

THE MEN OF JULY 20 AND THE JEWS:
A CASE OF LATE MORAL ACTION

INTRODUCTION

A NONDESCRIPT BUILDING IN BERLIN

By contemporary Berlin standards Stauffenbergstrasse, which runs off the Landwehr Canal (into which the bodies of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were thrown, in 1919, after their murder by forerunners of the nazis, members of a self-styled *Friekorps*), is a quiet street. It used to be called Bendlerstrasse and the large, architecturally-unimpressive grey building at Number 13 once housed the headquarters of the German Army, the *Wehrmacht*. High drama unfolded on and in the vicinity of the second storey of its wing nearest the canal, on July 20, 1944, when a group of army officers attempted to overthrow the nazi regime by implementing a long-standing plan, codenamed *Valkyrie* and originally conceived for a very different purpose. The curtain had risen early that morning at Hitler's headquarters at Rastenburg, in East Prussia, when a bomb was detonated by the decorated and maimed Colonel Claus Stauffenberg during a conference with the Fuhrer. But the bomb only wounded Hitler slightly and, consequently, *Valkyrie* never really got off the ground.

Although the term is somewhat inexact, partly because of its heterogeneity and partly because some of its members opposed the attempted coup, the members of the conspiracy behind it are collectively designated hereafter as "Men of July 20." During subsequent months the vengeful nazi regime executed some 200 Men of July 20 - - a number that accounts for almost the entire group - - along with dozens of its other opponents. Many of the executed were put to death in a particularly cruel fashion, after having been abused and humiliated in a notorious kangaroo court.

VARIETIES OF GERMAN ANTI-HITLER RESISTENCE

Today, the part of the building where most of the drama unfolded on that fateful day houses a Resistance Memorial which commemorates the conspirators. In the building's courtyard a plaque and wreath mark the place where Stauffenberg and a few of his comrades were summarily shot late that night, by order of a fellow-conspirator who sought, in the end unsuccessfully, thereby to conceal his own participation in the plot. The Memorial also commemorates the surprisingly large number of other, widely disparate groups that struggled, each in its own way, against the nazis, most of whose members eventually paid a terrible price. For all their diversity, all these groups share a common feature that sets them apart from the many, also diverse, resistance movements that emerged in the countries occupied by Germany. They acted against their own government at a time when their country was locked in a seemingly life and death struggle; the other groups performed their patriotic duty by opposing a foreign

occupier.

It scarcely diminishes the moral stature of the members of the other German resistance movements to point out that the Men of July 20 share an important distinction not shared by them: only these men might have overthrown the Hitlerite regime and brought the Second World War to an end. Although its outcome was sealed by July 20, when the American, British and Canadian armies were firmly established in Normandy and the massive Russian “Bagration” offensive” was in the process of destroying an entire German army group, the war was far from over. Had Stauffenberg’s bomb killed Hitler, as it was intended to do, the attempt to transfer control of Germany to the conspirators (senior *Wehrmacht* officers, some retired but most still serving, and retired and still-serving senior officials) might well have succeeded. If it had, the millions of lives that were lost between that day and Germany’s unconditional surrender the following May would have been saved, untold suffering and immense devastation would have been avoided, and the postwar political map of Eastern Europe might have looked very different.

It is also true, however, that, to varying degrees, most Men of July 20 share another important distinction: they had supported many of Hitler’s domestic and foreign policies after he became dictator of Germany in 1933. With due allowance for the heterogeneity of the outlook and behavior of its members, no other German resistance group was as thoroughly in league with Hitler as was this one. This explains why, in marked contrast with the members of the other groups who were never in a comparable position, the group’s military members that could, at one time or another, have taken direct action against Hitler did not do so. It also makes their eventual

stroke - - on which they staked everything - - all the more intriguing. For the Men of July 20 - - who repeatedly sought, but never received, encouragement or support from the Western Allies - - fully realized that the timing of their act (after the successful D-Day landings) was not optimal from a political standpoint. It would necessarily leave them, in the event of success, holding weaker cards for negotiating with the anti-Hitler coalition than those they would have held if they had acted sooner.

THE PARADOXICAL SUBJECT OF THE PAPER, AND ITS IMPORTANCE

When interrogated by the Gestapo after the failure of their attempted coup a number of the Men of July 20 stated that Hitler's genocidal program, mainly directed against the Jews, had been their primary motive for acting against him. They also made it clear, however, that they were not otherwise well-disposed towards the Jews. This paper focuses on this paradox. It begins by considering the representative attitude of the Men of July 20 towards the Jews during different stages of their lives. These stages range from their formative years before or during the First World War and the postwar Weimar years, through the peacetime years of the Hitler era, and culminate in the nearly-five wartime years that had elapsed by July 20, 1944. By then, as they knew, Hitler's "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem" had largely been implemented. The paper also takes cognizance of the policy towards the Jews that the Men of July 20 intended to implement after Hitler's regime was no more, and they had formed the government of Germany.

It is an inherently problematic exercise to capture, and summarize in representative form, the views on such a subject of all members of an illicit group that was so large, so mixed, and so informally-organized. Muller (1998):

. . . the resistance which led to the attempted putsch of 20 July 1944 . . . was many-sided. It included a strong national conservative group, and, in addition to a number of labour leaders, representatives of the anti-totalitarian reform movement associated with the Kreisau circle [sic]. Another complicating factor is the nature of this resistance as a process. . . . (p. 61)

The exercise is still more problematic because only some of the leading Men of July 20 ever articulated and disseminated their views on this subject. Many conspirators only left a cursory evidentiary trail, and others left no trail whatever. Nonetheless, it is possible to draw a general picture, based upon statements that individual conspirators made to the Gestapo, and upon letters and diaries in which the authors recorded their own thoughts and commented upon those of fellow-conspirators. As to the intended post-Hitler policy towards the Jews of the Men of July 20, a good deal of relevant documentary evidence is available.

