



German History in Documents and Images

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George Messersmith's Report to the State Department on the "Present Status of the Anti-Semitic Movement in Germany" (September 21, 1933)

During his first year as Reich Chancellor, Hitler sought to eliminate the political opposition, consolidate his power, and strengthen Germany's military position. To protect the reputation of his regime both at home and abroad, it was in his best interest to conceal the most radical elements of his ideology and policies. One of the soberest and most perceptive observers of the emerging Nazi regime was the American Consul General in Berlin, George S. Messersmith. In this report to the State Department, Messersmith describes the ideological underpinnings – and ever more troubling practical manifestations – of the regime's Jewish policy. In doing so, he quotes extensively from contemporary news reports and speeches by Hitler's top officials. Commenting on the "remarkable insincerity" of high-ranking members of Hitler's government, Messersmith urges the Secretary of State not to take German government reports at face value.

Following up on previous memoranda dated May 23, 1933, and June 17, 1933, Messersmith notes that the situation of the Jews in Germany had grown steadily worse during the intervening months and cites the widespread dismissal of Jews from posts as lawyers, doctors, and university professors as but one example. Moreover, he sees no improvement in their situation on the horizon. On the contrary, he lists a number of new discriminatory measures that would soon take effect: the establishment of "racial offices," the implementation of a law prohibiting marriages between Germans and Jews, and the initiation of efforts to disenfranchise them. Messersmith's memorandum includes a number of chillingly prescient observations. He was obviously wrong, however, in predicting that the worst period of physical persecution of the Jews had already passed.

American Consul General
Berlin, Germany, September 21, 1933

Subject: The present status of the anti-Semitic movement in Germany

The Honorable
The Secretary of State
Washington

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to my confidential despatch No. 1330 of May 23, on the status of the anti-Semitic movement in Germany at that time, and to my confidential despatch No. 1369 of June 17, giving a resume of the then social, economic and political status of the Jews in

Germany. In the present despatch, I shall endeavor to bring the Department a resume of developments since my last despatch.

Dr. Achim Gercke is the expert for racial questions in the Ministry of the Interior of the Reich. There is transmitted herewith, as of primary interest in connection with the situation of the Jews in Germany, a translation of a confidential memorandum prepared by Dr. Gercke on fundamental principles with respect to the "Mischlingefrage," that is, [the] question of racial intermixture. This memorandum was not intended for publication and came to me through a confidential source. It is worthy of the Department's attention as practically all laws and regulations affecting the Jews in Germany pass through Dr. Gercke as the racial expert of the Ministry of the Interior of the Reich, and this memorandum is particularly interesting as showing the attitude of Dr. Gercke on fundamental aspects of the problem. I quote below only a few of the significant statements made in the memorandum.

"A person is not to be considered Aryan, one of whose grandparents is Jewish; only those persons are to be considered Aryans who have no Jewish ancestors whatsoever. [. . .] The Jewish question and the question of mixed blood must therefore be solved on a social plane. It must again become an ethical rule that persons of German blood may only contract marriages with persons of their own kind. [. . .] Now as to the fundamental principles: It would be contrary to all principles of racial health if one would, without hesitation, look upon an admixture of Jewish blood in the second, third, or fourth generation as non-existent or negligible. Experience on the contrary tells us that no number of generations can be definitely determined which would be necessary to extinguish the influence of a blood mixture which has once taken place."

There is also transmitted herewith a translation of an article which appeared in the June¹ number of the "National-Socialistische Monatshefte" by Dr. Gercke. This article is also of particular interest as showing the basic attitude of the man who acts as the racial expert of the Ministry of the Interior. The following are significant quotations from this article.

