From Prejudice to Destruction
Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933

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Incitement and Riot

There is no doubt that public interest in the subject of Jews was fed by the political factor: the awareness that the questions of Jewish citizenship, rights, status, and perhaps even permission for Jews to live in a specific city or street were still not finally decided. This accounts for the plethora of publications of various kinds at this period. In 1816, the historian Heinrich Luden, editor of the important magazine Nemesis in Weimar, stated that he had recently received no less than eight articles about Jews and matters relating to them. He decided to print only three. From him we also know the trend of those writings: "On the question posed whether Jews in the German states should be given, without precautions and limitations, the citizen rights they are seeking, there is not one article in favor out of all of those submitted." Citizenship was the issue around which all the arguments revolved.¹

Ludolf Holst, in 1818, published anonymously a work entitled Über das Verhältnis der Juden zu den Christen in den deutschen Handelsstädten. He represented this work as "historically authentic," a personal evaluation that was taken seriously by Jewish historians, who cited it as testimony on the status of Jews, their activities and economic dealings. In truth it was a propaganda tract, which was most probably commissioned by interested parties in one of the powerful industrial cities, apparently Holst's own birthplace Hamburg, where the Jewish question was very much alive. The book was dedicated to "every politician throughout the Fatherland for serious consideration." Clearly missing in the book is any material drawn from direct observation. The author deals exclusively

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fering of others. Thus, it was easy for Holst to confront his readers with the horrifying prediction that, if the Jews were not stopped, they would take over from the Christians all the sources of their livelihood. They would go on to realize their messianic dream of “getting rid of all the Christians as one fell swoop... and turning Germany into a second Canaan.” In order to offset this development, Holst offers the draft plan prepared by the opponents of the Jews for settling the Jewish issue: “The Jews must remain completely within specific limits which will be drawn with intelligent caution and will be based on right and justice [Recht und Gerechtigkeiten].” Holst’s italics. This abstract formulation possessed a concrete significance for Holst’s generation. They took it to mean, that Jews should not stand on the same level as other citizens nor enjoy any rights other than those bestowed on them by the city or state rulers. The principle by which the Jews’ rights would be determined was thus expounded by Holst: The welfare (Wohlfahrt) of the Jews would be dependent on that of the Christians, and obviously, in the event of any contradiction between the two, that of the Christians, the citizens and lords of the state, would take precedence over that of the alien Jews. Holst held that it would be in the Jews’ interest to strive for such a compromise. They should recall what befell them previously when the populace of the lands where they dwelled rose up against them to free themselves from their subjection. This phenomenon could happen again in Germany. Holst points to signs of unrest directed against the Jewish domination. What was the dizzy progress of the Jews worth when they would ultimately “pitch down into nothingness from the high estate they had conquered, this being the miserable consequence of their deluded megalomania and unbridled arrogance.”

Holst’s book is the most comprehensive work of its genre, but its general motivations occur repeatedly in other contemporary publications. In his book Über Deutschland, wie ich es nach einer zehnjährigen Erfer-
zung wiederfand, published in 1818, Gerlieb Helwig Merkel has a chapter on the Jews. Among the changes he found in Germany after being away for ten years was a change in the condition of the Jews. While the “Ger-
man peoples had, in many years of political disaster lost their precious political rights and had diminished in stature, the Jews had increased their wealth (Wohlstand) at a terrifying rate. They knew how to gain equality with the Christians everywhere and they zealously set about developing this equality into further privileges.” This statement of Merkel has some truth in it; Jews had exploited, economically and socially the new status they had achieved in the past generation. Previously, Berlin Jews had only been permitted to live “on the other side of the river Spree opposite the Palace”, now the Jews bought up every house offered for sale

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in the main streets and filled the city with their shops. The Jews had long dominated in financial deals and trade in bills. Now they lead in occupa-
tions such as the book trade, which had previously been closed to them. Almost all the country homes (Landhäuser) on both sides of the Tiergarten, the Berliners’ only place of recreation, had passed into Jewish hands. “So, there these mobs of aliens sit on the lovely summer evenings in the doors of their homes watching the citizens walking in sand and slabs.”