The subject of the paper is important for a reason that transcends its inherent drama: it illuminates the overall political and social outlook of the Men of July 20 and their peers. In Germany, as elsewhere, negative attitudes towards the Jews historically have tended to be symptomatic of fundamental pathological tendencies in the society.

FORMATIVE ENVIRONMENT AND INFLUENCES

THE SECOND REICH

No more than it found any Germans, the advent of the Nazi era, in 1933, did not find the future Men of July 20 without definite attitudes towards the Jews. The Jewish Question had been a subject of heated public debate among Germans for generations, long before 1870, a milestone in modern German history, and the volume of the debate, as well as its virulence, had increased steadily between that year and the outbreak, in 1914, of the First World War. These men spent their formative years during various parts of this period and could not have avoided at least intermittent exposure to the debate. Widely-held stereotypical views on the Jewish Question were not only part of their political, philosophical and cultural inheritance, they were also, so to speak, in the very air they breathed. It is therefore necessary to begin by sketching their socioeconomic and political background, and to continue by summarizing some of the political and ideological currents that flowed through their environments during the decades when they came of age. Given their background, these currents could not have failed to condition their attitude towards the Jews when they started their careers as soldiers and government officials.

The Men of July 20 were not drawn from German society as a whole and, in certain important respects, their background and political outlook were different from those of other Germans. Their socioeconomic, religious and cultural antecedents were rooted in a single caste, the landed, militaristically-oriented, Prussian aristocracy namely, the Junkers. The year 1870 saw Bismark's creation of the Second Reich, an autocratic organism that enjoyed a spectacular

heyday before it collapsed precipitously, in 1918, after a ruinous war. This Reich was a curious thing, being composed of many diverse political entities, each having its own long history and cherished traditions. Its inhabitants shared a common language but only some, albeit important, aspects of a common culture. In some ways it was greater than the sum of its parts, and in other ways less. As a result, it was at once powerful but also fragile, arrogant but also insecure, progressive but also reactionary.

Politically and ideologically, Prussia was the Second Reich's core. Mann (1968) endorses Marx's description of Prussia as 'a military despotism, bedecked with parliamentary trimmings, with an admixture of feudalism, influenced by the bourgeoisie, bureaucratically constructed and protected by the police.' Stern (1971) explains why such an organism proved incapable of maintaining political and social stability.

. . . Bismark improvised a constitutional system that at best was a half-way house to liberalism. The middle class liberals, defeated in 1848 and again in 1866, were presented with the long-desired prize of national unity; dissatisfied bourgeois were given satisfaction by the establishment of free economy Bismark's democratically elected Reichstag offered the representatives of the nation carefully circumscribed powers and gave Germany the prestige of belonging to the ranks of constitutional, pseudo-parliamentary states. But it was Bismark's intention that the monarchical authority would remain inviolate - - and with it the traditional prerogatives of the Crown. . . . [He] clung to the realities of power but made ample room for the liberals to nurture illusions about their future place in the governing of Germany.

In less than a decade, however, the Bismarckian system ran into trouble. The different groups refused to play according to Bismark's script, and an economic crisis of unprecedented severity sharpened the various antagonisms. . . . By the end of the 1870s, Bismark . . . reached out for a new alignment, so different from the past that it has sometimes been called the second founding of the Reich. The liberal facade of the past decade was abandoned, as was free trade. A new coalition of Junkers and industrialists was put together, a new program of anti-socialist repression was adopted, and the regime acquired a harsher tone. . . . (pp. xvi-xvii)

Mann puts it analogously:

The class which now moulded the economic life of the nation was the capitalist one, the great financiers, industrialists and merchants. But this class did not rule politically. . . . It did not make foreign policy, it did not control the administration of the country or the army, nor could it determine what was fashionable or in good taste. In Prussian-Germany all these prerogatives still belonged to the pre-capitalist aristocracy. . . . (pp. 206-207)

Mann gives the Junkers their due but, after setting their sobriety, energy, and protestant piety against their unbridled lust for power, he concludes that by the start of the twentieth century their faults outweighed their virtues.

. . . Neither their economic policy nor their attitude of mind gave the Junkers a right to leadership in a new, industrial and democratic age. But they could not abandon their position, and they did not know how to adapt themselves. . . . Relying on the King, who for his part relied on them, they became a burden to the country. . . . Hence the unnatural, old-fashioned, problematical nature of German political life. The Junkers failed because they could not surrender the power which they had, the middle class because they could not grasp it [and advance towards democracy]. (pp. 207-208)

THE JUNKERS AND THE JEWS

As indicated, it was this proud, elitist yet insecure and defensive caste, privileged socially and politically but relatively disadvantaged materially, which produced most of the future Men of July 20. The caste looked with disdain, and not a little fear and resentment, upon those Germans it regarded as thrusting, vulgar and pretentious parvenus. It particularly disliked Jews, with whom it generally had little contact and about whom it was ill-informed, because they were

seen as being disproportionately represented in this growing and increasingly encroaching group. It also disliked them on other grounds, which were wholly or partly shared by many, perhaps most, other Germans, including those despised by the caste. In Mann's succinct words, all these grounds collectively constituted "an age-old, evil force which had existed in latent form from Christian, even pre-Christian, times onwards, concealed or under control and almost forgotten, only to break out again into brutal misdeeds." Mann goes on:

