

Primary Source: Adolf Hitler's First Antisemitic Writing September 16, 1919

Hitler returned from a military hospital to Munich in early 1919. There he underwent a Reichswehr sponsored course of systematic political education for demobilizing soldiers that featured Pan- German nationalism, antisemitism, and anti-socialism. These same themes were prominent in Bavarian politics following the repression of the Munich revolution of 1918-19. Because antisemitism had not played a notable part in Bavarian politics prior to the revolutionary disturbances, a Herr Adolf Gemlich was prompted to send an inquiry about the importance of the "Jewish question" to Captain Karl Mayr, the officer in charge of the Reichswehr News and Enlightenment Department in Munich. Mayr referred him to Hitler, who had distinguished himself in the above-mentioned course by the vehemence of his radical nationalist and antisemitic views, and by his oratorical talents. Hitler was already feeling his way toward a political career; four days before responding to Gemlich in the letter translated below, he had paid his first visit to the German Workers' Party (eventually renamed, the National Socialist Workers' Party) as a confidential agent of the Reichswehr. In the letter to Gemlich he appears anxious to establish his credentials as a knowledgeable and sober antisemite. Compared to the inflammatory mass-meeting oratory that he was soon to make his specialty, Hitler's rhetoric here is quite tame, stressing the need for a "rational" and "scientific" antisemitism. Some historians have interpreted the letter's call for the "irrevocable removal [Entfernung]" of the Jews from German life as a prefiguring of the Holocaust. But it is clear from the context and from later statements that, at this point, Hitler meant segregation or expulsion rather than systematic liquidation. The letter, Hitler's first explicitly political writing, impressed his Reichswehr superiors and he soon gained a reputation among radical rightist and socially respectable nationalist conservative groups as a man who could help inoculate the masses against revolution and whose antisemitic rhetoric could help discredit the democratic Weimar Republic. The letter may thus be seen as the launching of his political career. Source: Eberhard Jäckel (ed.), Hitler. *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905-1924* (Stuttgart, 1980), pp. 88-90. Translated by Richard S. Levy.

TEXT

[September 16, 1919]

Dear Herr Gemlich,

The danger posed by Jewry for our people today finds expression in the undeniable aversion of wide sections of our people. The cause of this aversion is not to be found in a clear recognition of the consciously or unconsciously systematic and pernicious effect of the Jews as a totality upon our nation. Rather, it arises mostly from personal contact and from the personal impression which the individual Jew leaves--almost always an unfavorable one. For this reason, antisemitism is too easily characterized as a mere emotional phenomenon. And yet this is incorrect. Antisemitism as a political movement may not and cannot be defined by emotional impulses, but by recognition of the facts. The facts are these: First, Jewry is absolutely a race and not a religious association. Even the Jews never designate themselves as Jewish Germans, Jewish Poles, or Jewish Americans but always as German, Polish, or American Jews. Jews have never yet adopted much more than the language of the foreign nations among whom they live. A German who is forced to make use of the French language in France, Italian in Italy, Chinese in China does not thereby become a Frenchman, Italian, or Chinaman. It's the same with the Jew who lives among us and is forced to make use of the German language. He does not thereby become a German. Neither does the Mosaic faith, so important for the survival of this race, settle the question of whether someone is a Jew or non-Jew. There is scarcely a race whose members belong exclusively to just one definite religion.

Through thousands of years of the closest kind of inbreeding, Jews in general have maintained their race and their peculiarities far more distinctly than many of the peoples among whom they have lived. And thus comes the fact that there lives amongst us a non- German, alien race which neither wishes nor is able to sacrifice its racial character or to deny its feeling, thinking, and striving. Nevertheless, it possesses all the political rights we do. If the ethos of the Jews is revealed in the purely material realm, it is even clearer in their thinking and

striving. Their dance around the golden calf is becoming a merciless struggle for all those possessions we prize most highly on earth.

The value of the individual is no longer decided by his character or by the significance of his achievements for the totality but exclusively by the size of his fortune, by his money.

The loftiness of a nation is no longer to be measured by the sum of its moral and spiritual powers, but rather by the wealth of its material possessions.

This thinking and striving after money and power, and the feelings that go along with it, serve the purposes of the Jew who is unscrupulous in the choice of methods and pitiless in their employment. In autocratically ruled states he whines for the favor of "His Majesty" and misuses it like a leech fastened upon the nations. In democracies he vies for the favor of the masses, cringes before the "majesty of the people," and recognizes only the majesty of money.

He destroys the character of princes with byzantine flattery, national pride (the strength of a people), with ridicule and shameless breeding to depravity. His method of battle is that public opinion which is never expressed in the press but which is nonetheless managed and falsified by it. His power is the power of money, which multiplies in his hands effortlessly and endlessly through interest, and which forces peoples under the most dangerous of yokes. Its golden glitter, so attractive in the beginning, conceals the ultimately tragic consequences. Everything men strive after as a higher goal, be it religion, socialism, democracy, is to the Jew only means to an end, the way to satisfy his lust for gold and domination.

In his effects and consequences he is like a racial tuberculosis of the nations.

The deduction from all this is the following: an antisemitism based on purely emotional grounds will find its ultimate expression in the form of the pogrom.[1] An antisemitism based on reason, however, must lead to systematic legal combatting and elimination of the privileges of the Jews, that which distinguishes the Jews from the other aliens who live among us (an Aliens Law). The ultimate objective [of such legislation] must, however, be the irrevocable removal of the Jews in general.

For both these ends a government of national strength, not of national weakness, is necessary.

The Republic in Germany owes its birth not to the uniform national will of our people but the sly exploitation of a series of circumstances which found general expression in a deep, universal dissatisfaction. These circumstances however were independent of the form of the state and are still operative today. Indeed, more so now than before. Thus, a great portion of our people recognizes that a changed state-form cannot in itself change our situation. For that it will take a rebirth of the moral and spiritual powers of the nation.

And this rebirth cannot be initiated by a state leadership of irresponsible majorities, influenced by certain party dogmas, an irresponsible press, or internationalist phrases and slogans. [It requires] instead the ruthless installation of nationally minded leadership personalities with an inner sense of responsibility.

But these facts deny to the Republic the essential inner support of the nation's spiritual forces. And thus today's state leaders are compelled to seek support among those who draw the exclusive benefits of the new formation of German conditions, and who for this reason were the driving force behind the revolution--the Jews. Even though (as various statements of the leading personalities reveal) today's leaders fully realized the danger of Jewry, they (seeking their own advantage) accepted the readily proffered support of the Jews and also returned the favor. And this pay-off consisted not only in every possible favoring of Jewry, but above all in the hindrance of the struggle of the betrayed people against its defrauders, that is in the repression of the antisemitic movement.

Respectfully,
Adolf Hitler