



from the German nation. During the First World War, right-wing circles even incited doubts and accusations regarding the loyalty of Jewish soldiers, resulting in a humiliating Judenzählung (Jewish census) being carried out within the German Army. This was implemented despite the fact that no less than 12,000 German Jews lost their lives in the war for Germany. Even the so-called stab-in-the-back myth, according to which the im Felde unbesiegte Heer (undefeated on the field) German Army was deprived of victory in the First World War because it had been betrayed by civilians on the home front, was accompanied by anti-Semitic overtones.



In the politically heated atmosphere of the post-war years, marked by extremely high reparation payments being demanded of the Empire, the surrender of territories, occupation of the Ruhr, hyperinflation, record unemployment and a global economic crisis, radical parties of both left and right -wing persuasions are in great demand. Hatred towards the Jews also grows in these uncertain times. Even Communist agitation directed towards financial capitalism frequently employs anti-Jewish stereotypes. However, a popular nationalistic party raises the racist anti-Semitism, which in the meantime had become an established reality for many Germans, to a new level that was more consistent than ever before. Hitler propagates exterminatory anti-Semitism, with the aim of annihilating the supposed Jewish race. As early as 1919, Hitler writes, ‘(...) letztes Ziel aber muss unverrückbar die Entfernung der Juden überhaupt sein.’ (‘(...) ultimate goal, however, absolutely has to be the irrevocable removal of the Jews.’). Nevertheless, prior to 1933 the Nazi Party is not able to command a majority within Germany with this radical approach.

After seizing power, Hitler quickly sets about putting his hatred of Jews into practice. The Nazi Party, or NSDAP, adopts the Nuremberg Laws at the Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg. The laws discriminate against Jewish citizens and exclude them from public life in the Reich. According to the Blutschutzgesetz (Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour), for example, marriage or sexual relations between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens are henceforth forbidden. The Reichsbürgergesetz (Reich Citizenship Law) declares the approximately 560,000 German Jews to be citizens with reduced civil rights. Only people with deutschen Blut (German blood) retain full civil rights.

The Nuremberg Laws are the first step towards implementing an anti-Semitism that will ultimately lead to Auschwitz. Every German in the Empire is affected by these laws; every German can certainly have personal experience of the everyday marginalisation and exclusion of the Jews as a result of the Nuremberg Laws. At the end of the war, many non-Jewish Germans try to escape their responsibility by maintaining that they knew nothing about the persecution of the Jews. Even so, as early as 1935, no casual observer can have any further doubt as to the true character of the Führerstaat (Führer state). However, many Germans allow themselves to be lured and corrupted by Hitler’s foreign policy successes, the reduction of unemployment through the growth of the armaments industry and many other social-political measures. The exact nature of the catastrophe they are being drawn into only becomes clear to some with the outbreak of the Second World War.

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