REPORT

The Imperfectly Mastered Past: Anti-Semitism in West Germany Since the Holocaust

by Frederick Weil

Frederick D. Weil is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Chicago.

While it is probably still correct to insist that the Nazi murder of European Jews, the Holocaust, is unique in the history of man's cruelty to man, one has a disturbing sense that it may not remain so — rather, that it may become a typical form of reaction by a society at a particular stage of development to a particular kind of crisis. One's natural reaction to this suspicion is to inquire into the conditions which permit this kind of tragedy and into the measures which help to inhibit its occurrence. One obvious way to approach an understanding here is to ask what the Germans themselves have learned from this crime. The telecast of the American film "The Holocaust" in West Germany provided an appropriate occasion for reflection,[1] and the special issue of *New German Critique* on this topic (Number 19, Winter 1980) contained a number of excellent articles analyzing the German response. However, it struck me that while most of the accounts of the German public reaction were historically oriented, there was little attempt made to trace the concrete historical development of post-war mass public opinion. My own research has been limited mainly to the question of political rather than ethnic or racial tolerance, but anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism cannot be entirely ignored in considering German liberalism any more than in considering American. Therefore, I felt I might be able to contribute to the discussion begun in *New German Critique* by adding a slightly different perspective and by deepening the concrete historical context.

1. I happened to be spending a year doing research in West Germany on the development of political tolerance there since World War II when the program was shown. Therefore, I had a chance to read some of the newspaper accounts of the German public's reaction to the program and to talk informally with German and German-Jewish friends. I also was there to see and participate in memorials to the 40th anniversary of the *Reichskristallnacht* Nazi pogrom, to see some of the latest films from the so-called "Hitler-wave," and to follow the debates about the statute of limitations for war crimes and murder (as well as the *Berufsverbot* and the anti-terrorist measures). Since I experienced all these things in a rather impressionistic way, I was very glad to be able to read several of the accounts in *New German Critique* which brought much of the scattered material together and which reported on debates which I missed.

Reprinted with permission from the *New German Critique*, An Interdisciplinary Journal of German Studies, Number 20, Spring/Summer 1980

In particular, I would like (a) to discuss the question of the *attitude* of anti-Semitism in Germany, which is not the same as the question of its effects, (b) to suggest, in a non-comprehensive way, how and when these attitudes become radically dangerous, (c) to make some observations about the post-war development and likely outlook for anti-Semitism and ethnic prejudice in Germany, and (d) to place the effects of the tv film into a longer-term perspective. Without trying to anticipate it entirely, the argument made here may be expressed in several theses.

(a) Anti-Semitism was severe in pre-Nazi Germany, but it was not as severe as that in Eastern Europe nor much more severe than in the United States at the same time. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the Holocaust was the "logical" outcome of German anti-Semitism, even in the crisis of the 1930s. Moishe Postone gives a provocative analysis in *New German Critique* of the function which anti-Semitism *empirically* played in national socialist propaganda; but — given the social, religious, and ethnic heterogeneity of Germany, even at that time, and the proven susceptibility of the German middle class to accepting Slavs, workers and socialists, and Catholics as scapegoats for intractable problems of social development — it seems unlikely that Jews could have been the only possible scapegoats.[2]

(b) Social and economic anti-Jewish prejudice is a seemingly universal phenomenon where there are Jewish populations, but it does not generally become radically dangerous for Jews unless it becomes "politicized," that is, attached to a radically anti-Semitic political movement: and the more successful the movement, the more radically dangerous for the Jews. However, there is no necessary correspondence between the sucess of such a movement and the importance to it of its anti-Semitism doctrines: the Nazi rise is largely explicable without reference to their anti-Semitism. (This is not the same as saying that their anti-Semitism was "unimportant" — it is arguably the most "important" thing about the Nazis.)

(c) We will see that popular anti-Semitism has largely declined in West Germany since the war (as it also has in the United States) and, everything else being equal, it may very well continue to decline. The most reassuring aspect, from the point of view developed here, is the virtual disappearance of anti-Semitic political movements, for reasons which have very little to do with social and economic anti-Semitic prejudice. On the other hand, ethnic prejudice remains, and (1) anti-Semitism remains more severe in Germany than in the United States, and (2) it also has significantly new objects in the foreign "Guest Workers" (*Gastarbeiter*), especially the Turks.

2. One may also profitably compare American nativism and bigotry as a reaction to many of the same socio-economic and developmental strains form the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries: America, of course, had a number of "safety valves" not available to Germany. Cf. S.N. Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1978) and John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New York, 1971). With regard to the "scapegoat" function of anti-Semitism, see Eva Reichmann's distinction between objective and subjective anti-Semitism: *Hostages of Civilization* (Boston, 1951).

(d) Markovits and Hayden are probably correct when they write in *New German Critique* that the "Holocaust's" effects on public opinion will be short-lived; this is almost always the case with such "events" (and, of course, it is simply too soon to talk about long-term effects). However, an inspection not only of the long-tem trends up to now but also of their structural roots will allow us to say whether the time was ripe for such a posited catalytic effect: to some extent it was.

The Holocaust and the Politics of Radical Anti-Semitism

There seems little doubt that the Holocaust was the greatest of the Nazi crimes as well as the greatest tragedy to befall Jews in millenia of anti-Semitism. The causes, particulars, and effects of the Holocaust cannot be examined adequately here, but working backward historically from the mass murders, one may make several observations. (1) During wartime Nazi totalitarianism, under conditions of a state of seige with all effective centers of opposition neutralized or suppressed, it would have been extremely difficult for even Germans of good will to prevent mass murders of defenseless civilians outside German borders or in isolated death camps. Yet, if it had not been for widespread moral indifference (or at worst, active support), even passive resistance among an unorganized, if sizable, minority might have hindered deportations, interfered with mechanisms of execution which required widespread coordination, or at least forced the regime to concentrate only on strictly military wartime activity. (2) The same is even truer during the period of Nazi consolidation of power. At the beginning, there was still some organization available. Later, during the process of *Gleichschaltung* (coordination), some of the organizations — especially those like the churches, which were only neutralized but not fully suppressed — might have made it a condition of their "coordination" to resist politically and militarily "needless" discrimination, if there had been popular support for such moves. (3) The Nazi achievement of *mass* support is largely explicable without reference to their anti-Semitic ideological elements,[3] although this ideology was undoubtedly important for the hard-core center which provided sustaining energy through difficult periods. But it is nevertheless important to note the susceptibility of large numbers of Germans to the use of anti-Semitism as a scapegoat in dealing with the social and economic displacement which occurred in the process of industrialization and modernization, especially in the crisis of the 1930s. (4) Although political anti-Semitism served the same scapegoat function among some segments of the German population at least

