

“ANTISEMITISM IS A BAROMETER OF DEMOCRACY”:

CONFRONTING THE NAZI PAST IN THE WEST GERMAN ‘SWASTIKA  
EPIDEMIC’, 1959-1960

by

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## **Abstract**

The vandalism of a synagogue in Cologne, West Germany on Christmas Day 1959 by two men in their mid-twenties sparked a wave of Antisemitic and Nazi vandalism across West Germany and the Western world. The “swastika epidemic,” as it came to be known, ignited serious debates surrounding public memory of the Second World War in Germany, and the extent to which West Germany had dealt with its Nazi past. The swastika epidemic became a powerful example of what critics at the time argued was the failure of West Germany to properly confront its Nazi past through the reconstruction policies of Konrad Adenauer. This thesis examines the reactions of West Germany’s government, led by Konrad Adenauer, to the swastika epidemic and its place in the shifting narratives of memory in the postwar era. Adenauer’s reactions to the epidemic were steeped in the status quo memory narratives of the preceding decade which would be increasingly challenged throughout the 1960s.

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## Introduction

On 19 September 1959, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer attended the inauguration of the *Roonstrasse* synagogue in Cologne, fifteen years after the end of the Second World War, and more than twenty-two years after the synagogue had been destroyed during the events of *Kristallnacht*. Adenauer stated the reopening of the synagogue represented “visible proof of the success of the Federal Government’s restitutions policy,” and asked the Jewish worshippers to pray not only for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, but also the Christian victims of the Nazis.<sup>1</sup> Later that evening, Adenauer gave a television address, in which he marked the tenth anniversary of the Federal Republic, encouraged Germans to see their capacity for good, and justified his close alignment with the Western powers. The West, he said, “affirmed ‘everything that is embodied in our basic law,’ the West German Constitution.”<sup>2</sup> Sydney Gruson, the *New York Times* journalist reporting on the address, noted that this call to focus on the good in Germans served as “an implicit reminder that not long ago they let the evil in them triumph.”<sup>3</sup> Konrad Adenauer had been Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany for ten years, and in those ten years he had tried to navigate the difficult memory politics of the postwar world. How Germans remembered the war became an important political question in a new state born out of the division of Germany into East

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<sup>1</sup> “Cologne Temple Open: Adenauer and Cardinal Frings Hail Rebuilt Synagogue,” *New York Times*. 20 September 1959, 83.

<sup>2</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Adenauer Asks Prayers by Jews: In Talk at New Synagogue in Cologne, He Cites Nazi Murder of Christians,” *New York Times*. 21 September 1959, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Gruson, “Adenauer Asks for Prayers,” 3.

and West, and one that was made up of the perpetrators, bystanders, and victims of the Nazi regime.

By 1959, Germans had undergone five years of occupation after six years of war, the creation of a new democratic state, and the intensive reconstruction of its war-devastated infrastructure. The rebuilding of West Germany was well underway, as Adenauer oversaw the country's integration into the West; and the reconstruction of the economy had seen the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) bring unprecedented prosperity to postwar West Germany at a time when many other countries, especially in the Eastern Bloc, were still struggling to recover. But while West Germany celebrated the reopening of the *Roonstrasse* synagogue, and Adenauer championed it as proof of the success of his restitution policy, the troubled past of West Germany would soon come back to haunt him. On the night of 25 December 1959, just three months after it had reopened, the *Roonstrasse* synagogue was painted with swastikas and the phrase “*Juden Raus,*” or “Jews get out.” The two culprits, later identified as Arnold Strunk and Josef Schönen, also defaced a nearby memorial to victims of the Gestapo, blacking out the lines on the memorial that read “this memorial recalls Germany's most shameful period.” Arrested the next day, the two twenty-five-year-old men confessed to the crime as well as to being members of the far-right *Deutsche Reichspartei*, or German Reich Party.<sup>4</sup> The *Deutsche Reichspartei* (DRP) was created in 1953 as the spiritual successor of two other right-wing parties, the German Rights Party, which evolved into the German Reich Party, and the Socialist Party of the Reich, which had been banned for its

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<sup>4</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle; Weissbuch und Erklärung der Bundesregierung*. (Bonn, 1960), 7-9.

extreme right-wing views and associations with neo-Nazism. The DRP's party chair in 1953, and its three deputies had all been members of the NSDAP before 1933, and many former Nazis became party members.<sup>5</sup> Konrad Adenauer immediately issued a statement condemning the Antisemitic acts.<sup>6</sup> Antisemitic incidents were not unheard of in postwar West Germany, but the Cologne vandalism received media coverage across the West, and seemed particularly shocking, occurring as it did on Christmas Day. But within a few days it quickly became apparent that this would not be an isolated incident. In the days and weeks that followed, hundreds of cases of Antisemitic vandalism and harassment were reported in West Germany, with hundreds more being reported in the United States and around the world. Indeed, the closing days of 1959 and first three months of 1960 were characterized by over a thousand instances of Antisemitism, ranging from a bombing at a Kansas City synagogue, to crude swastikas painted on the door of a Catholic Church in Lauda, West Germany.<sup>7</sup> Known in German as the *Schmierwelle*, and described in English as the swastika epidemic, outbreak, or wave, these numerous expressions of Antisemitism shocked many across West Germany and the world and prompted fierce reactions from the media and those in power. The

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<sup>5</sup> Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson, and Michalina Vaughan. *Neo-Fascism in Europe*. (London: Longman, 1991), 71-72.

<sup>6</sup> The use of the word Antisemitism has been debated by historians for its accuracy and its implications for the wider field. Antisemitism has traditionally been spelt in the English language using a hyphen, however, as historian Shmuel Almog writes, "If you use the hyphenated form, you consider the words 'Semitism,' 'Semite,' 'Semitic' as meaningful." These words, adopted to identify Jews in racial terms were first popularized by Wilhelm Marr around 1879 in Germany. Scholars have since begun to use Antisemitism, a more direct translation of the German word *Antisemitismus* used by Wilhelm Marr to distinguish between ancient religious based hatred from his modern conception of hatred deeply rooted in racial science theories. To deemphasize the misleading and inaccurate meaning granted to "Semitism" and "Semite," I have chosen to use the words Antisemitism, Antisemite, and Antisemitic. Jonathan Judaken, 'Introduction'. *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (1 October 2018): 1125.

<sup>7</sup> "Kansas City Bomb Rocks Synagogue," *New York Times*, 29 January 1960.

reactions of Konrad Adenauer, and the epidemic's place in the wider context of postwar Germany's memory politics, are the focus of this thesis.

In his leadership of West Germany, Konrad Adenauer promulgated a specific vision of coping with the Nazi past that largely tried to limit responsibility, and focus on reintegration and forgiveness, rather than reconciliation. Thus the Federal Republic of Germany's first decade saw the end of denazification after four years of Allied efforts, the restoration of many former Nazis to public life, and the integration of West Germany into Western Europe, a political realignment that saw the Federal Republic join NATO in 1955. How Germans were to remember their wartime experiences and what role that memory was to play in the construction of the new German state became election issues integral to the future of the country. Konrad Adenauer's victory over Social Democrat Kurt Schumacher saw his vision of forgiveness and integration triumph over Schumacher's insistence on reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> Over the next decade Adenauer's government and West German society would shape their public memory of the war and lead to many accusations of forgetting the crimes of the Nazis in favour of narratives of German victimhood. By 1959 discontent over this silence was beginning to show, and the swastika epidemic exposed the faultiness in the newly constructed Federal Republic, uncovering the past that had been buried or substituted in the 1950s for one more palatable to the German public. For many in the USA and the UK, the swastika epidemic called into question German fidelity to their new democracy and widespread

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 267-268.

Antisemitism was condemned as a symptom of the Nazism that had never truly been rooted out in West Germany.

The discontent expressed in 1959 was part of a wider, ongoing process of dealing with the past that Germans came to call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or “working through the past.” As Robert Moeller has demonstrated, Germans did not forget their Second World War experiences. Rather, he says, they selectively chose what would become public memory in their new democratic society, and the government helped shape these narratives by emphasizing what was important to remember.<sup>9</sup> This process was not one of unanimity, many protested the way narratives of German victimhood overtook those of the actual victims of National Socialism, and the moral arguments of Kurt Schumacher never disappeared; the swastika epidemic of 1960 became the first of many opportunities to revive a debate that had been quietly ongoing since the formation of the Federal Republic. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has largely been seen as an ongoing process, but traditional historical narratives have identified the election of Willy Brandt, and the student protests of 1968, as the point where the silence of the Adenauer period was replaced by an attempt to atone for past German crimes, and to actively remember the Nazi past. This thesis argues instead that the swastika epidemic, at the beginning of the 1960s, was a turning point in how Germans viewed their relationship to the past. The research in this thesis also illustrates that Adenauer was largely not a part of this change. After a decade under his leadership Germans had begun to question, if only slightly, the narratives of memory that he had helped to construct, and which he

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Moeller, “Remembering the War in a Nation of Victims: West German Pasts in the 1950s” in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. ed. by Hanna, Schissler. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 89.

still saw as integral to social cohesion. Thus while reactions to the swastika epidemic can be seen as a beginning in the process of change that characterized the 1960s, they can also be viewed as the beginning of the end of Adenauer's vision of West German memory politics. His quest to integrate former Nazis back into public life was increasingly challenged after 1960, and would culminate in the protests of 1968.

This research project has sought to explore the reactions to the swastika outbreak as part of a wider examination of the memory politics of the Federal Republic. By examining how it played out in the press, its impact on politics in the Federal Republic and West German society and its wider implications in the ongoing process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the thesis seeks to understand the swastika epidemic through the specific context of West German society in 1960. This has been accomplished through a careful chronological reconstruction of the events of January and February 1960, often on a daily basis, to better understand how both politicians and West Germany's most important allies responded to the outbreak. The thesis relies primarily on newspaper sources from the German monthly news magazine *Der Spiegel* and three major English language newspapers, as well as a number of other primary sources from both English and German organizations and individuals. The newspapers used, *The Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*, are all major publications that were largely considered to be establishment media sources that communicated the opinions of the political elite in the United Kingdom and the United States.

A large amount of the research is also based on a government report entitled *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle; Weissbuch und Erklärung der*

*Bundesregierung* (referred to here as the White Book), published by the Federal Republic while the epidemic was still ongoing. As it is an official government document, I have treated it as a source indicative of the federal government's thinking on the swastika epidemic. A collection of transcripts of meetings of Adenauer and his advisors, *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, was vital to understanding Konrad Adenauer's reactions to the epidemic. Hans-Peter Schwarz's biography of Adenauer, *Konrad Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War, Revolution, and Reconstruction* was also used to gain a better sense of his personal reaction to the crisis. Several statistical reports were compiled by international Jewish groups at the time, such as *Swastika 1960; the Epidemic of Anti-Semitic Vandalism in America*. Unfortunately, their methods of data collection are unknown. However they were reported as factual during the epidemic and as such formed the basis for the public's understanding of the phenomenon of the outbreak. As I have chosen to treat them as reasonably accurate and indicative of the widespread extent of Antisemitism occurring in the early months of 1960. This project does not seek to engage with the epidemic as a psychological or sociological phenomenon, rather it seeks to focus on how Antisemitism in West Germany was closely tied to the perception of the past. Antisemitism must be seen as closely connected to the survival of Nazism, as it was at the time. Rabbi Zwi Assaria, the rabbi of the *Roonstrasse* synagogue, said that "Antisemitism was a barometer of democracy."<sup>10</sup> In this context, then, Antisemitism can be seen as a link to Germany's Nazi past, what first Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman, and then several other scholars, including Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina

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<sup>10</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Vandals Desecrate Synagogue Opened by Adenauer in Cologne: German Vandals Smear Synagogue," *New York Times*. 26 December 1959.

Grossmann, have called the “Nazi racial state.”<sup>11</sup> The continuities between the Nazi racial state and West Germany became an important part of how Germans remembered the past and understood their present.

This thesis specifically focuses on a number of historical actors, especially in the federal government. Konrad Adenauer is a particular focus, as the head of the federal government his personal ideology played an important role in the development of West German politics. The West German Interior Minister, Gerhard Schröder, as well as the Foreign Minister Heinrich von Brentano were two of the most important ministers that oversaw official responses to the epidemic. However, their actions are largely understood as an extension of Chancellor Adenauer’s will in his capacity as leader of both the party and the Federal Republic. Various Jewish groups, including the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the World Jewish Congress, and the American Jewish Committee all spoke out against the epidemic, and their varying reactions are considered as important measures of how the Jewish community responded to the Antisemitism on display. Their statements are also considered important in wider foreign policy implications, as these groups often confronted West German ambassadors directly, an indication of their privilege in accessing high-ranking representatives of the West German government. The public’s wider role in reactions to the epidemic are considered through the activism of student groups, veterans’ organizations, and wider public

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ipperman, *The Racial State, Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann, Eds. *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 1-7. The characterization of the Third Reich solely as a “racial state” is currently being critiqued by historians. See Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell, Eds. *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

protests, ranging from individual acts of protest to large examples of civil unrest. Finally, the reactions of the United States and the United Kingdom are measured on a number of levels. Of course, there were the official reactions and statements of politicians in both governments. But the newspapers used in this project also indicate the wider opinion of the political elite in those countries. In addition to the actors, there are important temporal factors to consider.

The swastika epidemic began on 25 December 1959. Its end, however, is more difficult to define. The West German government's White Book was commissioned to study only the first month of incidents, while a later American study covered nine weeks of Antisemitic incidents in that country. Media reporting on the subject declined in February 1960, and the number of incidents that had occurred was decreasing throughout the latter weeks of January. The epidemic in West Germany lost steam and petered out by the end of February.<sup>12</sup> A handful of Antisemitic incidents were still reported into March, but they received much less coverage in the international press. The repercussions of the epidemic lasted longer, with the West German Minister of Expellees and Refugees resigning in early May 1960.<sup>13</sup> May 1960 represented an end point for another reason, as this was the month of Adolf Eichmann's capture. The widespread press coverage that Eichmann's capture and trial received means that I have chosen to limit the effects of the outbreak as much as possible to the time period between 25 December 1959 and April 1960. Subsequently, this study primarily focuses

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<sup>12</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> John P. Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy: Bonn Germany Confronts the Aftermath of the Third Reich*. (New York: P. Lang, 1998), 144.

on recreating the events of January and February of 1960, though the repercussions of the outbreak lasted longer.

The importance of the swastika epidemic of 1959/1960 lay in its ability to produce protests at the persistence of Nazism and Antisemitism in West Germany. The epidemic also illuminated Adenauer's inability to respond to the demands of those protests. And, the swastika epidemic became the first moment in a series of moments in the 1960s where Germans began to question the way they interacted with the past. Despite the significance of this series of events, the swastika epidemic has received little attention from historians of postwar Germany. This thesis represents the first significant attempt to understand the historical importance of the epidemic, and to situate it within the wider German historiography. Indeed, the epidemic remained largely the subject of sociologists and psychologists until the early 1990s. Viewed through the lens of a social or psychological problem, Antisemitism was studied using the swastika epidemic in the United States and West Germany by several different organizations and institutions. Both the West German government and the Anti-Defamation League studied the epidemic almost immediately after it ended, both collecting data on the locations of the vandalism and the supposed culprits. Their reports concluded that in both West Germany and the US that the majority of vandals were not motivated by outright Antisemitism but caused by, what the American researchers, David Caplovitz and Candace Rogers, called: "more widely diffused hostility of another kind, some of which was readily transferred to Jews when they were suggested as targets."<sup>14</sup> The copycat nature of the epidemic was

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<sup>14</sup> David Caplovitz and Candace Rogers, *Swastika 1960; the Epidemic of Anti-Semitic Vandalism in America* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1961), 50.

the focus of two studies published in the American journal *Social Problems* in 1962, “The Swastika Epidemic of 1959/1960: Anti-Semitism and Community Characteristics” by Howard Ehrlich and “‘Swastika Offenders’: Variations in Etiology, Behavior and Psycho-Social Characteristics” by Herman D. Stein and John M. Martin.<sup>15</sup> That same year in West Germany, the German Society for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis made the study of Antisemitism the theme for their Fourth Congress in 1962, as the reestablishment of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research encouraged reengagement with the social sciences in West Germany.<sup>16</sup>

The outbreak continued to be a topic of sociological study, with Simon Epstein of the Vidal Sassoon Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem publishing his report *Cyclical Patterns in Antisemitism: The Dynamics of Anti-Jewish Violence in Western Countries since the 1950s* in 1993. Epstein’s report studied the epidemic as a singular event in what he described as “waves” of anti-Semitism from the 1950s to the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Seeking to find an explanation for the seeming ebbing and flowing of anti-Semitism, Epstein was unable to correlate a theory to the facts that can adequately explain the seeming phenomenon, rather, he concludes that “the discussion on modern antisemitism lacks adequate documentation.”<sup>18</sup> Thus sociologists and psychologists sought to grapple with the legacy of the swastika epidemic in terms of what the German Society for Psychotherapy called the

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<sup>15</sup> Howard J. Ehrlich, ‘The Swastika Epidemic of 1959-1960: Anti-Semitism and Community Characteristics’. *Social Problems* *Social Problems* 9, no. 3 (1962): 265.

<sup>16</sup> Bergmann, and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Epstein, *Cyclical Patterns in Antisemitism: The Dynamics of Anti-Jewish Violence in Western Countries since the 1950s*. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 1993), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Epstein, *Cyclical Patterns*, 17.

“psychodynamics of prejudice” and what psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich called “a disease of prejudice.”<sup>19</sup> A specific study of the epidemic was released as part of a wider collection on Antisemitism and political culture in Germany by Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb in 1990.<sup>20</sup> They would again mention the epidemic in their book *Anti-Semitism in Germany after 1945*, published in English in 1997. But as a study of historical inquiry, the epidemic has mostly been relegated to minor mention in wider chapters on German postwar memory.

The outbreak as a subject of historical study has been mostly understood within the context of postwar German memory. Though Bergmann and Erb concluded that the epidemic was an important moment in wider trends of dealing with Antisemitism in Germany, historian John P. Teschke wrote that the epidemic was “nothing unique.”<sup>21</sup> Teschke, in his book *Hitler’s Legacy: West Germany Confronts the Aftermath of the Third Reich*, mentions the epidemic as part of the wider public reaction to the political scandal of Theodor Oberländer’s Nazi past. Oberländer was the West German Minister of Expellees and Refugees in 1960 and was under increasing pressure to resign after he was accused of war crimes. In Harold Marcuse’s *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*, Marcuse sees the epidemic as an example of how West German politicians were failing to prevent negative portrayals of the continuities between West Germany and the Third Reich. Specifically, the number of Antisemitic incidents occurring throughout the 1950s began to increase, and garnered increasing media coverage, resulting in embarrassment for Adenauer’s government.

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<sup>19</sup> Bergmann, and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb. *Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur nach 1945*. (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> Teschke, *Hitler’s Legacy*, 138.

More embarrassing still, was the fact that several of his ministers had indeed been ex-Nazis.<sup>22</sup> Wulf Kansteiner also mentions the epidemic in his book *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television and Politics after Auschwitz*. Kansteiner approaches the epidemic again as a matter of politics, a problem with Adenauer's political policies towards the Nazi past in West Germany, a problem that was beginning to grow. Here Kansteiner also links the epidemic to Oberländer and the wider memory politics of the Christian Democratic Party in general.<sup>23</sup> Hence, Teschke, Marcuse and Kansteiner use the outbreak as an example of the wider discontent at the state of West Germany's relationship to its past at the end of the 1950s. Adenauer's biographer, Hans-Peter Schwarz similarly uses the epidemic to discuss Adenauer's relationship to the memory narratives of the Federal Republic, but does so to criticize the tendency to see Adenauer as out of touch. Instead, in this highly favourable biography, Schwarz tries to paint Adenauer as the "occidental statesman" and argues that this image of Adenauer as out of touch only emerged after his retirement during the student protests of the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> As opposed to brief summaries, and attempts to use the events of the swastika epidemic as a tool to study other phenomena, this thesis addresses a gap in the literature by examining the epidemic as an significant historical event, not as an aside in a wider narrative, but as an event of its own importance in post-war German history.

The study/memory of the Third Reich and the Holocaust loom large in the historiography of West Germany. Understanding the history of the postwar German

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<sup>22</sup> Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 209.

<sup>23</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 222-226.

<sup>24</sup> Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War, Revolution, and Reconstruction*, (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995), 431-433.

world requires understanding the wider trends, and continuities and changes, of German history up to that point. The intersecting histories of memory in postwar Germany, that of political and intellectual histories, cultural and social, cannot be separated from the Third Reich and the Holocaust. What becomes important to the historian studying postwar Germany is not the truth per se, the facts of the Holocaust alone, but rather the truths understood and expressed by the people of West Germany, the perpetrators, bystanders, and victims. How German memories of the war were expressed in the postwar era were intimately connected to not only the everyday vagaries of the Federal Republic, but also to how Germans saw their own histories, and their interpretations of National Socialism. The *Sonderweg* thesis, once used to explain Germany's rise to a global empire, was now used to explain the dark road to the Second World War and genocide.

The idea of a *Sonderweg*, or “special path” of German history has been prevalent since the end of the First World War. Some historians argued that German history was on a path which led to inevitable conflict, the special nature of German society and history contributing to a warlike and expansionist nature that was predisposed towards conflict. Prussian militarism, German nationalism, and modernity all came to a head in the Second World War, culminating in Auschwitz and the Holocaust.<sup>25</sup> The study of Antisemitism in Germany took on new dimensions as scholars linked the Antisemitic writings of Martin Luthor to the modern Antisemitism of the Third Reich. Major works by Lewis Namier, A.J.P. Taylor, Fritz Fischer, and Friedrich Meineke, all sought to find

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<sup>25</sup> Frank B. Tipton, *A History of Modern Germany since 1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7-9.

the critical turning point in German history, the turn that would lead to the Nazis and the Holocaust.<sup>26</sup> While there was substantial disagreement over when this turn took place, the “German Question” dominated early historiography of Germany, and thus was critical to early interpretations of the history of the Federal Republic.

While debates have raged between political, intellectual, diplomatic, and economic historians of postwar Germany since the end of the Second World War, the study of social and cultural history did not gain traction until the 1980s. Much of the historiography on postwar West Germany foregrounded political, diplomatic, and intellectual histories, focusing primarily on the main political actors of the state and its relationship with the rest of the Europe in a nation no longer on the *Sonderweg*.<sup>27</sup> According to Moeller, “much of this scholarship was based on the premise that politics were of little interest to most Germans in the immediate postwar period.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, Moeller says, “West Germans, politically alienated after the experience of National Socialism, retreated into the ostensibly non-political worlds of family, workplace, and community.”<sup>29</sup> Social historians began to explore these “non-political worlds” in the 1980s, and, as the field expanded, challenged long held notions in the field. By the 1980s, a focus on the concept of *Stunde Null*, or “zero hour,” had permeated discussions of German culture and society in the postwar era. For many, May 1945 represented a “zero hour” of German history, the endpoint of not only the political entity of the Third Reich but also the absolute rupture of societal and cultural trends up to that point,

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<sup>26</sup> Tipton, *A History of Modern Germany since 1815*, 7-9.

<sup>27</sup> Robert G. Moeller, *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Moeller, *West Germany Under Construction*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Moeller, *West Germany Under Construction*, 3.

including the final end of the *Sonderweg*. Adopted to emphasise the drastic changes in German society that occurred after the war and Allied occupation, *Stunde Null* also obscured the continuities in German history that remained vital to understanding the new Federal Republic. It also implicitly meant that the new Germany was not complicit in the crimes of the old Germany. West Germany, the new political, social, and cultural entity was not the Third Reich, therefore it was not responsible for the Third Reich's crimes.

