebrews, some of whom hail from eastern European ghettos, have seen to that.... They know that once Jewry is finally kicked off of our continent it will also be the end of their ardently desired financial world dominion for good."

Hitler publicly stated the following on New Year's Day 1943: "The alliance between the arch-capitalist western states... with the phony socialist sham regimen of Bolshevism is only thinkable from the standpoint that in both cases the leadership rests in the hands of international Jewry....

Roosevelt's brain trust, the Jewish press in America, the Jewish radio in these countries, Jewish party organizations and so forth are no different than the equally Jewish leadership structure of the Soviet Union."

In 1941 Theodore Nathan Kaufmann, president of the American Federation of Peace and a member of FDR's brain trust, published a 104-page brochure entitled Germany Must Perish. It advocated mass sterilization of the German people and the "dissection" of Germany, parceling its territory to neighboring countries.

The German propagandist Wolfgang Diewerge drew passages from Kaufmann's text to expose "world capitalism's war aims" in a 32-page pamphlet designed to bolster Germany's will to resist. Diewerge's widely distributed pamphlet pointed out Kaufmann's Jewish ancestry and presented his arguments as an Anglo-American foreign policy goal.

Throughout the war, the crux of German propaganda focused on military events and optimistic diplomatic themes. Anti-Jewish fare made Germans uncomfortable and was too unpopular in the occupied countries to ever gain prominence.

Goebbels even lobbied to have the notoriously anti-Jewish newspaper Der Sturmer withdrawn from circulation. In 1940 his ministry released a one-hour documentary entitled The Eternal Jew, premiering in foreign language versions around Europe, to justify Germany's position on the issue. The film was not well attended.

It was the last anti-Jewish feature Germany produced. An objective examination of original German newspapers, radio broadcasts, speeches, motion pictures, and related news coverage reveals that there was far less public criticism of Jews in the Third Reich that is popularly believed today.

In 1939 Adolf Hitler told a foreign diplomat, "If you want to reach your objective by force you have to be strong. If you want to reach it through negotiations you must be even stronger." In pursuit of his prewar foreign policy goal to revise the terms of the Versailles peace treaty so detrimental to German prosperity, bluffing was among the weapons in Hitler's diplomatic arsenal. Massive military demonstrations, implying that Germany was ready and willing to fight, exaggerated the strength of the armed forces. Rare but ominous threats in his speeches were often bluffs as well. Perhaps the most notorious threat was his prediction on January 30, 1939, that "destruction" faced European Jewry in the event of another war.

When Hitler rose to address Germany's sham parliament that day, a taut political climate shrouded the continent. The Reich annexed Austria and the Sudetenland, which was the ethnic German portion of Czechoslovakia, the previous year. War scares accompanied the occupations, thanks to the Fuehrer's threat to use force to win these territories for the German people. This contributed to his international image as an insatiable land grabber, making European statesmen less inclined to compromise.

The German chancellor believed that his country was surrounded by hostile powers. Documents discovered by his intelligence service in Vienna and later in Prague revealed British machinations to involve smaller European states in an alliance system to insidiously weaken Germany. Hitler told his generals that England and France are "hate-filled enemies." When Britain announced a major rearmament program in 1937, the Fuehrer remarked that he had expected "nothing less."

Berlin saw a greater threat in the peripheral powers the Soviet Union and the United States. Hitler was aware of Moscow's strategy to destroy Germany, being privy to the minutes of secret Soviet Politbureau conferences which were regularly smuggled out of the Kremlin and into the hands of the German diplomat Franz von Papen. The Fuehrer viewed the USSR as the Reich's "deadliest enemy."

Under the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, American business developed profitable commercial ties with the USSR. Over two thirds of all large industrial complexes in the Soviet Union were built with American material or technical assistance. The German ambassador in Washington, Hans Luther, blamed "New York Jews especially" for influencing the American public to accept US-Soviet collaboration.

Roosevelt's anti-German "quarantine" speech in October 1937 was appraised in Germany as the end of American isolationism in favor of a policy hostile to the Reich.