3. See M. Rainer Lepsius' short but comprehensive account of the collapse of democracy in Germany, "From Fragmented Party Democracy to Government by Emergency Decree and National Socialist Takeover: Germany," in Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 33–49. Also cf. Reichmann.

since the last third of the 19th century — and flared up during the political and economic crises of 1873–95, 1918–23, and 1930–33 — it never achieved any notable political success (either in mass support or in legislation) until it became part of a successful, radically anti-democratic mass movement.[4]

Thus, although anti-Semitism was not as virulent in Germany at this time as it was in Eastern Europe, and although the existing anti-Semitism did not in itself imply the death camps, a serious but not extreme social intolerance was magnified to tragic proportions by extreme political intolerance (a) because a successful anti-democratic mass movement which incorporated radical anti-Semitism as one (but not the only, however one may debate it) of its positions came to power; but also (b) because popular resistance was lacking to prevent the radical *enactment* of this program, which was not essential for the seizing or holding of power and could presumably have been prevented by a population with enough moral will to draw this line. If this analysis is correct, then our emphasis in examining post-Nazi German anti-Semitism must first be placed on the political realm and the factors that shape it, and only second on the less malignant social and economic ethnocentric prejudices.

Although I stress the priority of the political realm, the study of German political culture since 1945 is too large an undertaking in the present context for me to do more than highlight a couple of factors.[5]

(a) Most Germans have accepted the reality the Federal Republic. There is almost no public support for a revival of National Socialism, at least not in its old colors. When asked, "Suppose a new National Socialist party tried to come to power; what would you do?" 13 percent of the respondents to a national survey in 1953 still said they would greet it and an additional 20 percent were indifferent; but when the same question was repeated in 1977, only 7 percent said they would greet it and 14 percent said they would not care.[6] However, about a quarter or a third of the population still refuses to find the historical Nazi regime all bad, although there is a long-term trend toward rejection. In 1945 and 1946, 47 percent of German respondents in

4. Cf. Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship* (New York, 1970), pp. 34–45, 420–44.

5. The best accounts from 15 to 20 years ago — which are also the best known — are now dated: Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, 1963), and Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, 1967 [1965]); the best recent account of a changed German political culture is David Conradt, "Changing German Political Culture," in Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, eds., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston, 1980), pp. 212–272.

6. Institut für Demoskopie, *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung V: 1968–1973* (Allensbach, 1974), p. 231; David P. Conradt, *The German Polity* (New York, 1978), p. 49. (The *Jahrbücher* will hereafter be referred to in this form: IfD. The figures in the *Jahrbuch* should be compared to those presented for a similar question in France by Juan J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, Reequilibration* (Baltimore, 1978), p. 122. The French gave far less support to their democratic institutions in 1958 than did the Germans in the same year.

the American zone of occupation agreed that "National Socialism was a good idea badly carried out"; in 1947 and 1948, the figure rose to 55 percent, about where it remained until 1968 (for the whole nation), but by 1977 the number agreeing dropped to 26 percent. Likewise, 38 percent of the Germans asked in a 1964 survey denied that the national socialist state had been "an unjust state [*Unrechtstaat*], a criminal regime [*Verbrecherregime*]," but this figure dropped to 24 percent in 1978. Significantly, the "Holocaust" tv production had virtually no effect on either of these two questions. In surveys conducted about a month after the telecast, support for National Socialism *rose* four percentage points for the former question and one point for the latter (that is, no real change).[7]

The same long-term trends are observable regarding the post World War II international settlement. As many as 71 percent of Germans in the American zone of occupation in 1946 believed that Germany might be reunified in the near future. Thirty years, a Cold War, and an *Ostpolitik* later in 1976, only 13 percent expected a speedy reunification. West Germans also gave up hope that the former German lands now east of East Germany (east of the Oder-Neisse line) would one day be returned to Germany. In 1953, 66 percent believed they would be returned, but by 1970 only 11 percent thought so. Indeed, with the coming of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the general thaw in East-West relations in the late 1960s and early 1970s, large majorities became willing to formalize the international *status quo* by recognizing the existing borders. Support for recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as the (East) German-Polish border and of the German Democratic Republic itself both rose from about one West German in ten in the 1950s to two out of every three in the early 1970s. It is probable that this turning away from "national" problems greatly helped open the way for Germans to turn their attention to their "social" problems.[8]

(b) Most Germans have come to accept the Nazis' responsibility for committing war crimes, but most do not accept any theory of collective guilt. Thus, the opinion that Germany alone was responsible for starting World War II rose from 32 percent in 1951 to 62 percent in 1967, and we saw earlier

7. Office of Military Government of the United States for Germany (hereafter, OMGUS), cited in Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany, The OMGUS Surveys, 1945–1949* (Urbana, 1970), p. 33; Max Kaase, "Demokratische Einstellungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," in Rudolf Wildenmann, ed., *Sozialwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch für Politik* 2 (Munich, 1971), question 1232; Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, Mannheim, reported in Martin and Sylvia Greiffenhagen, *Ein schwieriges Vaterland* (Munich, 1979), p. 334; IfD Reports; *Der Spiegel*, 19 (1979), p. 205.