In 1983 West German historian Werner Conze and historical sociologist M. Rainer Lepsius published a new volume that argued that the idea of *Stunde Null* ignored how some "characteristics of the Federal Republic were firmly grounded in the history of a unified German Reich."<sup>30</sup> The work of social historian Lutz Niethammer in the history of working peoples in the Ruhr valley would explode the *Stunde Null* way of thinking, as his oral interviews revealed that few ordinary Germans perceived May 1945 with the same importance as historians. As Robert Moeller explains, "if historians took seriously the importance of the cultural and political socialization that Germans brought with them from the 1920s and 1930s, it became meaningless to see 1945 as a *Stunde Null*, there was already far too much time on the clock."<sup>31</sup> Niethammer himself attempts to explain the importance of taking these socializations seriously by dispelling the fears of some of his contemporary historians that studying the people's experience smacks of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community), or that studying a single individual then allows a historian to wildly make generalizations of particular ideologies for entire peoples. Rather, he says, "this approach involves an interpretive attempt to grasp the

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<sup>30</sup> Moeller *West Germany Under Construction*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Moeller, *West Germany Under Construction*, 8.

multiplicity of experience and individuals' attempts to order and make sense of their everyday lives."<sup>32</sup> He further elaborates that "only on the basis of a nuanced study of experience can we historically constitute individuality within the mass, always remaining attentive, of course, to the particular sociocultural framework that so deeply shapes individuals and groups."<sup>33</sup>

Niethammer's ground-breaking study revealed that, far from seeing 1945 as a definitive endpoint, many Germans saw no difference between the totalitarian regime of the Nazis and the strict military occupation of the Allies.<sup>34</sup> No longer could German historians argue that 1945 represented a clear break with the past, for continuities abounded. Moeller notes that the subjects in Niethammer's study did not see traditionally important dates like the start of the Second World War or its end as significant changes to their ways of life, rather, events such as the Allied bombing campaigns of 1943 and the rising mass casualties on the Eastern Front after Stalingrad had a greater impact on their lives. Postwar the only significant change for many was that, in Moeller's words, "the exchange of one form of misery for another," as the bombings ended but the hunger began.<sup>35</sup> The work of Niethammer highlighted the flaws of *Stunde Null*, and asked questions of what continuities carried over into postwar West Germany. If, as Niethammer demonstrated, *Stunde Null* was not the abrupt separation of periods as historians had thought, what did this mean for the formation of narratives of public memory in West Germany, and the wider process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

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<sup>32</sup> Lutz Niethammer, "'Normalization' in the West: Traces of Memory Leading back into the 1950s," in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*. ed. by Hanna Schissler. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 238.

<sup>33</sup> Niethammer, "Normalization," p. 238.

<sup>34</sup> Rita Chin et al. *After the Nazi Racial State*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Moeller, *West Germany Under Construction*, 10.

in general? A similar question must also be asked of German attitudes towards Jews, and towards race. Historians, like Neithammer, began to understand that the continuities in German history had wide-ranging implications for the study of the post-war republic. The society that had rebuilt itself after the Second World War still had many disturbing similarities to the society that had started the war in the first place.

The continuities in German history became critical to the emergence of postwar memory narratives in the Federal Republic, and the subsequent attempts by historians to understand them. Theodor Adorno's public lecture in 1959 had taken up the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or "working through the past," but sought to challenge what this emerging intellectual idea must represent. Adorno insisted that this process must be ongoing, there was not one single answer to how to work through the past. This concept was adopted by intellectuals in West Germany at the time, and eventually evolved into a wider historical study of memory in postwar West Germany. Studying these intellectuals, Dirk Moses, in his book *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, seeks to challenge Whiggish assumptions of the linear progress of the transformation of German postwar memory. Instead, he argues that the changing nature of public memory is the manifestation of "an underlying structure of German political emotions," and that "this structure was inscribed in the subjectivities of Germans as individuals because their past, and therefore their collective identity, had been polluted and stigmatized by the criminal deeds of the German regime..."<sup>36</sup> Moses focuses on how the intellectuals of West Germany helped to shape the debates over memory, and how their concerns

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<sup>36</sup> A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

stemmed not just from questions of morality or philosophy, but rather the very real fear that, having failed to master the past, the Federal Republic could easily be destroyed by the same forces that destroyed the Weimar Republic in 1933.<sup>37</sup> The study of the past, then, had become more urgent.

Historians such as Wulf Kansteiner, John P. Teschke, and Norbert Frei have sought to understand the role that memory played in the politics of the Federal Republic. Frei especially focused on Konrad Adenauer's government and its policies of denazification. For Frei, Adenauer's politics during the 1950s focused on a specific "policy for the past," a political dynamic that sought to address wider desires in German society to address amnesty and integration for former Nazis.<sup>38</sup> Robert Moeller and Bill Niven are just two of the many scholars who sought to understand West German memory narratives in the postwar period. As shown above, Moeller has worked to emphasize the way in which Germans deliberately constructed their memories of the Second World War in the public sphere. Moeller and Niven's work has focused primarily on German society as a whole, while Jeffrey Herf seeks to bridge the gap between the social and the political in his book *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*. Herf shares Moses' disagreement with a Whiggish concept of linear mastery of the past, speaking of what he calls "multiple restorations."<sup>39</sup> The rise in consciousness of the need to confront the past emerged not only through a generational difference, but through the restoration of an anti-Nazi tradition that had been suppressed in 1933. Herf also maintains that politics remains a critical aspect of the formation of

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<sup>37</sup> Moses, *German Intellectuals*, 169.

<sup>38</sup> Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), xii.

<sup>39</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 3.

public memory, writing that the goal of his book was to show “the importance of politics for shaping the way a society thinks about its past while at the same time drawing attention to the autonomous weight that traditions and interpretive frameworks exert on political life.”<sup>40</sup> Understanding the formation of public memory in West Germany then requires a holistic approach which appreciates the wider continuities in German history, acknowledging that the *Stunde Null* is not accurate and knowing that many political and social continuities played an important role in how Germans remembered the Nazi past. It also means understanding that both West German society and its politics worked together to shape the narratives of German wartime experience in the Federal Republic as much as intellectuals at the time also pushed for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. These continuities also play an important role in understanding Antisemitism in Germany, and the way that historians have approached Antisemitism in postwar West Germany.

The study of Antisemitism in Germany has been subject to many of the same wider issues and debates that have affected the wider history of the country, while also being subject to the debates raging within the historiography of Antisemitism in Europe. Jonathon Judaken, in the October 2018 *American Historical Review* writes “anti-Semitism requires rethinking. Unlike anti-black racism, racism, nationalism, postcolonialism, or feminism, anti-Semitism remains under-theorized.”<sup>41</sup> The definition of Antisemitism is itself a contentious historical debate, as most scholars have come to use it to specify the racialized hatred that Marr first used *Antisemitismus* to describe. But this debate often falls prey to the same pitfalls of the German *Sonderweg* thesis,

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<sup>40</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Judaken, ‘Introduction’. *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (1 October 2018): 1122.

knowing that Auschwitz is the ultimate peak of Antisemitism, historians begin to work backward rather than forward, and fall prey to the same teleological problems of *Sonderweg*. Antisemitism, then, becomes a product of modernity, born out of the racial science of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and characterized in Germany by its eliminationist rhetoric that would ultimately lead to the Holocaust. *Antisemitismus*, becomes another uniquely German idea, one that began with Martin Luther during the Protestant Reformation, and was transformed by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century into the Antisemitism that would become one more step on the path to Auschwitz. This conception has already been misused by historians such as Daniel Goldhagen to reinforce misguided *Sonderweg*-equivalent views of the uniqueness of German history, one that misrepresents facts and ignores the greater nuances of the field. Jerome Friedman, writing in 1987, took exception to a singular focus on explaining German Antisemitism, seeking to root the racialization of anti-Jewish hatred not in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, or even in the writings of Martin Luther, but in that of the “pure blood laws” promulgated in sixteenth century Spain. Friedman argues that, as Spain forcibly converted its Jews, it became difficult to distinguish between these “New Christians” and gentile Christians. Courts of Inquisition were insufficient to root out these heretics because, as Friedman points out “Unlike [other heretics] ... crypto-Jews, would deceitfully affirm any and all tenets of orthodox faith and anything else required of them. It was assumed Marranos would say the expedient thing and hence Inquisition authorities dismissed statements of faith in Christianity as meaningless.”<sup>42</sup> Hence Spain passed laws that established genetic tests for Jewishness, similar to the Nuremberg Laws of the Third Reich. Thus, Friedman argues, the

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<sup>42</sup> Jerome Friedman, ‘Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism’. *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, no. 1 (1987): 15.

racialization of anti-Jewish hatred and the development of Antisemitism can be traced back to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, not the 19<sup>th</sup> as previously believed. Gavin Langmuir also shifts the development of Antisemitism even further backwards, to the Middle Ages, where he sees a definite shift from anti-Judaism to what he describes as a “socially significant chimerical hostility against Jews.”<sup>43</sup> “Chimerical assertions,” Langmuir writes, “are propositions that grammatically attribute with certitude to an outgroup and all its members characteristics that have never been empirically observed.”<sup>44</sup> Thus Antisemitism can be defined by its irrationality, one that is attributed to an entire “outgroup,” in this case, the Jews. This irrationality first emerged, according to Langmuir, in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, as rumours of Jews poisoning wells and causing the Black Death abounded in Europe, despite having no foundation in reality. Friedman and Langmuir then challenge the assertions made by historians who position Antisemitism as uniquely modern, centering on Germany and the Holocaust.<sup>45</sup> This debate, then, plays an important role in establishing the very nature of Antisemitism in Germany.

In seeking to explain the Holocaust, historian Daniel Goldhagen focused on the eliminationist nature of Antisemitism in Germany. By the *fin de siècle*, he argues, Germans were assured of the dangers posed by the Jews and their need to be eliminated.<sup>46</sup> This, according to Helmut Walser Smith, severely overstates the influence that eliminationist narratives had in the German Empire at the time. Instead, Smith

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<sup>43</sup> Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 328.

<sup>44</sup> Langmuir, *Towards*, 328.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Judaken, ‘Introduction’. *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (1 October 2018): 1130.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 72.

builds on the work of many other historians to posit that the eliminationist rhetoric found on the fringes of political debate in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century became entangled with other racist rhetoric, condoning, for example, the destruction of the Herero and Nama peoples in German South-West Africa.<sup>47</sup> This confluence then becomes entangled with less extreme forms of violence, such as resettlement, and entangled with ideas of imperial expansion. Perhaps then, the violence of the Holocaust can only be placed in the Third Reich, with what historians call the “Nazi racial state.” But if the unique conditions that led to the Holocaust are a result of the Third Reich, and not the *Sonderweg*, what then does this mean for Antisemitism in the Federal Republic? In the postwar period, Antisemitism became an important marker for the perceived “denazification” of Germany, but as we shall see scholarship has since complicated this understanding.

Postwar Germany saw many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust attempt to rebuild a life for themselves. Historians exploring the period often studied Jewish displaced persons (DPs) as a transitory people, separate from other DPs and the Germans themselves, waiting to emigrate from West Germany to Israel.<sup>48</sup> As Frank Stern writes, “the Jewish chapter of this period, as an integral part of postwar German history, has been left out.”<sup>49</sup> Most research done on the Jewish remnant (*She’erith Hapletah* in Hebrew), studied them as an isolated group of survivors without examining the social and political context of Germany at the time.<sup>50</sup> This led to a need for studying what Stern

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<sup>47</sup> Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 167-168.

<sup>48</sup> Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, p. 5,6.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Stern, “The Historic Triangle: Occupiers, Germans, and Jews in Postwar Germany,” in *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era*, ed. by Robert G. Moeller. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 200.

<sup>50</sup> Stern, “The Historic Triangle,” 200.

called “the historic triangle” of “Allied soldiers, defeated Germans, and liberated Jews,” and understanding the survival of Jewish people in the wider context of the postwar period.<sup>51</sup> Historian Atina Grossmann has done substantial work on this phenomenon, publishing her book *Jews, Germans, and Allies* in 2007. In it she explores the interactions and the plethora of experiences of Germans, Jewish DPs, non-Jewish DPs, and their American occupiers, especially through the gendered lens of women in wartime. She fully embraces and seeks to explore this “historic triangle,” to better describe the social history of this unique period of intermingling immediately after the war.<sup>52</sup>

By exploring how continuities affected the development of German Antisemitism and racism, authors Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Atina Grossmann, and Geoff Eley, in their book *After the Nazi Racial State* hope to better explain the historic development of race in West Germany in the same way other historians used this social turn to explore West German history. In their Introduction, Chin and Fehrenbach, explain that “our intervention seeks to demonstrate that the question of race remained at the very center of social policy and collective imagination during the occupation years, as the western Allies worked to democratize Germany, and during the Bonn Republic.”<sup>53</sup> For them, “taking seriously the issue of continuity would also open up new avenues of inquiry across the entire span of German history.”<sup>54</sup> They also stress that, postwar, conceptions of race shifted from now-taboo biological definitions to more subtle discussions of culture. Cultural incompatibility became one of the new ways to discuss

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<sup>51</sup> Stern, “The Historic Triangle,” 200.

<sup>52</sup> Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Chin et al, *After the Nazi Racial State*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Chin et al, *After the Nazi Racial State*, 10.

race, reframing the debate in ways that cast aside the pure blood laws of the past and focused on “fundamental differences in people.”<sup>55</sup> While many might consider Antisemitism to be founded on principles of hatred different than those used to justify racism towards people of colour, the authors take special care to point out that the racialized nature of Antisemitism was explicitly included in definitions of racism in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>56</sup> The postwar shift to bifurcate race and Antisemitism, and the shift from biology to culture, inherently changed how West Germans saw Jewish people. The Antisemitism on display during the swastika epidemic was born out of a number of factors, as historians have shown, and the association of Antisemitism with Nazism cannot fully explain the longer continuities of Antisemitism in German history. Thus the swastika epidemic must be understood within these greater continuities.

This thesis seeks to place the swastika epidemic within these greater continuities. Chapter One provides an overview of the development of relevant events in the history of postwar Germany up to 1960. It begins with a brief overview of the denazification policies of the Allies, and the political formation of the Federal Republic. After the election of Konrad Adenauer in 1949, his government sought to reduce denazification and grant amnesty to those persecuted in the denazification process, a series of policies that would eventually lead to the unrest of the 1960s as many ex-Nazis were allowed to reintegrate into public life. The chapter also examines policies such as restitution for Jewish Holocaust survivors and reparations for the state of Israel as a way to outline Adenauer’s governmental policies regarding the crimes of National Socialism. Next, the

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<sup>55</sup> Chin et al, *After the Nazi Racial State*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Chin et al, *After the Nazi Racial State*, 3.

formation of postwar memory narratives are examined, to understand how most West Germans publicly remembered their wartime experiences. Finally, Antisemitism in postwar West Germany would become an increasingly vexing issue for Adenauer, as an increasing number of Antisemitic scandals frustrated a population that increasingly saw that the past was not so much overcome as it was ignored, and thus a brief overview of Antisemitism in West Germany since the end of the Second World War is provided.

Chapter Two presents a detailed chronological study of the first few weeks of the swastika epidemic. Beginning with the Cologne synagogue vandalism on 25 December 1959, the chapter studies the events up to Adenauer's television address of 16 January 1960. Using newspaper editorials, statements from prominent Jewish groups, and public protests, the chapter seeks to understand public and governmental reactions to the epidemic and analyse the ways Adenauer decided to react to the outbreak. Chapter Three continues this process, by extending the chronology of events through the end of January and into February, as the outbreak continued, and Adenauer's government was forced to modify their approach. By studying the evolving ways in which Adenauer reacted, the chapter seeks to put Adenauer's policies within the wider context of the period and his own ideological beliefs.

The Conclusion provides detailed analysis of the epidemic, and its aftermath, and places the events of 1959/1960 into the broader history of the post-war Federal Republic. After eleven years of leading the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer and his CDU were confronted with what they regarded as a small foreign relations problem. The swastika epidemic led to widespread protest and international condemnation of the continuing presence of Nazism and Antisemitism in West

Germany. But Adenauer believed that the outbreak was little more than hooligans and Communist agitators seeking to undermine his reputation. Understanding his eleven years of leadership explains why Adenauer's guiding vision of the formation of a new Germany was based on the amnesty and reintegration of many former Nazis. Only through moving on from the past could Germans come together and rebuild a shattered country. For eleven years, it appeared to work. To be sure, not all Germans held the same convictions as Adenauer, and there are many examples of unrest stemming from former Nazis or those protesting their continued freedom, but overall most Germans were only too happy to substitute a narrative of Germans as perpetrators with one of Germans as victims. By December 1959, when two men vandalised the *Roonstrasse* synagogue, this sentiment had begun to shift. To many in the US and UK, the swastika epidemic proved that West Germany had still not overcome its Nazi past, and that many Germans remembered Hitler just as the man who had built the autobahn. For some Germans, the outbreak confirmed what they already knew to be true, that West Germany had failed to articulate the vision of reconciliation that men like Kurt Schumacher had maintained was critical to the success of a new democracy. But for Germans of a younger generation, the same generation from which most of the perpetrators would come, the epidemic represented a changing way in which they saw their country's past, and their parents' and grandparents' role in the Third Reich. The epidemic saw Adenauer's image challenged, and the beginning of the questioning of past that would become one of the main issues of the protests of 1968 in West Germany.

## Chapter One

### **“Is Nazism Dead and Buried?” The Federal Republic of Germany, 1945-1959**

In his 1961 book, *The New Germany and the Old Nazis*, Tete Harens Tetens writes “People often wonder where the millions of Nazis have disappeared to, all those who once hailed and faithfully served the Fuehrer... have they all become thoroughly reformed democrats, so that Nazism is ‘dead and buried?’”<sup>57</sup> West Germany on the eve of the swastika epidemic in 1959 was a remarkably changed country from the Third Reich of 1945. Setting aside even the partition of the country into East and West, the political, cultural, and economic changes that West Germany underwent in fifteen years rendered it nearly unrecognizable from the shattered country that surrendered on 8 May 1945. But how much Germans had changed in their beliefs was not as obvious. Real questions remained about German commitment to democracy, the status of Nazis both in the new government and in society in general, and Antisemitism in West German society. These questions were intimately linked with both the formation of the Federal Republic and the intervening years in which Konrad Adenauer and his ruling centre-right coalition sought to build this new Republic. This chapter traces the development of postwar West Germany’s policies towards the past, starting with the denazification campaigns of the Allies, then by examining the push for amnesty led by Konrad Adenauer’s government, and the development of new narratives of wartime experiences in the public sphere of German society. Finally, the chapter examines the persistent

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<sup>57</sup> Tetens, *The New Germany*, 22, 23.

problem of Antisemitism in West Germany, as a way to contextualize the multifaceted reactions to the swastika epidemic.

By Germany's surrender in 1945, the question of what was to become of the defeated country was still in doubt. The occupying Allies had debated the postwar order as far back as 1943, and an eventual decision was made to split the country into occupation zones managed by the British, American, French and Soviet armies respectively.<sup>58</sup> For the Western Allies, however, what kind of postwar political order would take shape was still being questioned, especially as the only example of democracy on which Germans could build was that of the failed Weimar Republic. Immediately after the war, pro-democratic, anti-fascist German groups in the western occupation zones were disbanded, despite their open opposition to National Socialism and their efforts to fight against SS divisions in Bavaria. "This disbanding of 'antifas,' or indigenous German democratic groups," Mary Fulbrook writes, "was symptomatic – in both the western and Soviet zones – of the way in which the Allies sought to impose their own, differing, conceptions of the reorganization of German political life."<sup>59</sup> For the Allies, there was little confidence that a country that had voted for Hitler's Nazis only twelve years previously could be trusted to rebuild their own democracy.

This uncertainty over postwar occupation policies extended into the realm of denazification as well. Although all the major parties agreed that Nazis had to be removed from public life, only in the Nuremberg trials did the major powers cooperate in bringing Nazis to account, and while the Soviets saw National Socialism as a

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<sup>58</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany, 1918-2008: The Divided Nation*. (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 114.

<sup>59</sup> Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 118.

structural issue requiring a complete socioeconomic shift, the West saw it as an individualistic problem.<sup>60</sup> This meant that denazification in the western occupation zones primarily focused on rehabilitation, and identifying and classifying the extent to which Germans had supported or participated in the Nazi regime. Rather than an “artificial revolution” aimed at eliminating Nazis from society, denazification became a policy of rehabilitation as much as it had been about getting rid of Nazis.<sup>61</sup> Questionnaires were created and distributed that classified Germans in one of five categories: major offenders, offenders, lesser offenders, followers or fellow-travellers, and exonerated.<sup>62</sup> Individuals would then be assessed by a tribunal, and given a classification based on their answers. The tribunal system often meant the classifications could be interpreted differently based on the zone of occupation they were used in, for example 90% of respondents were exonerated in the British zone while only 30% were exonerated in the American. However, more people were classified as fellow-travelers in the American zone than in the British zone.<sup>63</sup> This discrepancy reveals how even the Americans and British diverged in their thinking regarding denazification. For the Americans, the need to reconstruct Germany in the face of a quickly changing postwar world order meant that the desire to prosecute was outweighed by the consolidation of a new potential ally.<sup>64</sup> The British however, approached denazification as the victors in two wars against Germany in fifty years. Heavily influenced by the ideas of the *Sonderweg* thesis, convinced that National Socialism was not a random accident, and that the German

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<sup>60</sup> Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 123-124.

<sup>61</sup> Ian D. Turner. *Reconstruction in Post-War Germany: British Occupation Policy and the Western Zones, 1945-55*. (Oxford, UK; New York; New York: Berg; St. Martin's Press, 1989) 240.

<sup>62</sup> Fulbrook *A History of Germany*, 127.

<sup>63</sup> Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, p. 127.

<sup>64</sup> Turner, *Reconstruction in Post-War Germany*, 241.

people were not necessarily inherently suitable to democracy, the British did not believe that replacing all Nazis with other Germans would necessarily solve the problem.<sup>65</sup> Thus, British policy diverged from American policy by focusing primarily on Nazis in positions of political leadership, allowing many party members to avoid persecution, especially in industry.<sup>66</sup> Denazification policies throughout occupied Germany were ever-changing, and evolved as the years of occupation wore on and rebuilding began. Critics of the system became more vocal as the years wore on and very real problems with denazification were revealed and protested. For example, the nature of the American review system meant that lower-level Nazi party officials were often dealt with first, meaning that by the time the backlog of major cases were addressed attitudes had changed and these higher-level Nazis received more lenient treatment.<sup>67</sup> But even as criticism of the Allies' denazification policies grew, German political leaders prepared to form a new democratic government that would see the end of Allied occupation and the return of political control to Germans.

Many German political leaders shared some of the Allies' discontent. Most remembered that the National Socialists had only ever won 37% of the vote by 1933 (in an election characterized by intimidation and voter suppression by the Nazis), and that the right-wing order of businessmen and *Junkers*, the landed elite, had been all too eager to betray the Weimar democracy and install Hitler as Chancellor.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the Third Reich had still technically used the Weimar Republic's constitution until its collapse; though its provisions had been suspended by Hitler beginning in 1933, it represents an

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<sup>65</sup> Turner, *Reconstruction in Post-War Germany*, 242.

<sup>66</sup> Turner, *Reconstruction in Post-War Germany*, 249.

<sup>67</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 20.

<sup>68</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 340, 352.

important continuity between Weimar and the Third Reich.<sup>69</sup> With the rising tension between the West and the Soviet Union and its virtual destruction by the Nazis, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in the FRG was practically nonexistent (it would eventually be banned in 1956), leaving the Social Democratic Party of Germany as the only major political party in postwar Germany that had mounted any significant resistance to the Nazis. Indeed, it was the only party to vote against the Enabling Act of 1933 (the Communists had effectively been banned by that point), which had allowed Hitler to bypass elected officials and establish his dictatorship.<sup>70</sup> As a result, both the confidence of the Allies and German politicians that West Germany could democratize was not high. The political class that became the leaders of the infant Federal Republic had nearly all reached political maturity in the years before Hitler's rise to power, heavily influencing their perceptions and confidence in the establishment of the new democracy.<sup>71</sup>

Kurt Schumacher had become leader of the SPD in 1946, after he broke away from the Socialist Central Committee in Berlin, opposing their cooperation with the Soviets and Communists. A member of the Reichstag during Weimar, Schumacher had been imprisoned in 1933 and spent ten years in concentration camps including Dachau.<sup>72</sup> Schumacher was also staunchly anti-Communist.<sup>73</sup> Because of this, Schumacher was widely seen as morally above reproach, an authority untouched by the taint of Nazi associations. In contrast, Konrad Adenauer, leader of the CDU, had remained in

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<sup>69</sup> Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 354.

<sup>70</sup> Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 353.

<sup>71</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 3, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Tipton, *A History of Modern Germany*, 540.

<sup>73</sup> Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 120.

