



15.09.1935

15 September: Proclamation of the Nuremberg Laws ('Nürnberger Gesetze') at the Nazi Party Rally ('Reichsparteitag')



National Socialism, or Nazism, did not invent anti-Semitism. Antagonism towards the Jews, justified on religious grounds, had existed for centuries in Europe, repeatedly leading to pogroms. Even in the twentieth century, this form of anti-Semitism is considerable completely acceptable in most countries. Anti-Semitism was even supported by the vast majority in countries with a predominantly Catholic population, such as Poland in the period between the wars. Dating back to the German Empire, Jewish Germans enjoy legal equality with the non-Jewish population, even though they frequently suffer discrimination in the day to day reality. Theoretically, Jewish citizens are able to participate fully in society. However, in practice, they are frequently precluded from positions of leadership, for example in the military. Nonetheless, the Jewish population's status in the German Empire is one of the most progressive in the world, making Germany very attractive for many Jews outside the Empire. In spite of the anti-Semitism within society, which has still not been completely broken down, from the time of the early German Empire many Jews are very successful in establishing their careers. The construction of numerous synagogues throughout the German Empire is a clear indicator of the Jewish community's progress and increasing self-confidence. Even in the Weimar Republic, the German economy and intellectual life profits greatly from the influence of Jewish citizens.



However, the roots of a new form of anti-Semitism can be traced to the German Empire: namely, racially-motivated anti-Semitism. Here, the rejection of Jewish citizens is no longer justified on the basis of their different beliefs, but because of the alleged 'typical' features of appearance and character in a supposedly existing Jewish Rasse (race). When the German Empire was faced with a major banking crisis in 1873, also called the Founders' Crash, crude theories rapidly circulated about an alleged jüdische Verschwörung (Jewish conspiracy). In 1878, the Berlin court chaplain Adolf Stoecker founded the Christian Social Party, the first German party to name anti-Semitism as an integral part of their political agenda. In addition, Arthur de Gobineau's racist social-Darwinian works and Houston Stewart Chamberlain's anti-Semitic writings were also commonly read in Germany. In 1887, the journalist Theodor Fritsch published an anti-Semitic Catechism. An inflammatory book by Heinrich Class, the president of the nationalist Pan-German League, also had a great impact on Germans. In his book published in 1912, and titled 'Wenn ich der Kaiser wär' (If I were the Emperor), Class demands a reconstruction of the state according to racist criteria and the exclusion of Jews



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.

**T**ranslated into English by Heather Rae, proofread by Maria-Philippa Wieckowski



Prof. Dr. Tobias Arand



**References:**

Aly, Götz (2011) Warum die Deutschen? Warum die Juden? Gleichheit, Neid und Rassenhass 1800 bis 1933. Frankfurt a. M.

Blaschke, Olaf (1999) Katholizismus und Antisemitismus im deutschen Kaiserreich. Göttingen

Essner, Cornelia (2002) Die ‚Nürnberger Gesetze‘ oder die Verwaltung des Rassenwahns 1933-1945. Paderborn

Ferrari Zumbini, Massimo (2003) Die Wurzeln des Bösen. Gründerjahre des Antisemitismus. Von der Bismarckzeit zu Hitler. Frankfurt a. M.