8. These are, of course, the two aspects of the classical "German Question." Cf. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (New York, 1962), p. 9; Dahrendorf, p. 426. For another analysis of the "German Question" and a great deal of public opinion data, including much cited in this paragraph, see Gebhard Schweigler, *National Consciousness in Divided Germany* (Beverly Hills, Cal., 1975), pp. 150, 156, 169. See also IfD, V, pp. 510, 525; Merritt and Merritt, p. 24.

that a rising majority from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s were willing to call the Nazi regime a criminal regime. Rising numbers of Germans were also aware that this was their image in the world, but since the late 1960s, this perception has begun to decline. A survey organization asked the open-ended question, "One often hears that the Germans are unloved in the world. Why do you think this is so?" In 1955, only 13 percent of the respondents volunteered the opinion that it was due to the Nazis and World War II. This answer was eventually given by 38 percent of those asked in 1969, but the opinion declined to 27 percent by 1975.[9] However, again until the late 1960s, a growing majority of Germans came to favor "drawing a line" (*Schlussstrich ziehen*) on the past and enforcing a statute of limitations on war crimes — the numbers rose from 34 percent in 1958 to 67 percent in 1969 — but from then, opinion began to level off or even reverse, falling slightly to 62 percent by 1978. It seems that the tv film "The Holocaust" reinforced this trend, for public opinion changed twelve points in three months, dropping to 50 percent in 1979 in favor of retaining a statute of limitations.[10]

(c) An overwhelming majority of Germans has come to support the Bonn government, and smaller, but rising numbers of Germans also support civil liberties in concrete cases. Neo-fascist parties have only once attained more than 2 percent of the vote in a national election since 1945 (4 percent in 1969), and communist parties have not attained more than 2 percent of the vote since 1949, when they received 6 percent; and voting turnout has risen from just under 80 percent in the first federal elections in 1949 to stabilize at over 90 percent in the last several elections. Of course, voting statistics are not good measures of "deep" democratic beliefs, but they do indicate a high level of popular legitimation. More revealing have been answers to survey questions of this sort: "Do you think it is better for a country to have ONE party in order to have the greatest possible unity, or SEVERAL parties so that the different opinions can be freely represented?" In 1950 only 53 percent chose a multiparty system and a full 24 percent said "one party," while in 1979 the democratic alternative received 90 percent support and only 4 percent said "one party." Support for the present constitution also rose from 30 percent in 1955 to 70 percent in 1978.[11]

Respect for civil liberties has also grown, but to a lesser extent. Thus, in answer to the abstract question, "which of the four freedoms do you

9. IfD, IV, p. 146; IfD, I, p. 125; IfD, II, p. 138; IfD, III, p. 260; IfD, V, p. 221; IfD, VI, p. 56.

10. IfD, III, p. 221; IfD, IV, p. 165; IfD, V, p. 232; Survey numbers 3062, 3065. Markovits and Hayden report a larger change in their article in *New German Critique*, but the survey they refer to was conducted more immediately after the program than that reported here. This is the only question for which the telecast seems to have had this large of an effect; moreover, since the Parliament voted several months later to lift the statute of limitations and permit war criminals to continue to be brought to trial, the film's effect on this issue may have been very great indeed, even if it only encouraged an already existing opinion trend.

11. IfD Jahrbücher and Reports: 1979 ZUMABUS survey, Mannheim; Schweigler, p. 197.

personally consider most important — freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from fear, or freedom from want?" the number saying "freedom of speech" rose from 26 percent in 1949 to 58 percent in 1970; and concrete tolerance for a communist party's right to exist rose from 34 percent in 1950 (after dropping to 28 percent in 1957, during the period when the German Communist Party was banned) to 45 percent in 1979. Indeed, by the 1970s, Germans were expressing higher levels of political tolerance in opinion surveys than were Americans in allowing a range of unpopular non-conformists to speak publicly (an atheist, a communist, a neo-Nazi).[12]

This short excursus is not meant to be comprehensive, nor does it examine the root *causes* of democratization and liberalization, but it should serve to indicate that West Germany has moved largely into the "liberal democratic" camp. Indeed, Germans have not repudiated the Nazi past to an extent which an outside observer might think fit, but on the other hand, they have begun to accumulate the backlog of democratic tradition which is often thought to have prevented several older democracies from collapsing in the Great Depression.

Trends in Popular Anti-Semitism in Post-Nazi West Germany

Two factors must, above all, be taken into consideration in interpreting responses to opinion survey questions concerning anti-Semitism. First, there are very few Jews left in Germany. While the Jewish population before 1933 was greater than 500,000, there have been only about 20,000 to 30,000 Jews living in Germany (with a population above 60 million) since 1945, and half of them live in West Berlin. The natural consequence is that very few gentile Germans know Jews, and this number is declining. In 1949, only 25 percent of Germans said they had *never* known a Jew, but of the remaining 75 percent who (had) had Jewish acquaintances, only 13 percent met them since 1939, and a mere 8 percent since 1945. By 1974, fully two-thirds (68 percent) of the German population seems never to have met a Jew.[13] Secondly, anti-Semitism is by no means officially legitimated, and laws have been proposed which would levy a fine or prison sentence for publicly making anti-Semitic remarks or committing anti-Semitic acts in Germany. Virtually all anti-Semitism must now exist as an informal undercurrent. Therefore, it is only a slight exaggeration so say that anti-Jewish prejudice in Germany since 1945 is a paradox; for it exists without anti-Semites and without Jews.

12. EMNID, cited in Arnold Heidenheimer, *The Government of Germany* (New York, 1970), p. 105; IfD, I, pp. 272–3; IfD, III, p. 455; IfD, V, p. 320; F. Weil, "Tolerance of Free Speech in the United States and Germany," paper presented to the American Sociological Association Meeting in New York, August 27–31, 1980.

13. IfD, I, p. 128; Herbert A. Sallen, *Zum Antisemitismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1977), p. 284.