Was the Jew not the typical representative of the liberal economic system? Was he not the rich banker . . . or even the left-wing member of parliament . . . ? Was he not the usurer in the countryside, the cattle-trader and moneylender in whose nets the peasant was caught? Was he not also the godless agitator who incited people to false socialism in order to gain power for his like? Much was wrong with Germany's modern economy and politics and morality; all that was required was to shift the blame from the King and his servants, from the productive capitalist to the Jew on the Stock Exchange, in the pawnshop and the editorial office. . . . It was one of the sins of the German Conservatives [the political tendency supported by the Prussian landowning caste] that in order to make their not very popular policy more popular they entered into an alliance with the Jew-baiters. . . . (pp. 237-238)

Like other Germans, the caste tended to be receptive to the ideas of certain past and contemporary German philosophers, some with respectable credentials and positions, who waged war against the Enlightenment. It also tended to be receptive, in a similarly reflex and unthinking way, to the ideas of certain self- and half-educated publicists and artists - - some German, some not - - who selectively and tendentiously invoked the new Darwinist doctrines and other ostensibly scientific doctrines, in order to rank human characteristics by racial and other groupings. In the rare cases when these publicists and artists were not explicitly critical of the Jews their work tended to cast them in a negative light, by implicitly excluding them *a priori*

from the charmed circle of the Elect, destined by History for great things. The caste certainly regarded itself as belonging to the Elect.

VOICES FROM THE PAST

The earlier, still very influential Fichte, described by Mann as: “that profound thinker . . . and touchingly honourable man,” belongs to the category of German thinkers whose work cast a long shadow. Originally an ardent admirer of the French Revolution, a believer in man and humanity and in the right of the individual to develop himself in freedom, it was not long before he ardently propagated his concept of the omnipotent nation-state as the best promoter of that right. Further, and above all, the German people, in his judgment, “the only genuine, original people in a corrupted world,” had been assigned by Providence the historic task of guiding the world towards an ultimate league of nations, led (naturally) by it. It hardly seems necessary to mention that, already in Fichte’s time, few gentile proponents of his outlook imagined that the Jews were, or, more ominously, ever could be, full members of this unique, Elect People entrusted with its unique, world-saving mission. To the contrary, Jews should not even be granted ordinary civil rights. Ettinger (1976) quotes Fichte:

. . . Grant [Jews] civil rights? I see no other way of doing this except to cut off all their heads one night and substitute other heads without a single Jewish thought in them. How shall we defend ourselves against them? I see no alternative but to conquer their promised land for them and dispatch them all there. (p. 745)

Mann maintains that the “superficial and brazen” ideas about the German nature that would save the world, in vogue a hundred years later, were late consequences of the work begun by Fichte and his friends - - “consequences which his inflexible nature would certainly have rejected with scorn.”

MORE RECENT VOICES

The Second Reich was born at a time when anti-Jewish propaganda not only had lost none of the virulence of the Fichtean period, but had grown to unprecedented levels after the economic crisis of 1873. Anti-Jewish writings, such as those of Wilhelm Marr, coiner of the term ‘antisemitism,’ proliferated. The propaganda of the Christian Social Workers’ Party, founded by the Imperial Court preacher, Adolf Stoecker, to woo workers away from the Social Democrats, soon resorted to crude populist antisemitism and made it its main platform after it failed to make political headway. Reputable academic historians and philosophers, like Heinrich Treitschke and Eugen Duehring, added their bit. The author of a phrase much bruited about later by nazis: “The Jews are our misfortune,” Treitschke castigated the alleged refusal of the Jews to assimilate into German culture, in preference for their own ‘mongrel’ German-Jewish culture, a culture constantly augmented by the inflow of Jewish immigrants from Poland. Duehring struck a more sinister note. The ancient Hebrews had practiced human sacrifices, and their continuation by their descendants had provoked blood libels through the ages. The motive behind these abominable crimes was the desire of Jewish leaders to bind each Jew to the community by

inducing him to participate in them.

The openly antisemitic Conservative Party, whose support Bismark increasingly sought, even though he viewed its antisemitism with disdain, entered into an alliance with the reactionary, as or more antisemitic, National Liberal Party. This resulted in a range of measures formally designed to bar Jews from public and government offices. Jewish officers were not promoted, Jewish teachers were denied access to jobs in government-run schools, and Jewish academics were denied access to senior academic posts, and so on. The political fortunes of these parties first waxed but later waned, for they were vigourously opposed by other parties. The most important of these other parties were the Social Democratic Party and the liberal Progressive Party, which published voluminous material refuting the claims of the antisemites. Even the Kaiser and his government eventually spoke out against antisemitism, not, to be sure, because they rejected antisemitic ideas as such, but because overly-energetic propagation of these ideas allegedly redounded to the benefit of the Social Democrats.

“SCIENTIFIC” ANTISEMITISM

The already-hostile atmosphere towards the Jews was further poisoned after Houston Chamberlain’s notorious work, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, appeared as that century approached its end. The book’s utter lack of scientific validity did not prevent it from achieving wide circulation and earning much acclaim in Germany’s highest social and intellectual circles. It

was its author's main contention that history is an endless, intractable struggle between two fundamentally incompatible races: the Aryan and the Semitic. The former is inherently creative and constructive, the latter inherently destructive. These and other contemporary writings in the same vein put Jew-hatred on a different and more destructive plane. Whereas, the religious and cultural antisemite had previously assured the Jew that if he recognized the error of his ways and changed his affiliations and behavior, he ultimately could gain acceptance into respectable German society. First and foremost, he must embrace Christianity. Having done so, and then worked hard to shed his odious demeanor and habits, there was no reason why he could not, in time, be recognized as being as good a German as anybody else.