Germany during the Nazi period, stepping down as mayor of Cologne and had effectively gone into internal exile, avoiding politics and maintaining a low profile after refusing to join the Nazis.<sup>74</sup> Despite his opposition to the Nazis, Adenauer did not have the same resistance credentials as Schumacher, and spent most of the war in quiet retirement, only being arrested by the Nazis near the end of the war. In the election of 1949, Schumacher and Adenauer articulated diametrically opposing visions of the new Federal Republic. Both understood and worried about the so-called “German Question,” and Allied concerns about democratization, but their responses were very different. Schumacher firmly believed that a nation built on memory and justice was the only way forward for Germany. Its long history of social democracy could be the basis on which to build a new, neutral West Germany.<sup>75</sup> Konrad Adenauer disagreed. His perception of German history meant that only Western integration with a strong capitalist economy could prevent another totalitarian state. For Adenauer, the continued persecution of former Nazis created an environment in which resentment and fear could destroy attempts to democratize West Germany.<sup>76</sup> A vote for Adenauer then, became a vote for the end of denazification, and a vote for moving on from the past, towards a new future of Western integration. The election of 1949 saw voters choose Adenauer’s vision, or at least, some variation of it. Though his CDU and the Bavarian Christian Social Union achieved a relatively narrow victory, with 139 seats compared to the SPD’s 131, the 52 seats won by the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which also advocated for an end to denazification, meant that for now at least, the German people had chosen to move on

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<sup>74</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 210-211.

<sup>75</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 268.

<sup>76</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 277, 270.

from, rather than commit to the strong commitment to justice articulated by Schumacher.<sup>77</sup> The implicit policies of Adenauer's CDU and indeed the perception of many Germans at the time is best described by German philosopher Hermann Lübbe: "partial silence... [was] a social-psychological and political necessity for the transformation of our postwar population into the citizenry of the Federal Republic."<sup>78</sup> Or, as Herf puts it "West Germans could foster either memory and justice or democracy but not both."<sup>79</sup> That is not to say the Germans did not talk about the past at all, indeed the policies and practises of the West German government in the 1950s, especially those of amnesty and restitution, were built upon what Historian Robert Moeller calls "selective remembrance."<sup>80</sup> The politics of memory remained an important political issue in the Federal Republic of Germany, one that would manifest in several different ways that help to contextualize the swastika epidemic.

One of the first issues tackled by the Federal Republic was the amnesty of former Nazis. There was widespread public support for the end of denazification and the release of convicted war criminals. As such it remained an important issue for the government for most of the 1950s. The amnesty of former Nazis served to reinforce the "partial silence" of the postwar period and was a key plank in the *Vergangenheitspolitik* (what Norbert Frei calls "policy for the past") of the Adenauer era, as Germans sought to forgive and forget, especially because they saw the denazification measures imposed by the Allies as punitive and unfair.<sup>81</sup> Indeed a new term, *Entnazifizierungsgeschädigten*,

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<sup>77</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 270.

<sup>78</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Moeller "Remembering the War," 89.

<sup>81</sup> Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past*, xii.

was coined to describe those individuals who felt they had been wrongfully harmed by denazification.<sup>82</sup> One of the first actions of Konrad Adenauer's government in 1949 was to begin developing a law that would provide a blanket amnesty for crimes that carried a sentence of less than one year or 10 000 *D-marks* in fines. While the various Justice departments of the *Länder* (states) had various complaints and minor changes to suggest, support for the bill was overwhelming. Ostensibly, the bill would pardon many Germans for economic (black market) related crimes and other minor offenses that took place in the postwar period. However, Adenauer's government was fully aware that the bill would undercut most of the minor charges handed down by denazification courts.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the "General Inspector of the Central Judicial Office of the British Zone," Friedrich Meyer-Abich, personally complained to Thomas Dehler, West German Justice Minister, that the verdicts of the *Spruchgerichte* were not included in the bill. The *Spruchgerichte* were courts established in the British occupation zone to punish Germans for membership in criminal organizations, such as the SS and SA. These verdicts, punishing "conscious membership," did not indict individuals for specific crimes, but more generally for their membership in Nazi organisation deemed "criminal" by the Allies. This meant that members of a criminal organization might be receiving a harsher sentence than someone actually convicted of a war crime, if that person qualified for amnesty.<sup>84</sup> With this complaint in mind those convicted by the *Spruchgerichte* were added to the bill. Clearly, then, the amnesty bill explicitly, as well as implicitly, targeted former Nazis. To be clear, this sentiment was not expressed by Dehler when he

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<sup>82</sup> Frei, *Adenauer's Germany*, xii-xiii.

<sup>83</sup> Frei *Adenauer's Germany*, 7, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Frei, *Adenauer's Germany*, 8, 9.

introduced the bill into the *Bundestag*, but it was understood by all the parties in the legislature what this bill was meant to do.<sup>85</sup> Adenauer had articulated this in September 1949 when he called for a “*tabula rasa*,” a reset for the new democracy.<sup>86</sup> The “Law for Granting Exemption for Punishment” came into effect on December 31, 1949, having been approved by the Allied High Commission.<sup>87</sup> Estimates place the number of people that qualified for amnesty at 792 176; the total number who were Nazi perpetrators cannot be determined, but it is likely that a great deal of them were former Nazis.<sup>88</sup>

At the same time, the Americans undertook a review of the war criminals sentenced under the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings after widespread pressure from the German public. When the American High Commissioner of Germany (HICOG) surveyed public opinions on the Nuremberg Trials, they found that public opinion that the trials had been unfair had climbed from 6% in 1946 to 30% in 1949.<sup>89</sup> Thus HICOG believed that the perceived severity of the war crimes trials should be addressed. A new working group, the Advisory Board on Clemency for War Criminals, reviewed 105 cases of German soldiers convicted of war crimes and recommended commutation or reductions in 85 cases.<sup>90</sup> Though the Americans had been pressured by the West Germans, they fully understood the nature of these protests. American High Commissioner John McCloy worried that Germans were refusing to come to terms with the nature of their crimes, telling members of the *Bundestag* that Germans should have

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<sup>85</sup> Frei, *Adenauer's Germany*, 13, 14.

<sup>86</sup> Frei, *Adenauer's Germany*, 6, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Frei, *Adenauer's Germany*, 19.

<sup>88</sup> Frei, *Adenauer's Germany*, 23.

<sup>89</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 274.

<sup>90</sup> Valerie Hebert, *Hitler's Generals on Trial: The Last War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg*. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 163.

to “face the issue squarely and understand the enormity of what had been done.”<sup>91</sup>

Despite McCloy’s misgivings, the new German state continued to offer amnesty to former Nazis and release minor offenders. Another bill passed in 1954 extended amnesty for crimes committed that did not carry a sentence of more than three years. Again, this bill was motivated by a number of different factors, including amnesty for displaced persons who had no legal status in postwar Germany and did what they needed to survive, but again it was understood that this bill was more of a way to bury and move on from the past, as SPD Walter Menzel later stated: “Through this amnesty, all those who had so murderously and bestially assaulted helpless and defenseless people before 1945 were pardoned...”<sup>92</sup> One of the first actions of the West German government was to pass a law implicitly offering amnesty to former Nazi perpetrators. This was not a coincidence as support for the “past-political” groups that pushed for amnesty and reintegration of former Nazis back into public life was substantial, and, as Lübbe and Herf have noted, critical to the formation of the new German state. Adenauer knew and understood this fact. However, it would be wrong to describe support for the *Entnazifizierungsgeschädigten* as universal or Adenauer’s government as single-minded.

Denazification was just one of the monumental tasks facing the new Federal Republic in the 1950s. Flush with refugees from all corners of Europe, and confronted with cities of rubble, the Federal Republic was faced with the formidable task of rebuilding a country shattered by war. But West Germany was also challenged with an even greater task: to create a new national identity in a post-Nazi racial state. As we

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<sup>91</sup> Hebert, *Hitler’s Generals*, 166.

<sup>92</sup> Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany*, 69, 71, 91.

have seen, the search for a new German identity in West Germany was heavily influenced by the election of Konrad Adenauer's CDU. Making the FRG a firm ally of the West, with a priority on reintegration and the creation of a new normalcy centered around Western capitalism and consumerism, was the priority of Adenauer's government in the early years of the FRG.<sup>93</sup> This new identity would also be heavily shaped by the wartime experience of the Germans themselves. Millions of displaced persons (DPs) found themselves in West Germany at the end of the war, and millions more refugees would flee to the Western occupation zones immediately after the war ended. Many of these DPs were not German, many were victims of the concentration camp systems and Holocaust survivors or had been forcibly relocated to Germany during the war to work as slave labour. Millions more refugees were ethnic Germans forced to flee their homes in Eastern Europe, either by the Red Army or vengeful neighbours.<sup>94</sup> But the dominant memory of the war, and one that would form the basis for much the FRG's discourse on memory, was that of the ordinary German as victim, not of National Socialism per se, but rather a victim of the war that in the words of Robert Moeller, "Hitler had started but everyone had lost."<sup>95</sup> Indeed, Adenauer himself stated as much in September 1951, when he admitted that "Unspeakable crimes were committed in the name of the German people..."<sup>96</sup> Crimes had not been committed **by** the German people, but rather in their name, by unnamed culprits. Germans were able to remove themselves from their roles as perpetrators by embracing narratives of German

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<sup>93</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 269, 270.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Moeller, "The Politics of the Past in the 1950s" in *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* ed. by William John Niven, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 31.

<sup>95</sup> Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>96</sup> Moeller, "Remembering the War," 86.

victimhood, a disassociation made clearer by understanding how many Germans interpreted their wartime experience.

The majority of people living in the Third Reich had not been subjected to the racial violence and ideological oppression of the Nazis, rather they had suffered materially, in the shortages in necessities, the aerial bombing of German cities, and the mass sexual violence committed by the occupying Allies.<sup>97</sup> In fact, this suffering continued into the postwar years. As social historian Lutz Niethammer has shown through his Ruhr oral testimony project, many Germans identified the turning point of their lives during the Third Reich not at the start of the war, or even its end. Rather they emphasized a shift in their standard of living after January 1943, as losses increased on the Eastern Front after the German defeat at Stalingrad and the intensification of Allied bombing campaigns over major cities. The end of the war did not necessarily bring an end to German suffering, many saw little difference between their wartime experience and life during Allied occupation. Niethammer identifies the currency reform of 1948 as the major turning point in the lives of Germans affected by the war.<sup>98</sup> Thus for the vast majority of Germans violence as a result of the war characterized their victimization more so than any political ideology or racial identity. It became easier to portray the whole country as one that suffered from the violence of war. German politicians echoed these sentiments with the rejection of any notion of “collective guilt” and as we have

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<sup>97</sup> For more information on mass sexual violence perpetrated by occupation forces, see Mary Louise Roberts' *What Soldiers Do*, and Miriam Gebhart's *Crimes Unspoken: The Rape of German Women at the end of the Second World War*.

<sup>98</sup> Niethammer, “Normalization,” 237, 238.

seen, were only too eager to seek reconciliation for some of those charged with crimes committed during National Socialism.<sup>99</sup>

Another source of voices to add to the narrative of German victimhood were the German refugees forced from their homes in the East, some from their traditional homelands now redistributed amongst the newly liberated countries of Eastern Europe, and others from abortive Nazi attempts at colonization. These expellees had suffered immensely at the hands of the Red Army and postwar Eastern European governments, and some eight million people now found themselves homeless in the new Federal Republic.<sup>100</sup> Adenauer stressed the need to address these people's needs in many of his early speeches, and his government established a Ministry for Expellees, Refugees, and War-Damaged at the cabinet-level.<sup>101</sup> This new ministry was even headed by an expellee, Hans Lukaschek, who had lived in the region of Upper Silesia in what is now Poland.<sup>102</sup> This group of people would be an important bloc of voters in the new Federal Republic, and they were often courted by all the major political parties for their support. The new ministry immediately launched a project to write an official history of the expulsion by collecting testimony from expellees. A number of prominent academics who themselves had formerly lived in territories taken from Germany were appointed to the project's editorial board. The project was a massive undertaking, 11000 eyewitness accounts were collected to form the core of the project, and eight volumes were eventually published, the last in 1961.<sup>103</sup> There is no way to tell how many Germans

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<sup>99</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, 25.

<sup>100</sup> Moeller, "The Politics of the Past," 31.

<sup>101</sup> Moeller, "Remembering the War," 89.

<sup>102</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, 35.

<sup>103</sup> Moeller, "Remembering the War," 91, 92.

actually read these documents, but Moeller notes that this official account served to corroborate what many Germans had already believed about their wartime experience, and the experiences expressed in other personal accounts and in West German media.<sup>104</sup> Though the expellees' experiences formed an important part of postwar memory politics, the fate of German POWs would come to dominate the FRG, and become one of Adenauer's key policy initiatives.

In 1949 an estimated 1.5-2 million POWs were still unaccounted for, presumably still in captivity in the Soviet Union.<sup>105</sup> The release of these POWs became an important policy initiative in the new FRG, and an important narrative in the postwar discourse. Adenauer had spoken of the importance of the missing POWs as early as 1946, and many in West Germany had long extolled the importance to remember the missing POWs.<sup>106</sup> In 1955, when on a diplomatic mission to Moscow, Konrad Adenauer managed to negotiate the release of over 9000 POWs still held in the Soviet Union, along with civilian men and women who had been deported as forced labour or arrested as spies. Adenauer had ostensibly travelled to Moscow to improve relations with the Soviet Union, with the eventual goal of reunification, but the West German press and public treated his negotiations as a great diplomatic coup, and a major event in the fledgling country's history. The return of the last of the German POWs symbolically marked the end of the war for many Germans, whose family members had finally been returned to them.<sup>107</sup> A memorialization project similar to that of the expellees was launched, to preserve the memory of the POW's experiences. In 1967 a public opinion

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<sup>104</sup> Moeller "Remembering the War," 95.

<sup>105</sup> Moeller "The Politics of the Past," 31.

<sup>106</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 222.

<sup>107</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, 88-89.

survey showed that 75% of respondents placed Adenauer's negotiation of the release of prisoners as first among his accomplishments, a staggering number when you consider Adenauer had been Chancellor for over a decade and presided over the reconstruction of the country.<sup>108</sup> The predominant theme of the return of the POWs was their suffering at the hands of the Communists, much like the expellees. In this manner the prioritization of these memory narratives over victims of the Nazis meant that Germans were presented with an account of the Second World War that left them as victims, not perpetrators or even bystanders in the crimes of the Nazis.

The emphasis of these narratives of German victimhood, especially as victims of Communism, allowed for the creation of false equivalencies between German victims of Communism in the East and Jewish victims of the Nazis. German media depicted mass German suffering through film and literature throughout the postwar period, and a national narrative of suffering was constructed in which German perpetrators remained the faceless oppressors of Adenauer's early speeches.<sup>109</sup> No mention was made of the preceding violence against the Soviet Union that Germany had committed, only the survivors of a brave struggle against Communist oppression remained. To be sure, Germans did acknowledge Jewish victims, but often in ways that sidelined and ignored other victim groups of Nazi violence.<sup>110</sup> This recognition granted to Jewish victims, however, was continually undermined by comparisons to German victimhood, and they never entertained the same level of government interest or support. For example, Jewish victims never had a dedicated ministry at the cabinet level to deal with their issues as

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<sup>108</sup> Moeller, "Remembering the War," 90, 96.

<sup>109</sup> Moeller, "Remembering the War," 98.

<sup>110</sup> Moeller, "Remembering the War," 87.

expellees did, and no national project to commit Jewish memory of the war to paper was ever pursued by Adenauer's government, as they did for POWs and expellees. However, this is not to say that no work was done by the Adenauer government to address Jewish victims. Jewish survivors, the newly formed state of Israel, and the concurrent policies of the Adenauer government would all push Jewish issues into the spotlight in the early 1950s.

When film director Veit Harlan was put on trial for his role in directing the virulently Antisemitic movie *Jud Süß* (1940) in 1947-49, many demonstrated in support of Harlan while students began counter-demonstrations in protest against his work. Harlan was eventually acquitted, the judge ruling that although the film was indeed Antisemitic propaganda, Harlan could only be held responsible for the artistic decisions. Instead, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels was the one actually responsible for the film's Antisemitic content. Harlan returned to his career as a director, and his subsequent films would later be picketed by student protestors.<sup>111</sup> Harlan's case demonstrates how closely tied Antisemitism in postwar Germany was to issues of denazification and rebuilding. During the trial, Antisemitic attacks were made against witnesses, and counter protestors were often called "Jewish mercenaries."<sup>112</sup> This case demonstrates both the push for the end of denazification and the still-complex relationship with Jewish people in the new West German state.

Though amnesty and an end to denazification were both important parts of *Vergangenheitspolitik*, questions of restitution for Jewish victims were also raised and

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<sup>111</sup> Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, 12, 13.

<sup>112</sup> Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, 13.

addressed. Allied postwar occupation policies obligated the return of Jewish property “acquired” after 1933 to their original owners or their heirs, however there was significant pushback to this, especially to return homes and small businesses. Restitution of property was often used to portray Jews in a negative light, reinforcing old stereotypes of greed. Some Germans suggested that pushing for restitution actually bred resentment and encouraged Antisemitism.<sup>113</sup> The national debate on restitution shifted in 1951 when the state of Israel sent a statement to each of the occupying powers requesting restitution payments from both West and East Germany. A figure of at least \$1.5 billion was requested, based on the cost of resettling approximately 500 000 European Jews in Israel. Adenauer responded to the Israeli request on September 27, 1951 stating, “The government of the Federal Republic will support the rapid conclusion of a law regarding restitution and its just implementation.”<sup>114</sup> However, the language of Adenauer’s response seemed troublingly circumspect when it came to admitting German guilt for the Holocaust. Distancing West Germany from the Nazis and refusing to mention the perpetrators would characterize most of Adenauer’s public statements about the past and characterized the treatment of the past by the West German government in the Adenauer era.<sup>115</sup> However positive Adenauer’s response to the request by Israel, most Germans opposed restitution payments. Even within Adenauer’s own government, there was significant resistance to restitution and the size of such payments.<sup>116</sup> Strong support for restitution came from Schumacher’s SPD, and it was to the SPD that Adenauer eventually turned to pass the Luxembourg Agreement of September 10, 1952.

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<sup>113</sup> Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, 13.

<sup>114</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 282.

<sup>115</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 283.

<sup>116</sup> Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, 13.

The CDU negotiator appointed by Adenauer had almost resigned as a result of the intransigence of his own party, and the process revealed that most Germans regarded the suffering of the Jews as less important than that of Germans during the war.<sup>117</sup> Adenauer had to appeal to the CDU not with the moral arguments made by the SPD, but with what he would consider more practical arguments, that Jewish power and influence in the USA would make things difficult for the Federal Republic.<sup>118</sup> That Adenauer had to resort to tired tropes about Jewish political power in order to garner the support of his party is indicative of the continuing Antisemitism in the new Federal Republic.

That Antisemitism did not end in 1945 was apparent to the remaining Jews in Germany. The country that became the Federal Republic of Germany did not suddenly expunge its racial hatreds. From 1933 to 1945, the population of German Jews went from approximately 500 000 to 15 000, with about half of those in Berlin. Another 250 000 to 300 000 Jews (estimates have varied) found themselves within the borders of Germany at war's end, most the survivors of the camp system and death marches, while others fled persecution in the East.<sup>119</sup> These Jewish displaced persons (DPs), mostly fled to the American zone of occupation, hence the defeated Germans and indeed the Allies faced the unexpected task of looking after and managing hundreds of thousands of people in a country that, just two years previously, had entire regions declared *judenrein* (clean of Jews).<sup>120</sup> In Atina Grossman's "From Victims to Homeless Foreigners," she

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<sup>117</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 284, 285.

<sup>118</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 286.

<sup>119</sup> Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>120</sup> Atina Grossmann, "From Victims to 'Homeless Foreigners': Jewish Survivors in Postwar Germany" in *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe*, ed. by Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 55.

examines the plight of these Jewish communities as they tried to rebuild their lives. In her work she determines that even as the number of Jewish DPs began to decrease as many emigrated to Israel or the United States, Antisemitism persisted.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, for some Germans, it was understood that perhaps all remaining Jews in West Germany would want to leave, however, American High Commissioner John McCloy argued that Jewish people needed to remain in West Germany to act as “a barometer of and guarantee for the moral rehabilitation of the Germans,” a community that could create tangible evidence of just how far West Germans had come from their Nazi past.<sup>122</sup> Implicit in this argument was that the Jewish community would assimilate, and become an integrated part of German society. This, Chin and Fehrenbach noted, resulted in “an expectation of assimilation that was ultimately hard to distinguish from the eradication of Judaism pure and simple.”<sup>123</sup> Jewish survivors however, had no intention of assimilating with West Germans and by 1948, one prominent Jewish official remarked that “the anti-Semitism in Germany hardly needs to be exaggerated because it is sufficiently present.”<sup>124</sup> Jewish people were often prominent in black market dealings and faced repeated police raids, amid accusations that they had resumed their pre-war manipulations of the economy and threatened the renewed prosperity of West Germany.<sup>125</sup> The fact that so few of the Jews that remained in West Germany were of German origin allowed West Germans to recast their overt Antisemitism, now frowned upon, as a distrust of “foreigners,” a “kind of extraterritoriality that the DPs, and indeed

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<sup>121</sup> Grossmann, “From Victims,” 66.

<sup>122</sup> Grossmann, “From Victims,” 63.

<sup>123</sup> Chin et al, *After the Nazi Racial State*, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Grossmann, “Victims,” 64, 66.

<sup>125</sup> Grossmann, “Victims,” 66-67.

virtually all Jews living in Germany [could] ...claim.”<sup>126</sup> Thus, the racialized state the Nazis constructed did not completely disappear postwar, as West Germans began to reframe conceptions of race in terms of culture, and the few Jewish people that refused to emigrate or assimilate were recast as foreigners and imposters rather than victims, as the 1950s saw West Germans recast their own victimization over that of the Jews.

In 1949, during his first address to the newly formed West German Bundestag, Konrad Adenauer expressed his disbelief that “...after all that occurred in the Nazi period, there could still be individuals in Germany who persecute or hate Jews because they are Jews.”<sup>127</sup> The survey by HICOG has been noted above, but various other polls and surveys reinforce the persistence of Antisemitic attitudes in West Germany.

Between May 1951 and December 1952, an average of 41% of respondents thought that Nazi ideas were more positive than negative, while only 36% thought the reverse.<sup>128</sup> A

poll held in 1952 on attitudes towards Jews received Antisemitic responses 34% of the time, while a poll in 1958 concluded that “39% of Germans were definitely anti-Semitic” and “29% were conditionally anti-Semitic” (with no indication of what can make a person only “conditionally anti-Semitic”).<sup>129</sup> That Antisemitism was still

common in West Germany is apparent, but a number of high-profile incidents in the 1950s would continually embarrass Adenauer’s government, and eventually provoke a

legislative reaction on the eve of the swastika epidemic. In April 1957 a Jewish man,

Kurt Lieser, got into an argument with Ludwig Zind in a restaurant in the German town of Offenburg. During the argument Zind angrily stated that not enough Jews were sent to

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<sup>126</sup> Grossmann, “Victims,” 67.

<sup>127</sup> Stern, “The Historic Triangle,” 342.

<sup>128</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 274.

<sup>129</sup> Stern, “The Historic Triangle,” 257, Tetens *The New Germany*, 151.

the gas chambers, and that Lieser himself, a victim of the concentration camp system, should have also been gassed. Zind was a teacher at a local *Gymnasium*, and a well-respected member of the community. After his outburst, little was done to address Zind's blatant Antisemitism and role as a public educator until the news magazine *Der Spiegel* published an account of the confrontation, as well as the disturbing information that the authorities in Bavaria (where Offenburg was located) tried to hush up the matter. Zind had been a captain in the *Wehrmacht* during the war, and despite being banned from teaching, had taken his post at the *Gymnasium* in 1948. During the ensuing trial, prompted by negative publicity, Zind was unrepentant and when sentenced to a year in prison, escaped to Cairo.<sup>130</sup> In May 1958 an investigation was launched into Dr. Hans Eisele, a doctor living outside Munich, who had convinced one of his former patients to bequeath her villa to his wife in exchange for medical treatment. However, of more importance was the fact that former inmates and guards at Buchenwald concentration camp identified Eisele as one of the men responsible for countless deaths at the camp in his capacity as camp doctor. In fact Eisele had been sentenced to death in a 1945 trial of perpetrators at Dachau concentration camp; however, his sentence was commuted. A defendant in a 1947 trial relating to Buchenwald, Eisele was again sentenced to death and again had his sentence commuted. Eisele was then imprisoned but released sometime in the early 1950s.<sup>131</sup> By 1958 however, implicated in yet another trial of SS perpetrators, and, facing negative press coverage after being discovered living in Munich, Eisele fled to Egypt to avoid prosecution.<sup>132</sup> That both Zind and Eisele were

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<sup>130</sup> Tetens, *The New Germany*, 3-13.