Most elements of ethnocentrism in general, and anti-Semitism in particular, have steadily declined in West Germany since the early 1950s, although there is a slight indication that it may have risen in the early 1950s. Thus, the proportion of Germans who believed that Germans are, or are for the most part, "more capable and gifted than other peoples" declined from 60 percent in 1955 to between 38 and 45 percent in the mid-1960s, but it seems to have risen again to 49 percent in 1976. And the opinion trend on "abstract" anti-Semitism seems similar. For example, West-German *perceptions* of anti-Semitism in Germany have for the most part declined over a long period. In 1949, 68 percent of the population thought anti-Semitism was the same or worse than in 1945 (32 percent thought it had eased). This figure rose to 76 percent in 1952 (as against 24 percent who saw a decline in prejudice), but in 1974, the population split 50-50 in saying that anti-Semitism was either at least as bad, or better, than a few years before.[14] A similar rise in anti-Semitism in the early 1950s can be seen in the open question, "what is your overall view of Jews?" For in 1949, 23 percent of the respondents made spontaneously anti-Semitic remarks (47 percent tolerant or philo-Semitic), while in 1952, 34 percent of the responses were anti-Semitic (30 percent tolerant or philo-Semitic). And the same decline in anti-Semitism from the 1950s on can be seen in the general question, "would you say that Germany is better off without Jews?" The 1952 response was almost the same as in the previous question — 38 percent thought Germany was better off without Jews — but anti-Semitic responses declined steadily till the mid-1960s to 19 percent in 1965. Since then the question seems not to have been repeated. It is very difficult to draw from these data, or from the more specific questions reported below, a firm "level of anti-Semitism,"[15] but it does seem clear that there has been a long-term, moderate decline in prejudice.

As we turn to questions on more specific or concrete aspects of anti-Semitism, it will be useful to recall the distinction made earlier between social and economic anti-Semitism on the one hand and political anti-Semitism on the other hand. Anti-Zionism, however, while also a political opinion, is not identical to political anti-Semitism. For a number of these questions, parallel questions exist which allow us to compare anti-Semitism in Germany with anti-Semitism in the United States and with other forms of ethnocentrism in Germany.

The simplest and most direct expression of political anti-Semitism is the opinion that Jews or Jewish organizations exercise too great an influence on

14. There was change in question wording, which may have made a difference: the respondent was always asked to compare the present to the recent past, but in 1949–52 the recent past was identified as 1945, the date of the Nazi defeat. This factor may have had a suppressing effect. If the 1974 reference had also been to 1945, one might expect — if all the population had such long memories — a more dramatic change registered. IfD, IV, p. 154; VII, p. 56. IfD, I, p. 128; Sallen, question 100.

15. IfD, I, p. 128; IV, p. 96. Cf. also OMGUS data for the American zone in 1947 and 1948, Report nos. 49 and 122.

national politics. A very small and declining proportion of Germans have said that the Federation of Jews in Germany has too much political influence (from 13 percent in 1966 to 6 percent in 1971), and only 18 percent said in 1974 that Jews in general had too much political influence. This question was always asked with a *list* of potentially overly-influenced groups, and Jews were virtually always perceived as the least or almost least objectionable (the trade unions were most often seen as too powerful). Very similar results were obtained in 1965 from a sample of elites (100 each doctors, lawyers, Catholic clergy, and Protestant clergy); 11 percent of the combined sample responded that the Federation of Jews in Germany had too much political influence, but very significantly, 16 percent of the doctors and 18 percent of the lawyers, as against only 3 percent of the Catholic and 6 percent of the Protestant clergy, gave this anti-Semitic response.[16] One cannot, of course, extrapolate the opinions of the political elites from these figures, but considering that the clergy may have an interest in saying that another religion does *not* have too much influence, the fact that other elites are more anti-Semitic than the general population does not bode well for German political culture.[17]

When this question has been asked the same way in the United States (since 1975), Jews have also been near the bottom of the list, but in comparison with Germany, they were seen much more often as too influential: 37 percent said "too influential" in 1975, 26 percent in 1976, and 19 percent in 1977. However, when the question was asked in the US without a comparative list, the "too influential" response dropped from nearly half the population in the late 1930s (after rising to well over half in the mid-1940s) to 17 percent in 1962 and 11 percent in 1964. The careful reader will notice that the highest figures since World War II come during the post-1974 economic squeeze caused by rising oil prices, but that otherwise the levels of political anti-Semitism measured this way are about the same in the two countries — perhaps a little lower in Germany. Two cautionary observations must be made in interpreting these results: (a) other evidence from the US indicates that neither Jews nor Israel were seen as the *chief* causes of America's economic or political problems connected with the oil price rise — rather, the oil companies, the Arab nations, and the President were held mainly responsible — but large numbers did believe that Jews and Zionist organizations were *among* the groups with too much influence on American Middle Eastern policy;[18] and (b) as we noted above, the slightly lower levels

16. IfD, IV, p. 337; IfD, IV, pp. 174, 337; V, p. 217; Sallen, Question 39.

17. Cf. Dahrendorf on the conservatism of the law profession in Germany (1965), pp. 221–36; cf. Klaus von Beyme, *Die politische Elite in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Munich, 1971).

18. See S.M. Lipset and W. Schneider, "Anti-Semitism and Israel: A Report on American Public Opinion," Ms. (December, 1978), pp. 12, 14, 15, 21. Also cf. Charles Stemberg, "The Recent History of Public Attitudes" in Steinberg et al., *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York, 1966), pp. 31–234.

of political anti-Semitism in Germany on this measure may simply reflect the fact that there are so few Jews living there, especially as compared to America. The second factor can, of course, cut both ways, for on the other available measure of political anti-Semitism available for both countries, the results are strongly reversed. In the United States since the War, between 70 and 80 percent of the respondents declared themselves willing to vote for a Jewish candidate for President if nominated by their own party; but in Germany in the same period (a survey in 1960), only 31 percent were willing to vote for a Jew in their own party, less than half the American figures.[19] This second question may in some ways be a better measure of political anti-Semitism since it requires less estimation of an empirical fact and asks only for a political judgment. If this is so, then political anti-Semitism may be much higher in Germany than in the US.

