

Anti-Semitism Versus Democracy and Welfare State in the Weimar Republic



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1 Introduction

After World War I, the Reichsrätekongress strove to socialize the means of production. Specifically, this referred to nationalization specifically of the steel and electrical industries and of mining. Regions particularly affected by this would have been the Ruhr area, Berlin and various other industrial sites.

The actual responsibility for the disaster of the world war was in the private owners of the means of production, and in particular of the heavy industry, according to the Socialists and Communists. The latter believed that socialization would not only lead to a fairer participation of the workers in the capital, which was mostly privately owned, but also to a more peaceful world. A socialized large industry would reduce the idea of competition within and between states, they said.

Most industrials, but also members of the nobility, fearing expropriation, thought the socialization efforts of the labor parties and their unions to be nothing but theft that had to be prevented under all circumstances.

There were various legitimate and illegitimate strategies for this. The legitimate ones were those that Hugo Stinnes tried to enforce in the convention with Carl Legin, as well as the great tax reform plans of Matthias Erzberger. He believed that a good minister of finance would be the best socialization minister (records of the national assembly. p. 1377A).¹

Against socialization, i.e. nationalization or collectivization of means of production, the representatives of industry and mines initially used the principle of participation of the workers in the productive assets of the companies and politics and,

¹Negotiations of the Reichstag: http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt2_wv_bsb0000011_00648.html Records, Erzberger 2019 (National Assembly).

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representing the minister of finance, strove for a moderate re-distribution by way of tax laws and a welfare state. These conventions and tax plans could be considered the foundation of what was called the Rhenish Capitalism, in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon one, after World War II.²

These forces from the economy and politics that were critical but (initially) constructive in their approach to socialization efforts were, however, supplemented by those who not only opposed the socialization efforts in a polemic-destructive manner, but who also were against the democratic system that seemed to permit such socialization. These forces found their political home mostly in the German national people's party (DNVP), which had chosen its party name less out of conviction and more out of opportunistic reasons. In particular the conservatives in this conglomeration party saw the term "people" to be rather negatively connotated. However, it was suitable as an ideological term of challenge to distinguish from the "dull" and "misguided mass" for which the left-wing parties were responsible. In order to open the eyes of these misguided masses, however, concerning the governmental form of "democracy" that was unsuitable for the German people, as well as about the "true" background of the socialization plans and any form of Socialism, it was decided to use Anti-Semitism for information and re-education. Some social democrats also called this the conversion of class hatred into race hatred in order to conceal the reactionary targets of this party. The opposition to the Erzbergersche tax reformation plans took place mostly through the contents of the stab-in-the-back myth after the Parliamentary investigation committee in November 1919.³ In it, Erzberger was held mainly accountable for the loss of the World War and the resulting consequences due to the peace resolution of the Reichstag from 1917 and the ceasefire treaty from November 1918.

The three following sections are to show how Anti-Semitism was to be and actually was used to reeducate the "people" and particularly the "dull mass".

2 The Staatspolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the DNVP 1919

In the first months of 1919, the Staatspolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the DNVP convened two meetings.⁴ These evenings were about the party's position on Judaism. The meeting wanted to determine whether Jews were to be admitted to the party or not. Tracking the course of the two meetings, the process and result records of which are preserved in the originals, it becomes clear that part of the persons present did not want to answer the question of whether the membership of Jews was desired or not,

²Zur Zukunft des "Rheinischen Kapitalismus", source: Bundeszentrale für Pol. Bildung, with historical summary <http://www.bpb.de/apuz/26478/zur-zukunft-des-rheinischen-kapitalismus?p=all>.

³Helferich's campaign "Fort mit Erzberger" digitized source:file:///C:/Users/Bernd/Downloads/Fort%20mit%20Erzberger!.pdf.