<sup>131</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 239.

<sup>132</sup> Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, 15.

able to escape to Egypt while under intense media scrutiny and under investigation seemed to suggest to many Germans that there were still people in the judiciary who were sympathetic to National Socialism. A case in early 1959 confirmed some of these suspicions.

In 1956 Hamburg lumber merchant Friedrich Nieland published *How Many World (Money) Wars Do Nations Have To Lose?* a virulently Antisemitic brochure that denied the Holocaust and blamed “international jewry” for spreading misinformation. Nieland mailed copies of the brochure to all deputies in the Bundestag and Länder parliaments, as well as officials in state ministries. An investigation into Nieland concluded that there was not enough evidence to sustain an indictment, and by 1959 the Hanseatic Supreme Court rejected a prosecutor’s appeal for an injunction, effectively allowing Nieland to publish with impunity.<sup>133</sup> The press later revealed that the judge presiding over Nieland’s case, Dr. Enno Budde had in fact stringently opposed the Weimar Republic, and had later praised Hitler’s racial laws in the Third Reich. More disturbingly, Budde in his position as a judge had been appointed by the Adenauer administration and had dealt with former Gestapo members with “extraordinary leniency.”<sup>134</sup> For many people in West Germany, especially on the left, this seemed to confirm their worst fears that West Germany had failed to denazify. The publicity of the Zind, Eisele, and Nieland cases prompted the SPD to sponsor a new bill by the end of 1959 to curb Antisemitism, which was being debated in the Bundestag when the swastika epidemic occurred.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Tetens, *The New Germany*, 165, 166.

<sup>134</sup> Tetens, *The New Germany*, 166.

<sup>135</sup> Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, 15.

In 1959 German philosopher Theodor Adorno wrote his essay “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” in which he lambasted West Germans for utterly failing to confront their past crimes. Adorno believed that in a rush to return to some semblance of normalcy, Germans willingly forgot their Nazi past and buried their memories of the events. Despairing at the continuities between National Socialism and the Federal Republic, Adorno posited that the Republic could be replaced by a return to National Socialism at any moment, with many officials in power having little faith in the new democracy.<sup>136</sup> This essay conformed to much of the thinking around the intellectual left in the Adenauer era. Real fears persisted among postwar intellectuals about the disturbing continuities between the Third Reich and the Federal Republic, namely the politicians and officials who had served with the Nazis remaining in power in the FRG.<sup>137</sup> In a way, they were not wrong. The judiciary did indeed have several former Nazis in it, as the Nieland case shows, and denazification had not succeeded in removing Nazis from public life, as the amnesty debates and Zind case shows. Indeed, Adenauer’s government had been criticized in 1951 for reconstructing a new Foreign Office and diplomatic corps when the French High Commissioner reported the 62 out of the 100 members of the corps had somehow been complicit in the Third Reich, with 43 being former members of the SS and 17 of the Gestapo.<sup>138</sup> Adenauer’s appointment of Hans Globke as chief of staff in 1949 and State Secretary in the Chancellor’s office in 1953 had also generated substantial controversy. Globke had been a conservative official in Weimar and written generous commentaries on the Nuremberg Race Laws during the

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<sup>136</sup> Theodor Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past” *Signale*.

<sup>137</sup> Moses, *German Intellectuals*, 164.

<sup>138</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 292.

Nazi period. As we shall see, Globke was not the only former Nazi to be appointed to a high position under Adenauer's tenure, but Globke's hiring, in Herf's words "more than any other personnel decision of his tenure as Chancellor... signaled his policy of democratization via integration."<sup>139</sup> That the reintegration of former Nazis seemed necessary for the formation of the FRG has already been mentioned above (see Lübke), but for Adorno and the intellectual left, there was a real fear of the failure of democracy and the potential for re-Nazification. This in part stemmed from the organization of the Federal Republic, and the broad consensus-based politics that Adenauer pushed for, creating what scholars have dubbed the "Chancellor democracy," in which significant polarization is discouraged in exchange for consensus building. This discouragement of polarization was meant to prevent radicalism, but it meant that many frustrations of the Left went unheeded, and the lack of recourse for political change meant that, in the words of Nick Thomas, "it was all too easy... to portray [the FRG] as unrepresentative, rigid, dominated by the authoritarian personality of the Chancellor, and frustratingly unresponsive to opposition by parliamentary means."<sup>140</sup> In effect, it meant that "it was possible to equate 'Chancellor democracy' with a restoration of totalitarianism by stealth." To paint Adenauer as a Nazi sympathizer is patently ridiculous, but it is apparent from this period that he firmly believed in reintegration. Thus as the 1950s drew to a close his perceived choice to look the other way as more and more cases of Antisemitism occurred and unease at the position of Nazis in his government grew became increasingly untenable. Reintegration was the bedrock on which Adenauer

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<sup>139</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 289.

<sup>140</sup> Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 29.

rebuilt West Germany. Into this milieu two deeply Antisemitic men in their twenties, members of a right-wing nationalist party, decided to vandalise a Cologne synagogue and a memorial to victims of the Gestapo.

## Chapter Two

### **“The Murderers Are Still Among Us” The First Weeks of the Swastika Epidemic, 25 December 1959- 16 January 1960**

Klaus Rath was walking home from Christmas Mass with his mother and grandmother when they noticed swastikas and Antisemitic phrases painted on the Roonstrasse synagogue in Cologne. After trying to wipe the paint off the synagogue walls without success, they then notified the Cologne police force of the vandalism.<sup>141</sup> The police moved to investigate while also notifying city workers to come and clean the paint off of the synagogue walls. Workers had already begun this process when the police investigator realised that no one from the synagogue itself had actually been contacted about the vandalism. Once Rabbi Zwi Assaria-Hermann Helfgott heard about the vandalism, he immediately ordered a halt to the cleanup, remarking, “I want to see that first.”<sup>142</sup> Asaria was a Yugoslavian Jew who had spent four years in a POW camp during the war.<sup>143</sup> After the war he moved to Bergen-Belsen to assist the displaced persons living there, and eventually emigrated to Israel in 1948, becoming a citizen there. In 1953 Asaria returned to Germany as part of an Israeli delegation and became chief rabbi of Cologne and the Roonstrasse synagogue.<sup>144</sup> Upon seeing the vandalism, Asaria prevented the police from continuing the removal. “I wanted the people to see

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<sup>141</sup> “Synagogen-Schändung: Die Nacht von Köln” *Spiegel Online*, 6 January 1960, 19.

<sup>142</sup> Zwi Assaria, born Hermann Helfgott, had immigrated to Israel in 1948 and took the Hebrew name Zwi Asaria. “Synagogen-Schändung: Die Nacht von Köln” *Spiegel Online*, 6 January 1960, 20, ‘To Witness and Proclaim’ Yad Vashem.

<sup>143</sup> Asaria had served in the Yugoslavian armed forces before being captured by the Germans and interned in a POW camp. ‘To Witness and Proclaim’ Yad Vashem.

<sup>144</sup> ‘To Witness and Proclaim’ Yad Vashem.

what had been done,” he told reporters, because he said, “Antisemitism is a barometer of democracy in this country.”<sup>145</sup> Colleagues of the rabbi agreed with his decision to not remove the graffiti, arguing that the vandalism was, so-to-speak, the writing on the wall, or in Hebrew *Menetekel*, an allusion to the story of Belshazzar’s Feast in the Book of Daniel.<sup>146</sup> In this case, however, the power and word of God was not on display, but rather what many saw as the failure of Germany to come to terms with its past.

This chapter provides a close reading of the days following the *Roonstrasse* incident using newspaper reporting and other primary sources to recreate the events and reactions of the West German government, the international press, and the wider public to the Antisemitic incidents. As we shall see, in the days immediately following the Cologne incident, condemnations of the vandalism were issued by the government and many other parties, as they promised action against the two perpetrators. As the number of reported incidents rapidly rose in the days after Christmas, the actions and statements of government officials began to change, as they tried to deflect blame and control the fallout from this public relations problem, while many people protested what they saw as the far-right run amok, and ex-Nazis were emboldened to act out. Finally, the chapter culminates in the television address of Konrad Adenauer on 16 January 1960, as he personally intervened in the crisis to try and control the narrative.

Authorities in the region reacted quickly to the news of the synagogue vandalism. The state government of North-Rhine Westphalia offered a 10 000 *Deutsche Mark* reward for any information relating to the vandalism and promised an

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<sup>145</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Vandals Desecrate Synagogue Opened by Adenauer in Cologne: German Vandals Smear Synagogue,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1959, 1.

<sup>146</sup> “Synagogen-Schändung: Die Nacht von Köln” *Spiegel Online*, 6 January 1960, 20.

investigation into possible political motives.<sup>147</sup> Later in the day, Max Adenauer, son of Konrad Adenauer and Cologne's city planner, went on local radio to express regret at the damage.<sup>148</sup> Despite the reward for information, Cologne police had already begun investigating two suspects based on fingerprints lifted off of abandoned paint pots, and tips from the public. Around 6:00pm Christmas Day, Cologne police arrested 25-year-old baker's assistant Arnold Strunk in his flat. A few hours later, at 9:00pm, police arrested 25-year-old Salesman Paul Josef Schönen while driving his father's Volkswagen. Strunk had been a tenant of a flat owned by Schönen's father, a printer who had done work for the synagogue.<sup>149</sup> Both men were members of the right-wing *Deutsche Reichspartei* (DRP), or German Reich Party, a right-wing nationalist party associated with former Nazis and radical right-wing views.<sup>150</sup> Indeed one of the tips that Cologne police received had come from the Cologne DRP party chair, Ernst Custodis, who told the police that on December 18 at a DRP Christmas party both Schönen and Strunk had said that they wanted to vandalize the Cologne synagogue, a claim which no one had taken very seriously.<sup>151</sup> As a reporter for *Der Spiegel* wrote, "even simple-minded DRP people had to realize that such an act would jeopardize the existence of the party."<sup>152</sup> By this point more of Schönen and Strunk's handiwork had been discovered, this time at a memorial to victims of the Gestapo about a mile away from the

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<sup>147</sup> "Synagogen-Schändung: Die Nacht von Köln" *Spiegel Online*, 6 January 1960, 19.

<sup>148</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Vandals Desecrate Synagogue Opened by Adenauer in Cologne: German Vandals Smear Synagogue," *New York Times*. 26 December 1959, 1.

<sup>149</sup> There seems to be a discrepancy in the timing of the arrests, the *Der Spiegel* article gives the times as 5pm and 6:30pm respectively, but the White Book reports that Strunk was arrested at 6pm and Schönen at 9pm. "Synagogen-Schändung: Die Nacht von Köln" *Spiegel Online*, 6 January 1960, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 7.

<sup>150</sup> Cheles, Ferguson, and Vaughan. *Neo-Fascism in Europe*. (London: Longman, 1991), 71-72.

<sup>151</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 7.

<sup>152</sup> "Synagogen-Schändung: Die Nacht von Köln" *Spiegel Online*, 6 January 1960, 20.

synagogue.<sup>153</sup> The memorial plaque, which had read “Here Rest Seven Victims to the Gestapo. This Memorial Recalls Germany’s Most Shameful Period 1933-1945,” was vandalised with black paint, the second sentence regarding Germany’s shame had been painted over by Schönen and Strunk in disagreement over the validity of the statement.<sup>154</sup> When police searched Strunk’s apartment they found Nazi paraphernalia, pictures of Adolf Hitler, and a painting of Horst Wessel, an early member of the SA regarded by most Nazis as a martyr and hero of the party. Strunk also had painted a cabinet in his room red, white, and black, the colours of the flag of the Third Reich. Strunk’s library contained Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, several Antisemitic and Holocaust-denying tracts, and various DRP party publications. He also had a vinyl collection including several albums out of the “Speeches and Songs of Nazi Germany” series.<sup>155</sup> Significantly, little of this information was released to the press and much conjecture would be made in the coming days over the possible motivations of the two culprits.

The next day, December 26, Konrad Adenauer issued a statement from his Rhöndorf home outside Bonn, where he was celebrating Christmas and recovering from a cold. In the message, which he sent to Rabbi Helfgott, Adenauer expressed his regret and wrote that “all decent Germans join me in condemning this atrocious deed.”<sup>156</sup> FRG President Heinrich Lübke echoed Adenauer’s words in his own statement, announcing that the German people “on whose name criminals have already once heaped shame and

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<sup>153</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Vandals Desecrate Synagogue Opened by Adenauer in Cologne: German Vandals Smear Synagogue,” *New York Times*. 26 December 1959, 1.

<sup>154</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 7.

<sup>155</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 9.

<sup>156</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Adenauer Scores Outbreak of Bias: Leads West German Critics of Anti-Semitic Incident in Cologne -- Two Held” *New York Times*. 27 December 1959, 3.

dishonor,” wanted to live “in peace and mutual respect” with all peoples.<sup>157</sup> The Central Council of Jews in Germany also issued a statement, writing “it is ominous in 1959 to be able to evoke pictures that bring to mind the November days of 1938,” referencing the events of *Kristallnacht*, which had resulted in the *Roonstrasse* synagogue closing due to damages wrought during the tragedy.<sup>158</sup> The vandalism had already garnered international attention, with reporter Sydney Gruson of the *New York Times* on the scene in West Germany, sending several news reports back to the *Times* for speedy publication over the Christmas holiday. Clearly, the optics of two members of a far-right party openly committing acts of Antisemitic vandalism during Christmas were understandably problematic, and the DRP acted quickly. The party’s Federal chairman, Wilhelm Meinberg, announced on December 26<sup>th</sup> that both Schönen and Strunk were to be expelled from the party via a mechanism included in the party constitution to deal with exactly this sort of situation, and that the Cologne district branch was to be dissolved because of its “anti-Semitic tendencies.”<sup>159</sup> The DRP had been a fringe party associated with ex-Nazis and Antisemitism, but to avoid being banned the party maintained that it was a legitimate party with legitimate concerns. Indeed, Gruson reports that there were already calls to ban the party after the Christmas Day vandalism.<sup>160</sup>

The DRP had experienced a minor breakout success in the 1958 election, earning over 5% of the vote in Rhineland-Palatinate, the threshold needed to sit deputies in the

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<sup>157</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Adenauer Scores Outbreak of Bias: Leads West German Critics of Anti-Semitic Incident in Cologne -- Two Held” *New York Times*. 27 December 1959, 3.

<sup>158</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Adenauer Scores Outbreak of Bias: Leads West German Critics of Anti-Semitic Incident in Cologne -- Two Held” *New York Times*. 27 December 1959, 3.

<sup>159</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Adenauer Scores Outbreak of Bias: Leads West German Critics of Anti-Semitic Incident in Cologne -- Two Held” *New York Times*. 27 December 1959, 3.

<sup>160</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Adenauer Scores Outbreak of Bias: Leads West German Critics of Anti-Semitic Incident in Cologne -- Two Held” *New York Times*. 27 December 1959, 3.

legislature, getting one seat for their share of the vote.<sup>161</sup> But they had won no seats at the federal level, and had difficulty shaking their image as a fringe extremist party due to most of their leaders being openly Antisemitic and former Nazis. Wilhelm Meinberg had fought in the *Freikorps* in the interwar period, had joined the *Sturmabteilung* and had been appointed to the Prussian *Staatsrat* by Hermann Göring. The party's deputy chairman, Otto Hess, had been a district leader of the Nazi party and an *Oberführer* in the *Sturmabteilung*, while the party's publisher, Waldemar Shutz, was a member of the *Waffen SS* during the war.<sup>162</sup> Meanwhile, the party's propaganda chief, Adolf von Tadden, had personally told correspondent Sydney Gruson that he could understand why some Germans might have unfriendly feelings towards the remaining Jews in Germany, since they had received restitution and been given a "preferred place" in German society.<sup>163</sup> The questionable past of the DRP and its possible influence in the vandalism led to the arrest of Cologne branch chair, Ernst Custodis, the very man who had tipped off the police to the original Cologne incident, on 29 December 1959.<sup>164</sup> But what had started as two young adults and a fringe political party in Cologne was quickly growing into a national, and soon international, problem.

On the same day that Cologne police issued a warrant for the arrest of Ernst Custodis, police in Darmstadt announced the search for a person who had sent a threatening letter to 85-year-old Jewish concentration camp survivor Isaak Hamburger. The letter had accused him of desecrating Christian graves and threatened to crucify

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<sup>161</sup> Cheles, *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, 71.

<sup>162</sup> "More Insults To Jews In Germany." *Times*, 31 December 1959, p. 8.

<sup>163</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Adenauer Scores Outbreak of Bias: Leads West German Critics of Anti-Semitic Incident in Cologne -- Two Held" *New York Times*. 27 December 1959, 3.

<sup>164</sup> "Cologne Party Chief Held In Synagogue Inquiry." *Times*, 30 December 1959, p. 6.

him, also mentioning that “the time for the persecution of Jews would come when Dr. Adenauer was no more.”<sup>165</sup> Clearly, then, Antisemitism was more than just a problem of the DRP. Indeed the *Times* correspondent reporting on this news also noted that while “there is no evidence that active anti-Semitism is widespread, it is painfully clear that Nazi ideas still persist.”<sup>166</sup> The *Times* reporter then went on to discuss the various incidents of Antisemitism and pro-Nazism that had occurred in the recent past, including the Zind case. Of particular note to the reporter was the disturbing number of government employees involved in some of these incidents. Zind himself was a schoolteacher, and the report worries about judges who had been allowed to maintain or to resume their judiciary posts. However, the report also maintained that the DRP was “not noticeably anti-Semitic,” and that the number of extreme right-wing groups that could negatively influence Germans were rare.<sup>167</sup> The reporter then went on to write that most Antisemites in Germany were “unteachables,” that is, middle-aged Germans who still supported Nazi ideology and Hitler, and that Antisemitism would “go with their passing.”<sup>168</sup> This newspaper report in *The Times* interestingly worried about Antisemitism and the persistence of Nazi ideology but took steps to assure its readers that the problem could be addressed (even if their solution was to essentially allow the old racists to die off), and does not worry about right-wing organizations such as the DRP. As we will see, the sentiments expressed in this report are quickly swept aside amidst a growing fervour over the prevalence of Antisemitism and the persistence of Nazi ideology in the Federal Republic. Three days after the Cologne smearings took

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<sup>165</sup> "Cologne Party Chief Held In Synagogue Inquiry." *Times*, 30 December 1959, p. 6.

<sup>166</sup> "Cologne Party Chief Held In Synagogue Inquiry." *Times*, 30 December 1959, p. 6.

<sup>167</sup> "Cologne Party Chief Held In Synagogue Inquiry." *Times*, 30 December 1959, p. 6.

<sup>168</sup> "Cologne Party Chief Held In Synagogue Inquiry." *Times*, 30 December 1959, p. 6.

place, Antisemitism was seen as a troubling issue, but a minor one. That day in Cologne, a group of resistance fighters and concentration camp survivors laid three wreaths at the memorial to victims of Nazism, with a ribbon pinned to one of them that read “The murderers are still among us.”<sup>169</sup> For those that had experienced firsthand the violence of the Nazis, this was not an isolated incident limited to just a few intractable Germans. Events over the next few days would prove them right, and quickly propel public opinion from seeing this as simply a troubling issue to one of international concern.

By the next day, 30 December 1959, the national, and international, dimensions of the outbreak had begun to emerge when several more instances of Antisemitism were reported, including the discovery of swastikas in Notting Hill, London. In the Ruhr, a Catholic church was defaced with a large white swastika, while in Brunswick the slogans “Death to Jews” and Jews Out!” were found painted on park benches.<sup>170</sup> In a press conference held that day, Meinberg and the DRP attempted to defend their Nazi past by pointing out the government itself still had former Nazis serving in it, including Konrad Adenauer’s cabinet ministers Hans Globke and Theodor Oberländer.<sup>171</sup> This fact was not lost on critics of the West German government, and had already been perfect proof of the continuity between the Third Reich and postwar German society, as Theodor Adorno had described in his conference presentation “The Meaning of Working Through the Past” delivered only a month earlier in November 1959. Despite the entreaties of Meinberg at the DRP press conference, police in Brunswick confiscated the

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<sup>169</sup> This could also be a reference to the 1946 movie *The Murderers are Among Us*, an East German film that was the first German film to be released after the Second World War ended and was widely seen in the East. The film was the first to interrogate German feelings of guilt and former Nazis. "Cologne Party Chief Held In Synagogue Inquiry." *Times*, 30 December 1959, p. 6.

<sup>170</sup> "More Insults To Jews In Germany." *Times*, 31 December 1959, p. 8.

<sup>171</sup> "More Insults To Jews In Germany." *Times*, 31 December 1959, p. 8.

latest edition of the DRP's newspaper, the *Reichsruf*, as well as the *Deutsche-Wochen-Zeitung*, the newspaper of the right-wing league of national students. Both papers had been edited by DRP propaganda chief von Thadden, who had supposedly slandered the Minister of the Interior of North-Rhineland Westphalia, Hermann Dufhues in his papers.<sup>172</sup> Federal Minister of the Interior Gerhard Schröder announced that night on television that there would be far-reaching consequences of the Cologne vandalism, including a possible ban on the party, whatever the DRP's claims to be tolerant.

Also published in *The Times* on 30 December was an article entitled "New Birth of an Old Evil," another interpretation of Antisemitism in West Germany. However, rather than dismiss the DRP, as the news article published in the *Times* had a day prior, this new article worried that the DRP was seemingly behind the acts of Antisemitism, and that the demonstrators were motivated beyond only Antisemitic feelings, rather that they were influenced by the "full panoply of Nazi ideology, complete with swastika and salute."<sup>173</sup> This was an incredibly dangerous prospect, as these young men, who had been too young to remember the Third Reich, must have learned of this ideology from somewhere else, i.e. the DRP or some other Nazi propaganda group. The article also notes that while Antisemitism was indeed a fringe hatred, just as it was in many countries, in Germany, Antisemitism had been an official policy of the state only 15 years before, and as such could still "strike a dangerous chord even in many ordinary Germans."<sup>174</sup> The article also maintained that in the long run only the removal of Nazis from positions of influence and proper education could finally eliminate

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<sup>172</sup> "More Insults To Jews In Germany." *Times*, 31 December 1959, p. 8.

<sup>173</sup> "New Birth of an Old Evil." *Times*, 30 December 1959, 7.

<sup>174</sup> "New Birth of an Old Evil." *Times*, 30 December 1959, 7.

Antisemitism.<sup>175</sup> While authorship of these two *Times* articles is not known, it is interesting to see how the two differed while being published only a day apart. The DRP's influence was now more prominently placed, and references to the continuities in the German racial state were alluded to, whereas before only a small minority of intransigent Hitlerites were the problem. Both articles agreed, however, that denazification needed to be a priority of the German government. The Board of Deputies of British Jews echoed their call for denazification, using Cologne as an example of the persistence of Nazism in Germany.<sup>176</sup> Over the following days a number of prominent voices would join this chorus, and more calls for action would be made, this time placing direct pressure on the Federal Government with specific policy reforms.

New Year's Day 1960 saw the arrest of Ludwig Vogel, a 22-year-old carpenter from Kitzingen (a community near Würzburg) for a number of Antisemitic incidents ranging from the painting of swastikas on a district court to writing a letter to a local Jewish citizen threatening to shoot them. There were a number of similarities between Strunk and Vogel, as both owned copies of *Mein Kampf*, and the DRP brochure "Richter und Antisemiten." Vogel himself had tried to join the DRP in October 1959 and said that he had committed the acts after going to their rallies.<sup>177</sup> However, he denied that the DRP incited him to act, and maintained that he committed his crimes because he was "basically Anti-Semitic."<sup>178</sup> Vogel's young age and his connections to the DRP lent only more fuel to the arguments that the DRP, among others, was spreading Nazi and

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<sup>175</sup> "New Birth of an Old Evil." *Times*, 30 December 1959, 7.

<sup>176</sup> "More Insults To Jews In Germany." *Times*, 31 December 1959, 8.

<sup>177</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 17, 18.

<sup>178</sup> 'More Swastikas Found On German Buildings'. *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*; 2 January 1960.