German opinions on politically motivated crimes against the Jews have followed much the same trends as opinions on National Socialism. The crimes have become increasingly de-legitimated, but the guilt (or its consequences) has been more and more rejected. The Institut für Demoskopie asked several questions in 1949, four years after the fall of the Nazi regime, about the effects of national socialist ideology and policy regarding the Jews. At that time, misinformation about the fate of the Jews was quite high despite the revelations of the closely-followed Nuremberg War Crimes Trials. 65 percent of the respondents had no idea how many Jews were then (in 1949) left in Germany, and an additional 20 percent guessed the wrong answer.[20] Furthermore, only 30 percent of the 1949 respondents believed that most Jews in Nazi Germany had been killed; 30 percent thought most had emigrated and an additional 34 percent claimed not to know what happened to them. Most respondents (65 percent) also believed that Nazi propaganda had been effective in intensifying anti-Semitic feelings in Germany, but much smaller numbers were willing to admit that they themselves had been so affected: 21 percent said they were sympathetic to this propaganda (52 percent were indifferent, and 27 percent found it "repugnant") and only 7 percent report reacting favorably to seeing Jews wearing yellow Stars of David (27 percent were indifferent or claimed not to have seen it, and 50 percent found the sight bad).[21]

Twelve years later in 1961, a number of surveys were conducted during the trial of Adolf Eichmann, who was condemned to death by an Israeli court for mass murder. While 67 percent of the Germans surveyed favored

19. Lipset and Schneider, p. 13; IfD, III, p. 218.

20. In 1974, the overall rate of misinformation remained roughly constant at 79 percent, but only 5 percent had no idea, and just under half made a close or correct estimate. See Sallen (1977), p. 277.

21. IfD, I, pp. 129–30. These latter questions have not, so far as I am aware, been asked again since 1949. But, even if they had been, demographic turnover in the population and the effects of time on memory would have made interpretation of responses problematical.

the death sentence or life at hard labor (as against 15 percent who urged consideration of mitigating circumstances), majorities also agreed with these opinions in connection with the trial: "I personally had nothing to do with it and don't want to hear anything more about it" (59 percent; 28 percent disagreed); "it would be best to forget about this affair and to concern ourselves exclusively with the present and future" (53 percent; 33 percent disagreed); and "I think one should defend the German people in this affair, and not just offer apologies; many people knew nothing about it" (72 percent, 11 percent disagreed).[22] Likewise, 88 percent of the respondents to a 1961 survey answered "no" to the question, whether "you as a German feel at all guilty (*mitschuldig*) for the extermination of the Jews," and only 8 percent acknowledged any sense of collective guilt at all. However, large majorities have maintained that many Germans did not know at the time what was happening to the Jews — 72 percent in 1961 and 77 percent in 1979.[24]

As noted above, it was proposed to make it a crime in Germany to make anti-Semitic remarks publicly or to engage in anti-Semitic activity. Such laws, of course, would not set an unequivocal standard of liberalism — American laws, for instance, are not proscriptive in this respect, but rather prohibit discrimination or vandalism or violence against persons, for the most part blind to the characteristics of the victim — but popular opinion on obedience to such laws could be taken as a rough measure of attitudes on political anti-Semitic crimes. In 1949 and 1958 the IfD asked whether "persons who commit anti-Semitic actions in Germany today should be punished by a court or not," and the proportion answering "yes" rose from 41 to 46 percent in this period; two years later in 1960 the same question, with the word "anti-Semitic" changed to "anti-Jewish" (*judenfeindlich*), drew a response of 78 percent saying that crimes against Jews should be punished.[25] And in 1970, the population of Hessia was asked their opinion on a slightly different statement, "one should not publicly abuse the Jews, of course, but prison is too hard a penalty for anti-Semitic remarks": 60 percent agreed and 32 percent disagreed.[26] Thus, the only fully comparable questions (1949–1958) show a moderate trend toward willingness to condemn political anti-Semitic crimes. Again, however, as was the case for Nazi war crimes, there has been a rising tendency to reject collective guilt or responsibility for past (proven) crimes. Thus, while 31 percent of Germans in 1949 *disagreed* that "Germany has an obligation to make reparations to the still living German Jews," 46 percent in 1966 agreed with the demand,

22. IfD, III, pp. 225, 227.

23. IfD, III, p. 227. Shortly before the "Holocaust" tv film, 16 percent felt that all Germans who were adults at the time of the Third Reich bore some kind of guilt. After the film, this figure rose slightly to 22 percent. See Markovits and Hayden, p. 68.

24. IfD, III, p. 229; Survey no. 3065.

25. IfD, I, p. 131; III, p. 219.

26. Hans Klingemann and Franz Pappi, *Politischer Radikalismus* (Munich, 1972), p. 66.

"the reparations to the Jews should finally be ended; they have already gotten too much."[27]

Economic and social anti-Semitism are less explosive than political anti-Semitism, and for that reason, although there are more available data, we will examine these aspects more briefly. In general, most of the more concrete questions which measure probable behavior showed some easing of economic and social anti-Semitism in Germany; but the more attitudinal questions, which seem to measure simple prejudice, did not show such unambiguous trends. Thus, a declining number of respondents said they would *not* shop in a Jewish store if the same goods were cheaper there (25 percent in 1949, 14 percent in 1974); and a declining number also said they would *not* marry a Jew (70 percent in 1949, 54 percent in 1961), but here prejudice was considerably higher than that in the United Staes at the same time (57 percent in 1950 and 37 percent in 1962 gave these responses). Other questions which elicited *decreasingly* anti-Semitic responses included the perceptions that Jews are industrious, peace-loving, helpful, and artistically talented. However, a good number of other questions showed *rising* levels of economic and social anti-Semitism and also compared unfavorably to levels of prejudice in America. Thus, there was an increase in opinions that Jews do not like physical work and will avoid it, that they incite hatred and unrest (paradoxically so, since they are also seen as increasingly peace-loving), that they are cowardly, and that they keep others out of business (the responses in the US show less prejudice on this item). There was a small decline in the opinion that Jews are intelligent, and Jews are seen much more often in Germany as using shady business practices and dirty tricks than in the US.[28]

Finally, although it has been shown in the United States[29] that anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli sentiments are only weakly related to anti-Jewish prejudices, this is still often found to be a form of anti-Semitism, or an attitude which masks anti-Semitism in complex ways.[30] Thus, 66 percent of Germans asked in a 1949 survey said they thought the establishment of the

27. Likewise, in 1949, 54 percent said that reparations should be made, and just before the 1979 showing of the "Holocaust" tv film, 45 percent believed that Germans had a moral obligation to make reparations to the victims of the Holocaust. After the showing of the film the figure rose again to 54 percent. IfD, I, p. 130. Markovits and Hayden, p. 68.