The Jews had made their gains at the expense of the other citizens. The proliferation of Jewish shops had forced rent up intolerably; the penetration of Jews into the book trade had downsized this occupation through the flooding of the market with books printed without a license. If, just then, the Jews seemed to be treading hard on the heels of the Chris-
tians, the outlook for the future was that they would dominate them com-
pletely. The Jews were trying to buy up the estates of the nobility (Rittergüter). “If they are allowed to do this, thanks to the vast sums of ready money at their disposal, then, lo and behold, the debilitated nobility will be uprooted in a few decades time, while the citizens of the state, the tillers of the soil, will become subjected to these aliens in certain areas will be their serfs.”

The familiar mixture once again: a smattering of facts—the Jews reach positions of economic and social advantage as a consequence of their improved political condition—combined with exaggeration in pre-
senting the facts and blaming the sufferings of others on the achievements of the Jews. Then, the last step, balloonizing the future consequences of Jewish progress. Merkel had been forced to leave Germany because of anti-French activity in 1806 and lived in Riga until 1816. It is possible that his absence from Germany in the decisive years sharpened his view of the changes that had occurred in the status of the Jews, in Prussia particularly. The Edict of 1812 had given them freedom of residence, occupation, and business. But it was not just the status of the Jews that had changed, but the views of the beholder. At the beginning of the century, when public opinion was concerned with the Jewish question, Merkel had adopted the typical enlightened attitude. In his book Letters on Hamburg and Lübeck, written in 1801, he had lauded the Hamburg authorities for their understanding in granting Jews a firm legal status that would enable their ability and wealth to be fully utilized for the benefit of the city. He also cen-
sured, by contrast, the mass of the people and those citizens who clung to Christian prejudices and rejected social intercourse with Jews. Now, nothing remained of this attitude of enlightened tolerance. He invoked ideological arguments against bestowing civic rights upon the Jews: “The European countries are Christian.” The justification of this definition was
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Christian children. Such accusations were no longer made. "But much more reasonable charges will doubtless be found whose effectiveness will be far more terrible."

As has been stated, these warnings of popular indignation against the Jews were intended to goad the authorities into taking action to restrain Jewish progress, to refrain from enlarging their rights, and to annul those rights they already possessed. However, insofar as these warnings were heard in public, they caused, in the first instance, a hostile reaction to the Jews, and thus they could have been interpreted as incitement. In the first months of 1819, two contemporaries, one a Jew, the other a liberal Christian, expressed their apprehension that if the atmosphere continued to worsen, Jews would not escape injury to their persons and their fortunes. Rachel Varnhagen said, after the riots broke out, that for years she had been claiming that the continuous incitement would end in violence against Jews. Most Jews lacked a sense of security in those years, and this is emphasized by an episode in Breslau in 1818. A sort of minor revolution took place there. Local inhabitants who had been called up for military reserve duty rebelled against the order to leave their own city while alien soldiers were billeted in their homes. The army crushed the uprising, and order was restored at the cost of some casualties among the citizens. An eyewitness, Wolfgang Menzel, concluded his account with this observation: "The very next morning the people were laughing again, especially at the corporal police chief and the Jews who had gone into hiding during the riots. This was because, despite the fact that 2,000 Jews regularly resided in Breslau at that time and disturbed the people with their open ostentatious appearance in the city streets, on August 23rd (the day it all happened), they all hid away. Not one showed his face. Their fear was certainly well-founded, because the Hep Hep which swept throughout Germany the following year, proves how detested this people is." Menzel was referring to the riots that broke out against the Jews in the summer of 1819. The slogan the rioters used, "Hep! Hep!" gave its name to the movement.