Antisemitic ideas among German youth. New Year's Day also saw the most scathing rebukes of the Federal Government thus far, with the chairman of the Jewish community in West Berlin and directorate of the Central Council of Jews in Germany Heinz Galinski, releasing a highly critical statement regarding the Federal Government's actions in the epidemic. Galinski attacked the apathetic policies of Adenauer's reintegration, arguing that while "Nazism is dead" there remained far too many people in power with compromised pasts and that ordinary West Germans did not care about the "spirit of Nazism" that was "...not being dealt with by the state, the school, or the parents."<sup>179</sup> Apathy, Galinski maintained, was the greatest threat, as West Germans began to ignore their past and consider it behind them. Galinski criticized Adenauer for focusing too much on foreign policy and caring too little about internal matters. The reintegration policies of Adenauer, which the Chancellor credited with the success of the Federal Republic, were now under attack for the role they had seemingly played in building this apathy. The head of the German Evangelical Church, Bishop Debelius, agreed, calling the Cologne events disgusting and proof "that the German nation had not overcome its past."<sup>180</sup> Some ordinary Germans agreed with the bishop; in Offenbach counter protesters painted anti-Nazi slogans and "Ban the DRP" on walls in the town.<sup>181</sup>

The next day Kurt Grossmann, a prominent German journalist, wrote an Op-Ed in *The New York Times* declaring that the synagogue vandalism was not an isolated incident, citing several examples of West Germany's failure to deal with its Nazi past. Grossmann's examples included Freidrich Nieland, mentioned above, and the case of

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<sup>179</sup> "Fourth Arrest In German Wave Of Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 2 January 1960, 5.

<sup>180</sup> "Fourth Arrest In German Wave Of Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 2 January 1960, 5.

<sup>181</sup> "German Police Guard Jewish Property." *Times*, 1 January 1960, 10.

Theodor Oberländer, the Minister of Expellees and Refugees, who had been accused of war crimes but was still a member of Adenauer's cabinet. Grossmann warned that young people in Germany were not free from the prejudices of their parents, and that the United States could not ignore the serious nature of these events just for the sake of having a common ally against the Soviets.<sup>182</sup> Geopolitical maneuvering then, could not be used as an excuse to ignore the past and the present continuation of Antisemitism in West Germany. Criticism of Oberländer's presence in cabinet was also expressed by Dr. Cyril Bibby in the UK, who noted that it was outrageous that both Hans Globke and Theodor Oberländer were still cabinet members. How was the government supposed to purge former Nazis from its ranks, he asked, when two of its highest offices were held by former Nazis?<sup>183</sup> It was now one week after the Cologne synagogue vandalism, and in the face of dozens of incidents and protest and outcry, Adenauer's government gave its response.

The West German government issued a statement on 2 January, declaring that they felt "great anxiety" over the Antisemitism on display and would do everything in their power to prevent future episodes from occurring.<sup>184</sup> They would also seek to discover the "wire-pullers" behind the incidents. The West German government maintained that this outbreak was an attempt to discredit the Republic and undermine its international image.<sup>185</sup> But despite the evidence presented thus far and the close

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<sup>182</sup> Kurt R. Grossmann, "Anti-Semitism in Germany: Urgency Seen for Measures to Aid Democratic Forces" *New York Times*, 2 January 1960, 12.

<sup>183</sup> "Fourth Arrest In German Wave Of Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 2 January 1960, 5.

<sup>184</sup> "Bonn Pledges Drive On Anti-Semitism: Bavaria Starts Probe," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 3 January 1960, A16.

<sup>185</sup> "Bonn Pledges Drive On Anti-Semitism: Bavaria Starts Probe," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 3 January 1960, A16.

connections proven between right-wing groups and various culprits, ex-Nazis and right-wing organizations were not the “wire-pullers” the Federal Republic was interested in. Rather, Adenauer believed that some of the culprits of the graffiti were in fact agents of the East Germany or the Soviet Union, coordinating an outbreak that would undermine Adenauer’s work to integrate West Germany into Western Europe and NATO.<sup>186</sup> By smearing West Germany’s reputation, and reinforcing East German propaganda that the capitalist West Germany was just a continuation of Hitler’s fascism by a new name, the Communists could jeopardize West Germany’s new place in the West. Yet in the face of numerous news reports of right-wing extremism, why did the West German government persist in blaming the Communists? There is little compelling evidence that East Germany played any significant role in planning or perpetrating the swastika epidemic. Scholars have mostly used as their source the book *KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents*, written by the Reader’s Digest’s John Barron in 1974. His work was an unsourced and unreferenced series of stories supposedly gleaned from Soviet defectors, including high ranking generals in the KGB.<sup>187</sup> Whether or not East German agents were involved, no such evidence was ever produced by the West German government, and the White Book based their conclusions on East German involvement on a number of unconvincing guilt-by-association anecdotes, including past trips made to East Germany and conversations with East Germans.<sup>188</sup> It should of course be noted that past involvement with East Germany did not preclude actual Antisemitic feeling, and that evidence suggests that most acted independently. But while there may have been no

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<sup>186</sup> Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 431.

<sup>187</sup> John Barron. *KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents*. (New York: Reader’s Digest Press; distributed by E.P. Dutton, 1974) p. vii.

<sup>188</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 30-36.

proof available to Konrad Adenauer and his cabinet that there was direct East German involvement, recent events suggested that memory politics was an area East Germany was all too willing to interfere with in the Federal Republic.

In 1959 East Germany launched a campaign designed to undermine West Germany's reputation and bolster its own in the eyes of its citizens, who were fleeing the country *en masse* by the end of the 1950s. This effort, led by Albrecht Norden, targeted high-ranking officials in the Adenauer administration starting with Minister for Refugees Theodor Oberländer.<sup>189</sup> Oberländer had joined the NSDAP in 1933 and became one of their foremost experts on Eastern Europe, strongly advocating for German immigration into the area.<sup>190</sup> During the war, he commanded a unit of Ukrainian nationals recruited to fight against the Soviet Union, until disagreements with the party led to him being shunted aside to an administrative post. His leadership of the "Nightingale" unit of Ukrainian exiles would be highly scrutinized in East Germany, and it was eventually the impetus for charges to be laid against him.<sup>191</sup> A trial was held for him *in absentia* in October 1959, accusing his "Nightingale" unit of taking part in the massacre of Polish professors in Lvov during the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. However, no proof exists that Oberländer ever participated in the atrocities perpetrated in Lvov or anywhere else on the Eastern Front. He was in the city around the same period, but no direct evidence places him at the massacres.<sup>192</sup> Despite this, East Germany produced circumstantial evidence and convicted him. Even this evidence was too spurious to win over even the most hostile opponents of Oberländer, but it was a

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<sup>189</sup> Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory*, 222, Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 134.

<sup>190</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 104.

<sup>191</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 104.

<sup>192</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 105, 106.

serious attempt by the DDR to smear his reputation. Oberländer's place in the epidemic is interesting because he embodied both the government's position to the outbreak's response and the main arguments of the government's critics.<sup>193</sup> The obvious attempts to accuse him of war crimes and undermine the CDU government reinforced Adenauer's belief that East Germany's interventions into West Germany's memory politics were the main source of unrest in this area, and thus any domestic opposition to his memory politics was rooted in foreign interference. For Adenauer's opponents, Oberländer symbolized everything wrong with his administration. How could a man who had been a devoted member of the party and supported Germany's genocidal colonization in the East be allowed to survive denazification and return to public life, rising to one of the highest offices in the land?<sup>194</sup> Oberländer was a political opportunist, switching parties often in the postwar era, but he was also an unabashed revanchist, and used the political power of other irredentists to guarantee his political success.<sup>195</sup> This was one of the primary reasons Adenauer appointed him to Cabinet in the first place. Yet, even after he had left the BHE party Adenauer had kept him in his cabinet in an attempt to garner refugee votes.<sup>196</sup> Clearly then, Adenauer was comfortable courting the votes of people he knew were politically questionable, seeing it (perhaps) as a necessary evil. Either

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<sup>193</sup> Kansteiner, *In Pursuit*, 224.

<sup>194</sup> Oberländer did not keep his controversial opinions to himself in the postwar era, constantly speaking out against the "Bolsheviks" and barely contained his continuing prejudices against Eastern Europeans, once conceding that Slavic peoples were not "*Untermenschen*" only if they fought back against the Bolsheviks. Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 113.

<sup>195</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 116, 117.

<sup>196</sup> Oberländer had moved between several different parties in the postwar era, eventually becoming a member of the *Bund der Heimatvertriebene und Entrechtete*, a party almost exclusively focused on the political needs of the German refugees forced out of Eastern countries at the end of the war and those who felt damaged by denazification. Fiercely revanchist, the party was included in Adenauer's coalition government, which was how Oberländer became Minister for Refugees. He retained this post when he left the BHE to join the CDU and had weathered numerous controversies on his path to becoming a cabinet minister, resisting calls to resign on numerous occasions. Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 117, 126, 131, Kansteiner, *In Pursuit*, 223.

way, his apathy towards Oberländer's personal politics was surpassed by his stubborn determination to see the epidemic as simply another tool of Albrecht Norden's attempts to undermine his regime. This perhaps explains why he was so willing to overlook the right-wing connections of the outbreak's perpetrators while accusing the Communists on 2 January.

Despite government assurances, the next day, Monday, 3 January, *Bundestag* members from both parties called for a legislative debate on Antisemitism, and increased pressure for Adenauer to act. Adenauer responded to this by calling for a cabinet meeting that night and warned that drastic measures could be taken. Despite an unwillingness to act against the DRP, the public perception of doing nothing would be worse for international approval, something Adenauer was not willing to jeopardize. Ignoring the past might have worked to reintegrate Western Europe, but it would not to do lose that progress because of what Adenauer saw as a few hooligans and East German rabble-rousers. The SPD welcomed action by the government but warned that a wholesale banning of parties would indeed be drastic action. A full accounting of Antisemitism, however, was needed and the SPD called on the government to make all information on these incidents available.<sup>197</sup> According to a reporter for *The Times* "Adenauer is inclined to ignore the Social Democrats, but their approach to this problem may prove decisive. As a party they have the best anti-Nazi record in Germany."<sup>198</sup> The reporter was right. While the SPD had champions of resistance like Kurt Schumacher as examples of resistance to the Nazis, Adenauer had actual Nazis in his cabinet, and knew

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<sup>197</sup> "Anti-Semitic Incidents In Germany Persist." *Times*, 4 January 1960, 10.

<sup>198</sup> "Anti-Semitic Incidents In Germany Persist." *Times*, 4 January 1960, 10.

he could not vouch for many more people connected to him. Members of Adenauer's own CDU expressed dissatisfaction with their leader's response. CDU Deputy Dr. Franz Boehm, in Hans Tetens words, said that it was "a dangerous self-delusion to assume that Communists were masterminding the incidents" and that, according to Teten: "the outbursts appeared to be synchronized acts of fascist elements throughout West Germany."<sup>199</sup> Evidence seemed to suggest that, if not the coordinated acts of a fascist element, that at the very least there was indeed still a fascist element in West Germany. At least 100 000 Germans were members of what were characterized as extreme right organizations, with another 40 000 young people in youth organizations considered extreme right, including the *Bund Nationaler Studenten*, a right wing student group that saw ten of its members arrested on 2 January for parading down Berlin streets with old Imperial flags and singing Nazi anthems.<sup>200</sup> Pressure was quickly building, and the events of the coming week would quickly outpace the feeble assurances of action that the federal government made at the beginning on the week.

Of the 36 arrests of perpetrators since the Christmas synagogue vandalism, 27 of those arrested were caught in West Berlin. This includes the ten students of the *Bund Nationaler Studenten*, and in spite of the lack of action from Adenauer, West Berlin's Minister of the Interior Joachim Lipschitz moved to ban both the *Bund Nationaler Studenten* and student group *National Jugend Deutschland* for their Antisemitism and neo-Nazi influences. He also called for a federal ban on the DRP. Authorities in West Berlin reacted to the student demonstrations of the *Bund Nationaler* by raiding the

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<sup>199</sup> Tetens, *The New Germany*, 149-150.

<sup>200</sup> "15 Germans Now Detained For Anti-Semitic Acts." *Times*, 5 January 1960, 6.

chairman's home, where they found copies of *Mein Kampf*, while also raiding other locations that were known to be frequented by students in the organization. In the district of Wedding, West Berlin, some 80 people marched with a banner that read "Stop anti-Semitic excesses."<sup>201</sup> West Berlin would continue to be a center of action and reaction during the outbreak, with Lipschitz even participating in a large protest just three days later, on 8 January, when 20 000 protestors marched past a Jewish community centre. Lipschitz would later speak to the crowd, stating that: "We are not here because we are prompted by fear or because we are seriously threatened; it is indignation, wrath, and shame that makes us meet."<sup>202</sup> In the meantime, however, the Adenauer administration stuck to its Communist instigator script. Ernst Custodis was released from prison after no evidence to implicate him in the Cologne smearing was found, and Konrad Adenauer repeated his defamation claim when on the phone with Dr. Henrik G. van Dam, of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, who was congratulating Adenauer on his 84<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>203</sup> But across the Atlantic, in the United States, more proof of Antisemitic influence in West Germany was about to be released.

On 5 January 1960, the American Jewish Committee, a Jewish advocacy group, handed a statement to Wilhelm Grewe, West German ambassador to the United States, detailing a number of concerns over the outbreak, and the results of investigations by the Committee.<sup>204</sup> The statement criticized the ending of denazification and the resulting shift to allow former Nazis to continue in government posts. This failure to eliminate

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<sup>201</sup> "Stamping Out Residual Nazism In Berlin." *Times*, 6 January 1960, 8.

<sup>202</sup> "Berliners' Challenge To Neo-Nazism." *Times*, 9 January 1960, 5.

<sup>203</sup> "Stamping Out Residual Nazism In Berlin." *Times*, 6 January 1960, 8.

<sup>204</sup> Julius Duscha, "Anti-Semitism Is Laid To Hungarian Exiles: Outsiders Blamed" *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 6 January 1960, A6.

Nazis from public life, the Committee argued, allowed for Nazis to continue to undermine democratic institutions and spread their hateful ideology. Examples included by the Committee include the Nieland and Zind cases, and the spread of Antisemitic propaganda through Nazi literature.<sup>205</sup> But, “more ominous” according to the statement, was the DRP’s electoral victory in the April 1959 election, in which it was able to obtain a seat in the legislature of North-Rhineland Westphalia. The DRP’s role as the successor party to the Socialist Reich Party, a party which had been banned for its neo-Nazi links, meant that “its totalitarian, anti-democratic, and anti-Semitic character ha[d] been manifest from its inception.”<sup>206</sup> In failing to immediately proscribe the DRP under similar grounds to the SRP, the West German government, argued the Committee, legitimized the DRP as “an acceptable fact of political life.”<sup>207</sup> The statement lambasted the education system in Germany, its failings reflected “official apathy” and provided “an opening for distorted and anti-democratic ideas, which in turn give rise to nationalistic and anti-Semitic tendencies.”<sup>208</sup> But perhaps most damning of all was the statement’s evidence which suggested that there were still neo-Nazi and fascist organizations spreading Antisemitic propaganda in West Germany with impunity.

The statement focused specifically on a group of Hungarian fascists who had been prominent propagandists in the fascist Arrow Cross regime in Hungary during the Second World War. This group’s leader, Ferenc Fiala, lived in Cologne in 1959, and had

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<sup>205</sup> “Full Text of the Document Presented by American Jewish Committee leaders to German Ambassador Wilhelm G. Grewe January 5, 1960 – German Embassy” in *AJC Press Releases January 1960*. American Jewish Committee Archives, Digital Archives. 2-3

<sup>206</sup> “Full Text,” *AJC Press Releases January 1960*, American Jewish Committee Archives, Digital Archive, 4

<sup>207</sup> “Full Text,” *AJC Press Releases January 1960*, American Jewish Committee Archives, Digital Archive, 4

<sup>208</sup> “Full Text,” *AJC Press Releases January 1960*, American Jewish Committee Archives, Digital Archive, 4

been chief of the Arrow Cross Press and editor-in-chief of the Arrow Cross Party newspaper during the war. In fact, Fiala had been sentenced to death in Hungary by its then-democratic government, but his sentence had been commuted. Fiala subsequently escaped to West Germany during the uprising in 1956.<sup>209</sup> The statement also names a group of Hungarian generals, and several other ex-Arrow Cross Hungarians who had escaped to West Germany as refugees and subsequently organized neo-Nazi groups and propaganda efforts. Fiala himself, located in Cologne, was allegedly implicated in fascist propaganda linked to the perpetrators of the Cologne smearing.<sup>210</sup> That there could be clear links between fascist propaganda spread by groups openly operating in West Germany meant that the Federal Republic was perhaps not quite as committed to democracy as Adenauer had maintained. The Committee helpfully pointed out that many polls had proven this, and that while West Germany touted itself as tolerant, internal polling suggested otherwise.<sup>211</sup> The statement ended with a list of six policies that needed to be implemented immediately to fight back against the spread of neo-Nazism and Antisemitism: 1) investigation of the outbreak and swift prosecution of the culprits, 2) resumption of denazification of those in government employment, 3) a review of the backgrounds of former Nazis in political office, 4) outlawing of neo-Nazi parties, 5) immediate investigation of Hungarian fascist groups and other foreign groups that may be promoting Antisemitism, and finally 6) the rapid implementation of a new democratic education program by the *Länder* to provide instruction in Germany's most recent

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<sup>209</sup> "Full Text," *AJC Press Releases January 1960*, American Jewish Committee Archives, Digital Archive, 4, 5

<sup>210</sup> "Full Text," *AJC Press Releases January 1960*, American Jewish Committee Archives, Digital Archive, 5

<sup>211</sup> "Full Text," *AJC Press Releases January 1960*, American Jewish Committee Archives, Digital Archive, 4

past.<sup>212</sup> While the AJC was an American group it was still prominent, and as shown during the restitution debates, Adenauer was concerned with the influence prominent Jewish groups like the AJC might have in Washington. However, after an hour-long meeting with members of the AJC, Grewe told the press that the incidents were likely the fault of East German agents, repeating Adenauer's sentiments, despite evidence to the contrary.<sup>213</sup> Even in the face of direct evidence of foreign fascist groups operating on West German soil, to say nothing of home-grown neo-Nazism, the ambassador repeated the mantra of his Chancellor, convinced as they were that the Communists sought to undermine the Federal Republic.

In terms of discovering the identities of the alleged “wire-pullers” behind the epidemic, the AJC report was to be a disappointment. But its findings were important in other ways and alarming in their implications. Though their evidence was not compelling enough to change the West German Ambassador's mind, they did articulate an oft-repeated criticism in discourses on the Federal Republic. A concern for the education of German youth pervaded conversations around the outbreak, and several calls were made to improve the education of German youth in the Nazi past. As Moeller has shown, public discourse on German wartime experience focused primarily on German victimhood, and the education system often followed this trend. One German textbook, according to a *Times* reporter, mentioned the persecution of Jews but emphasized that Hitler's economic success made it difficult for ordinary Germans to resist the pull of Antisemitic propaganda. The book made no mention of the refusal of

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<sup>212</sup> “Full Text,” *AJC Press Releases January 1960*, American Jewish Committee Archives, Digital Archive, 6

<sup>213</sup> Julius Duscha, “Anti-Semitism Is Laid To Hungarian Exiles: Outsiders Blamed” *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 6 January 1960, A6.

centre parties to work with the left to oppose Hitler and most German textbooks, wrote the reporter, “shed a kind of Wagnerian twilight in which the German people are seen as victims of a cruel and inexorable fate.”<sup>214</sup> The portrayal of Hitler’s victory as inevitable aside, the textbook also let German military leaders off lightly, despite many of their complicit involvement in the crimes of the Third Reich.<sup>215</sup> The impression that few children knew of Hitler’s past crimes was widespread.

The Executive Vice President of B’nai Brith, Maurice Bisgyer, concluded after a week of meetings in West Berlin that there was no planned drive behind the epidemic. Instead he attributed the cause of the vandalism to copycat vandals, and that if there were any problem with West German youth, it stemmed from the fact that “the school children seem to know Hitler best as the man who constructed the autobahn.”<sup>216</sup> Even German newspapers acknowledged the taboo nature of the Nazi past in German society. In a *Der Mittag* cartoon, two boys are seen talking to each other. “Has your father had the talk with you yet?” the first boy asks, “about what?” the second replies, “storks or Nazis.”<sup>217</sup> This cartoon, described in a *Washington Post* editorial by columnist Flora Lewis was proof, she maintained, of the failure to educate German youth. This lack of ideals was to blame for the outbreak. Uneducated youth with no notion of the seriousness of the German past were being negatively influenced.<sup>218</sup> This concern with education did not, however, extend to the Adenauer regime. On 8 January the Federal

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<sup>214</sup> "Teaching History To The Germans." *Times*, 13 Jan. 1960, p. 10.

<sup>215</sup> "Teaching History To The Germans." *Times*, 13 Jan. 1960, p. 10.

<sup>216</sup> "No Planned Drive Seen In Swastika Outbreak" *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 8 February 1960, B6.

<sup>217</sup> Flora Lewis, "Spread of Anti-Semitism Indicates W. German Youth in Vacuum of Ideals: Most in Their 20s" *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 7 January 1960, A5.

<sup>218</sup> Flora Lewis, "Spread of Anti-Semitism Indicates W. German Youth in Vacuum of Ideals: Most in Their 20s" *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 7 January 1960, A5.

government flatly refused to entertain notions of a second wave of denazification, and stressed that education remained the jurisdiction of the *Länder*.<sup>219</sup> It would be up to them individually to act to change their education systems. The challenges they would face are apparent. What was to be done, one teacher asked, when they had the son of an “unreformed Nazi” and the child of concentration camp survivors in the same classroom?<sup>220</sup> When the Chief Ministers of the *Länder* met on 14 January they agreed that it was to be their responsibility to improve education, agreeing to have the Nazi period taught more thoroughly in their school systems.<sup>221</sup> In this the *Länder* split in opinion from Konrad Adenauer. The *Länder* acted to address what they saw as an internal problem, while Adenauer stubbornly maintained that external forces were to blame, and in early January Western reaction seemed split on who exactly was to blame.

Widespread reporting of Antisemitism and the revival of Nazism in the American press did not lend itself to a positive outlook on West Germany in 1960. Yet there seems to have been no official statement on the epidemic from the American government, or President Eisenhower. Indeed, Hans-Peter Schwarz, Adenauer’s biographer, maintains that any friction in the American-German relationship at this point stemmed from the death of John Foster Dulles and the difficulties in the development of a working relationship with the new Secretary of State, Christian Herter.<sup>222</sup> In the UK, Financial Secretary to the Treasury Sir Edward Boyle told the press on 5 January 1960 that the West German government was doing everything in its power to deal with Antisemitism and that “the confidence of the west has not been misplaced since the

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<sup>219</sup> "Berliners' Challenge To Neo-Nazism." *Times*, 9 January 1960, 5.

<sup>220</sup> "Teaching History To The Germans." *Times*, 13 January 1960, 10.

<sup>221</sup> "Berliners' Challenge To Neo-Nazism." *Times*, 9 January 1960, 5.

<sup>222</sup> Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 435.

war.”<sup>223</sup> Speaking on 11 January 1960 while visiting Jamaica, the leader of the Opposition Labour Party Hugh Gaitskell agreed, believing that “the movement was confined to a neurotic minority and that public opinion would soon set things right.”<sup>224</sup> Some of their constituents, however, disagreed. Former Labour MP Ian Mikardo told the British Press that he was “not at all impressed by Dr. Adenauer’s crocodile expressions of indignation at swastika-daubing hooliganism, because it is he who has appointed large numbers of criminal and unrepentant Nazis to prominent posts in his Government, in the Civil Service, in the judiciary and in the army.”<sup>225</sup> Many ordinary Britons shared Mikardo’s sentiments. Elizabeth Dales, an Austrian married to an English doctor from Kent, led a protest outside the German Embassy on 6 January holding a placard reading “Yesterday Hitler’s hanging judges. Today Adenauer’s special judges, In the name of humanity we demand dismiss and punish all Nazis” and “Nazis *Raus* [out], we remember Lidice, Belsen, Buchenwald.”<sup>226</sup> Several students accompanied her in this protest wearing Stars of David. The St Thomas Film Society also protested the choice of the BFI, or British Film Institute’s decision to invite Leni Riefenstahl to lecture at the National Film Theatre, on account of her past propaganda film-making efforts on behalf of the Third Reich.<sup>227</sup> This British anti-German sentiment would intensify as the outbreak wore on, but while protestors derided the lack of action in West Germany, the federal government was finally acting.

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<sup>223</sup> "Liberal-Minded Germans 'Need Encouragement'." *Times*, 5 January 1960, 6.