28. IfD, III, p. 131; III, p. 215; Sallen Question 71.

29. Cf. Lipset and Schneider, 1978.

30. Several of the contributers to *New German Critique* point out that many Germans who lived through the Nazi period or who came to maturity in the first two decades after 1945 developed a form of philo-Semitism and philo-Zionism which masked real feelings of guilt which they could not deal with or overcome. In the same way, many young Germans who came to maturity since the mid-1960s — also unable to overcome their sense of guilt for what their parents' generation did during the war — paradoxically turned to anti-Zionism as a way of opposing their parents. See especially the articles by Postone and Herf; also see the theory as it was developed by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zur trauern* (Munich, 1967).

state of Israel was a "solution to the Jewish question."[31] Of course, many Zionists (i.e., Jewish nationalists) would agree here with German nationalists or anti-Semites. German Jews are also seen as possibly less than fully faithful German citizens, whose loyalties are divided with Israel: 55 percent of the respondents to a 1974 survey thought Jewish ties to Israel were more important to them than their ties to Germany, while in the US only an average of 30 percent thought so, between 1964 and 1977. However, when asked their sympathies in the Middle-East conflicts, German responses were almost identical to American (although sometimes a little lower). The ratio of support for Israel over the Arab states in the US rose from 25 to 7 in 1964 to 53 to 7 in 1974, and it rose in Germany from 25 to 15 in 1965 to 50 to 7 in 1974.[32] Here again, it is possible to interpret these results as having little to do with anti-Semitism, and indeed, as being ethnocentrist, for Israel may be viewed as a western democracy in conflict with non-democracies, or worse, as a white people against brown.

Indeed, one can argue that since the Holocaust, ethnic prejudice has acquired new objects in Germany, especially in the case of migrant "Guest Workers." In various surveys, Germans have been asked their views of a number of characteristics of certain ethnic groups and other nationalities, and for some of these characteristics, self-anchoring responses about the respondent himself or "the Germans" are also available. Almost without exception, there are no instances in available surveys in which the Germans, or the respondent, are not viewed in a stereotypically better light than other groups (Blacks are seen as less cowardly, and the English are seen as slightly more devout). This result probably proves nothing more than that these stereotypes are stereotypes. Unless shown otherwise by cross-national empirical comparisons, one would assume that the results would be similar in other countries. However, if we compare the Jews, who, among the groups shown, were probably historically the greatest object of prejudice in Germany, we find that the only groups seen in a consistently worse light are the "Guest Workers" (and their constituent groups, Turks, Yugoslavs, and Italians) and the Russians. The Americans, British, Japanese, and even Blacks are sometimes seen as having better, sometimes worse, qualities than the Jews. The "Guest Workers," and each important group of "Guest Workers" for whom there are data, are considered less intelligent, less industrious, less helpful, and less clean than Jews. Moreover, more Germans would *not* marry a Turk, Yugoslav, or Italian (but also not a Black or Japanese) than would not marry a Jew. However, it should be noted that most of these latter data come from different time points.[33]

Again, the two standard explanations may apply here that the number of

31. IfD, I, p. 131.

32. Lipset and Schneider, pp. 16–17, 36; Sallen, Question 72; IfD, IV, p. 473; VI, p. 292.

33. IfD, III, pp. 216–217, 560; IV, pp. 95–436, 440, 442, 452; V, pp. 494–95, 545, 587; Sallen, Questions 24–57.

Jews still living in Germany is too small so that they would be considered objects of prejudice. Moreover, anti-Semitism has been officially de-legitimated. Yet, there is no good way to take these factors systematically into account, nor have we seen any indication that they had had a visible and regular effect on the previous questions. Also, these data concern relatively "benign" social prejudices and do not necessarily translate into "malignant" political prejudice. Still, there are other indications that potential political prejudice exists against "Guest Workers," at least in a reduced or latent state. Germans see the presence of "Guest Workers" as an increasingly serious problem, although this opinion seems to have remained in the minority for the present. 32 percent of the respondents in 1964 and 36 percent in 1971 saw them as a "serious problem for us," and 55 percent of the respondents in a 1975 survey fully agreed (an additional 28 percent partially agreed) that "it is to be feared that in the future the 'Guest Workers' will become a serious problem for us."[34] However, according to our analysis thus far, there is no reason to look for German "exceptionalism" on this point. Every western, industrialized country has migrant workers (of internal and external origin) who form an "underclass" willing to do work spurned by middle-income workers, and each of these countries faces at least some economic uncertainty for the future. However, (a) we have seen that prejudice only reached crisis proportions in Germany when it became fully politicized and was borne by a successful anti-democratic radical party, and (b) the evidence we have seen to now gives no cause to think that any such political movement imminently threatens to acquire a significant degree of power.

The Structure of Anti-Semitism in Post-Nazi West Germany

In an important article, S.M. Lipset and W. Schneider summarize the known research findings on anti-Semitism in the United States since the 1930s and extend detailed analyses to the mid-1970s.[35] We have already compared some of the opinion trends from Germany with those for the United States. It may help to maintain a comparative perspective by beginning our account of the structural forces underlying anti-Semitism in West Germany within the context of Lipset and Schneider's findings gathered in America. As is well known, the better educated are much less anti-Semitic than the worse educated in the US, and no other measure of social status

34. IfD, V, p. 493; VI, p. 154.
35. Lipset and Schneider.

(e.g. income, occupation) can "account" for this relationship.[36] Moreover, it is likely that a good portion of falling levels of anti-Semitism in America are due to rising levels of formal education in the population. Age, too, plays an important role. In general, the young in America are less anti-Semitic than the old; and older liberals are less anti-Semitic than older conservatives (ideology plays no role in anti-Semitism among the young).