"Through the victory of the National-Socialist revolution, also those who have never before worked or fought for its solution have recognized the Jewish question as a national problem. Every one has acknowledged that the present situation is untenable. The unrestricted expansion and the equal treatment of Jews lead to unfair competition on the part of the Jews and to the surrender of the important positions of German spiritual and material value to those of a strange race. [. . .] This distortion of the Jewish problem must not be supported even by outward appearance, all the more as it would be political insanity if the national regulation of the Jewish question were mingled with questions of foreign policy. [. . .] All propositions which intended to create a permanent condition or a permanent regulation for the Jews in Germany do not solve the Jewish question, as they do not detach the Jew from Germany. And that is the main thing. The Jews, if they can live

¹ It was actually the May issue of 1933, no. 38.

eternally as parasites in the nations which offer them their hospitality, will always remain a source of political danger where the open destructive fire of Bolshevism can again and again be set ablaze. [. . .] We must build up our country without the Jews; they can only remain strangers without nationality and may not occupy any legal and legitimate permanent position within the structure of the country. Only in this way will Ahasverus be forced to reach for his staff for the last time and exchange it for the axe and the spade.”

Since I last addressed a despatch to the Department on this subject, there has been no alleviation what[so]ever of the situation of the Jews in Germany. On the contrary their condition is growing steadily worse. The situations described in previous despatches continue to exist and in the time which has elapsed it is possible to see even more definitely the implacability with which the various laws and regulations affecting the Jews in practically all conditions of life in Germany are carried through. That this should be so was to be expected, for those who control the National Socialist movement and the Government have not changed their views with respect to the treatment of the Jews. I am informed that the Chancellor, Mr. Hitler, and the Minister of Propaganda, Dr. Goebbels, among the higher leaders of the Party are the ones who remain adamant on this question. Outstanding Americans and foreigners who have in the past months had an opportunity to talk with the Chancellor and who believed it would be important to give him the view of the outside world on the Jewish question have, I am informed, found it entirely impossible to speak to him on this question. If they endeavored to make any remarks on the Jewish question the Chancellor interrupted them and delivered his point of view, which, I am told reliably, has remained entirely the same from the outset. I am informed also from reliable and confidential sources that Mr. Keppler, who is the most intimate of the Chancellor's economic advisors, Dr. Schmitt, the Minister of Commerce, and Dr. Schacht, the President of the Reichsbank, are not able to talk with the Chancellor on this subject and as soon as they endeavor to bring to him certain points of view, he refuses to listen to anything they have to say on this subject. This information comes to me from such creditable sources that I believe it may be taken as correct. Dr. Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, who is still the principal spokesman of the Government on the Jewish question, will listen to what others say to him, but without comment, and apparently so far without any change in his opinions being effected. My conversations with various people closely connected with the Government and with the Party, some of them occupying responsible positions in the various Ministries, would indicate that these [individuals] would be very happy if a more mild Jewish policy could be carried through; but it is obvious that they are powerless as long as the opinions of the highest leaders of the Party remain unchanged.

Dr. Rosenberg, the head of the Foreign Office of the National Socialist Party, who has been considerably in eclipse since his visit to London several months ago, came prominently into the press again on August 24 when he commented on the Zionist Congress held in Prague. According to the “Voelkische Beobachter,” Dr. Rosenberg expressed himself as follows:

“The fact that Germany as the first of the great nations decided recently to remember its origin and its right to individuality in the formation of its political life, has, in spite of strong opposition, not failed to make a deep impression on the rest of the world. [. . .] National Socialism did not start this problem; but it has been its fate to have this problem forced upon it for solution, and in spite of what Jewry has done to Germany in the last fourteen years, the great movement of National Socialism has avoided taking vengeance on them in the legal way, taking into consideration the participation of the Jews in the war, and their deed, to avoid hardships as far as possible. [. . .]”

In this same article Dr. Rosenberg brought out that if the plan of the Prague Zionist Congress to help all the Jews emigrate from Germany were carried through, this would make it impossible for the German Government to take action against those Jews who remained in the country for the offensive action of those who had left. He said that the position of Germany in the future towards the whole problem would be determined by [the] results of the Congress at Prague and by the leaders of Jewry throughout the world. In other words, he made the threat that if the action of Jewish world leaders was objectionable to the German Government, it would only result in greater hardships for the Jews in Germany.