<sup>224</sup> "Mr. Gaitskell In Jamaica." *Times*, 11 January 1960, 9.

<sup>225</sup> "Demonstrators At German Embassy." *Times*, 6 January 1960, 8.

<sup>226</sup> "Demonstrators At German Embassy." *Times*, 6 January 1960, 8.

<sup>227</sup> "Demonstrators At German Embassy." *Times*, 6 January 1960, 8.

The same day the American Jewish Committee's report came out, the West German government's chief spokesman Felix von Eckhardt announced that the government would be amending the Penal Code to create a specific offense for Antisemitism that carried a minimum three-month prison sentence, and that the government was going to meet next week to discuss possible actions against the DRP.<sup>228</sup> However, the proposed changes Adenauer's government were pursuing did not originate with Adenauer's CDU. These changes had actually been proposed months before by the SPD after various instances of Antisemitism had been reported, including cases like that involving Friedrich Nieland. The bill proposing the changes had been introduced to the legislature for debate in December 1959 but had not been passed by Adenauer's majority coalition.<sup>229</sup> The fact that Adenauer's government had not supported the bill before the bad publicity of the swastika epidemic indicates that Antisemitism was not a high priority for Adenauer or the CDU, a fact also made obvious by the lack of interest in the government on a number of Jewish issues since the restitution bills had been passed. The immediate reaction to the proposed changes were mostly negative, according to Sydney Gruson of the *New York Times*, who noted that Mayor of Hamburg and Socialist Max Brauer decried the changes as not nearly enough action. The new punishments for Antisemitic acts carried a three-month minimum sentence, a sentence which by this point was seen as too short for crimes of such a serious nature. Both the SPD and the *Frei Partei* would come to oppose the bill, as they wanted stricter changes to the penal code.<sup>230</sup> It is important to note that the proposed bill signaled not so much a change in

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<sup>228</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Bonn Plans Curb on Anti-Semitism: Adenauer Decides to Ask for a Law Against Slander -- Desecrations Continue" *New York Times* 1 January 1960, 1.

<sup>229</sup> Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism*, 15.

<sup>230</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Bonn Plans Curb on Anti-Semitism," *New York Times*, 1 January 1960, 1.

the government's attitude toward the severity of these crimes, but rather, according to scholar Wulf Kansteiner, was merely a face-saving measure. With other Western countries debating or passing similar bills, it was not possible for West Germany to ignore making similar legal changes. Reinforcing an impression of West German apathy regarding such matters, Kansteiner points to events that occurred a few months later, when in May 1960 the statute of limitations for some violent Nazi crimes was allowed to lapse with only a short debate on the matter.<sup>231</sup> At the time of the epidemic, the proposal of limited changes to the penal code did little to quell growing opposition to the government's stance.

Several Jewish leaders disagreed with the Adenauer government's efforts thus far. According to *The Times*, "anti-Semitism is obviously endemic" in West Germany.<sup>232</sup> Dr. Henrik G. van Dam, who had just called to congratulate Adenauer on his 84<sup>th</sup> birthday, penned a critical think piece in *Die Zeit* in which he argued that Antisemitism needed to be seen as a symptom and tool of supporters of Nazism and fascism. Van Dam warned against a government witch-hunt, disagreeing with many of his colleagues by writing that it would be impractical to try and target all ex-Nazis. Nevertheless the West German government needed to treat this as a serious moral problem, one that the country needed to confront.<sup>233</sup> Antisemitism in and of itself was not dangerous to Jews living in Germany, argued van Dam, because of the low population of Jews in Germany. But Adenauer concerned himself too much with Communist agitators, and too little with the "education of the political mind" of Germans.<sup>234</sup> Van Dam also argued that Jewish

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<sup>231</sup> Kansteiner, *In Pursuit*, 222.

<sup>232</sup> "W. German Jews Call For Educational Reform." *Times*, 8 January 1960, 8.

<sup>233</sup> Hendrik G. van Dam, "Antisemitismus Ohne Juden" *Zeit Online*, 8 January 1960.

<sup>234</sup> "W. German Jews Call For Educational Reform." *Times*, 8 January 1960, 8.

survival in West Germany was a test of German democracy, a sentiment expressed over a decade ago by John McCloy, American High Commissioner for West Germany during the occupation. Just as they did then, some Jews took exception to being used as a measuring stick for democracy in Germany. "Sufferance was an awful word," according to Rabbi Assaria, "a substitute for equality and justice. Germans had not changed: they still lived with the ideas of the past."<sup>235</sup> On 7 January 1960, Dr. Alexander Easterman of the World Jewish Congress met with Foreign Minister Bretano and presented him with a list of reforms his organization recommended to confront Antisemitism and Nazism. The reforms were very similar to the demands given to the Germans from the AJC and included the establishment of a committee to investigate every government official's possible Nazi past, a review of pensions paid to former Nazis, close monitoring of foreign fascists groups, and heavier punishments for Antisemitic acts. Easterman was very optimistic about the reforms' chances, but Bretano stressed that no guarantees could be made. In this, he was right.<sup>236</sup>

Just two days after Easterman delivered his reforms to Bretano, the DRP won an important court case in Rhineland-Palatinate. The DRP had originally planned a party conference at a venue in the *Länder* of Rhineland-Palatinate. The owner had refused to allow them to use the venue space, even after booking months in advance, due to the negative publicity of the swastika outbreak. The DRP sued, and eventually won their suit, holding their meeting on 10 January 1960.<sup>237</sup> The meeting itself was not a great success, the heat had been turned off in the venue prior to it being opened, and very few

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<sup>235</sup> "W. German Jews Call For Educational Reform." *Times*, 8 January 1960, 8.

<sup>236</sup> "Jewish Proposals To Crush Neo-Nazism." *Times*, 8 January 1960, 8.

<sup>237</sup> "Victory In Court For The Deutsche Reichspartei." *Times*, 11 January 1960, 9.

DRP members showed up. It was a victory nonetheless, and Federal Minister of the Interior Schroder acknowledged that it would now be very difficult to convince a judge of the need to ban the party. No mention was made of the proposals mentioned by Dr. Easterman, but supposed Communist involvement was once again brought up in his scrum with reporters.<sup>238</sup> The next day Adenauer appeared on television to again stress that these events were being used to undermine the West German government as the Israeli government sent a note to the government expressing “deep shock” at the events that transpired in West Germany, but assured the leaders of the Federal Republic that they understood the vast majority of Germans did not hold these beliefs.<sup>239</sup> In Hamburg that day, the Foreign Minister doubled down, calling for the entire country to rise up against the “criminals and fools” that were responsible for Antisemitism.<sup>240</sup> Yet even as Adenauer and his Cabinet were placing the blame on Communist agitators and fools, Bavarian officials confirmed to the press that they had found evidence of Hungarian fascists spreading propaganda and had given the culprits one year to leave the country. Bavarian officials stressed however, that they were not directly responsible for any actual vandalism.<sup>241</sup> No mention of the Hungarians was made by Adenauer, however, and the official story continued to be plugged despite no evidence presented to confirm their claims. Indeed, two days later, when pressed by *Der Spiegel*, Interior Minister Schröder admitted that the government could prove neither left-wing or right-wing backers, and that the obsession with Communists was not based in solid fact.<sup>242</sup> This

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<sup>238</sup> "Victory In Court For The Deutsche Reichspartei." *Times*, 11 January 1960, 9.

<sup>239</sup> "Adenauer Says Nazis Must Stop: Opposes Change Threats in London Rash of Swastikas Continues in U.S." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 12 January 1960, A8.

<sup>240</sup> "Adenauer Says Nazis Must Stop: Opposes Change Threats in London Rash of Swastikas Continues in U.S." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 12 January 1960, A8.

<sup>241</sup> "Israel Note Speaks Of Lessons Of History." *Times*, 12 January 1960, 10.

<sup>242</sup> "Antisemitismus: Hintermänner," *Spiegel Online*, 13 January 1960.

disturbing revelation was perhaps best explained by the opposition SPD, who told the *New York Post* on 15 January that Adenauer was afraid to acknowledge the facts of the situation because he “doesn’t want to offend the Right and lose it as a solid voting bloc.”<sup>243</sup> This would set the stage for Adenauer’s television address of 16 January 1960 in which he would articulate his own thoughts on Antisemitism in West Germany and tell the West German people what needed to be done to fight back against prejudice.

The television address itself was preceded by a night of discussion between Adenauer and his advisors, in which they debated the need to speak on the matter at all, or whether the federal government was acting too hastily. One advisor, Dr. Alfred Rapp, pointed to Henrik van Dam’s article in *Die Zeit* as proof that there was no need to act rashly. In this he felt that government action specifically against Antisemitism would backfire.<sup>244</sup> Adenauer seemed frustrated that this was still an issue, he told his colleagues that if Cologne had just acted as Berlin had done in banning right-wing groups like the *Bund Nationaler Studenten* and prosecuted the culprits quickly, it could be put behind them.<sup>245</sup> When asked by Adenauer if he was doing too much, however, journalist Peter von Zahn responded with “We do too little!”<sup>246</sup> His impression was that many Americans were under the impression that nothing was taught of the Nazi period in schools. Adenauer took exception to this, retorting “The Allies have forbidden that!”<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Tetens *The New Germany*, 150.

<sup>244</sup> Transcript of meeting, 15 January 1960, Nr. 14 Kanzler-Tee (Wortprotokoll) StBKAH 02.21, in *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, ed. by Hanns Jürgen Küsters. (Adenauer Rhöndorfer Ausgabe, Berlin: Siedler, 1988), 177.

<sup>245</sup> Transcript of meeting, 15 January 1960, Nr. 14 Kanzler-Tee (Wortprotokoll) StBKAH 02.21, *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, 177.

<sup>246</sup> Von Zahn was a German journalist who had worked in America for many years. Transcript of meeting, 15 January 1960, Nr. 14 Kanzler-Tee (Wortprotokoll) StBKAH 02.21, *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, 177.

<sup>247</sup> Transcript of meeting, 15 January 1960, Nr. 14 Kanzler-Tee (Wortprotokoll) StBKAH 02.21, *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, 177.

Clearly then, the advisors agreed something had to be done to address the young people of Germany. Discussions were held over whether an appearance before students on a college campus would be more proper, but Dr. Rapp did not consider this to be official enough. Eventually, the proclamation was agreed to and Adenauer decided to go on German television the next night.<sup>248</sup>

Adenauer began his country-wide address by pointing out to listeners that he felt especially qualified to speak on this matter, as he too was a victim of National Socialism. He told Germans that he was on the death lists of the Nazis no fewer than four times, and that it was a miracle he survived.<sup>249</sup> Next, he addressed his relationship with the Jewish community. He noted how when his family was in financial hardship it was two Jewish families who offered to help, and that he had worked very hard on behalf of Jews in Israel to secure reparations. "I wanted to tell the whole world," said Adenauer "that the Germany of to-day totally rejects anti-Semitism."<sup>250</sup> Most of the incidents, he told Germans, were caused by "louts" and that they deserved a good beating if caught in their endeavours.<sup>251</sup> The vast majority of Germans had not been Nazis, according to Adenauer, and were not Antisemitic now. Only a few of the incidents, like the Cologne smearing, were influenced by politics. Finally, Adenauer ended his statement by telling the country that the condemnation of Antisemitism and Nazism by many Germans was proof of the benevolence of the German people.<sup>252</sup> In all, the proclamation was a short, two-page statement, condemning Antisemitism and

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<sup>248</sup> Transcript of meeting, 15 January 1960, Nr. 14 Kanzler-Tee (Wortprotokoll) StBKAH 02.21, *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, 178.

<sup>249</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 40.

<sup>250</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 40.

<sup>251</sup> "Hooligans Blamed For Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 18 January 1960, 10.

<sup>252</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 41.

assuring the German people that there was no widespread threat to German society. No mention was made of Communist agitators, nor was there mention of the DRP or the student groups banned in West Berlin, or the fascist propagandists spreading hatred. It is interesting to note how Adenauer began his address. In seeking to portray himself as a victim of the Nazis, Adenauer hoped to grant himself authority on grounds he had largely ceded to the SPD since the end of the war. To be sure, Adenauer was briefly imprisoned during the war, but he suffered nowhere near the same fate as his SPD and KPD colleagues, who were murdered or imprisoned in concentration camps.<sup>253</sup>

Adenauer had not suffered at the hands of the Nazis as Kurt Schumacher had. And while the SPD could claim to have voted against the Enabling Act, Adenauer had tried to remain neutral to preserve his position as Mayor.<sup>254</sup> Yet historian Wulf Kansteiner argues that Adenauer “eloquently” framed Antisemitism as a private issue, a problem of individual hooligans who needed to be punished rather than a systemic and pervasive problem in West German society. Furthermore, Kansteiner notes that this was Adenauer’s honest assessment of the situation. He did not see the need to rehash old debates he thought settled when he had defeated Schumacher in the election of 1949.<sup>255</sup> The television proclamation demonstrated to West Germany and the rest of the world that there was no wider problem in German society; that these were only a few hooligans and even fewer politically motivated die-hards. But the television address did not end the epidemic; indeed, the drama that Adenauer saw little need to address and devoted

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<sup>253</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 40.

<sup>254</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 40.

<sup>255</sup> Kansteiner, *In Pursuit*, 222.

little time to would continue for another month, and further action would need to be taken.

The Cologne vandalism quickly escalated from another unfortunate example of Antisemitism in the Federal Republic to encapsulate all that critics saw wrong with the Federal Republic. After the initial events and the early days of the epidemic, the Adenauer regime reacted by accusing the Communists of acting to undermine the West German state. But by mid-January this claim was increasingly under fire, especially as more evidence of far-right activity was reported in the press. By 16 January, Adenauer still questioned the need to even make a statement but did so anyway. However, his statement did little to assuage the concerns of most of those protesting. Rather than admit the responsibility of the far right or acknowledge a need for a change in policy, Adenauer simply privatized the problem, foisting responsibility for dealing with Antisemites onto the shoulders of everyday Germans, a solution that was little comfort to those who understood Antisemitism and Nazism to be systemic problems. The reaction to Adenauer's address was not the one he was hoping for, as events in the weeks that followed proved.

## Chapter Three

### **Forgotten in a Fortnight? Reactions and Responses to the Swastika Epidemic, 16 January – 29 February 1960**

Konrad Adenauer had made his television proclamation on 16 January 1960 hoping that it would be sufficient to deal with the outcry prompted by shocking displays of Antisemitism and Neo-Nazism. Of much more importance to Adenauer were foreign affairs of state, including upcoming international trips.<sup>256</sup> But his emphasis on private action and confident unconcern with right-wing Neo-Nazi influences, to say nothing of his firm disbelief in systemic Antisemitism, did not translate into a reassured international and national audience. This chapter will explore the continuation of this unrest through February and beyond. While the number of incidents reported in West Germany would rapidly decrease by the end of the month, critics both inside and outside the country did not lessen their attacks on Adenauer. The end of January saw the implementation of a government study of the epidemic, to be released in mid-February, and in early February Adenauer visited a concentration camp for the first time, at the behest of the president of the World Jewish Congress, in what was seen as a reaction to growing critiques of his policies towards the Jewish community and far-right organizations. The release of the White Book, the government's conclusions on the cause of the epidemic, prompted heated debate in the *Bundestag* and a sharp rebuke from many newspaper pundits, who saw it as little more than a government whitewash.

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<sup>256</sup> Amidst a hectic schedule of travelling and meetings, it would be hard to believe that Adenauer would be overly concerned with a domestic problem he believed to be a non-issue. Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 437, 438.

Throughout this period Adenauer maintained his eastern influences line, and unsurprisingly Germans continued to reject this narrative. By the end of February, however, the number of incidents had trickled down to a handful, and the outbreak began to fade from headlines. The debate, though muted, continued in other ways, and one of the founding questions of the Federal Republic once thought settled was again being asked, this time with new answers. The debate had been raised at other points in the past, but this time it was started again in earnest. The 1960s, then, began for the Federal Republic with a debate that would consume it by the late 1960s. The beginning of the end of the Adenauer period started with the recognition of the chancellor's place in the memory politics of West Germany, a place he would continue to occupy symbolically years after his death.

On 16 January 1960, the day Adenauer made his television address, *The Times* reported that a Jewish firm in the UK, Stanmor Clothing Company, had cancelled a German contract for cloth worth £150 000 a year in order to put pressure on the German government to act. Similar boycott measures were being prepared by seven other firms.<sup>257</sup> Anti-German boycotts had been reported sooner in the epidemic, but Foreign Minister Bretano insisted that these were mere rumours.<sup>258</sup> If Adenauer hoped that his television address would calm international opposition, he was sorely disappointed. Two days after the firms announced their boycotts, a massive protest took place in London organized by the Association of Jewish ex-Servicemen and Women. Police estimated 7500 people attended but organizers told the press that an estimated 50 000 people

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<sup>257</sup> "Order For German Cloth Cancelled." *Times*, 16 January 1960, 8.

<sup>258</sup> "Germany Blames Neo-Nazis." *Times*, 15 January 1960, 10.

joined the march. Marchers included concentration camp survivors like Claudette Kelly, who wore her Auschwitz prison uniform, two former mayors of London, and a number of MPs and prominent faith leaders. At the end of the march a letter was presented to the West German Ambassador Joachim Ritter, stating in part "...these matters indicate that only by a thorough cleansing operation throughout Germany, undertaken with every sense of urgency, can the Germans convince the world of the sincerity of their aspirations towards true democracy."<sup>259</sup> Specifically, the letter expressed shock at the number of ex-Nazis allowed to retain their posts, including many teachers. Ritter assured the protestors that the government would not rest until "this evil had been eradicated."<sup>260</sup> But Ritter's assurances were hardly rooted in fact or policy. No attempt to renew denazification was ever entertained by Adenauer. Only a day later Theodor Oberländer flat out refused to entertain notions he should resign, and the day after that *Der Spiegel* ran a lengthy interview with the leadership of the DRP, giving them a prominent stage to defend themselves and their party's platform, calling themselves the "party of the future."<sup>261</sup> They also maintained, despite their own personal histories, that only 25% of their members were former Nazis.<sup>262</sup> Clearly then, the DRP were not concerned about possible government action by this point, and the federal government was not changing its course.

A little over a week after the television address, on 25 January, the UN representative of the World Jewish Congress, Dr. M.L. Perlzweig, announced that to

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<sup>259</sup> "Thousands In London March Against Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 18 January 1960, 7.

<sup>260</sup> "Thousands In London March Against Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 18 January 1960, 7.

<sup>261</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Synagogue Arson Foiled in Bavaria: Authorities Disclose Attempt Last Wednesday -- 3 Held for Swastika Daubing" *New York Times*. 20 January 1960, 15; "Die Deutsche Reichs-Partei" *Spiegel Online*, 20 January 1960.

<sup>262</sup> "Die Deutsche Reichs-Partei." *Spiegel Online*, 20 January 1960.

date, 1000 incidents in 243 cities in 34 countries had been recorded by the Institute of Jewish Affairs in New York. Going on, Perzlweig said that based on the evidence thus far: "I venture to suggest that one judgement we can draw is that anti-Semitism is a disease of Christian democracy."<sup>263</sup> However, while maintaining that it would be wrong to overestimate the extent to which Nazism has influenced such a global phenomenon, he warned that it would be wrong to dismiss the possible threat Antisemitism could pose to Jewish people all over the world. Also, while no evidence of coordinated action exists, it was not possible that all the incidents could be attributed to hooligans. Jewish concerns over international Antisemitism were on full display, but the emphasis still remained on West Germany. The same conference that Perzlweig attended also called on the Federal Government, in the words of a *Times* reporter, to "eradicate Nazism in all its forms from the body politic in Germany."<sup>264</sup> Regardless of the Antisemitism on display around the world, West Germany remained the focal point and country of greatest concern, for obvious reasons. Antisemitism in other countries could be dismissed as hooliganism, but in West Germany, the country of National Socialism, it was more serious. This sentiment was still shared by many protestors, Adenauer's assurances notwithstanding. On 24 January 4000 former servicemen, resistance fighters, and concentration camp survivors marched up the Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe in protest of the Antisemitism on display across Europe.<sup>265</sup> Meanwhile, West Berlin student and member of the Socialist German Students Union Reinhard Strecker filed charges of homicide against 43 judges and lawyers who had allegedly held office before

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<sup>263</sup> "1,000 Incidents Of Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 25 January 1960, 8.

<sup>264</sup> "1,000 Incidents Of Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 25 January 1960, 8.

<sup>265</sup> "Swastika-Daubings Protested in Paris," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 25 January 1960, A5.

1945. This action was part of a larger campaign called “Actions Against Unexpiated Justice” started in November 1959 but had been given “special significance” by the swastika daubings.<sup>266</sup> Finally, perhaps as the ultimate example that Adenauer’s words had resonated with a few Germans, a builder in Dimbach was charged with assault on the 24<sup>th</sup> after beating a child he caught throwing snowballs at the side of a building to make the shape of a swastika. The man cited Adenauer in his defense as the boy’s father brought charges against him.<sup>267</sup> Thus as January ended, Adenauer’s television address had seemed to do little more than get a man in Dimbach charged with assault and did little to quell the tide of criticism heaped on the German government.

If Adenauer and his government thought that the controversy would “be forgotten abroad within a fortnight” as one reporter put it, he would be sorely disappointed.<sup>268</sup> Dr. Carlo Schmid, Vice-President of the *Bundestag*, made a statement on the swastika outbreak in the *Bundestag* on 20 January.<sup>269</sup> In his statement he argued that despite the international scope of the outbreak, Germans should feel particularly concerned and ashamed. The fact that many of the culprits were young people should not, he argued, make the situation any less serious because of all the actions they may have taken to act out, they chose to be Antisemitic.<sup>270</sup> He also maintained that despite the possible overzealousness of the press to report on so many incidents, it was important to see how widespread these events were. Germans, he argued, had a moral imperative to act on this matter, to fully atone for the sins of the Third Reich, and to

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<sup>266</sup> "Ex-Nazi Judges In Germany." *Times*, 25 January 1960, 9.

<sup>267</sup> "Ex-Nazi Judges In Germany." *Times*, 25 January 1960, 9.

<sup>268</sup> "Hooligans Blamed For Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 18 January 1960, 10.

<sup>269</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 42.

<sup>270</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 42.

fight to eradicate Nazism and Antisemitism. It was not worth arguing over how many people had been killed by the Germans, such an argument, he stated, was moot because what mattered was that Germans had murdered people. Not teaching children this fact, quibbling over accuracy of numbers over the moral implications of the murders of the Nazis, was a failure on the part of the country. Schmid told the *Bundestag* that “above all, however, we will fail as long as we consider what has been done at the synagogues first and foremost, not from the moral point of view, but from the point of view of the possible damage which the Federal Republic may have suffered.”<sup>271</sup> Here Schmid was directly attacking the government’s position. Much of the concern of officials had been the serious impact the outbreak had on foreign relations with Western powers, over any serious moral problem with West German society.<sup>272</sup> Schmid echoed the moral arguments his former party leader Kurt Schumacher had articulated a decade earlier, and which many left-leaning intellectuals had continued to articulate over the intervening fifteen years. Pressure to act also came from the Right; on 1 February the youth branch of the CDU, the Association of Christian Democratic Students (*Ring Christlich - Demokratischer Studenten* - RCDS) passed a resolution condemning Theodor Oberländer. Party officials forced them to rescind the resolution the next day, but the RCDS would demand his resignation two weeks later.<sup>273</sup> On 3 February the British Labour Party met to discuss censuring the British government’s decision to supply German forces with nuclear capable weapons. While they cited the upcoming East-West summit in May, several party officials were influenced by the outbreak when they

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<sup>271</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 43.

<sup>272</sup> "Teaching History To The Germans." *Times*, 13 January 1960, 10.

<sup>273</sup> Teschke *Hitler's Legacy*, 139.

derided the British government's decision to entrust medium-range missiles to German forces.<sup>274</sup> Probably more rhetoric than actually compelling, the use of the swastika epidemic as an excuse to express distrust in West Germany was exactly what German officials feared. Konrad Adenauer, perhaps in an attempt to assuage these concerns, decided to visit Bergen-Belsen, a former concentration camp in Lower Saxony, the first such visit of his Chancellorship.