However, in what they call a "critical reversal," Lipset and Schneider find that at least by the mid-1970s the better educated emerged as more anti-Israel than the worse educated (the better educated were formerly more pro-Israel), and young liberals became more anti-Israel than either young conservatives or the old of any ideological persuasion. This recent emergence of anti-Zionism, particularly among the well-educated young Left, it is speculated, is probably traceable to the polarization of American politics since the mid-1960s and is consistent with the New Left's critique of militarism and America's role in the world (especially in the Third World).[37] None of these findings will be foreign to the most casual observer of political change in the West during the last twenty years, but it should alert us, above all, to certain dangers in interpreting the German scene in a non-comparative framework. In particular, the otherwise attractive thesis becomes questionable that the young New Left in Germany became anti-Zionist (which is sometimes seen as disguised anti-Semitism) *because* they were reacting against the philo-Semitism of their parents — in both cases because they have not come to terms with their sense of guilt about the Nazi past. Quite possibly this factor plays some role, but it is probably subordinate to broad changes which are taking place in all western societies.[38]

Aside from the more complex opinions on Israel and Zionism, most studies of anti-Semitism in West Germany reveal the same patterns for age and education as do the American studies. In perhaps the most comprehensive recent empirical study in Germany, it was found in 1974 that those with

36. Cf. the debate about the reasons for education's effect on anti-Semitism and Selznick and Steinberg's critique of the psychodynamic interpretation in *The Authoritarian Personality*, namely, that education acts to socialize people into the "higher" enlightenment culture, largely by increasing their cognitive sophistication. G.J. Selznick and S. Steinberg, *The Tenacity of Prejudice* (New York, 1969), pp. 135–69; and T.W. Adorno, et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1950).

37. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that young black militants and, apparently, young Jewish leftists both take this stand. It should, of course, be re-emphasized that anti-Zionism is not the same as anti-Semitism. In fact, the young black militants are the only ones of the anti-Zionist groups just mentioned which show appreciable signs of true ideological anti-Semitism. See Lipset and Schneider.

38. Indeed, the picture of philo-Zionist conservative parents and anti-Zionist leftist youth in Germany may not even be empirically accurate. In 1973 those under 30 were 14 percentage points more sympathetic than those over 60 to the Israelis as against the Arabs in the Middle East conflict; and in 1975, SPD supporters were 11 percentage points more likely than CDU-CSU supporters to say that Germany should work as closely as possible with Israel. See IfD, V, p. 593; IfD, VI, p. 279.

a university degree were a full 35 percentage points less anti-Semitic on a general scale than were those with just a grammar school education (*Volksschule ohne Lehre*), and that those under 30 were 18 percentage points less anti-Semitic than those over 55.[39] In general, the peripheral segments of society tend to be the most anti-Semitic, just as they tend to be least politically tolerant or liberal: those in rural areas, the petty bourgeoisie and sometimes workers (especially if they are not in the unions), those in the southern provinces, and as pointed out, the old and poorly educated.

These demographic patterns naturally remind one of the sociological base of support for the Nazis in the 1920s and 1930s (although the demographic patterns tend to be about the same in all western countries). Indeed, disturbing patterns of political anti-Semitism emerged during the most recent period of mild political radicalization in Germany during the late 1960s when the neo-fascist National Democratic Party (NPD) nearly cleared the 5 percent hurdle required for representation in Parliament in the 1969 federal elections. Thus, while only 11 percent of the respondents with an opinion in a 1969 survey believed that "the Jews once again have too much power and influence here" (19 percent thought it was partly true, and 69 percent did not believe it), this position was taken by 36 percent of those who said they would vote for the NPD and 23 percent of those who welcomed the NPD's elecoral gains, by 18 percent of those who said their economic situation had worsened in the past year, 16 percent of refugees or expellees from the East, 15 percent of those who wre dissatisfied with the performance of the government, 14 percent of those who favored outlawing the German Communist Party, and — significantly — by 17 percent of those who favored an end to war-crimes trials and 20 percent of those who thought that "the 'Guest Workers' harm us more than they help [*nützen*] us."[40]

Do these findings mean that political anti-Semitism is still flourishing in West Germany? There are three questions here: (a) Can we identify a coherent political anti-Semitism or neo-Nazi ideology in the general public? (b) If so, is it widespread? (c) Is it increasing or decreasing over time? The first question can be answered by taking a set of relevant ideological survey questions and asking whether people tend to respond the same way to certain questions — that is, whether the questions tend to hang together in ideological "clusters." We can do this with factor analysis, a technique which searches the correlations among all the questions (variables) used in an analysis and computes a smaller set of new, mutually independent variables (factors) which summarize the main clusters in the data. When such an analysis is performed on a set of ideological questions in the 1969 survey just cited, three factors can be identified which could be called Main-Stream

39. Sallen, pp. 310–11. Sallen also finds that occupation, income, and size of place of residence have large impacts, but they would probably be much reduced if educational level were taken into account (pp. 309, 314–14).

40. My own calculations from IfD survey number 2052, May 1969.

Partisanship, National Socialist Ideology, and Völkische Ideology; and the results allow us to make several important observations about the ideological structure of these questions. (1) National Socialist ideology continues to exist as an identifiable cluster of opinions, and anti-Semitism is one important element of this cluster, but this ideology is related neither to mainstream politics in West Germany today nor to a milder kind of patriotic or *völkische* ideology. (2) However, contemporary neo-fascism, as represented by sympathy with the NPD, and anti-communism are *not* strong components of this national socialist ideology;[41] instead, it is most strongly characterized by concern with issues remaining from the historical Nazi regime (war crimes and the statute of limitations) and by racist xenophobia (anti-Semitism and prejudice against "Guest Workers").[42]