In the issue of August 26 of “Der Deutsche,” which is the personal organ of Dr. Ley, the leader of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront, this paper comments that it would be a very happy solution if all Jews in Germany could be got out of the country as the Zionist Congress in Prague was planning, and that Germany would place no obstacle in the way of Jews leaving as this would only make more room for Germans now without work. This article comments, however, that “to clear up this problem, there remains the question of how much in the way of property the Jews leaving Germany will be permitted to take with them.”

During the Nuremberg Party convention, the Chancellor and Dr. Goebbels both made significant speeches on the Jewish question. As the Department has, I believe, received copies of these speeches with appropriate comment, it does not seem necessary to comment on them further, except to state that these speeches indicated clearly that the Chancellor and Dr. Goebbels remain as implacable on the Jewish question as from the outset of the movement and place such stress on the question that, at the most important meeting the Party has ever held, their principal speeches are on racial questions.

It is, however, interesting to quote the following from the close of one of Goebbels’ speeches at the Nuremberg convention:

“Let me say at the close a few words concerning the measures which we have taken against the dangers of the world propaganda which is directed against us. It is quite clear that such a well-planned campaign against Germany’s peace and safety cannot remain unanswered by us. World propaganda against us will be answered by world propaganda for us. What propaganda is, and what might it has, and with what measures and methods it

can be combated, that we know. We have not learned this in theory, but in practice, and have mastered it in our everyday work.”

If the principal spokesman of the Party, and its highest leaders and the racial expert of the Government in the Ministry of the Interior hold the views set forth in the speeches referred to above and in the memoranda hereto appended, it is not difficult to understand that the racial question has not become in any sense easier.

The establishment of so-called “racial offices” is to take place throughout Germany. As early as May 4 the “Berliner Tageblatt”, evening issue, carried an article to the effect that a racial office was being established in Dortmund under the head of the Kommissar for health. According to this article the racial records for the eighty thousand school children in Dortmund were to be made up as rapidly as possible in view of the importance of the new generation.

On June 28 a meeting took place in the Ministry of the Interior of the Reich, at which Dr. Frick addressed the committee of experts on population and race problems, when he stated that “in addition to the threatening increase of hereditarily inferior persons, the Government must follow with equal care the increasing mixture of races”. He indicated that a law would soon be issued prohibiting [the] marriage of Germans with Jews.

The question as to who is Aryan and non-Aryan has been one which since the Party came into power has been creating considerable discussion. The matter is one of primary interest under the so-called “Reichsbeamten-gesetz,” that is, [the] law governing the officials of the Reich. According to this law persons of Jewish blood are to be prohibited from holding any office in the country, with certain exceptions, the principal exception being the “Frontkaempfer,” that is, Jews who fought at the front during the war. The basic principles are laid down somewhat as follows:

- 1) He is to be considered non-Aryan who has Jewish parents or grandparents. It is sufficient if one parent or grandparent is non-Aryan.
- 2) Anyone who is called to be an official of the Reich has to show that he and his wife are of Aryan origin. Every official of the Reich who wishes to marry has to show that the person whom he wishes to marry is of Aryan origin. This proof is to be in the form of birth certificates and marriage certificates.
- 3) The basic principles laid down are to apply to the officials of the Reich, the states, the communes, the communal organizations and other bodies, institutions and foundations having official status.

According to the “Berliner Tageblatt” of September 16, the Ministry of the Interior of the Reich has issued a further explanatory statement in connection with the office-holders law to clear up the term “non-Aryan”. In this declaration it is stated that if one of the grandparents of the official

is Jewish or of Jewish origin, the official shall be considered Jewish under law. The Minister emphasizes that in interpreting the law, Aryan origin does not depend upon religion, but upon race and blood.