The new, ostensibly scientific antisemitism was a different matter altogether. Simply put, there was no way in which the Jew could ever change his bad characteristics; they were the product of his genetic nature, unalterably ingrained in his very blood and psyche. These antisemites argued that religious and cultural antisemites harbored a dangerous illusion, for they were prepared to open their doors to the converted Jew with improved social graces (and enough money). They failed to recognize that this Jew was even more dangerous than the stubborn, unconverted one because, after mingling by marriage with "true" Germans, he soon became indistinguishable from them, but the baleful effects of his bad blood continued down the generations.

Houston Chamberlain's celebrated father-in-law, Richard Wagner, made his own direct

and indirect contributions to this new antisemitism as, per Mann:

. . . the writer, who condemned Jewish influence in music, who referred with respect to Paul de Lagarde [a notorious antisemite] and in whose *Bayreuther Blätter* real antisemites were given a hearing; Wagner the philosopher, who allowed himself to be convinced by Gobineau's racial theory and promised a regeneration of humanity. . . . (p. 238)

THE ETERNAL OTHER

The foregoing and similar ideas influenced the attitude towards the Jews, during the formative years of the future Men of July 20, of the Prussian-German caste to which they belonged. Like all Germans, the caste was also exposed to opposing ideas, some advanced by Jews and philosemites, which rebutted the arguments of the antisemites of every stripe. Other opposing ideas were of a more general nature but tended to preclude antisemitism and similar bigotries, because they militated against the narrow, Prussian-centered *blut und boden* ideology in which the caste was steeped in favour of a less chauvinistic love of country. Generally speaking, however, the impact upon the caste and most other Germans of ideas opposed to antisemitism was far weaker than that of antisemitic ideas. To all these Germans, the Jew was irremediably the alien Other: the capitalist, the socialist, the liberal, never more distasteful when, as was usually the case, his patriotism and devotion to German culture were palpable. However vigorously and comprehensively the Jew and his friends rebutted the variegated, often mutually exclusive, claims of the antisemites and demanded his due - - to be considered as a German with the same rights as every other German - - he remained in their eyes unassimilated and

unassimilable. Not only did he belong to one or another of these unpalatable categories, he was also a cosmopolitan who maintained ties to an exotic, far-flung and strangely cohesive tribe that stubbornly clung to its ancient traditions and rituals. This meant, again in their eyes, that his loyalties could never be confined, as theirs were, to a single beloved home and hearth.

All this against the backdrop of a religious tradition that had for centuries taught that the Jew's adherence to his own, ancient religion, in any version - - and his rejection of their Christianity that claimed to supersede it - - was perverse. The Messiah that he patiently awaited had for them arrived two millennia ago and had, inexplicably and unforgivably, been delivered to Roman executioners by his ancestors. Finally, his reading of the sacred texts they both cherished could, in important respects, not be reconciled with theirs.

ADULTHOOD

DEFEAT IN WAR

Like almost all their compatriots, almost all of the future Men of July 20 acclaimed the outbreak of the First World War, in the full expectation that, like the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, it would soon end in a decisive German victory. And like most, but to their chagrin by no means all, of their compatriots they viewed the war's end, in November, 1918, as a humiliating disaster, to be reversed one day. Accordingly, it was not long before they joined those Germans

that deeply resented the Treaty of Versailles and had persuaded themselves that Germany had not really been defeated on the field of battle by the British, French and Americans. Craig (1972):

The crisis of the peace terms had ominous results. The memories of the extreme conservatives and the superpatriots were notoriously short. They . . . [forgot] . . . how decisively Germany had lost the war; and it was in these very months [in 1919, when the new German “Weimar Republic” was established] that the *Dolchstoß* legend was being born - - the myth that invincible German armies had not been defeated by the enemy but by “a stab in the back” inflicted by pacifists, socialists, and defeatists on the home front. (p. 559)

Hamerow (1997) quotes the 1918 views, which reflected those of his fellow officers, of the then-Major Ludwig Beck, who would later become a leading Man of July 20. Beck did not doubt that the domestic unrest that had toppled the Kaiser had been planned long in advance. It occurred at a critical time in the war, when an acceptable peace and a healthy peacetime economy were still attainable, and its effects upon Germany’s war effort were similar to the effects of forcing surgery for appendicitis upon a patient suffering from a serious lung ailment. No country could endure such a treacherous onslaught as the one that had condemned Germany to defeat, humiliation, and oppression. Those behind it had committed an unpardonable crime against their own people.

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC AND DEEPENED ANTIPATHY TOWARDS THE JEWS

The officer corps and traditional officialdom deprecated the fact that Jews were

represented, not only among the left-wing opposition to Germany's continuation of the war but, even more so, among the liberal supporters of the postwar Weimar republic that had ended the long-standing, semi-official discrimination against Jews in the military and the bureaucracy. Political careers were now possible for Jews, and a few of them even rose to high office, something previously unheard of. These included the socialist economist, Rudolf Hilferding, as well as the leading industrialist, Walter Rathenau, whose previous yeoman service to his country's war effort counted for little in the eyes of the antisemites that had long reviled him or the proto-nazis that murdered him in 1922. Under Weimar, Jews also became more prominent than before in various fields, including journalism, literature and the arts.

These developments mainly served to reinforce existing negative attitudes towards the Jews in the minds of the likes of the future Men of July 20, rather than inspire attitudes not previously held. As seen, these men had long deemed Jews socialists, capitalists, or liberals, and more generally and perhaps most deplorably, naturally oriented towards a modernity that was inherently incompatible with their innate conservatism. Put another way, the Jews were already labeled as most of the things they were under the republic, things traditionally held in low esteem.