⁴June 6 and 17, 1919.

but asked how Jews could be used for the party's interest. It was not, as the supporters were later accused, mostly about money, but about propaganda support. This group believed that Jews were the better publishers and journalists. They were more highly skilled in speech and writing than, e.g., the authors of the *Kreuz-Zeitung*, which would hardly reach any larger number of readers outside of the sphere of nobility and horse breeders. The contents were to be specified by the party; the manner of distribution was left to the Jewish authors.

In terms of content, the DNVP management wanted to present democracy to the citizens as something foreign that did not match the German nature. This was all the more the case if democracy, as they said, was targeted at the rule of the mass or the disdainful number and represented welfare matters. Social responsibility may have been a Christian requirement, but it was a personal matter, rather than a state one, as the conservatives saw it. This was all the more the case since it was believed that democracy would only be a transition form after all on the path to Socialism/Communism that Russia already presented.

This was about starting a propaganda campaign for the upcoming Reichstag elections that took place in the spring of 1920, in order to make the citizens despise the new system. Since this seemed to be impossible with clean argumentation, a method was sought that would not show easily what the new "people's party" actually was about. The target was to reach the masses, i.e. the disdainful numbers, in the hope of a veritable election result in order to then overthrow the system that seemed to endanger their possessions using the seat distribution in the Reichstag: they wanted to legally, as they thought, overcome "Democratism" by way of the vote. It may be called a great defrauding maneuver toward the electing citizen. The pending Reichstag elections might have been the last elections for the voters then.

Some of the group had decided to place the specific agitation in the hands of qualified Jews for their methodical procedure. The grotesque thing about the planned reeducation of the people was that the people were supposed to be met with their resentments and conspiracy myths for the purpose of reeducation. The most widely spread one, which also seemed to best lead to the desired effect, was Anti-Semitism. This seemed to be virtually multifunctional. The Anti-Semites in the people's party, who were viewed as the mass base of the party by the DNVP leadership, preached that Jews were diametrically opposite to the German nature. They were essentially responsible for the status of the Communist system in Russia; they were the protégés of the Democratism that eroded the natural order; they are at fault for the World War just as for the fact that Germany lost it. According to the *Völkische*, the Jews were at fault for every disaster and any misery. DNVP politicians wanted to use this myth, mostly based on the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion",⁵ and the Jews to be included in the party were to spread this among the voting people. The party wanted to ensure that in particular its agitators for the people did not slip into street jargon. They wanted, as they put it, Anti-Semitism on a high level. Some even put value on

⁵5 Protokolle der Weisen von Zion: Die mächtigste aller Lügen in: *Die Zeit*, ZEIT Geschichte Nr. 3/2017, 22 August 2017, Wolfgang Benz <https://www.zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2017/03/protokolle-weisen-zion-antisemitismus-faelschung>.

making clear that they had Jews among their friends and acquaintances and that they were therefore beyond any accusations that they might be Anti-Semitic.

Since Jews were to engage in propaganda for the benefit of the party of Anti-Semitism, even though only in a homeopathic dilution, it was to be made clear to them first that this type of agitation was neither targeted against them, nor against Judaism as a whole, but against the Jewish spirit that appeared among the Jews but that had most of all taken a hold of fifty percent of the German people, in order to avoid any misunderstandings. Therefore, the recipe for healing was: *similia similibus curantur*.

A sentence that documents the will to use the Anti-Semitic resentments like no other in the source is:

It has been said here recently that Anti-Semitism would be a nice thing if a capable Jew organized it. This hits the core of the issue. (v. Oppeln-Bronikowski, Staatspol. AG p 37)⁶

Many other quotes of this source can also document the instrumentalization of Anti-Semitism to remove the democratic system. There is a good reason why the meeting's chairman (Ulrich v. Hassel)⁷ asked the participants in the meeting to maintain silence about the controversial discussion subjects here to the outside at the beginning of the meeting. (Staatspol. AG, p. 33) towards the end of the night, he summarized that there was the "issue":

How do we translate the language spoken in this room into practical effectiveness? (Staatspol. AG, p. 38).⁸

How was it possible to approach a reeducation of the people by Anti-Semitism, "organized by skilled Jews" without people who were contaminated by the supposedly "un-German spirit" (democracy and Socialism) recognizing the true reason for the agitation?