It is obvious from the foregoing that all persons with Jewish parents or grandparents are excluded from being officials or from holding any official position in Germany.

With respect to citizenship, the laws planned which are to disfranchise the Jews are for the most part still in preparation. From the best information available, it is apparently still the intention that practically all the Jews in Germany are to be disfranchised. The Jews are to be given the status of "foreigners" in Germany even though the family may have been in Germany for generations. This is the attitude of the radical element of the Party and unless there is a considerable change, the laws, when they appear, will be very drastic. Under the law of July 14, 1933, the Minister of the Interior of the Reich already has the authority to deprive persons of their citizenship without giving any reason for such action, and to confiscate the property of such persons. The "Berliner Tageblatt" of August 25 and other newspapers carry of a list of thirty-three German citizens who were deprived of their citizenship under this law by the Minister of the Interior. Among the names in these lists are those of George Bernhard, Leon Feuchtwanger, Heinrich Mann and Philip Schneidemann.

The laws governing the prohibition of mixed marriages have not yet been issued; but such marriages have been almost as effectively stopped already by the other measures in effect as they could be by law. The Department is aware from previous reports that Party members can no longer marry a person who is not of Aryan origin, and if there is any Party member who has a non-Aryan wife or husband, he or she must be excluded from the Party. According to the "Beamtengesetz" many persons of Aryan origin who are married to non-Aryans have been compelled to give up their positions. It is no exaggeration to state that thousands of marriages which had been planned between Aryans and non-Aryans are not taking place as the marriage would ruin the career or the possible chance of making a livelihood of the one or the other party. The non-Aryan wives of Aryan officials have to my knowledge voluntarily left their husbands in order that they might continue in their careers. The wife of an Aryan professor recently informed me that she was leaving for the United States and separating from her husband as he had a position with a Government office in Stuttgart, and as she was of Jewish origin she was leaving him in order that he might be able to continue to make his living. As I happen to know that this was a happy marriage, I merely cite this as an isolated instance of the human tragedies daily taking place.

The "cleaning-out" in the universities of Jewish professors and those who have any non-Aryan ancestors according to the "Beamtengesetz" is continuing. There is, I understand, only one professor of Jewish origin left in the University of Berlin. On September 9 the Reichstatthalter of Saxony, in accordance with a decision of the Saxon Ministry of Education and the "Beamtengesetz", ordered the separation of six former Professors from the University of Leipzig,

of whom five were of Jewish origin. In other universities the "cleaning out" process has been completed for some time.

In this connection it may be interesting for the Department to know that a few days ago I had a conversation in the Ministry of the Interior of the Reich with the Ministerialdirektor Dr. Buttsman, whom I had gone to see with regard to an American physician in Germany, and he insisted on talking on the Jewish question. He told me the usual defence, which is made in various Ministries and in the press and which we hear constantly from all sides, and stressed particularly that in solving the Jewish problem Germany was doing a service for our country and for the rest of the world as well. He said that in carrying through the various laws affecting Jewish professors and professional men, it had been endeavored to avoid all hardships, and that in applying the numerus clausus the German government was following the only possible course. I told him that I did not want to discuss the Jewish question but that since he had raised the matter I should be interested in knowing how many Jewish professors there were left under the numerus clausus in the University of Berlin. He then gave me the impression that very few of the professors had been disturbed, and when I told him that so far I could learn only one was left, if he were still there, he had nothing to say. I then asked him how many Jewish professors were left in the University of Leipzig and he said that most of them were undisturbed. When I brought to his attention that five had been let out one at a time less than two weeks ago and that I understood no non-Aryan professor was left in Leipzig, he had nothing to say. I merely mention this to indicate that there is a remarkable insincerity which one finds in high-ranking officers of the Government. As Dr. Buttsman is apparently one of the high-ranking officers of the Government to whom American and foreign professors are directed for information when they come to Germany, it is quite possible to understand why some of the professional men who come to Germany leave it with such an incorrect picture of the situation.