Hitler himself was oppressed by the negative publicity prevalent in democratic countries. He demonstrated this preoccupation right during a parade in May 1938, when he publicly reviewed military and Party formations in Dessau. As a contingent of Hitler Youth marched toward the grandstand, the Fuehrer abruptly dispatched aids to re-route the column to a side street. After the parade, he explained his surprising action to the local Gauleiter: "The world press—the Jew press, I mean—is maligning me, and half the world believes it, that I'm letting the children, right to the smallest who can barely even walk, parade past me as future cannon fodder and I am already mobilizing them for war down to the last baby in our land. I want to deprive this hate propaganda of any prerequisite and excuse." \*\*

\*\* Only weeks before visiting Dessau on May 29, 1938, the Fuehrer ordered that no more Hitler Youth formations participate in parades he was to review. This discreet directive was not uniformly circulated, with the result that no party functionaries in the Magdeburg Anhalt district where Dessau was located were informed. Hitler's adjutant reviewed the parade itinerary in advance but by oversight failed to delete the Hitler Youth unit from the program. Hitler later apologized to Gauleiter Rudolf Jordan for brusquely diverting the boys right during the parade, explaining that he could not make an exception.

(Jordan, page 174)

The following November, the German ambassador to the United States, Hans Dieckhoff, telegraphed Berlin that in America, "a universal mood of hatred prevails" against Germany. The German diplomat in Washington Hans Thomsen cabled this: "President Roosevelt's claim to leadership in worldwide political affairs pursues the objective of destroying National Socialist Germany with every means at his disposal."

In January 1939, Hitler ordered the German media to launch a publicity campaign condemning the "war scare lies of the Roosevelt clique." On the 21st, Reich's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels published a nationally syndicated article asserting that "since January 30, 1933, the Third Reich has been an object of ridicule, hate, lies, and slander in practically the entire American press." He added that those orchestrating the attacks were "mostly Jews or people up to their ears in the service of or dependent on Jews.... Almost the entire radio and almost the entire film industry in the United States today serve this international worldwide agitation conducted against Germany."

These arguments corresponded to Hitler's perception that Jewish influence on western politicians and in the communications industry was setting the stage for a second world war to annihilate the Reich.

The Fuehrer, however, had cards to play of his own. One was Germany's remaining Jewish population. In 1933, the Reich's government had already parried a burgeoning international boycott of German exports by organizing a one-day boycott of Jewish shops in Berlin. National Socialist party storm troops stood outside Jewish establishments holding placards urging would-be patrons to shop elsewhere. Foreign restrictions on German trade relaxed out of concern for the livelihood of the German Jews.

In 1939, there were still enough Jews residing in Germany to represent a useful bargaining chip. As a contemporary German historian observed, "Hitler was firmly resolved to factor Jewry into his foreign policy deliberations as a hostage, a sort of insurance policy." The Fuehrer was in a position to threaten retaliation against his country's Jewish community unless the west halted its hostile media campaign.

In his Reichstag speech of January 30, 1939, Hitler denied any plans for military aggression. He denounced the accusations as "lies born of pathological hysteria or the self-interest of individual politicians.

In certain states these lies are intended to rescue the finances of unscrupulous businessmen. Most of all, international Jewry hopes to placate its desire for revenge and lust for profit." Hitler then forewarned that if "international Jewish high finance in and outside of Europe" should manage to provoke a war, the result would not be a triumph of Jewry but the "destruction of the Jewish race in Europe."

Germany, he announced, "possesses the means to make plain to the world, if necessary, the essence of an issue that many nations are instinctively aware of but just lack clear knowledge about." Jews abroad, he continued, could

momentarily "carry on their agitation under the protection of the press, film industry, radio propaganda, theater, and literature in their hands." But Germany could, in the event of war, expose to the masses of other countries that the real nature of the struggle was "to serve Jewish interests." Within Germany, the Fuehrer concluded, his government's "enlightening" media had already "completely cut down Jewry in just a few years."

Hitler's reference to the "destruction" of the Jews may have implied financial, political, or social ruin, or indeed physical annihilation. By leaving the actual meaning open to speculation, he followed the maxim that what is not said can often alarm the imagination more than what is in fact clearly expressed. The Fuehrer was aware that his regime's anti-Jewish policy was a public relations disaster overseas, and generally soft-pedaled this policy in his speeches. Such a radical departure from custom as to openly threaten the Jews with destruction demonstrates how desperate he was to muzzle the international media campaign confronting Germany.

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## Endnotes

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Slide 5: Hitler, grossdeutsche Freiheitskampf, 32-33; Bley, 2  
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