Someone who showed the way to such an agitation was the formerly free conservative Siegfried v. Kardorff, now a member of the DNVP, who recommended giving the "matter of the Eastern Jews" an Anti-Semitic character. This kind of agitation superficially guided attention to the Jewish migration from Poland, but met the purpose of "reeducating the people". This way, the assimilated German Jews were taken out of the focus a little, and the conservatives were given the option of contributing to agitation, as he expected.⁹

As a result, it can be said from the point of view of the DNVP that the concept partially worked, but failed in the end. As the Reichstag elections of 1920 approached, and in particular the DDP felt the Anti-Semitism targeted against it—which was

⁶Staatspolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft der DNVP, p87 state archive Berlin [inventory signature: R8005/327 S.33-38(R)] "Es ist hier neulich gesagt worden, der Antisemitismus wäre eine schöne Sache, wenn ein tüchtiger Jude ihn organisierte. Das trifft den Kern des Problems".

⁷v. Hassel Short biography: <https://www.dhm.de/lemo/biografie/ulrich-hassel>.

⁸Staatspolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft der DNVP, p.89 (inventory signature R8005/327 S. 38) "Wie übersetzen wir die Sprache, wie sie in diesem Zimmer gesprochen wird, in die praktische Wirksamkeit?"

⁹Federal archive Berlin, Nachlass Westarp 2329/vol. 114 folio 46 also Jan Striesow "Die DNVP und die Völkisch Radikalen", p. 148.

denounced as the Jews' party. It lost nearly half its voters who had still given it their vote in the elections for the National assembly (Dt. Wollen, no. 3, p. 13).¹⁰ Apart from this, the Anti-Semitic agitation was targeted against the USPD and specifically against the MSPD, the parties who supposedly had absorbed the disintegrating Jewish spirit to a special degree. DNVP strove to ensure loss of the parliamentary majority for the parties of the Weimar Coalition. However, it saw a downer in the fact that another "people's party" had been founded in addition to it: the Deutsche Volkspartei. It has been claimed that the success of the DNVP would have been much larger without it.

This form of instrumentalization of Anti-Semitism not leading to the perfect success for the DNVP in the end was, among others, due to the separation of the Völkische in 1922, who sharply criticized the DNVP in their agitation. In their election campaign of 1924, these Völkische kept repeating that the DNVP grandees used Anti-Semitism in the form of the Eastern Jew agitation to mislead voters. Since they had enough internal party information, they were also able to use this strongly in their "arms" against the DNVP.¹¹ In this dispute between the Völkische and the DNVP, the absurd discussion of who the true Anti-Semites in the country were soon sprang up in public. They even called each other the "Jews' party" because they apparently were paid by them and acted in their interest and therefore harmed the "national matter".

The parliamentary group chairman and later party chairman Cuno Graf Westarp spoke for not pushing them out of the party after the murder of foreign minister Walter Rathenau as a mentor of the "Sozialvölkische". He probably believed that the German and free conservatives within the party would not be able to dispense with the Völkische as a party mass base if they wanted to pursue their restorative targets.

The dilemma of the party leadership concerning instrumentalization to collect votes before the elections, and as an ideology of its goals against any welfare state and democratic participation soon became evident. Anna von Gierke, whose mother was Jewish, and who was a member of the steering committee of the state political work group, soon left the DNVP because Westarp had forced her to give up her promising list position for the upcoming Reichstag elections for the benefit of the Völkische. It was impossible to mention the Anti-Semitic agitation of the Völkische sub rosa and use it while presenting a candidate for the Reichstag who was referred to as a "half-Jew" in the jargon of Anti-Semites. As Westarp had found, there was a gap in the party's credibility here.

Equally von Kardorff, who had still recommended the instrumentalization of the Eastern Jew matter in the program commission, turned his back on the DNVP after the Kapp coup, among others because it was unable to keep the Völkische under control where their openly agitating and people-endangering rabble-rousing was concerned.