The second and third questions, whether political anti-Semitism is widespread and growing in West Germany, have already been partly answered earlier in the negative. Although we have seen that support for a statute of limitations on war crimes and intolerance for a communist party's right to exist were relatively strong, they have also been slowly declining; open prejudice against "Guest Workers" has remained a minority position; and most importantly, support for old Nazism or neo-fascism (the NPD) has been miniscule. Moreover, like anti-Semitism, these views have for the most part been restricted to the margins of German society, to the old, the poorly educated, the rural and those in small towns. However, during the economic downturn in Germany in the late 1960s, this right-wing political radicalism[43] and ethnocentrism was disturbingly related to individual perceptions of personal economic decline — that is, scapegoats were sought in the process of protest. But this pattern seems not to have repeated itself in the more serious economic difficulties since the mid-1970s. If scapegoats were to be sought, they surely could have been found in Israel (and perhaps the Jews), which was blamed by the oil-rich Arab states as the source of the Middle East conflict. Just as we have seen that Americans did not blame Israel or the Jews for the oil crisis, the Germans did not turn against Israel for this reason. In November 1973, the Institut für Demoskopie asked, "The Arab states have now restricted all deliveries to Western Europe. By this restriction they mean to bring the West European states more strongly to the side of the Arabs in the future. . . . What is your opinion?" Only 16 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I think we should no longer

41. This finding supports at least the first part of the thesis developed by Lutz Niethammer that the NPD does not seek to revive historical National Socialism or its old expansionistic or racist goals, but rather represents a new kind of fascism which seeks to conform (*anpassen*) with the Bonn system and the western alliance. *Angepasster Faschismus: Politische Praxis der NPD* (Frankfurt am Main, 1969).

42. Sallen also finds that anti-Semitism was strongly related to a scale of anti-democratic tendencies and to a scale of racist opinions in 1974, op. cit., pp. 262, 317–318.

43. See Klaus Liepelt, "Anhänger der neuen Rechtspartei. Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion über das Wählenreservoir der NPD," *Politisches Vierteljahresschrift* 2 (1967), 237–271.

support Israel in this conflict. Only in this way will we again get enough oil," while 57 percent said, "I think we must not give in to the Arabs now. The West European countries must unite against the Arab demands even if the Arabs ship less oil because of it."[44]

West German Anti-Semitism in Perspective

We are now in a position to make a few non-comprehensive concluding remarks.

(1) If our analysis is correct that modern anti-Semitism becomes dangerous primarily when it becomes politicized — and more particularly, when it becomes connected to a radical anti-democratic movement — then we can point to at least two reasons for *not* becoming overly alarmed at the levels of popular anti-Semitism still displayed in West Germany today. First, as we have seen, the West German political culture has converged to a very great extent with that of countries with much longer liberal democratic traditions. Although we did not examine the data here, it can be shown that the younger generations and the better educated adhere most strongly to liberal democracy — a good sign in the light of German political history. In addition, political anti-Semitism today is mainly connected to the old, discredited historical Nazi regime, and only weakly to more recent forms of neo-fascism; nor have we found evidence in our limited analysis of anti-Semitism in the New Left. (The New Left may be *anti-Zionist,* but if so, the Germans would not be unique in western societies. Given its probable roots in anti-militarism and — confused — anti-imperialism, this anti-Zionism is unlikely to become domestic anti-Semitism.)

(2) Almost all aspects of anti-Semitism itself are declining in West Germany today. One probable reason for this decline is the change in political culture just mentioned, in which West Germany has "caught up" with the rest of the West. Moreover, West Germany has participated in the broad changes which have taken place in virtually all western societies. Studies have shown that liberalization has also occurred in other Western societies since the height of the Cold War;[45] and the parallel rise of the New Left and the more liberal younger generation throughout western societies is plain to see.[46] We have not been able here, however, to disaggregate the effects of the entry of new, more liberal, generations into the population, rising levels of education, and

44. IfD, V, p. 596. No age groups, political party supporters, or groups which used different kinds of energy deviated from these aggregate results by more than a few percentage points.

45. Cf. Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton, 1977); James A. Davis, "Communism, Conformity, Cohorts, and Categories," *American Journal of Sociology,* 3 (1975), 491–513; Clyde Nunn, et. al., *Toleration for Conformity* (San Francisco, 1978).

46. I would maintain this view for the present depiste the insightful analyses of new weak points and dangers which accompany these changes. See, e.g., Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York, 1976).

historical changes in the opinions of the *whole* population. My research on political culture would indicate that all factors contribute, but in the present case of anti-Semitism, the question will have to remain open for the present. Finally, it now seems clear that by the time the American tv film "The Holocaust" was telecast, West German anti-Semitism had already been in decline for a long time. I tend to think that the show reinforced pre-existing opinion trends and that the population was rather open to this sort of reinforcement. I might also add that, although I find the psychological theory concerning the "unmastered guilt from the past" (*unbewältigte Vergangenheit*) attractive and enlightening, I think (a) that it sets standards for a society which are difficult enough for a patient in psychoanalysis to meet, and (b) that satisfactory social change can (and probably has) come in a much less profound way by simple passage of time and generational change in a stable democratic institutional and cultural setting.

(3) All this said, a very serious danger continues to exist in West Germany — as in other western democracies — that scapegoats will be sought during crises. My analysis has suggested that levels of prejudice or hostility to certain groups need not necessarily be high in normal times for tragedy to result from a crisis. In order for social analysis to do what it can to help alert against some future holocaust, it must perform several tasks. (a) It must be able to see a crisis coming, to monitor its progress, and to suggest what can be done to help moderate it. (b) It must discern which groups are particularly susceptible to being made scapegoats in a crisis and to suggest ways of keeping them out of danger or of their protecting themselves. In particular, the suggestion made by Lipset and Schneider is useful that *objective* social conflict be treated differently (conflict resolution sought) than *subjective* scapegoating. (Education of real interests may help here, if the crisis has not progressed too far.) And (c), we must remain open to the possibility that the Jewish Holocaust was not "logically" unique to Nazi Germany, but that it could happen again in another place or to another target (e.g. migrant workers) for new and unforeseen reasons.

$1.00
per copy

For further information or additional copies please write to:
Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith
823 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017
or contact the ADL regional office in your area.