There was, however, an important additional element in the *weltanschauung* of these men: bitterness engendered by their country's defeat and their caste's consequent loss of political power and social status. These painful, unexpected developments served to deepen their

longstanding antipathy towards the Jews and strengthen their disposition to view the rising nazi tide with enthusiasm. They tended to view the prospect of a nazi regime as a necessary, albeit initially rather coarse and rough, antidote to the noxious influences - - many of them Jewish - - which had flourished under the despised republic and sapped the true German spirit. Hamerow reports, as an example of such an influence, that the then-young officer, Henning von Tresckow, also later a Man of July 20, went on record during the twenties to the effect that the notion of permanent international peace was Jewish in origin, propagated in order to promote a commercialism that is inherently inimical to that spirit. Another future leading Man of July 20, the former senior bureaucrat, Johannes Popitz, testified after the failure of the coup that, during Weimar, he came to believe that the Jews must be eliminated - - though not by brutal means - - from Germany's political and economic life. Similar sentiments were expressed during the same period by Karl Goerdeler, also destined to be a leading Man of July 20.

THE THIRD REICH

GROWING PERSECUTION

Like a great many other Germans, the future Men of July 20 and their peers applauded

the economic recovery wrought by the nazi regime and they hailed Hitler's repeated promises, increasingly translated into reality, to restore the Fatherland's military might (and their former status) and again make it a power to be reckoned with in the councils of nations. They consequently had little difficulty in rationalizing events like the 1934 bloodletting of the "Night of Long Knives" (which also claimed two generals): the event did, after all, eliminate leading members of the Nazi paramilitary organization, the Storm Troopers, which had threatened the interests of the military. Nor did the Nuremberg Laws, which effectively deprived German Jews of their rights as citizens, trouble them unduly, as a group. Hamerow:

The same subordination of moral scruples to national and professional interests is discernable in the attitude of the soldiers in the resistance towards the government's racial program. Very few of them were out-and-out anti-Semites [sic]. They generally regarded Jews with disdain rather than hatred. Some of them even felt at heart that the treatment of "non-Aryans" by the Third Reich was not altogether fair or honourable. Yet they were unwilling to say so openly. Why risk the career of a lifetime for the sake of a small, alien minority? Why oppose a regime that was doing so much good for fatherland to uphold some remote and abstract principle of toleration? It was easier to turn away, to suggest that charges of racial persecution were greatly exaggerated, or to argue that the welfare of the many was more important than the security of the few. (p. 112)

This, however, does not mean that the systematic persecution of the Jews had no impact upon the attitude towards the regime of the future Men of July 20. Like their forebears, they prided themselves as belonging to an elite caste with long, honourable and, indeed, chivalrous traditions. It was one thing to look down upon the Jews, as had their forebears, as possessing characteristics they disdained or as members of social, economic or political groups they disliked and that, in their view, needed curbing. (Although, as Heinrich Himmler, the head of the *SS*, was

later to confirm, most of them were acquainted with individual Jews that did not fit these stereotypes, they tended to deem them exceptions to the rule.) It was another thing altogether to stomach the increasingly blatant and violent thuggery with which the nazis gave tangible expression to the abuse that Nazi Party spokesmen and press heaped upon the Jews every day. The future Men of July 20 initially had been inclined to attribute this behavior, not to the Fuhrer who was too preoccupied with the manifestly successful task of restoring Germany to greatness to notice, but to his low-class and uncouth minions that they had always disdained.

This distinction became harder to sustain and, ultimately - - especially after *Kristallnacht*, in November, 1938 - - it became impossible. Though they did little or nothing about it at the time, the growing brutality that the nazis inflicted upon the visibly defenseless, disenfranchised and progressively impoverished Jews planted seeds of disgust and shame in the minds and souls of many future Men of July 20. These seeds would multiply and increasingly make themselves felt during the Second World War as, first Poland and, later, enormous areas of the Soviet Union came under German control, and the genocide of Jews and (at a slower pace) Slavs got under way.

MASS MURDER

Many of the Men of July 20 knew quite early - - some as early as the Spring of 1942, well before Hitler's tide of conquest crested - - that large-scale genocide was being perpetrated.

Hoffmann (1988):

When Major (GS) Claus Count Stauffenberg learned of the mass murder of ‘racially inferior’ persons, especially Jews, not later than April 1942, before the turning point of the war, and believing the Russian front could be stabilised [sic], he responded that Hitler must be removed. The important point for Stauffenberg’s motivation to oppose Hitler is that, at a time when Stauffenberg was informed of the mass murder of Jews and prisoners-of-war, between 26 and 30 April 1942, he condemned Hitler’s genocidal policies and called for Hitler’s overthrow, but he still accepted Hitler’s military leadership (e.g., the operations to capture Moscow in 1941), and did not consider the war lost. The military verdict against Hitler came only later, in July 1942. . . . (p. 90)

Some of Stauffenberg’s fellow-officers came to the same conclusion later, during the Summer of 1943. The tide of war had now decisively turned against Germany, but that was not the reason. Hoffmann again:

. . . The notion that an officer who valued his honour would attempt to attack his supreme commander because the war was not going well was totally foreign to Stauffenberg’s and his fellow-officers’ thinking. German officers do not rebel because they are not winning. They regarded death of the field of honour as the fulfillment of the soldier’s life. What they could not accept was that they were being used to cover crimes and dishonour. . . . (p. 91)

Hoffmann identifies some 50 anti-Hitler resisters who are on record to the effect that their awareness of the unfolding Final Solution was either their primary motive, or one of their primary motives, for conspiring to overthrow the nazi regime. The same is undoubtedly true of the majority of the other resisters commemorated at Stauffenberg 13, irrespective of the particular group to which they belonged.