The Hep Hep riots began in the city of Würzburg, Bavaria, on August 2, 1819. All the factors that created the hostile attitude toward Jews were present there in an intensive degree. The change in regime that occurred in Napoléon’s time resulted in profound transformations in the government of the city and its political and social affairs. Until 1803, Würzburg had been the capital of the bishopric, and Jewish residence had been forbidden there since the expulsion in 1567. In 1803, following the abolition of the Catholic duchies in Germany (known as secularization), the bishopric and country were annexed to Bavaria. Three years later, the country became a secular principality under a ruler of the Austrian Haps-
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announced the appearance of his book in the Intelligenztlist, giving a short summary of its contents. Scheuring's words did not remain unanswered. Professor Sebastian Brendel of the law faculty of the University of Wurzburg, reacted in the same newspaper on July 15 and 21. Brendel had a more consistent liberal approach than his colleague Josef Behr. He attacked Scheuring severely for intolerance, inhumanity, and even non-Christendom in his views. He accused him of ignorance of the sources of Judaism and other related subjects. Scheuring had arrogated to himself authority on the basis of citations whose meaning he had not grasped, in order to decide an issue that was beyond his understanding. Brendel announced that he was about to publish a book refuting Scheuring's views and establishing the position that the Jewish question could only be resolved by granting full citizenship rights to the Jews, immediately and without any reservations. The announcement elicited an abashive and insulting reply from Scheuring. It was printed on Thursday, July 29, in the above-mentioned Wurzburg newspaper. On the following Monday evening, August 2, harassment of the Jews began in the city. They were forced to flee public places to cries of "Hey! Hey!" a rallying cry for the attackers. The argument between Brendel and Scheuring raised the temperature of unrest against the Jews to the boiling point, while their interminable language ultimately produced acts of violence.

On August 3, Behr returned from Munich. His colleagues and students went to meet him in a procession, and it is quite likely that this additional traffic increased the unrest in the city. It is a fact that on that day the disturbances reached a fever pitch. Jews were removed from the city streets, the rioters attacked their houses, smashed windows, broke doors, and tore down signs over Jewish firms. The house of Jacob Hirsch was among those damaged. Jews who defended themselves were beaten up. The police were unable to impose restraint, and the security authorities had to invoke the assistance of the army. Despite this, the rioting continued until August 4. There were two fatal casualties during the riots: a citizen and soldier were killed by shooting. There were no fatalities among the Jews, but many fled screaming from the city or hid away inside their homes until the storm subsided. Ultimately, army reinforcements restored order. The leaders of the riots were arrested and brought to trial. Despite this, the anti-Jewish incitement continued through anonymous announcements demanding the removal of Jews from the city or limitations on their commercial activity. The anger of the attackers was turned against Brendel, who was accused of having been bribed to defend the Jews. The anti-Jewish ferment went on throughout August and the beginning of September. Meanwhile, the disturbances spread to other cities. In Bavaria, Bamberg and Bayreuth were hit, and serious riots occurred in several
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villages. In one of them the synagogue was razed and the Scroll of the Law and sacred objects were vandalized.

The outbreaks were followed with growing concern by the central government in Munich. King Maximilian Joseph and other observers of the situation viewed them not just as attacks upon Jews but as the beginning of an insurrection against the regime, and even, perhaps, a conspiracy directed by hidden revolutionaries. The king reacted very strongly. He ordered military force used to suppress the disturbances. He held the city councils responsible for the riot damage. The latter eagerly proclaimed their loyalty and placed the responsibility on radical elements among whom they had no control. Nevertheless, there were hints that the authorities should learn a lesson from the riots and put the Jews in their place. The initial cause of what had happened was evident: The riots originated because the Jews had been permitted to live in places where they had hitherto been forbidden and to enter into occupations previously closed to them. The protesters found ideological support in intellectual circles, while their complaints and slogans stirred the masses to hatred and destruction. Thus matters erupted in violence.