¹⁰Deutsches Wollen, no. 3, p. 13, Berlin 1920.

¹¹Deutschnationales Rüstzeug, year 1924: The Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei, Berlin 1924. Here, the DNVP strove to relativize the presentations brought up against them, or to claim them as false. The "Rüstzeug" was, among others, an instruction for its election speakers out there who had to defend themselves against accusations of the völkische.

3 Anti-semitic Speech of the Chairman of the Preliminary Economic Council 1922

The speech of Edler v. Brauns in the Reichstag is an example of how much the Völkische and the party head fought about when, where and for what purpose Anti-Semitic agitation was to take place within the meaning of instrumentalization. The publication of DNVP “Die Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei” shows that there had been disputes in the party rooms in light of an important speech of v. Braun about whether v. Braun was to play the Anti-Semitic card against the “fulfillment policy” of the Wirth-Rathenau cabinet in the Reichstag or not (*Deutschnationales-Rüstzeug* 1924, p. 37).¹² Obviously, he was urged to do so against the will of the party leadership. The debate that was conducted in the Reichstag that day and where the chairman of the preliminary Imperial Economic Council, v. Braun, was to represent the position of the DNVP, was the London ultimatum.

One most unpleasant item of this ultimatum was the “debtor warrant”. Its content stated that the German economy had to pay a 26% export duty to the countries receiving the goods, i.e. a kind of discount or reimbursement that, according to Otto Wels, the state couldn’t possibly reimburse to the economy if any plannable Imperial budget was to be drawn up at all. v. Braun started at this neuralgic point, converting Wels’ words of the “capitalistic solidarity” into the anti-Semitic connotated term of international capital. Then continuing:

We want nothing to do with such machinations of the international Jewish capital, (vivid confirmation on the right) and therefore see severe danger in particular in the current composition of the cabinet. (Again vivid agreement on the right). (RT-Protok. Vol. 349, p. 3737 A/B)¹³

This statement was to present the German-Jewish foreign minister Rathenau as part of an international “Capitalistic” conspiracy. The chairman of the Economic Council wanted, for a change, to implement the terms of the entente as agreed. This meant: The state was to fully reimburse the German goods exporters for the “debtor warrant”.

The expected volume of this budget item to be included in the plans would have been 1.5 to 3 billion Reichsmark in light of the variability (RT. Protok. Vol. 349, p. 3726D). According to Rathenau, this was the “most dangerous” part of the convention (RT. Protok., vol. 349, p. 3744D).

Indirectly, this dispute conducted with an Anti-Semitic affront as well was about the question of which part of society was to pay more for the consequences of the war. Von Braun’s position and that of the DNVP and DVP alike was: Protecting the economy and private assets and introducing the 12 h day for workers again. This was to recover positions from the Stinnes-Legin treaty as well.

¹²*Deutschnationales Rüstzeug* 1924: Die Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei, p. 37.

¹³Negotiations of the Reichstag vol. 349, S.3737 A/B, (2 June 1921) “Wir wollen nichts zu tun haben mit derartigen Machenschaften des internationalen jüdischen Kapitals, (lebhaftige Zustimmung rechts) und deswegen sehen wir gerade in der jetzigen Zusammensetzung des Kabinetts eine schwere Gefährdung.” <http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt2w1bsb000003300438.html>.

The fulfillment policy was also called “socialization on the cold path” by the “national opposition”, under contribution of the entente (RT Protok. Vol. 349, p. 3738D). In public, the Wirth-Rathenau government was presented as a servant that abandoned German possessions to the winning forces. The reasons why this was done were always given in the agitating media of the *Völkische*, claiming that the responsible politicians had been bribed by the international Jewish capital. v. Braun’s speech was the template for serving these sheets.