THE INTENDED POST-HITLER JEWISH POLICY OF THE MEN OF JULY 20

Some of the Men of July 20 that were executed after the failed coup attempt had been long-time opponents of Hitler and, during the war, had devoted a great deal of time and thought, to the Germany they would fashion after his regime was a thing of the past. Leading exemplars are the members of the “Kreisau Circle,” who regularly met at Helmut James von Moltke’s estate of that name to develop a detailed blueprint for their new Germany. (Some of its members opposed the attempt of July 20 on various grounds, a fact that did not save them). One of the questions discussed was the place of the surviving Jews. A driving force in the Circle’s formulation of its proposed Jewish policy was Karl Goerdeler, former Mayor of Leipzig and Prices Commissioner under the Third Reich, and one of the earliest and most tireless opponents of Hitler’s regime. It was noted above that Goerdeler was among those that went on record during the Weimar period to the effect that Jewish influence in the republic’s economy and politics was excessive and needed curbing - - to be sure, by legal and peaceful means, not by the brutal means advocated by the nazis. Arguing that Goerdeler’s revulsion against those means was a primary factor in turning him against the nazi regime, Hoffmann chronicles various actions taken by him during the latter thirties that reflect that revulsion. These actions included using his mayoral powers to mitigate nazi restrictions on the ability of Jewish physicians to practice their profession, resigning his office after the nazis defied him and removed a statue of the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Barthaldy, and repeatedly utilizing his influential British contacts to brief the British Government on Hitler’s atrocities against the Jews and others, as well as on the growing nazi menace to international peace - - all in the interest of persuading that government to take a

firm stand against Hitler before it was too late.

Yet, like most of his peers among the resisters, Goerdeler could not accept the principle that all Jewish citizens of Germany were not only his fellow-human-beings with an inescapable claim upon his conscience in their time of torment, they also were his fellow-citizens with the same rights as any others. Defining the Jewish people as a race, he advocated that German Jews be deemed foreign nationals if they had not lived within the borders of the Second Reich before its formation, “and that they be treated as citizens of the Jewish state to be founded.” Goerdeler also drafted a document, in 1941, advocating that naturalized German Jews be deprived of their citizenship. Acknowledging that this appears shockingly insensitive, Hoffmann insists that Goerdeler’s motive was benign.

. . . In light of all the evidence that Goerdeler was motivated by the persecution of the Jews, it is impossible to assume that he was intended to injure the Jews’ status. His suggestion can be understood only a desperate attempt to appease the murderers and wrest the murder weapons from their hands. . . . (p. 86)

The fact remains, however, as Hoffmann (1977) reports, that the plans which the Kreisau resisters formulated, three years later, for Jews in post-Hitler Germany bear the hallmarks of Goerdeler’s earlier thinking: German Jews are a breed apart from “true” Germans and, therefore, cannot qualify for full German citizenship: in view of everything that has happened, it would be best if, with international help, they were resettled elsewhere. After their own fashion, Goerdeler and his Kreisau Circle colleagues were classic Zionists. In their view, the Jews had no secure and comfortable long-term future in Europe: they must, therefore, resettle in their own homeland. It

would be better all around if (to use a horrible word much bruited about by nazis) their new Germany were as *Judenrein* as it could humanely be made to be. It is telling that while many of the Third Reich's institutions and laws were forthwith to be dismantled and repealed, its anti-Jewish laws were merely to be suspended. Hoffmann (1977) suggests that this position probably would have been neither Goerdeler's last word nor that of his fellow-conspirators, but there is no denying that it was, so to speak, his first word, and theirs. As to Goerdeler's distinctions between categories of Jews, which depended upon how long they, or their forebears, had lived in Germany, to envisage the trauma that would be experienced by the surviving German Jews, as these distinctions were administratively drawn, is to recognize their most important implication. Whether or not they were designated German citizens, all German Jews, as well as all non-Jewish Germans, would have understood in the marrow of their bones that the Jew remained as much the Other as ever.

CONCLUSION

MOTIVES FOR RESISTENCE

The thing hardest to bear is the fact that Stauffenberg's bomb failed to kill Hitler. If it had killed him, *Valkyrie* would at the very least have thrown the Third Reich into turmoil, with the *Wehrmacht* and the *SS* at each others throats throughout the length and breadth of Germany and Occupied Europe. General Rommel would have opened his front to the Western Allies, whose

armies, aided by the resistance fighters of France, Belgium and Holland, would have surged into Germany. Even in the unlikely event that diehard formations, like the *Waffen SS*, tried to hold the line in Italy, Denmark and Norway, they could not have held it for long. And, finally, contrary to the unrealistic hopes of the Men of July 20, the Western Allies would not have permitted Germany to continue the war against the Soviet Union. For one thing (and it was hardly the only reason during the looming Yalta era), their respective public opinions, long encouraged to admire their Gallant Soviet Ally that had broken the *Wehrmacht's* back at a fearful cost, would have risen up in outrage if they had even considered doing so. The Second World War would have ended in short order, and millions would have survived that did not.