The happenings in Wurzburg served as a pattern for other places in Germany even beyond Bavaria. Disturbances broke out in Frankfurt on August 10, 1819 and continued for three days. Some thirty other cities were also affected, the most important being Heidelberg, Karlsruhe, and Hamburg. The wave of riots reached Copenhagen and other places in Denmark. All the riots resembled the Wurzburg disorders, with some local nuances arising out of special local circumstances. In Frankfurt, the seat of the Germanic Confederation Council, deputies of the states demanded that the Senate take care of law and order. Because Frankfurt was such a vital center, the riots there aroused reactions much further afield. The riots influenced the representatives of the German governments who were sitting in Carlsbad at that time drawing up preventive measures to be taken against revolutionary movements that were threatening the regime and the peace of society. During the course of the discussions, the chairman of the assembly, Prince Metternich, issued an order that the confederation's military forces at Mainz should be placed at the disposal of the Frankfurt Senate to put down the riots. Although the Bavarian force quartered at Mainz was placed on a state of alert, the Senate managed to quiet the city without recourse to outside help. In Heidelberg the rioters exploited a holiday, Prince Ludwig’s Feast, when the police were occupied elsewhere, to descend upon Jewish homes and wreak havoc in a manner reminiscent of the Russian pogroms of a later era (tearing open pillows and counterpanes, throwing furniture into the street). The outrages were brought to an end by the intervention of students and professors who defended the vic-

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time of the attack. These academics were lauded by the authorities and denounced by civilian and university elements. Those who participated in the rioting the Jews declared that it was not their intention to side with the Jews. They had just been fulfilling a humanitarian obligation toward the weak and assailed.

The disorders continued in Hamburg from August 20 to 26. They began with the pestering of Jewish passers-by in the Jungfernstieg, the main promenade. Jews were driven out of the coffee houses, and stones were thrown at Jewish houses. However, the young Jews did not pick up the fight but actively counterattacked to the extent that the rioters could claim they were the aggressors. The Senate warned the populace to observe law and order and ordered the police to fire on anyone found in the street after a fixed time in the evening. The Senate’s warning was first directed to the rioters, but following protests from the citizens, the Jews were included in those who were warned that no disturbances would be permitted. Although the disorders in Hamburg persisted longer than in other places, they did not assume as serious dimensions as those in Wurzburg and Heidelberg. Nevertheless many Jews left the city and sought refuge in Altona, which, though adjacent, was under Danish rule and had remained quiet.

The Hef Hef riots lasted only two months, but had extensive repercussions. Despite prior warnings, the outbreaks nevertheless took by surprise all those concerned -- Jews, propagandists, and authorities. Immediately after the disturbances began, the question was raised: Who was responsible? The authorities at Munich, as we have seen, worked on the assumption that the riots against the Jews might be the beginning of an uprising against the regime. This view was widely accepted by those who supported the existing regime. In March 1819, the writer August Kestner was killed in Mannheim by Karl Ludwig Sand. The victim was a supporter of the reactionary regime, while his assassin was a member of an extremist student organization at the University of Jena. He had intended his act as a violent protest against the regime and as a call to his comrades to follow in his footsteps. In June that year there had been a similar attack on a minister of Nassau. Tension increased between those responsible for the existing regime and those seeking to change it. At that time, the debate was still continuing in the southern states whether to increase the freedom of the citizens by the grant of a constitution and the creation of a parliamentary regime. The tangible threat of violence by the revolutionaries strengthened the conservatives. Prince Metternich, the architect of the conservative regime created at the Congress of Vienna, now sought to consolidate his system. He assembled the German states at Carlsbad with the aim of deciding on joint measures to restrain the fermenting
elements—introducing severe police control, imposing censorship, and so forth. News of the riots at Würzburg and Frankfurt reached Carlbad while the consultations were in progress. The reports helped Metternich and his associates to demonstrate that a subversive movement against the regime existed and the time for a strong hand had arrived. It is possible that Metternich and his associates deliberately exaggerated the danger revealed by the attacks on the Jews, although they certainly believed the danger did exist and did view the attacks on the Jews as part of the ferment against the regime. In this view they were not alone. Several propagandists, one apparently a Jew, claimed that “men seeking to turn everything into anarchy” caused the anti-Jewish riots. Voices warned against seeing the riots as actually anti-Jewish. “Those who today plunder and destroy the house of a rich Jewish merchant will, with the same motives and pleasure, do the same tomorrow to the house of a Christian merchant.”