Though Adenauer had been imprisoned at various points during the period of the Third Reich, he had never formally visited a concentration camp in his position as Chancellor. At certain points in the FDR's eleven-year history the President of the FDR had spoken at commemorations at concentration camps, but the presidency was largely a ceremonial role, thus it was fitting for a symbolic appearance at such events.<sup>275</sup> However, Adenauer had never attended these events, and he travelled to Bergen-Belsen on February 2<sup>nd</sup> at the behest of Nahum Goldmann, president of the World Jewish Congress.<sup>276</sup> At Bergen-Belsen Adenauer gave a short speech in which he assured Jewish-Germans, and the rest of the world, that West Germany would guarantee the rights of all citizens, no matter their race or religion. He also told those gathered that both himself and all of West Germany felt deep regret at the events of the past few weeks, and that everything would be done to punish those that violated the safety and respect of Germany's Jewish citizens.<sup>277</sup> But Adenauer went further, to commemorate all victims of the Nazis, Germans, Poles, Czechs, French, and he vowed that he would do

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<sup>274</sup> "Labour Censure Motion On German Arms." *Times*, 4 February 1960, 10.

<sup>275</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 317.

<sup>276</sup> Transcript of meeting, 5 February 1960, Nr. 15 Kanzler-Tee (Wortprotokoll) StBKAH 02.21, *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, 191.

<sup>277</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 44.

everything in his power to ensure that “every man on Earth must enjoy justice, security, and freedom in the future.”<sup>278</sup> Adenauer’s visitation as a direct result of these events is proof that the outbreak forced him to acknowledge the Nazi past. But, it is difficult to argue that the visit to Bergen-Belsen could be anything more than an attempt at damage-control in a public relations scandal.<sup>279</sup> To be sure, it was still a significant moment, but hardly a landmark shift. Bergen-Belsen, indeed, most concentration camps, did not have the same place of central importance in public memory of what we now call the Holocaust as they do now. The concentration camp infrastructure at Bergen-Belsen was almost entirely destroyed after its liberation and in the subsequent years small memorials had been built by several victims’ groups, including Polish and Jewish survivors.<sup>280</sup> An obelisk memorial was built in 1948 and commemorated in 1952, but no specific mention of Nazi crimes was made on the memorial, only non-specific references to the number of people who had died at the site.<sup>281</sup> Thus Bergen-Belsen remained a powerful symbol of Nazi war crimes in the postwar era in the minds of those whose families had been victims, and the British public, due to its liberation by the British 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division.<sup>282</sup> Any wider significance was largely lost on the German public, with its infamy as the place where Anne Frank was killed perhaps its only notable reference.<sup>283</sup> Thus, placing Adenauer’s visit within the context of the camp as a site of public memory, his attendance at the ceremony should be seen mostly as a conciliatory act

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<sup>278</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 45.

<sup>279</sup> Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 209.

<sup>280</sup> Rainer Schulze, “Forgetting and Remembering: Memories and Memorialisation of Bergen-Belsen” *Holocaust Studies* 12, no. 1–2 (1 June 2006): 218.

<sup>281</sup> Schulze, “Forgetting and Remembering” 220.

<sup>282</sup> “The 11th Armoured Division (Great Britain)” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>283</sup> A small documentation centre was built Bergen-Belsen in 1966, and as attitudes towards public memory of the Nazi period changed, more work was done to increase the educational content of the camp in the 1980s. Schulze, “Forgetting and Remembering,” 221.

towards the Jewish community and perhaps to a lesser extent those British veterans who still remembered the camp. Indeed, that he visited the camp at the behest of the World Jewish Congress is also telling of his motivations. In a conversation Adenauer had with his advisors a few days later they discussed the event not as the start of new policy initiatives, but to simply compliment Adenauer and Goldmann on their performances.<sup>284</sup> It is unfair, perhaps, to accuse Adenauer of just using Bergen-Belsen as a positive press opportunity, he certainly did mean what he said and had always been committed to protecting the Jewish community, but his visit cannot be seen as a major shift in his opinion towards the swastika outbreak or indeed to the role of public memory in West German society. Whatever his motivations, whatever good press he had hoped to receive, would quickly be drowned out by the events of the trial of Schönen and Strunk, the Cologne perpetrators.

At the trial of Schönen and Strunk serious attention was paid to the men's political thought and Antisemitism, and the origins of both. Interestingly, during the trial, Schönen told the court he was more interested in the political aspects of Nazism and the DRP, while Strunk was more virulently Antisemitic, and denied that he adopted these views after joining the DRP in 1958.<sup>285</sup> Schönen told the court he believed that democracies were not a practical form of government, advocating instead for a "moderate dictatorship."<sup>286</sup> Clearly then, his devotion to the DRP stemmed in part from what he saw as the party's anti-democratic tendencies. His smearing of the memorial to

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<sup>284</sup> Transcript of meeting, 5 February 1960, Nr. 15 Kanzler-Tee (Wortprotokoll) StBKAH 02.21, *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, 191.

<sup>285</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 9, "Horst Wessel Taken As A Model." *Times*, 6 February 1960, 5.

<sup>286</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 9.

Nazi victims was motivated by his belief that the offending sentence represented “a self-defilement of the German people” and that the Nazis had done many positive things for Germany.<sup>287</sup> However Schöner stressed that he disapproved of the way the Nazis treated the Jews, a sentiment not shared by his co-conspirator Strunk. Despite misgivings from Schöner, Strunk wanted to smear the synagogue in an act of blatant Antisemitism. Unapologetic in his views, Strunk maintained that while extermination was going too far, Germany needed to expel its Jewish population.<sup>288</sup> Indeed, Strunk told the court that he had already been Antisemitic from an early age, and both men had committed previous acts of vandalism, with Schöner focusing primarily on painting pro-DRP slogans and Strunk painting Antisemitic slogans in various places. During the trial much speculation on the involvement of the DRP was laid to rest, while the DRP did sanction events where Antisemitic and Nazi ideas were expressed, no other members took part in the smearing.<sup>289</sup> Ernst Custodis was asked to take part in the Cologne vandalism but declined and told the court that he thought it was simply a joking conversation held over beers.<sup>290</sup> Finally, the sentences were announced on 6 February 1960. Strunk was sentenced to one year and two months in prison while Schöner was sentenced to ten months.<sup>291</sup> Many people complained at what they saw as the leniency of the punishment. The judge defended the state’s actions by arguing that their punishment could not exceed

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<sup>287</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 11.

<sup>288</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 9.

<sup>289</sup> It should be mentioned that despite the lack of involvement by the DRP and the perpetrators insistence that they were not influenced by the DRP, DRP members knew of Schöner and Strunk’s personal bigotry, indeed Strunk’s room had been called the “Brown Room” by DRP members, a reference to the brownshirts, or Nazi SA, and had been used as a meeting place by many DRP members. An explicit reminder that while they may not have expressed their views in the same way as Strunk, they at the very least tolerated them, if not agreed with them. Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 8-10.

<sup>290</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 11-12.

<sup>291</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 12.

the scope of their guilt. In this manner the judge argued that the two culprits were in fact, political “numskulls” (in German, *Wirrkopfen*, or “scatterbrains”).<sup>292</sup> The judge apparently felt that the two men were not acting wholly rationally in their beliefs but did warn that it was still a serious matter because “it is out of numbskulls that stormtroopers are made,” a clear reference to the SA brownshirts of the Third Reich.<sup>293</sup> Many people protested this decision, when the judge told the court that the two perpetrators were not a danger to the state, a Jewish witness in the gallery called out “yes, not yet!” clearly dissatisfied with the judge’s leniency, and warning that they could still as yet do more damage.<sup>294</sup> It is interesting that the judge decided that despite their influence by right-wing Antisemitic literature that they had no general knowledge and were “political numskulls.”<sup>295</sup> For those hoping that there would be a severe punishment, they were sorely disappointed. It seemed as though there would be no sufficient resolution for those concerned by the Neo-Nazism and Antisemitism on display in West Germany.

No immediate solution perhaps, but steps were being taken to make systemic changes in education. While the Chief Ministers for the *Länder* had agreed to address education in mid-January, on 11 February the Conference of Ministers of Culture passed a resolution to examine German textbooks’ portrayal of the “most recent past.”<sup>296</sup> The speed with which the ministers reacted to public outcry could partially be explained by the recent review of German textbooks which had occurred in 1959, this resolution

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<sup>292</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 13, “Desecration Of Synagogue.” *Times*, 8 February 1960, 9.

<sup>293</sup> “Desecration Of Synagogue.” *Times*, 8 February 1960, 9.

<sup>294</sup> “Desecration Of Synagogue.” *Times*, 8 February 1960, 9.

<sup>295</sup> “Desecration Of Synagogue.” *Times*, 8 February 1960, 9.

<sup>296</sup> Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 209.

intended to act upon the results of this previous study.<sup>297</sup> Ironically, one of the first textbooks on the Nazi period to be used in West German schools was *The Burden of Guilt: A Short History of Germany, 1914-1945*, which was written as a direct result of the epidemic after its author, Hannah Vogt, took it upon herself to write a book for students to use themselves. However Vogt's book was not introduced until 1961, and the process of change in West German schools would take years.<sup>298</sup> As a result of the epidemic, ideas that senior scholars had been expressing for years gained in popularity, with Adorno's 1959 lecture receiving publication by several educator's journals as a direct result of the outbreak. Thus the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* began to be introduced into the pedagogy of educators across West Germany.<sup>299</sup> However, these slow changes would take years to develop; in the meantime, people continued to protest.

Student actions continued into February, despite the decline in the number of Antisemitic incidents.<sup>300</sup> On 12 February over a dozen student youth groups came together in a demonstration in Munich at the Technical University, their poster carrying the slogan "The Past We Haven't Dealt With – A Motto For Our Time." These students called for better education, the resignation of top Nazis from their posts, and stated "ethical and political apathy endanger the good name of our people and the existence of

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<sup>297</sup> Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau* 210.

<sup>298</sup> Hannah Vogt, "The Burden of Guilt" *Sources of the Western Tradition*. Tenth edition. Marvin Perry and George W. Bock. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2019), 440.

<sup>299</sup> Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 210.

<sup>300</sup> While the White Book only measured the outbreak up to January 28, and thus it is difficult to determine the number of incidents in February, a similar study done in the US by the Anti-Defamation League over nine weeks determined that 17% of all recorded incidents occurred after the fifth week, assuming these outbreaks followed a similar pattern it can be determined that least a handful of incidents were still occurring in February, even if they did not receive press coverage. Caplovitz and Rogers, *Swastika 1960*, 44.

our democracy.”<sup>301</sup> On 15 February Adenauer met with 3000 students at a Cologne university, where they were protesting. This could possibly be a result of the discussion he had had with his advisors the previous month, when they believed that a direct address to students would help assuage their concerns. Whatever the reason, as the students started shouting “out with Oberländer” Adenauer told them in no uncertain terms that he would not be firing him. “I have no intention of doing what you are calling upon me to do. You want him to be sacked. When the SED demands that a federal minister should be sacked, I am not inclined to propose that to the federal president.”<sup>302</sup> Right before he told the students this, he had admitted that Oberländer was indeed a Nazi, but that he had never done anything “dishonourable.”<sup>303</sup> According to Hans-Peter Schwarz, Adenauer’s biographer, students reacted with wild applause when he refused to cave to the SED, the chief political party in East Germany. Once again Adenauer had expressed his personal beliefs that East Germany was the main problem confronting West Germany in this issue, not the fact that his Minister for Refugees was an ex-Nazi. As Schwarz notes, Adenauer was highly critical and suspicious of most groups and newspapers attacking his administration for its past-Nazi links. Believing most attacks to be political in nature, he “conceded pure motives to Jewish organizations and Jewish journalists alone. Therefore he doggedly stood by people who were attacked.”<sup>304</sup> This is perhaps another reason why he was willing to listen to the advice of Nahum Goldmann and go to Bergen-Belsen a month after he had told his advisors the government was

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<sup>301</sup> “The Student Demonstration against the Nazis and against Anti-Semitism, Munich, 1960” The National Library of Israel.

<sup>302</sup> Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 431.

<sup>303</sup> Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 431.

<sup>304</sup> Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 431.

already doing too much. His support for Oberländer is telling of his determination to keep the past in the past. Denazification was over, and Adenauer no longer saw it as a priority. Unfortunately for him, the White Book was set to be released two days later, and the debate in the *Bundestag* and the reaction of the press suggested some did not agree with Adenauer's sentiments.

The White Book was set to be released 17 February and debated in the *Bundestag* the next day. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the SPD and the Trade Union Federation released a joint statement declaring "the danger in West Germany today lies not so much in forces that are aggressively disposed toward democracy but more in the fact that too many people have too few deep-rooted feelings for democracy."<sup>305</sup> The statement went on to read that Germans must fight against the desire to "cover the horrors of the past with a cloak of silence," and do more to educate German youth about the Nazi past.<sup>306</sup> Releasing a statement before the upcoming *Bundestag* debate, the SPD sought to clarify its stance on the outbreak, and prepare for the release of the White Book, and what was to become a contentious debate.

The White Book released on 17 February 1960 was forty-six pages long and counted a total of 685 cases from the initial Cologne graffiti incident, up to 28 January. While providing a breakdown of the Cologne vandalism and the motivations of its perpetrators, the White Book went on to systematically classify known cases, that is cases in which the perpetrators were caught, and provide examples of each. The White

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<sup>305</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Widespread Bias is Denied by Bonn: It Finds No Evidence Large Parts of Population Have Anti-Semitic Feelings," *New York Times*, 18 February 1960, 18.

<sup>306</sup> Sydney Gruson, "Widespread Bias is Denied by Bonn: It Finds No Evidence Large Parts of Population Have Anti-Semitic Feelings," *New York Times*, 18 February 1960, 18.

Book first described the nature of the incidents, i.e. a swastika smearing or the shouting of Antisemitic slurs or Nazi slogans in public, and then explored the specific motivations of the culprits. A breakdown of the data showed that the outbreak peaked on 7 January 1960 with 58 incidents, then slowly tapered off throughout the remainder of the month.<sup>307</sup> A breakdown of the apprehended culprits by age found that of the 234 perpetrators, 35 were under the age of 14, 95 were between the ages of 14 and 20, 49 were between 20 and 30 years old, 22 were 30-40 years old, 16 40-50, 11 50-60 years of age, and finally 6 offenders were over the age of 60.<sup>308</sup> Next the White Book concentrated on the classification and description of various incidents and the motivations. 215 perpetrators were examined out of the 470 cases they did not immediately dismiss due to evidence they were committed by children.<sup>309</sup> First, a total of seventeen perpetrators were identified in a total of 24 cases as featuring “anti-constitutional sentiment” or demonstrated clear links to right- or left-wing extremism. This anti-constitutional sentiment included Antisemitic and Nazi attitudes but also a link to an organization, which meant that several cases where culprits had links to East Germany were included. They also included cases that demonstrated “an emphatically anti-democratic character” by specifically targeting democracy, Adenauer, or the Federal Republic.<sup>310</sup> Examples of blatant Antisemites in the report included Ludwig Vogel, mentioned above, and Rolf Wollny, a 23-year-old businessman in West Berlin who got drunk, told several people Jews should not receive reparations, then vandalised a number

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<sup>307</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 15.

<sup>308</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 15.

<sup>309</sup> German authorities dismissed graffiti that was crudely drawn, or drawn on playgrounds and low to the ground, hard to reach places. Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 14, 23.

<sup>310</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 17.

of homes with slogans and swastikas.<sup>311</sup> Evidence of Communist perpetrators listed in the White Book listed several men in their late 20s and early 30s who had been members of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend*, the youth wing of the Communist Party before it was banned. Indeed, two culprits were included because they had attended the Communist World Youth Festival in 1951, when they were 18 and 26 respectively.<sup>312</sup> It is interesting to note that no other evidence is presented to indicate ties to contemporary Communist organizations. Many of these cases were directed against religious buildings, both Jewish and Christian, and cemeteries. Sixty-six acts were directed against Jewish citizens or organizations, including an example that is perhaps the most interesting case presented in the White Book. A 41-year-old former *Obsturmführer* in the Waffen-SS named Werner Telchert told a Jewish person in his town of Darmstadt that they gassed too few Jews like him. However, what is interesting is the manner in which he was treated by the criminal justice system. Telchert was declared to be mentally unfit and his trial was suspended until they could determine his sanity.<sup>313</sup> No other explanation is given by the White Book as to why he was considered to be mentally ill, including whether or not it was linked to the nature of his crime or if he had exhibited other behaviour.

Fifty-six of the perpetrators were determined by the White Book to be motivated by “subliminal political motives” brought upon by the effects of intoxication or were committed spontaneously. Rather than attribute deliberate motivations to these perpetrators, the White Book concluded that while they were not overly anti-democratic,

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<sup>311</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 17-18.

<sup>312</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 19.

<sup>313</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 19, 21.

pro-Nazi, or Antisemitic; specific circumstances led them to act out in ways that were perceived to be such, often under stress or the influence of alcohol. For example, “in the absence of other forms of expression, Nazi symbols and slogans were used to protest against the democratic form of government, without recognizing National Socialism at the same time.”<sup>314</sup> With regards to Antisemitism, the White Book argued that in some cases people used Antisemitic slurs against colleagues or strangers because they were frustrated, the target’s Jewishness a convenient way to insult them. Examples included 39-year-old Georg Lagodny, who made Antisemitic remarks in a restaurant because he was irritated by a woman who he did not like and who he knew had adopted a Jewish child. Another example was the case of Werner Leukel, a former member of the Waffen-SS who was under the influence of alcohol when he painted swastikas on numerous buildings and parked cars one night. After his arrest he told police he was incited to act in anger at his treatment in captivity during the war and his treatment in his postwar profession.<sup>315</sup> These two examples suggest that there was a determined attempt to draw a line between perpetrators with clear intent and those whose intent was not overt Antisemitism or Nazism. While it is of course difficult to determine the intent behind someone’s actions it is telling that the White Book chose to attribute so much to “subliminal” political feeling, but then stressed that this feeling was only expressed after the consumption of alcohol or a perceived slight. Arguably, many of these culprits could be considered sympathetic to National Socialism or outright Antisemitic. This problem also arose in the 113 offenders the White Book reported had “almost certainly acted for

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<sup>314</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 24.

<sup>315</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 25.

reasons other than political ones.”<sup>316</sup> The White Book concluded that fully two-thirds of the culprits, including 113 offenders classified as hooligans, were “without political motive”<sup>317</sup> Besides the 113 hooligans, 35 were attributed to children, and 17 to people with mental illnesses.<sup>318</sup> But of the 113, it is again difficult to tell how many were actually Antisemitic and who were only doing so as a prank. Of course the White Book attempted to distinguish between the two, but it is possible to be both and so the 2/3 to 1/3 measurement should be viewed with some skepticism. The White Book concluded with an analysis of possible external influences, and it was this section that proved to be the most controversial.

Devoting only a single page to a section on “right-wing radicals,” the study concluded that there was no evidence to link any of the perpetrators to any specific organized effort by a right-wing group. It did admit the influence of the DRP on many actors, and the influence Antisemitic and Nazi writings had on some culprits, but no organized effort could be proven.<sup>319</sup> The White Book then spent the next seven pages outlining alleged Communist involvement. In this section the White Book cited Albrecht Norden’s propaganda efforts as evidence of a wider movement to discredit the West German government, outlining his various efforts for three pages but offering no proof of Norden’s antics extending to the vandalism of the past two months.<sup>320</sup> Instead, the report offered evidence of individual Communist involvement, or at least, the involvement of individuals they believed to be Communist. This in effect proved that

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<sup>316</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 25.

<sup>317</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 27.

<sup>318</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 27.

<sup>319</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 29.

<sup>320</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 30-32.

some culprits were members or past members of left-leaning organizations but could not prove that they were being directed by any organized Communist entity, such as East Germany.<sup>321</sup> Evidence that both Schöenen and Strunk had visited East Germany was presented as possible Communist influence, though the visits had happened years earlier.<sup>322</sup> The positive reaction of East Germany to the swastika outbreak, using it in their propaganda was also presented as evidence that this was indeed their plan all along. However, it must be stressed that no clear links to the East Germans were ever proven in the White Book, a failing that would be derided by the Government's critics as vindication of their belief in the Government's failed obsession with pinning the incidents on the Communists. The White Book, however, presented two conclusions at the end of its report. First, that the overwhelming number of Germans were not Antisemitic and in fact had spoken out against the synagogue desecrations. These perpetrators, according the White Book, represented only a fraction of the population of the Federal Republic, and there was no widespread Antisemitism problem in West Germany.<sup>323</sup> Secondly, the White Book concluded that there was a clear attempt being made by the East Germans to damage the reputation of the Federal Republic in the eyes of the world, and that the Communists had been conducting it. But the White Book did not go so far as to connect the outbreak to the East Germans.<sup>324</sup> Thus, while it spent over seven pages discussing Communist involvement, it did not conclusively prove a connection, and the subsequent debates would pounce on this fact, along with the total disregard for the realities of Antisemitism in West Germany.

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<sup>321</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 33.

<sup>322</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 34-35.

<sup>323</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 37, 38.

<sup>324</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 39.

Minister of the Interior Gerhard Schröder opened debate in the *Bundestag* on the White Book by first stating that rebuilding democracy was a monumental task, one that was unprecedented in German history, and one that called for patience. It was unfair, he went on, to blame teachers for these events. Indeed he said, the low voting numbers for extremist parties indicated that schools were indeed doing their jobs in teaching democratic values. He called for a commission of teachers, theologians, and historians to research the massacre of Jews and the totalitarian nature of the Third Reich, while also stating that there would be no kneejerk banning of parties. He then pointed out the White Book's proof of Communist influence, despite his admission weeks earlier that the government had no evidence of any external involvement.<sup>325</sup> The vice president of the *Bundestag* Dr. Carlo Schmid provided the opposition's response. He asked the German people to realize that the events of the past two months revealed that something Germans had convinced themselves was wiped out had in reality only been "swept under the rug."<sup>326</sup> Proof that West Germany had not overcome its past, he argued, was plain to see in the fact that several federal ministers of Adenauer's government were still Nazis, clearly referring to Oberländer and Globke.<sup>327</sup> The debate only went downhill from there. SPD deputy Gustav Heinemann told the diet, according to Teschke, "that Adenauer was propagating the dangerous view that Germans had the duty of protecting the west against Communism."<sup>328</sup> Ferdinand Friedensberg, a CDU deputy, then moved to defend what he saw as Germany's role in the "crusade" against the east and told the assembly Adenauer's support for Jewish reparations was proof he was not Antisemitic.

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<sup>325</sup> "W. German Plan For Study Of Jewish Repression." *Times*, 19 February 1960, 9.

<sup>326</sup> "W. German Plan For Study Of Jewish Repression." *Times*, 19 February 1960, 9.

<sup>327</sup> "W. German Plan For Study Of Jewish Repression." *Times*, 19 February 1960, 9.

<sup>328</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 140.

SPD deputy Adolf Arndt took exception to both arguments, while stating that in the minds of some CDU members, “anti-communism” was replacing Antisemitism. Another CDU member was upset that Heinemann had dryly commented that “Christ had not died to oppose Marx,” instead shouting that Marx had opposed Christ.<sup>329</sup> Exasperated, SPD deputy Gerhard Jahn launched a renewed attack on Oberländer and others, only to be threatened by CDU deputy Resner that he would reveal the Communist past of the deputy leader of the SPD, Herbert Wehner, if Jahn continued to besmirch Oberländer’s reputation.<sup>330</sup> This proved too much. Insults began to fly, and the debate ended after the SPD members walked out. As Teschke points out, this exchange proved that in the minds of many CDU members, “being an ex-Communist was at least as bad as being an ex-Nazi.”<sup>331</sup> Like the television proclamation before it, the White Paper was meant to put the matter of the swastika smearings to rest, instead it only prompted disappointment at the lack of government action, and in this case, literally fierce debate. An explanation of why the two parties were so diametrically opposed on this issue can be seen in the two opening statements at the beginning of the debate. While Schröder called for patience (probably perceived by the SPD as inaction) and decried foreign influence, Schmid brought up the moral imperative all Germans were responsible for. The two parties differed, then, in that the Adenauer and the CDU continued to see the issue as one of foreign relations and bad press, rather than a domestic problem with stark moral implications. The CDU’s hopes that the White Paper would satisfy the foreign press were in vain, as a report from *The Times* published the next day showed.

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<sup>329</sup> Teschke, *Hitler’s Legacy*, 140.

<sup>330</sup> Teschke, *Hitler’s Legacy*, 140.

<sup>331</sup> Teschke, *Hitler’s Legacy*, 141.