How should we retrospectively view the Men of July 20 - - whom Hitler ensured that he and his regime would outlive - - not from a broad historical perspective, for that is much too large a subject for a single paper, but from the perspective of the Jewish Question that, though narrower, sheds important light upon the broad one? As seen, Hoffmann adduces evidence to show that, more than any other factor, it was Hitler's persecution of the Jews that culminated in his Final Solution which motivated many of them to dedicate themselves to his overthrow, and, in some cases, this occurred well before the tide of war turned against Germany. Hoffmann also argues that an adverse tide of war generally would not, in itself, have sufficed to induce a German officer, especially an officer of their type, to turn against his leader, let alone a Fuhrer to whom he had sworn a personal oath of allegiance.

Without disputing Hoffmann's argument with respect to the cases he cites, it may be recalled that, as Josef Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda genius, incessantly assured the German people, what faced Germany after its unconditional surrender (demanded by the Western Allies at the Casablanca Conference of January, 1943), was occupation and possible dismemberment. Thus, the officers' revolt that would not have been inspired by prospective consequences of defeat like those of 1918 might well have been inspired, at least in part, by the prospective consequences of fighting to the bitter end under Hitler. Many Men of July 20 cherished to the very end the belief that a post-Hitler Germany led by themselves that sued for an armistice would be viewed not-unfavourably by the Western Allies, and consequently result in milder terms: so, ridding the world of Hitler and his regime before the Allies did it could be expected to bring important benefits to the Fatherland.

CATEGORIES OF PATRIOTIC GERMAN OFFICERS

Nonetheless, as Hoffmann insists, the decisive importance of the moral dimension must be acknowledged. A traditional German officer, especially a member of the General Staff and descended from Junkers or other aristocrats, who viewed himself as a knightly adherent to a moral code that ranked personal honour and devotion to the best interests of the Fatherland above loyalty to transient King, Kaiser or Fuhrer, could well conclude - - after seeing at first hand how Germany behaved in Poland and the Soviet Union - - that his soldierly duty demanded tyrannicide or, at least, the tyrant's overthrow. Hitler had led Germany into a moral and spiritual

abyss that a German victory could only deepen. As Admiral Canaris, the anti-Hitler head of German military intelligence, the *Abwehr*, said, Germany's defeat would be a disaster, but its victory would be a catastrophe. To officers like Stauffenberg, their duty was as clear when victory seemed possible, even likely, as it was to officials like Goerdeler and other members of the Kreisau Circle, whose anti-Hitler activities preceded the outbreak of the war.

The same cannot be said of the category of officers mentioned by Hamerow, for whom the good things Hitler was accomplishing for Germany during peacetime outweighed the harm he was inflicting upon people they had long held in low esteem. Now that Germany was locked in mortal combat, with every prospect of success, with the hated Communist colossus to the east, fount of a world-wide conspiracy, the stakes were correspondingly greater and the weight to be attached to the suffering of Jews and Slavs - - another lesser breed - - correspondingly less. But the Hitler (the "Bohemian Corporal," whose plebeian Austrian origins and accent they tended privately to deride) who was in the process, not only of losing his crusade against Communism but of leaving Germany prostrate before vengeful Slavic hordes, was another matter altogether. To have opposed him in peacetime would initially have meant risking one's career, as Hamerow notes, and, later, one's freedom; to have opposed him during the early, victorious wartime years would, of course, have meant risking one's life. By mid-1944, however, when the war was clearly lost, failure to oppose him while all battle fronts were still far from Germany's borders meant risking literally everything - - for oneself, one's loved ones, and one's Fatherland. Thus reasoned the likes of Generals Rommel, von Kluge, and Stulpnagel, who either supported the

coup attempt or tacitly approved it, and who lost their lives as a result. These men do not qualify for membership in the subgroup of resisters cited by Hoffmann. They only qualify for membership in the subgroup for whom Hitler's gravest crime was failure as warlord, a subgroup easy to comprehend and that need not detain us. It is the members of the preceding, larger subgroup that merit further consideration.

VARIETIES OF ATONEMENT

It is unlikely that the above-mentioned responses of the Men of July 20 to Gestapo interrogators, while under arrest after the failure of their attempted coup, were made opportunistically in order to win favour, for they surely realized that more weight would be attached to their opposition to genocide than to their antipathy towards the Jews. It is also hard to discern a reason why the interrogators would wish to doctor their testimony. There is therefore no reason to doubt that so great was their abhorrence of mass murder, that these Men of July 20 staked their lives and the lives of their loved ones (the nazis proclaimed a policy of punishing entire families for misdeeds of any member) on an attempt to end it by overthrowing the murderous regime. They also staked their honour, for they knew that if their attempt succeeded, many of their countrymen would revile them as traitors. They would be reviled *a fortiori* if they failed. Small wonder, then, that General Henning von Tresckow declared, on the eve of July 20, that he and his comrades had donned the Shirt of Nessus. He also declared, however, before committing suicide on the morrow of that day, that just as God had promised

Abraham that sinful Sodom would be spared for the sake of the ten virtuous men that lived there, so, he hoped, God would spare sinful Germany for the sake of the resisters. For von Tresckow, as presumably for other resisters, the Act of July 20 was more than an act of attempted tyrannicide, it was also an act of atonement.

But the question arises: atonement for whom, and for what? With perhaps the sole exception of Berlin's Chief of Police, Arthur Nebe, who had previously commanded a German mass-murder unit in Russia, none of the Men of July 20 had Jewish or other innocent blood on his hands. Since they commonly invoked their Christianity - - a religion based upon the concept of vicarious atonement - - as justification for their action, it could be argued that their act of atonement was intended to be vicarious, made on behalf of fellow-Germans guiltier than they. Though consistent with von Tresckow's last words, this argument cannot settle the issue. These men were not uninitiated newcomers to the long story of Germany and the Jewish Question: they brought baggage to its last chapter that Hitler wrote in Jewish blood. Their assurances to their interrogators that they had not encountered the Final Solution as friends of the Jews may render their voluntary enlistment, in response to that encounter, in the ranks of the Men of July 20 all the more remarkable - - and it certainly sets them apart from their numerous fellow-officers that refused to enlist when invited to do so (but did not report the treasonable invitations to the Gestapo) - - but it also means that they were among the very many Germans that bore some responsibility for the existence of the necessary - - as opposed to the sufficient - - conditions for what Winston Churchill later called "History's Greatest Crime."