The thesis that the anti-Jewish riots derived from general social unrest has gained a place in modern historical research. It finds expression in Eleonore Sterling’s statement that the anti-Jewish disturbances were no more than a dress rehearsal for social protest really directed against the harsh and oppressive regime, but finding an outlet in the depressed and weak Jewish group. However, this theory is refuted by the facts: The participants in the anti-Jewish riots were not those who held the ideals of national unity and social revolution and who formed those underground cells that so terrified the existing regime. These were made up principally of university students who did not participate in the anti-Jewish riots. We have clear testimony from Würzburg of the absence of students from the area of disturbances. There were no universities in Frankfurt and Hamburg, while in Heidelberg the students went to the rescue of the Jews. The ground for the riots was prepared by prolonged anti-Jewish propaganda whose purpose was to tilt the balance against the Jews on the question of full citizenship. The disturbances were concentrated in places where the question of citizenship was still open—in Würzburg, Frankfurt, and Hamburg. The stimulus for the opposition came from those who saw themselves harmed by the entry of Jews into their occupations, namely, merchants who had previously enjoyed a monopolist position within the civic commerce. A brooding apprehension, perhaps even fear and terror, over infiltration of society by residents of the ghetto, who were held to be a dangerous element, was aroused in the population even when there was no actual direct competition. A physical attack on Jews was imminent. However, until the riots actually broke out, the political leaders closed their eyes to the problem. In every other aspect of life they closely scrutinized every conceivable threat to the peace of the community and existence of the regime. Had any hostility been aroused against any group other than the

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Jews there is no doubt that the state would have taken steps to restrain it. With regard to the Jews, they allowed matters to ferment until they actually resulted in violent outbreaks. It is evident that the improvement in the status of the Jews from the time they left the ghetto was only a formal achievement. It did not gain them social immunity: derogatory statements, expressions of their character, and insults to their religious beliefs were still permissible. The relationship between the Jewish community and non-Jewish society was still strained by a heavy historical burden and social tension. This strain by itself can suffice to explain the outbreaks of hostility; one need not seek an explanation in the general unrest prevailing in society. Despite the fact that they now were a part of the general social framework, having been recognized as citizens of the state—albeit in an inferior class—the Jews were still a discreditable and separate group and a problem to themselves and their environment. The disturbances of 1819, which were directed against the Jews alone, prominently highlighted this separation. Although only certain elements of society actually participated, the riots did demonstrate in a very clear manner the isolation of the Jews, their status as a group distinct from German society. It is true that at that time the authorities hastened to help the Jews and that, here and there, individual Gentiles publicly condemned what had happened. However, the majority of the public, while not actually justifying the violence, did draw the conclusion that the very presence of the Jews in German society was fraught with danger. About a year after the riots, the historian Georg Sartorius reviewed the situation in Germany to see whether there was a foreseeable danger of the revolution that writers and politicians had been foretelling for some years. Sartorius analyzed the political and social conditions of the German states, one by one, and reached the conclusion that the fears of revolution had been exaggerated in previous years and that careful and intelligent action could prevent the danger in the future. Sartorius saw the anti-Jewish riots of the previous year as an exceptional happening flowing from the tension existing between the Jews and their surroundings as a consequence of their growth and their entry into the occupations of their rivals. He looked on the steps taken by the governments to crush the disturbances as a legitimate necessity and recommended a policy of firmness in the future should the occasion require it: “For no matter what type of uprising there be, no matter what its causes may be, what causes anxiety at this time is that we cannot calculate where it may lead and how the flames may spread.” The advice he tendered the regimes was not to wait for disturbances to break out but to take measures to preempt them, and to remove the causes that were likely to lead to a recrudescence. The regimes should prevent the further spread of the Jews and stop their infiltration into
locations and occupations where they had not hitherto been found; in brief, they should stop the emancipation process and possibly even reverse it. Sartorius was convinced that the Jewish problem was not derived from the other problems that were troubling German society, but was an expression of the difficulties that the Jews had encountered—in his view for good and logical reasons—in their attempt to gain acceptance as members of equal standing in German society. Although the conclusion that Sartorius derived from his diagnosis did not remain valid for very long—the process of emancipation was not halted but for a short period—his diagnosis was the fruit of his realistic consideration of his own time and is confirmed by us in hindsight also in the historical perspective.

Part III: France, 1780-1880