The position of the Jewish physicians in Germany is becoming more difficult continually. They have been excluded from the physicians' organizations in which membership is a necessity if the physician is to enjoy any of the ordinary privileges of his career. They are excluded from the hospitals and clinics, except from those which are Jewish. They are for the most part not permitted to treat patients belonging to the various insurance organizations, public and private, unless they be purely Jewish organizations. The only exceptions in this connection which have been made are those in favor of Jewish physicians who served at the front during the war. Such war service, however, is no guarantee of privilege. I transmit herewith two clippings taken from a newspaper in Nuremberg. In the first clipping are given the names of eleven Jewish physicians in Nuremberg who have been re-admitted to practice with the sick benefit insurance organizations in the city; but the newspaper, in order to show its readers its regret that this official re-admission to practice has taken place, surrounds the item with a black border. The second clipping is from the same newspaper of the following day and refers to the previous article. The head of the Physicians' organization in Nuremberg, Dr. Strock, publishes the same list of eleven physicians and says that this publication of their re-admission was made without his knowledge and consent. He goes on to warn all people not to in any way consult or use

these physicians in spite of the fact that they have been re-admitted. The "Vossische Zeitung" of August 24 carries an article to the effect that the new "Academy of Physicians" has been established and that no physician of non-Aryan origin is to be admitted to the Academy.

The situation of the Jewish lawyers in Germany has in no sense become better. A general depression prevails among the majority of lawyers who have been re-admitted. Dr. Max Alsberg, one of the most distinguished lawyers at the Berlin Bar and who was only 56 years of age, committed suicide in a sanatorium in the Engadin some days ago. The "Berliner Tageblatt" of September 13 carries an article of considerable length, commenting on Dr. Alsberg's professional reputation, stating that he died of a heart attack from which he had suffered for some time. I am informed from a reliable source that Dr. Alsberg took his own life as a result of the depression from which he was suffering.

There is transmitted herewith a copy of the questionnaire which must be filled in by all persons who desire to be appointed to any public office in Germany or to hold an office in an official or semi-official organization. The interesting questions are found on page 4 where the applicant is required to give very detailed information with regards to his parents and grandparents. All German officials, high and low, are being required to fill in this form and they are carefully examined. Those who cannot prove their Aryan origin by supporting documents or who are not accepted under the "Beamtengesetz" are separated from their office.

As an indication of the extent to which the anti-Semitic movement is carried, it is interesting to note that a new telephone alphabet has been published by the German Post Office, which is to be effective throughout the country. It was customary when spelling names on the telephone, to use "Samuel" for the letter S, but this must now be "Siegfried"; and instead of "Nathan" for N, it must now be "Nordpol".

The Department is aware of the steps which have been taken in various universities and throughout the various cities in Germany to exclude from the libraries books written by Jewish authors. In this connection the following order issued by the appropriate Prussian Ministry to universities, high schools, etc., is of interest:

"For scientific libraries, the confiscation or destruction of Jewish or Marxist books does not come in question. The lending, however, of such books is to be carried on with the greatest care in the future. Such books can only be given out when the lender can show that he needs the books for serious scientific investigational work."

As indicative of the popular sentiment, I wish to bring to the Department's attention a meeting which took place in the Sport Palast in Berlin on the evening of September 18. The meeting was addressed by Dr. Habicht, whose speech was reported in a number of the Berlin newspapers. He was followed by Schultze Wechsungen, who is the National Socialist propaganda chief for the Berlin district. Some 6,000 persons were present at this meeting and listened with interest