The Men of July 20 made conscious decisions at various junctures throughout their adult lives that rendered them to some degree culpable. They endorsed the antipathy towards the Jews that they had, so to speak, imbibed with their mother's milk, and at least some of them must have communicated it to others. More generally, they frequented environments, in both their professional and private lives, where that antipathy was a staple of discourse, couched in terms of hoped-for policies designed to "put the Jews in their place." The increasing violence of nazi rhetoric against the Jews, during the twenties, may well have fallen discordantly upon their ears, but mainly because they deemed it vulgar and excessive, not because they deemed it unwarranted and immoral. After 1933, when the nazi regime began translating that rhetoric into action, they tended, at least at first, to rationalize its viciousness. This will pass before long, they said to themselves and their peers, the responsibilities of power will sober the nazis, make them more refined, more gentlemanly - - in a word, more, though never quite, like us. The Fuhrer, after all, is leading Germany on the right path, and that is the paramount consideration.

The shock at *Kristallnacht* experienced by the Men of July 20, a shock shared, incidentally, by most Germans (which explains why the nazis thereafter resorted to domestic subterfuge: the German Jews were being resettled in the East, etc.), was real. After November, 1938, there could be no doubt that Hitler and his fellow-nazis were brutes who would behave brutally, not only towards the Jews, but towards all those, at home or abroad, whom they deemed obstacles to their ambitions. Most of the Men of July 20 probably deprecated this fact, but war clouds were gathering and duty to the Fatherland called. In effect, they implicitly

concluded, where the Jewish Other was concerned: vilification, humiliation, disenfranchisement and impoverishment, Yes; brutalization, No; and mass murder, emphatically, No. On that last No they eventually staked everything. It is therefore not unlikely that their act of atonement was intended to be more than vicarious, for they must have realized that their earlier acquiescence in, if not approval of, persecution had rendered them to some degree complicit in what had followed.

Before proceeding, it must be noted that there were other Men of July 20 that said No to all of it, from the beginning, men such as Adam von Trott zu Solz and Helmut James von Moltke, but they constituted a rather small minority. On the other hand, it is also true that the minority was still smaller that believed that the surviving Jews, in their envisaged post-Hitler Germany, should be full-fledged Germans that must enjoy the same status as all others: full citizenship, with equal rights and responsibilities. It is surpassingly intriguing that men who quite consciously risked everything they held dear to stop the mass-murder of Jews could only embrace them as fellow-human-beings, not as fellow-citizens.

ROOTS OF MORAL ACTION

The foregoing dictates that while he must be given his due, the typical Man of July 20 must not be made out to have been what he was not. Like the typical member of the caste from which he sprang, he tended to be at least somewhat arrogant, autocratic, reactionary, narrowminded, unlearned, chauvinistic and racist. But, in sharp contrast with his fellow-Junkers

and almost all other Germans, the day arrived when he looked Evil squarely in the face and decided that, at whatever cost to himself and his loved ones, he must henceforth dedicate himself to its destruction. For that decision - - and for the act inspired by it - - he deserves to be numbered among the righteous.

Questions remain, however, as to why the typical Man of July 20 was what he was. As to his less admirable tendencies, he came of age in a very different world from that of his forefathers, a world in which, for all its problems, the means of communication and opportunities for travel afforded unprecedented access to new ideas. Why, then, did his basic political and cultural outlook remain so similar to the one he had inherited, including his attitude toward his Jewish fellow-Germans? What prevented him from recognizing what was readily apparent: that their patriotism was equal to his own (indeed, as Thomas Mann once remarked, it exceeded that of most Germans) and, what was as or more apparent, that they had fought as heroically and bled as copiously in the trenches of 1914-1918 as any other Germans? Did he take due cognizance of the contributions to the war effort of Jews like Fritz Haber and Walter Rathenau - - without which Germany would have been defeated long before 1918 - - as well as of the less-spectacular contributions of many other Jews? Did he denounce Rathenau's murder? The list of questions goes on.

To be sure, he ultimately drew lines. Initially, perhaps he only drew a private line against systematic brutality; but later, when it was a question of countenancing mass murder, he drew a

very firm and public line. But why did he only draw his lines there, and why so late in the day? His Christianity cannot provide an adequate answer - - after all, the great majority of his peers also were Christians and they never drew a line, anywhere - - although it may provide some, albeit ambiguous, elements of the answer. On the one hand, like all Germans, the Man of July 20 was aware that the Church had long preached Jew-hatred, overtly reiterated at least once annually at Easter, and he may also have been aware that it had for centuries condoned active persecution, provided it fell short of murder - - and he was confronting mass murder on an unprecedented scale. On the other hand, it could hardly have escaped his notice that the Church was keeping silent about the Final Solution, and if this did not necessarily imply tacit approval of the genocide, it certainly was not a call for action by the faithful.

In the end, we can only speculate about the source of that fateful resolve which entitles him to be numbered among the righteous. Perhaps it was an autonomous kernel of morality, rooted in his innermost being, which could no longer be suppressed and eventually made his continued inaction impossible. Let us call that kernel conscience.

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