The verbal attack conducted by v. Braun on Rathenau and the entire Wirth cabinet was somewhat harsher in its anti-Semitic sharpness than the speech of Karl Helfferich, which is more often found in literature, on the day before Rathenau’s murder, in which Helfferich called Rathenau a traitor of the German matter, and in particularly traitor of the people of Saarland.¹⁴

4 Hugo Stinnes in Spa and the Anti-semitic Threat 1920

The threat of using the anti-Semitically agitated street as leverage against the positions of Rathenau and Bonn on the conference of Spa by industrial magnate Hugo Stinnes is another example for how Anti-Semitic agitation was used to enforce economic interests at the highest level.

The DNVP-related *Kreuz-Zeitung* told its readers about the “Jewish-Democratic spirit of Spa” after the conference (*Preußische (Kreuz-)Zeitung*, Nr. 358, year 1920).¹⁵

Foreign minister Walther Simons, head of the German delegation in Spa, had taken two renowned representatives of the 2nd socialization commission to the negotiations of the entente in Belgium: Hugo Stinnes and Walther Rathenau. Soon, there was a severe dispute about the direction to be taken in the German delegation. In his position of opposing the winning forces in terms of reparations, in particular in the delivery of millions of tons of coal, and to therefore also potentially accept or even provoke the occupation of the Ruhr area by entente troops, Rathenau opposed what would later be called the fulfillment policy.

After the conference of Spa, Stinnes was facing accusations that he had only thought of his own personal advantage, i.e. the advantages of the Stinnes group (*Vorwärts*, no. 364 vol. 1920).¹⁶ Specifically he was accused of having seen an advantage in occupation of the territory, since occupation by entente troops would have severely limited the sovereign rights of the German state; in addition to this, the coal trade with the French had made him the “greatest owner of foreign currencies”. Finance expert Moritz J. Bonn saw the negotiation strategy of Hugo Stinnes even as

¹⁴23 June 1922, Helfferich’s speech in the Reichstag <http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt2w1bsb0000003900668.html>.

¹⁵*Preußische (Kreuz-)Zeitung*, no. 358, year 1920 “Das wahre Gesicht von Spa”.

¹⁶Accusations of Steigers Werner (also 2nd Socialization commission) in: *Vorwärts* no. 364, year 1920.

an effort to counteract stabilization efforts for the Mark, in order to generate high inflation profits (M. J. Bonn, *Bilanz*, p. 250).¹⁷

In light of this background, which was briefly sketched above, Stinnes had threatened the participants Rathenau, Bonn and Dernburg, who were of Jewish origin, in Spa that he would cause “severe political and social fights in particular of an Anti-Semitic kind” if they were unwilling to continue to follow his negotiation strategy from the conference.

Regarding the public criticism he faced in Spa, he responded: a number of representatives in Spa had broken the resistance against unworthy impositions of the entente due to their “foreign psyche” (*Kreuz-Zeitung*, no. 354, year 1920).¹⁸ The DNVP-related *Kreuz-Zeitung* turned this into: “Representatives of a foreign nation” that had undermined the German position out of shady motives.

Spa represents the setting of the tracks of a “national collection policy” as represented by Stinnes, the DNVP and, at the time still, the DVP, up to the “fulfillment policy” towards reaching an agreement with the winning forces (H. Gründer: W. Simons, p. 115).¹⁹

There are many other examples where Anti-Semitism was used without any actual conviction of its contents being necessary. One is that of DNVP delegate von den Kerkhoff, who denounced a Jewish merchant who had outbid a client of Kardorff in a business matter from the stage of the Reichstag. The Jewish merchant had previously been threatened with this approach if he did not withdraw from the transaction (RT Protok. Vol. 348, p. 2746C/D).²⁰ SPD delegate Kahmann called this procedure in the Reichstag “political-economic blackmail” that showed certain parallels to the proceedings of Hugo Stinnes.

Instrumentalization of Anti-Semitism was particularly strong in the Federation of farmers, which had already had some relevant experiences with political use of such resentments in the Empire. Again, there are some sections of the speech in the records of the Reichstag. The Anti-Semitism of the farmers and their political representatives was targeted against forced management of basic foods and specifically against the Reich grain office in Berlin (Bernd, *Diss.* p. 284 et seqq.).²¹

¹⁷M. J. Bonn: *So macht man Geschichte, Bilanz eines Lebens*, Munich 1953 p. 250.