The day after the White Book's release, *The Times* released a scathing review of the report's findings. The White Book, the reporter argued, dedicated little space to the study of far-right groups and "strain[ed] hard to give the impression of east German responsibility." In fact, the reporter went so far as to call it a government whitewash, stating that the report "c[ould] hardly be regarded as an objective summary of evidence."<sup>332</sup> The West German government was complaining that East Germany was exposing ex-Nazis in government, the reporter reasoned, but the West German government failed to do anything about the very real accusations of past Nazi involvement. Indeed the report cited an East German offer to the Adenauer government of a list of one thousand West German judges and prosecutors who had Nazi ties, but the FRG refused to take the list because of "strings attached" to the deal. An FRG public prosecutor, Dr. Gude, was shocked at this news, stating that these members of the judiciary were not fit to dispense justice in a democratic country.<sup>333</sup> However, none of these facts were listed in the White Book. The story concluded by stating that the White Book "seems primarily concerned with reassuring opinion abroad," a statement which all evidence seemed to prove correct. A *Der Spiegel* story on the White Book published at the end of February noted that there was a serious internal squabble between government officials over the supposed involvement of Communist agitators, it seems though, that the common narrative of Adenauer and his senior cabinet won the day.<sup>334</sup> Thus *The Times*, a prominent establishment newspaper indicative of the thinking of the British elite, disagreed with the White Book's conclusions, and the fact that the SPD

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<sup>332</sup> "Anti-Semitic Incidents In Germany Analysed." *Times*, 18 February 1960, 11.

<sup>333</sup> "Anti-Semitic Incidents In Germany Analysed." *Times*, 18 February 1960, 11.

<sup>334</sup> „Antisemitismus: Ohne Hintermänner,“ *Spiegel Online*, 24 February 1960.

walked out of the debate foreclosed on any real policy progress as a result of the White Book. However, regardless of the controversial nature of the White Book, the news cycle was beginning to move on as the swastika wave petered out.

As February drew to a close news stories on the swastika epidemic began to appear less frequently in major foreign newspapers. However, the fallout from the epidemic persisted. On 22 February the *New York Times* reported that US State Department officials were quietly embarrassed when news broke of a West German request to utilize air force bases in Spain for training purposes.<sup>335</sup> The State Department told West German officials that it would be undesirable to have West German forces training and operating in Spain, still under the control of strongman Francisco Franco, especially in light of the epidemic and recent accusations of un-democratic behaviour in West Germany. Ironically, the US had its own training bases in Spain, much to chagrin of other NATO partners.<sup>336</sup> Some support for the Adenauer government would come from an unlikely American source, however. John McCloy, the former US High Commissioner in Germany told the *New York Times* on 23 February that while he doubted Communists were behind the outbreak, he did not think that the “old Nazi attitude” was still prevalent in West Germany, a very different opinion than that of the doubts he expressed when he was still High Commissioner years previously.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, “Bonn-Madrid Link Vexes Washington: Bonn-Madrid Link is Deplored in U.S.” *New York Times*. 23 February 1960, 1.

<sup>336</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, “Bonn-Madrid Link Vexes Washington: Bonn-Madrid Link is Deplored in U.S.” *New York Times*. 23 February 1960, 1.

<sup>337</sup> “Red Hate Role Doubted: McCloy Lays Anti-Semitism Wave to German Hoodlums,” *New York Times*. 24 February 1960, 5.

Meanwhile in West Germany, while Antisemitic vandalism had stopped, evidence persisted of the subtle Antisemitism endemic in West German society. Dr. Otto Klemperer, a famous Jewish conductor, wrote a complaint to the German Association of Composers and Music Teachers alleging discrimination against Jewish composers. In the Association's annual almanacs no special attention was drawn to the anniversaries of the births of German and Austrian composers Felix Mendelssohn and Gustav Mahler, both of whom were Jewish. A seemingly small slight, it would be hard to argue that an association of composers would not highlight the birthdays of two of the greatest composers of the Romantic period, something Klemperer helpfully pointed out to them. He even suggested that it was perhaps the fault of Communists in the organization, a clear reference to Adenauer's repeated attempts to blame Communists for German Antisemitism. Klemperer decried what he perceived to be the persistent support for fascism in Germany, writing that it stemmed from those "who are still in leading positions in Germany. The Rule of Law destroyed by Hitler, ought to be re-established; that would be justice in the name of art."<sup>338</sup> University students in Hamburg had also protested this perceived injustice, proof that young students would not forget as quickly as the media.<sup>339</sup>

Klemperer had invoked the oft-repeated call for denazification in his letter, and while there were no plans to remove all ex-Nazis from their positions of power, at least one ex-Nazi lost his job because of the events of the previous months. Theodor Oberländer, once fiercely defended by Konrad Adenauer, was by early March under

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<sup>338</sup> "No Slight On Jews Intended." *Times*, 23 February 1960, 11.

<sup>339</sup> "No Slight On Jews Intended." *Times*, 23 February 1960, 11.

pressure from Bonn prosecutors, who called for his parliamentary immunity to be lifted.<sup>340</sup> The party was hoping that Oberländer would step down to spare the CDU embarrassment, and under increased pressure from the SPD and in the wake of another East German show trial, a deal was eventually reached in which he would step down from Cabinet effective 4 May 1960, but keep his seat in the *Bundestag* and retain his ministerial pension.<sup>341</sup> Though Oberländer's downfall could perhaps be more attributed to party politics and the absurd propaganda efforts of East Germany, the swastika epidemic certainly played an important role in refusing to allow his story to disappear, the method he had seemed to use in past cases where complaints had been raised.<sup>342</sup> By May 1960 Oberländer had become a political liability, and though Adenauer had always tried to defend him, it was no longer politically expedient to do so.<sup>343</sup> Adenauer himself was too busy on several foreign trips, trying to secure West Germany's position in an upcoming East-West summit.<sup>344</sup>

Swastika graffiti seemed to haunt Konrad Adenauer for months after he had hoped it would be forgotten. On a trip to Washington DC in March 1960, somebody drew a swastika next to his signature in the guestbook at the National Gallery of Art.<sup>345</sup> Perhaps it is with a sense of irony that the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* suggested the swastika was drawn by Adenauer himself.<sup>346</sup> Still the Communists tried to undermine his

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<sup>340</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 141.

<sup>341</sup> Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy*, 144.

<sup>342</sup> For more information on the dramatic events surrounding Theodor Oberländer, see John p. Teschke's *Hitler's Legacy: West Germany Confronts the Aftermath of the Third Reich*

<sup>343</sup> Kansteiner, *In Pursuit*, 224.

<sup>344</sup> This summit would eventually be derailed not by fears of German Antisemitism, but by the shooting down and subsequent capture of Gary Powers in his U2 spy plane. Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 431-434.

<sup>345</sup> "Swastika Incident Aimed at Adenauer," *New York Times*. 18 March 1960, 5.

<sup>346</sup> "Red Swastika Tale Draws Bonn Protest," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 5 April 1960, A5.

reputation. But perhaps it is fitting that one of the last examples of vandalism in the outbreak targeted Adenauer himself. He had flatly refused to entertain a return to denazification and had always maintained that the hysteria was an East German plot to undermine his work. The Antisemitism bill proposed back in January was passed in April 1960, long after Adenauer had considered the matter closed.<sup>347</sup> But while the events of early 1960 did not produce any substantial change in the policies of the Federal Government, they reignited important conversations about West Germany's memory politics, German wartime experiences, and persistent Antisemitism in West Germany. Konrad Adenauer could not entertain a significant change in his shift away from denazification that he began when he took office eleven years earlier. For Adenauer this policy was integral to the survival of West Germany. Calls for denazification were ignored by him even as the state governments acted to reform education. Debates surrounding West Germany's postwar memory that were once relegated to the lectures of philosophers like Theodor Adorno had taken centre stage in the international press, and the swastika epidemic opened a decade that would eventually see the first serious efforts by West Germans to interrogate their pasts. But in the days immediately after the epidemic there seemed to be few answers. The West German government's White Book had only concluded that there were few explanations beyond the wave of Antisemitism, blaming most of the incidents on children or hooligans. Nothing was seriously done to combat Antisemitism. As one Interior Ministry official admitted in October 1960, long after the epidemic ended: "one can never say such an outbreak will not occur again."<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Michael Lausberg, "Schändung der Kölner Synagoge vor 55 Jahren- ein kritischer Rückblick" *haGalil*, 17 December 2014.

<sup>348</sup> Tetens *The New Germany*, 151.

## Conclusion

The West German White Book recorded 685 incidents between 25 December 1959 and 28 January 1960.<sup>349</sup> The Institute of Jewish Affairs counted 1000 incidents in 234 countries by 25 January, and in a study commissioned by the Anti-Defamation League, approximately 650 incidents were tracked in the US between December 1959 and March 1960.<sup>350</sup> The swastika epidemic was a global event, with nearly as many incidents reported in the US as in West Germany (though over a nine-week period versus a four-week period). Yet the greatest outrage was not directed towards the United States, where a Kansas City synagogue was bombed on 28 January, or to Great Britain, where a “British Nazi Party” claimed responsibility for some incidents, but towards West Germany where the incidents were overwhelmingly non-violent and no conclusive evidence could be produced to link the incidents to any organized right-wing movement.<sup>351</sup> The answer to this directed outrage seems obvious, but it is not enough to say that Germany used to be the Third Reich, therefore it may become so again. The answer perhaps, was best articulated by Rabbi Zwi Asaria when he told the press that “Antisemitism is a barometer of democracy in this country,” or the Board of Deputies of British Jews who said that the Antisemitism in Cologne was evidence that “the ugly spirit of Nazism is still abroad in its country of origin.”<sup>352</sup> Antisemitism was seen as a

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<sup>349</sup> Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 14.

<sup>350</sup> “1,000 Incidents Of Anti-Semitism.” *Times*, 25 January 1960, 8, Caplovitz and Rogers, “Swastika Epidemic 1960” 7.

<sup>351</sup> “Kansas City Bomb Rocks Synagogue,” *New York Times*. 29 January 1960, “Demonstrators At German Embassy.” *Times*, 6 Jan. 1960, 8.

<sup>352</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Vandals Desecrate Synagogue Opened by Adenauer in Cologne,” *New York Times*. 26 December 1959, “More Insults To Jews In Germany.” *Times*, 31 December 1959, 8.

measurement of the democratic nature of West Germany because Antisemitism was also seen as a symptom of Nazism, and its continuation, or its rebirth in a younger generation. Whereas Antisemitism could be dismissed as “hooliganism” in the UK or United States; because it had been the official policy of the state in Germany only 15 years before it posed a greater threat.<sup>353</sup> Of course, Jewish concerns over Antisemitism went beyond a perception of mere hooliganism, whatever some leaders believed. The assurances of Dr. Hendrik van Dam that there was no political danger was little comfort to Jewish people directly targeted by the epidemic, like Isaak Hamburger who had been threatened with crucifixion for a crime he did not commit.<sup>354</sup> The Jewish community in Germany was well aware of their use as a measurement of democracy. US High Commissioner John McCloy had articulated this belief in the immediate postwar period, and Dr. van Dam had reminded Jews of this fact in 1960. Of course not all Jews wished to be a litmus test for intolerance. Zwi Assaria told the press that “Sufferance was an awful word, a substitute for equality and justice. Germans had not changed; they still lived with the ideas of the past.”<sup>355</sup> The scholarly research of Rita Chin and Heide Fehrenbach *et al.* has shown that the racial state constructed by the Nazis did not disappear in 1945, nor did the hatreds produced by this state. Even democracies suffered the hatreds of Antisemitism, as Dr. M.L. Perlzweig had noted in 1960.<sup>356</sup> Indeed some of the Antisemitism on display seemed to have roots in its Medieval embodiment, as the call for the crucifixion of Hamburger proved. Perhaps then it is difficult to attribute Antisemitism only to the Nazi racial state, a differentiation some critics did try to make.

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<sup>353</sup> "Demonstrators At German Embassy." *Times*, 6 January 1960, 8.

<sup>354</sup> "W. German Jews Call For Educational Reform." *Times*, 8 January 1960, 8.

<sup>355</sup> "W. German Jews Call For Educational Reform." *Times*, 8 January 1960, 8.

<sup>356</sup> "1,000 Incidents Of Anti-Semitism." *Times*, 25 January 1960, 8.

But the links between Nazism and Antisemitism were too great to ignore and would dominate much of the discourse surrounding the epidemic.

Old fears over reconstruction were brought to the fore in the swastika epidemic, as Britons and Americans questioned the fidelity to democracy in West Germany, a question they had asked when they instituted denazification in the first place.<sup>357</sup> But the concern of the British and Americans towards democracy went deeper than just recent memory. Interior Minister Schröder had called for patience as West Germany tried to build a healthy democracy; according to one reporter, “it was an unprecedented task to begin a new chapter of German history after the uprooting of a dictatorship and complete collapse.”<sup>358</sup> But this was not the first time Germany had lost a war in even the first half century of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And while the end of the First World War and the collapse of the German Empire was not the same level of upheaval, it did see the creation of Germany’s first democracy in the Weimar Republic. The subsequent collapse of Weimar and the usurpation of German democracy by Hitler and the NSDAP provided a shocking historical example to British and American forces trying to rebuild West Germany. The fact that the right-wing elites and centre had essentially caved to Nazi power after appointing Hitler in the first place was a troubling precedent for German self-government. However, the conditions that enabled Hitler to seize power were largely gone in West Germany; the *Junkers* as a political class were essentially abolished, there was no Communist threat within Germany for the German right to use as a wedge issue, and the political instability and violence which characterized Weimar

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<sup>357</sup> Turner, *Reconstruction*, 242.

<sup>358</sup> “W. German Plan For Study Of Jewish Repression.” *Times*, 19 February 1960, 9.

was mitigated by strong economic success and a close watch by Allied occupation authorities. Thus, while there was outrage in the press, the American and British authorities seemed to react with apprehension rather than panic. John McCloy, who had once held grave misgivings about German democracy, now said “Certainly remnants of the old Nazi attitude prevail today in Germany, but I really think the responsible opinion in Germany is ashamed of that period and is humiliated by it.”<sup>359</sup> The British government repeatedly voiced their support for the West Germans and maintained that it was simply a “neurotic minority” committing crimes.<sup>360</sup> But if the implications of German history were becoming less important to those outside of Germany, it was of vital importance to those within Germany. In this context, the swastika epidemic gained historical significance.

If the swastika epidemic should be studied not as a topic of international relations, but as one of a German domestic politics, then what of Konrad Adenauer’s constant concern of foreign relation ramifications? In fact, understanding the swastika epidemic in its wider place in the memory politics of West Germany explains Adenauer’s insistence on foreign implications. Understanding Adenauer’s importance in the formation of the memory politics of the West German state is key to understanding his response to the epidemic. The election of 1949 in which Konrad Adenauer’s CDU campaigned against Kurt Schumacher’s SPD was not just a referendum on the economic system of the new West Germany. The election was a referendum on the way that the new Germany would treat its past. Whereas Schumacher firmly believed that there was a

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<sup>359</sup> “Red Hate Role Doubted: McCloy Lays Anti-Semitism Wave to German Hoodlums,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1960, 5.

<sup>360</sup> “Mr. Gaitskell In Jamaica.” *Times*, 11 January 1960, 9.

moral obligation to remember, and that a new state could only be built on the back of reconciliation, Adenauer disagreed. The country could only be pieced together, democracy could only take root, in a country that would move on by forgetting, or more properly, selectively remember, its past. In this the majority of the German people, perhaps not unexpectedly, agreed with Adenauer.<sup>361</sup>

Adenauer's thinking was largely influenced by that long path of German history, the *Sonderweg*, that had, according to some, led from the declaration of the German Empire at Versailles to Auschwitz.<sup>362</sup> Germans had a difficult history with democracy, starting with the failure of the revolutions of 1848 and the rejection of a crown offered "from the gutter," and the failure of democracy and the Enabling Act of 1933 and the rise of the Nazis. Adenauer had experienced the Nazi period firsthand and put the *Sonderweg* thesis in horrifying perspective. As Jeffrey Herf writes: "in the face of the apocalypse of the war and the Holocaust, the inherited traditions and ideologies these leaders carried in their hearts and minds became ever more precious sources of meaning with which to interpret the present and shape the memory of the recent past."<sup>363</sup>

Adenauer then advocated for the integration of West Germany into Western Europe to counter the isolationist, militaristic nature of the Prussian Empire that had dominated united Germany since the Empire's formation. Denazification had to end because it was the only way to rebuild a democratic West Germany.<sup>364</sup> A house divided against itself cannot stand, after all. West Germany would be a state in which victims, perpetrators, and bystanders lived next to one another and the widespread persecution of those

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<sup>361</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 267-268.

<sup>362</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 267.

<sup>363</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 4.

<sup>364</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 267

perpetrators would never allow for a cohesive state whose citizenry were dedicated to their democratic government. If that government continued to persecute them, what role could former Nazis play in their new country? West Germans agreed with Adenauer, electing his CDU party and snubbing the SPD. What would have become of West Germany if Kurt Schumacher had become Chancellor is a question that can never be answered, but his ideas lived on after his death, and would become the driving thought for many intellectuals in this period.

But what makes these politicians so important to the formation of memory in postwar Germany, that is, why should Adenauer be seen as such a central figure? As Herf maintains: “it has been my firm conviction that the history of politics and the history of beliefs, ideas, ideology, discourses, narratives, and representations are inseparable from one another.”<sup>365</sup> Herf stresses “the importance of politics in shaping the way a society thinks about its past while at the same time [drawing] attention to the autonomous weight that traditions and interpretive frameworks exert on political life.”<sup>366</sup> Political choices shaped the way that Germans interpreted their past in the Federal Republic, while at the same time German society shaped the way that the government reacted to and formed policies. In this light, then, the German government took on a decisive role in shaping discourses about the past, and in the Federal Republic’s consensus politics, Konrad Adenauer became the central character in shaping that past. To be sure, every policy and action taken by the state cannot be attributed to Adenauer alone, but his overwhelming influence cannot be underestimated in the actions of the

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<sup>365</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 9.

<sup>366</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 9.

federal government. Similarly, German society sometimes resisted Adenauer's attempt to engage with the past. While Robert Moeller has shown that the German government was all too happy to indulge in the formation of new post-war narratives of German wartime experience (see their efforts to record prisoner-of-war and expellee testimonies), the drive for reparations and restitution saw significant opposition, and was largely championed by Adenauer.<sup>367</sup> The actions of Konrad Adenauer's administration during the swastika epidemic must then be put into the context of his personal beliefs translated into political action in the midst of a wider societal reaction.

The demands of the American Jewish Committee and the World Jewish Congress had called for the immediate denazification of the German government, judiciary, and education system. Protestors demanded Nazis be kicked out of government, while others called for the banning of the *Deutsche Reichspartei*. Adenauer's government did none of these things. Instead, Adenauer blamed East Germany and called for Germans to take individual responsibility for Antisemites in their communities. But by understanding Adenauer in the context of his beliefs and the history of West Germany, these responses make sense. Adenauer would not entertain a revival of denazification; the German legal system was already equipped with the tools to bring Nazis to justice if there was substantial evidence of their crimes.<sup>368</sup> Any attempt to organize a widespread purge would bring to mind the occupation policies of the Allies, the very policies that Adenauer's government had ended. Denazification would undo all the work Adenauer had done to build German democracy. Adenauer had

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<sup>367</sup> Moeller "Remembering the Past," 91, 92.

<sup>368</sup> Bergmann and Erb *Anti-Semitism*, 14.

privatized Antisemitism with his television address and abdicated responsibility for larger widespread action from the Federal government. His visit to Bergen-Belsen was at the behest of the Jewish community, to which he was sympathetic but not willing to make any substantial changes for.<sup>369</sup> Finally his government's White Book was determined to prove a Communist link that would vindicate its insistence that there was no widespread problem with Antisemitism in Germany, only an attempt to undermine a relationship with the West that Adenauer had worked for eleven years to build. But if the West German federal government was determined to stay the course, the actions of the *Länder* suggested that some were willing to act. West Berlin banned several student organizations, and both West Berlin and Rhineland-Palatinate eventually banned the DRP.<sup>370</sup> The internal review of textbooks ordered by the National Conference of Ministers of Culture sought to remedy the gap left in their textbooks concerning the Nazi period, in an earnest attempt to improve education. The discordant reactions of the federal and *Länder* governments suggest that German society was perhaps beginning to fall out of lockstep with the Federal government.

Widespread opposition to the outbreak in West Germany was centered around students and victim groups. The protests that took place in Berlin and Munich were largely student-led affairs, acting against Antisemitism and Nazism. But these students were part of a wider movement of dissenting thought that stretched back to Kurt Schumacher's belief in the moral imperative of reconciliation.<sup>371</sup> Dirk Moses extensively

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<sup>369</sup> Transcript of meeting, 5 February 1960, Nr. 15 Kanzler-Tee (Wortprotokoll) StBKAH 02.21, *Adenauer Teegespräche 1959-1961*, 191.

<sup>370</sup> Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism*, 15.

<sup>371</sup> To be sure, these ideas did not originate with Schumacher, but in terms of political thought, they were widely taken up by the SPD, unsurprising given the anti-fascist background of many of its members. Indeed, we can see this in Carlo Schmid's referral to the moral obligations in ensuring German children

explores the way that German intellectuals navigated the Nazi past in postwar West Germany, including the “unwritten contract of discretion between the forty-fivers and the older generations,” that is, the implicit deal that younger Germans had made in the postwar years to adopt the silence of their older peers regarding the Nazi past, allowing for the substitution of memory of Nazi war crimes with the narratives extensively explored by Moeller.<sup>372</sup> But while this might have persisted throughout the 1950s, by the end of the decade this silence was being challenged by younger Germans who had no memory of National Socialism, and by older intellectuals who had never believed in the contract to begin with. It is perhaps no coincidence that Theodor Adorno gave his lecture on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in November 1959. The 1960s would see the breakdown of the dominant memory narratives of the 1950s as the sixty-eighters, a generation untouched by Nazism, decried the moral failure of their elders to come to terms with the past. Where then does this leave the swastika epidemic in the history of this process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*? The swastika epidemic occurred at the beginning of the 1960s, a decade that would see a series of events that would ensure the Nazi past was never far from the headlines. The arrest and trial of Adolf Eichmann in May 1960, and the Auschwitz guards’ trial in 1963, would receive substantial publicity. Perhaps just as important as the generational shift was the political shift. Adenauer would retire in 1963 and died in 1967. His death marked the end of an era, and Adenauer came to symbolize a Germany that could not reconcile its past, even if it had become a stable democracy because of it. Hans-Peter Schwarz calls this image a cliché, that the image of Adenauer

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understood the importance of the state-driven murder of the Holocaust. Bundesregierung, *Die Antisemitischen und Nazistischen Vorfälle*, 42-44.

<sup>372</sup> Moses, *German Intellectuals*, 69.

was that of the “occidental statesman, leading Europe torn apart by nationalism and imperialism back to unity under the banner of Christian and humanistic values.”<sup>373</sup> But if this was still Adenauer’s image in 1959 it was an image that was beginning to tarnish. Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb call the reaction to the epidemic “extraordinary,” and that the epidemic “heralded a change in the treatment of anti-Semitism and the Nazi period.”<sup>374</sup> Norbert Frei calls this period one of “cautious change” fueled by pressure from Israel and abroad.<sup>375</sup> But if it was not so much a landmark shift, more than just Israeli and international pressure was at work. The practical policies of reconstruction that Adenauer had used to rebuild West Germany were no longer satisfying a generation who saw physical reconstruction as largely complete. The narratives of memory that dominated West Germany in the 1950s were no longer sufficient to explain the recent past, and the moral impetus for reconciliation was beginning to become more urgent. The swastika epidemic should perhaps be best understood as the beginning of the end of Adenauer’s image as the occidental statesman, and the beginning of the decade that would see the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* take on the importance that Kurt Schumacher had envisioned in the election of 1949. Zwi Asaria told the press that “Antisemitism is a barometer of democracy in this country,” because Antisemitism was seen as a symptom of totalitarian Nazism. He had left the swastikas painted on his synagogue for a day because he “wanted the people to see what had been done.”<sup>376</sup> Just as the writing on the wall at Belshazzar’s feast had foretold the end of Belshazzar, so too

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<sup>373</sup> Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*, 433.

<sup>374</sup> Bergmann and Erb *Anti-Semitism*, 16.

<sup>375</sup> Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany*, 312.

<sup>376</sup> Sydney Gruson, “Vandals Desecrate Synagogue Opened by Adenauer in Cologne,” *New York Times*. 26 December 1959, 1.

did the swastikas painted on the *Roonstrasse* synagogue signal a change in the way Germans would remember their past.

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## Conference Presentations:

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