



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 6. Weimar Germany, 1918/19–1933

Gershom Scholem on the Atmosphere in Munich in the Early 1920s (Retrospective Account, 1977)

As a reaction to Anti-Semitism, Zionism propagated a return to the traditional values of Judaism, Jewish self-confidence, preparation for emigration (above all, through agricultural training), and finally, resettlement in Palestine. After the Nazis seized power in 1933, Zionism, with its clear recommendations, offered oppressed, isolated, and persecuted German Jews – until then, mostly non-Zionist – a kind of new or alternative identity. It also gave them a concrete goal: emigration to Palestine. Before 1933, however, the clearly defined goal of emigration, to which all other activities were to be subordinated, led to a situation in which German Zionists rarely participated (only in exceptional cases) in the defensive fight against Anti-Semitism, in general, and against the National Socialists in particular.

In Munich I had a chance to get acquainted with incipient Nazism at the university from close up. The atmosphere in the city was unbearable; this is something that is often disregarded today and presented in more muted colors than it actually was. There was no disregarding the huge, blood-red posters with their no less bloodthirsty text, inviting people to attend Hitler's speeches: "Fellow Germans are welcome; Jews will not be admitted." I was little affected by this, for I had long since made my decision to leave Germany. But it was frightening to encounter the blindness of the Jews who refused to see and acknowledge all that. This greatly encumbered my relations with Munich Jews, for they became extremely jumpy and angry when someone broached that subject. Thus my association with Jews was limited to a small circle of like-minded people.

Source of English translation: Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem. Memories of my Youth*. Translated from the German by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, pp. 135-36.

Source of original German text: Gershom Scholem, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977, pp. 172-73.