¹⁸*Neue Preußische (Kreuz-)Zeitung* np. 354, year 1920.

¹⁹H. Gründer, *Walther Simons als Staatsmann, Jurist und Kirchenpolitiker*, PH.C.W. Verlag, Neustadt a.d. Aisch 1975, p. 115.

²⁰Negotiations of the Reichstag: http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt2_w1_bsb00000032_00119.html.

²¹H. D. Bernd, *Die Beseitigung der Weimarer Republik*, *Diss.* p. 284 et seqq. Debates about the agricultural crisis of 1921 to the spring of 1922: https://ub-deposit.fernuni-hagen.de/receive/mir_mods_00000074.

5 Conclusion

The beginnings of the Weimar Republic are reminiscent of a large political field for experimentation in which not least the Socialization Commission controversially discussed many different models of new economic forms. The discussions in these commissions influenced the political streams outside the country just as, on the other hand, the specific internal and foreign-policy events on the course of negotiations of these commissions.

This paper was to briefly define how Anti-Semitism was used as a means of influencing. For this, chapters were chosen that refer to the first months of the Republic and persons and committees that essentially worked towards the new business models or tried to prevent them with various strategies. One of the means for exercising pressure on the political opponent that were used by the German national party was Anti-Semitism, which had all but disappeared before the World War, but then spread again strongly during the food supply crisis in the “Beet Winter” of 1916/17 and that characterized public discourse very strongly in nearly every single area of politics in the years of crisis of the Weimar Republic.

Anti-Semitism as a mass phenomenon appeared in crisis and could be used by right-wing politicians as well as by actors of the large industry (see Stinnes), in order to produce crisis-like situations or to be used as leverage of the street against opponents.

The concept of Antidemocratic forces—not only right-wing ones—was the reinforcement of crises or the production of crises since they assumed in their concepts that the new system could only be overcome in crisis—best by the voters directly. However, as the state-political work group of the DNVP 1919 was certain, this required re-education of the broad masses that had been penetrated by Socialist and Democratic ideas—i.e. “non-German spirit”. A coup from above, a military campaign against the new system, seemed not to be opportune to most in the lead of the party—as the Kapp coup and the Hitler coup confirmed later—since the expected organized resistance would be too great. Nevertheless, this strategy that worked by way of raising disdain for the system and its representatives, fueled a latent civil war atmosphere, in particular in the first four years until 1924, and then again after 1929 until the end of the Republic.

Finally, it should also be mentioned that there was an attitude against instrumentalization in the DNVP as well. Industrial v. Raumer said about this in the Staatspolitische AG: “I think that the party can only be designed in a modern fashion by throwing Anti-Semitism overboard (...)” (Staatspol. AG p. 89).²² Germany was only able to return to power through the economy and this required international relationships that would only be impaired by preaching Anti-Semitism.

Following this sentence, it could be summarized that serving resentments does not generally promise any future-oriented solutions. Quite the opposite! Such strategies seem to be rather an admission of inferiority. They speak of the weakness of not

²²Staatspol. AG of the DNVP, p. 89.

being ready to face the new challenges of the time. Instead, there is a yearning back to an order that restores the old conditions of existence that were successful in it.

The restoring forces that acted not only within the DNVP put a severe strain on the young democracy. The attempt at restoring the old order not only took place with useless strategies, but to a high degree also with morally objectionable ones. The actors were also apparently aware that their methods were reprehensible. The dignitaries of the old regime strove to maintain something that could be called “clean hands” to the outside and also towards themselves. The editor of *Vorwärts*, Stampfer (SPD), said about the German national party: “The worse off Germany is, the more happily some faces will shine” (RT Protok. Vol. 353, p. 6632C). By this, he meant the deliberate disaster policy to get rid of democracy.

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