

Towards disinheritance

EARLY IN 1934, the campaign to create 'Jew-free' villages gathered momentum. A typical episode took place that February, when Stormtroops entered the village of Arnswalde, in Pomerania, and at a given signal hurled stones at all Jewish houses, shops and meeting halls. Breaking into the synagogue, and into the house of the rabbi, the Stormtroops destroyed the furnishings, tore up and trampled on the Torah, and extinguished the Eternal Lamp. Throughout the night, Jewish homes were attacked, and Jews, if caught, beaten up in the street. On the following morning, most of the Jews left the village. That same morning, German children on their way to school helped themselves to toothpaste, soap and sponges lying in the wreckage of a Jewish chemist's shop, 'while parents and teachers looked on'.¹

A month later, on Palm Sunday, a member of Julius Streicher's personal bodyguard, Kurt Baer, marched at the head of a squad of Stormtroops into Gunzenhausen, his parents' home village, and also the home of nineteen Jewish families, small shopkeepers, craftsmen and innkeepers. Baer ordered these Jews to be dragged from their homes, and from the cellars in which they had hidden. He himself dragged one Jewish woman through the streets by her hair. Throughout the night, the Jews were beaten, whipped and cursed: and on the following morning two Jews were found dead, a seventy-five-year-old man, Rosenfelder, his chest torn open with knife wounds, and a thirty-year-old man, Rosenau, hung on a garden fence.²

The fanning of popular resentment and physical attack was not only against wealthy Jews, or those who had supported the democratic parties, or the Communists. It was an assault upon every Jew in Germany: an attempt to turn all German Jewry into an outcast, fit

only for persecution, harassment and expulsion. The Jew would be driven from every profession, and then from the life of the nation. On 1 May 1934 *Der Stürmer* gave vent to this all-embracing hatred in a special fourteen-page issue by reviving the medieval 'blood libel' accusation against the Jews of using Christian blood in the baking of their Passover bread, and in other 'Judaic' rituals.

This 'ritual murder' issue, of which 130,000 copies were printed and sold, and which was displayed on public noticeboards, reproduced an old engraving showing four rabbis sucking the blood of a Christian child through straws. There was also a photograph of a dead child, with the caption 'Slaughtered on 17 March, 1929, near Manau, shortly before the Jewish Passover'. Eleven columns listed alleged ritual murders from 169 BC until 1929.

This issue of *Der Stürmer* also portrayed the Christian Holy Communion as yet another example of a Jew, Jesus, drinking Christian blood in the Communion ceremony. Two weeks after it was published, and following protests from the Christian churches about this particular portrayal, Hitler ordered the issue banned, 'owing', it was explained, 'to an attack on Christ's Holy Communion'. But copies of the issue were still widely available throughout that summer.³ Nor was there any lessening of the demand for 'Jew-free' villages. On May 26, a German newspaper described how, at Hersbruck in Franconia, Streicher's province, 'on Thursday at 5 p.m. the swastika flag was hoisted on the property of the last Jew to leave Hersbruck. The Hersbruck district is now definitely purged of Jews. With pride and satisfaction the population takes cognizance of this fact. . . .' The newspaper was convinced that other districts 'will soon follow suit and that the day is not now far off when the whole of Franconia will be rid of Jews, just as one day that day must dawn when throughout the whole of Germany there will no longer be one single Jew.'⁴

On June 3 the Jewish community of Worms celebrated the nine hundredth anniversary of the foundation of its Old Synagogue. No single city official or non-Jew participated in the ceremony. According to legend, in Roman times the Jews of Worms had declined to participate in the Sanhedrin elections in Jerusalem, claiming to have built their own 'new' Jerusalem on the banks of the Rhine. Now, in common with every German Jewish community, the Jews of Worms had to decide whether to ride out a storm which would pass, or to

leave. In 1933, sixty Jews had left Worms for France, forty-three for Palestine, and thirty-two for Poland. The idea that the storm might travel to France or Poland did not arise: no man could foresee the unforeseeable. In 1934 the exodus from Worms continued, twenty-nine Jews going to the United States and twenty-six to Palestine. By the end of 1934 a total of 264 Jews, nearly a quarter of the Worms community, had left Germany.⁵

The pressures to leave were continuous. On 14 June 1934 a special court at Nuremberg sentenced the non-Jewish wife of a Jew to four months in prison as a 'race-defiling female'.⁶

In the Nazi perspective, the rule of law went parallel with the rule of fear and the rule of the gun. On 15 July 1934 Kurt Baer shot dead two Jews, Simon Straus and his son, who had given evidence against him after he had been accused of the killing of the two other Jews in Gunzenhausen in March. At the trial, the court had found that the two murdered Jews had 'definitely committed suicide', while Baer was found guilty only of 'a breach of the peace'. Baer's vengeance against Straus and his son, bringing the number of Jews whom he had murdered to four, went unpunished.⁷

Success for the continuing Nazi broadcasts to the Arab world, through Radio-Berlin and Radio-Stuttgart, came on August 3, with the beginning of three days of anti-Jewish riots in the Algerian city of Constantine. In three days, twenty-three Jews were killed, and thirty-eight wounded.⁸ But Arab unrest could not staunch the flow of German refugees, either to Palestine or elsewhere. In 1934 a total of 6,941 German Jews were admitted to Palestine.⁹

By the end of 1934, more than fifty thousand German Jews had left Germany. About four hundred and fifty thousand remained. Ten years later, two Jewish historians, Arieh Tartakower and Kurt Grossman, experts on the refugee question, wrote, of 1933 and 1934: 'During this first period, the refugee movement had a rather tentative character. To many it seemed that the anti-Jewish excesses would pass, to be followed by a new Jewish policy, embodying moderate restrictions and disabilities.' It was hoped by many German Jews, the authors added, 'that there would be only a limited exodus, and that the bulk of the Jewish population would remain in Germany'. There were even cases of Jews, who, 'unable to adjust themselves abroad', returned to Germany.¹⁰

The first months of 1935 seemed to bear out the hopes of those,