and enthusiasm to the speech which Mr. Wechsungen made attacking the Jews. He advocated increasing the total of 40,000 persons now in the concentration camps by sending there large number of Jews, as this would help the unemployment problem. He demanded the further persecution of the Jews in Germany and advocated the beating of German women who dared to appear in public with Jews. He states that far too many who belong in the concentration camps are still free but one by one they will go there. He added that the Jews have good reason to thank their God that Hitler is the National Socialist leader. If Hitler were not their leader the Jews in Germany would no longer exist. He went on to say that as propaganda chief of the Berlin district he decreed that in the future every Aryan German girl who is seen in a restaurant or on the street with a Jew, must be given a good beating. "The municipal administration must keep the drainage system working. The Storm Troopers of the National Socialist Party have to take care of the other purifying measures." This speech was so outrageous that not a single newspaper in Berlin carried an account of it and only one newspaper made any mention at all that Wechsungen had spoken at the meeting. A correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune and [a correspondent] of the International News Service were present at the meeting and took stenographic notes of Wechsungen's speech.

In various dispatches I have informed the Department that the period of physical persecution of the Jews may be considered as over. This I think still holds, but isolated instances of physical outrages committed on Jews continually take place. About three weeks ago the son of one of the most prominent Jewish families in Germany was delivered dead to his wife, and the family allowed to bury the body but not to see it, except one side of the face. The mother of this Jew is one of the most philanthropic women in Germany and has contributed during the war and since then, freely from her considerable fortune, to the relief of suffering. Her son, who was obviously brutally murdered, was five times wounded during the first war and after the first time that he was wounded would not have been under the necessity of returning to the front. After the war, being impaired in health as a result of his wounds and enjoying an ample fortune, he bought an estate about 40 miles from Berlin where he devoted himself to training young men to be good farmers. He gained the enmity of a father and son living on his estate, who were continually making difficulty, but who, as National Socialists, after March 5 saw that this Jew was put into a concentration camp where he was severely mistreated. On account of the position of his family and his own good works and those of his mother, he was released from the concentration camp. After leaving the concentration camp he came to live with his wife in Berlin as it was no longer safe for him on the estate. About three weeks ago on a Saturday morning, he was notified by the police of his district to appear at the police station to register. He went to the police station and when he arrived there was told a telegram had just come requiring his arrest and he was detained. He was permitted to send word to his wife, who came and brought his luncheon to the police station. This was the last time he was seen live by any of his family. On the Wednesday evening following, a policeman came to the home of his wife and said that if she would come to the police station she would have good news of her husband. In the meantime prominent persons had used all their influence in an endeavor to learn where the young man was; but he could not be located even with the assistance of high-ranking members of the Government in

Berlin. The wife went to the police station and when she arrived there was informed that her husband was dead. She was taken to the mortuary and a cloth was lifted from one side of the face of the young man so that she could identify him. The body was delivered to the family for burial but they were not permitted to see it. The police gave out that he had committed suicide by throwing himself in front of a truck while being taken to the concentration camp. The fact is that the same two men, father and son, who had previously caused his being placed in a concentration camp through the S.A. and the assistance of the police, had got him into their hands. How he was actually killed remains a mystery, beyond that his dead body was delivered to the police at the police station by the S.A., who had received him alive at the same station. The facts in this case as above recited, horrible and unbelievable as they may seem, come to me from sources which are unimpeachable.

That incidents of the above nature are becoming more and more isolated is undoubtedly correct; but it is equally true that they are still continuing to take place and that the perpetrators, even though it is possible for the authorities to locate them, remain entirely unpunished.

I have gone into the present status of the Jews in Germany at this length as I believe it is essential that the Department be informed as to details. The Minister of Propaganda, Dr. Goebbels, repeated in his speech on the racial question at Nuremberg the phrase heard so often, that not a hair on the head of a Jew had been harmed since the 5th of March. If such statements are made by responsible officers of the Government, it is necessary that the real facts appear in the record.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith
American Consul General

Source: George S. Messersmith Papers, Item 305, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware. Messersmith, G.S., Berlin. Despatch No. 1596 to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Washington, September 21, 1933 – George Messersmith's Report to the State Department on the "Present State of the Anti-Semitic Movement in Germany" (September 21, 1933)

Original text is in English.