

Götz Aly
Europa gegen die Juden
1880 - 1945

Europe Versus the Jews
1880-1945

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Synopsis

The Holocaust cannot be explained solely as the product of German history. Driven by nationalism and social crisis, anti-Semitism took a quantum leap in both Western and Eastern Europe beginning in 1880. Without in any way lessening German guilt, historian Götz Aly shows how rivalries and envy, discrimination and pogroms in various places helped pave the way for deportations and murder.

Germans directed the mass murder of Jews, providing both the technical means and a significant portion of the personnel for the Holocaust. But the genocide against a Jewish minority spread throughout Europe was not only committed by those who initiated it. On the contrary, in order to achieve their ends, the latter activated nationalist, "national-social" and anti-Semitic resentment everywhere. They based their policies of exclusion and extermination on the increasingly intense popular desire - particularly prominent in Eastern Europe with its unusually heavy Jewish presence - to be rid of Jews. Without the cooperation and help of natives in countries occupied by and allied with Germany, without the participation of local government administrators, police officers, journalists and politicians, there would have been no way to realize the "final solution" with the breathless speed the Holocaust did in fact possess.

Thousands of Lithuanians, Latvians, Ukrainians and Romanians were directly involved in the mass murder of Jews. They and millions of other non-Jewish civilians seized the property left behind not just by those who were murdered but also those who had gone

into hiding, fled and been stripped of all their rights. For that reason, as of 1945, whether it was in Vilnius, Warsaw or Thessaloniki, returning survivors of the Holocaust were greeted with hatred. Those who had profited from their misery had been convinced that deportation meant certain death for their victims.

The German leadership purposely initiated the organized disappropriation of Jews, in which people all over Europe participated. The principle "in for a penny, in for a pound" corrupted the beneficiaries of Jewish misery and made things easier for the German occupiers. After Hungarian gendarmes had herded hundreds of thousands of Jews into ghettos, Joseph Goebbels triumphantly concluded: "He who says A must also say B. As of a certain point, Jewish policies propel themselves. The advantages of anti-Semitism cannot be underestimated."

Götz Aly's point is not to diminish German culpability or responsibility, but rather to explain historically why some aspects of the Holocaust proceeded swiftly whereas other sputtered. This book aims to prevent a similar genocide from being repeated in future. There is no doubt that Germans were the authors of the mass murder of Jews. They alone bear responsible for the most important precondition for the demise of the rule of law and morality - the massive, abominable destruction of World War II. It wasn't until human misery, terror and death had become widespread that the German masters could implement the "final solution to the Jewish question" in most parts of subjugated Europe. In order to do that, though, they required the supports of administrators, police

and societies in general. Let us sketch out a few examples of what happened in various countries.

In the spring of 1941, when the Romanian head of state Ion Antonescu learned that Hitler intended to wage war on Russia, he said of his country's Jews: "Romania must be liberated - energetically, methodically and permanently - from the entire swarm of parasites that have sucked dry the vital liquids of the people. The international situation is favorable, and we shouldn't miss the opportunity." In an attempt to exploit the extraordinary situation of war, Antonescu sent troops to invade the Soviet Union together with the German Wehrmacht. Romanian police forces, militias and soldiers were guilty of or were at least complicit in the murders of at least 250,000 Jews in the disputed areas of Moldavia (Bessarabia), Transnistria and Bukovina. Yet simultaneously, the same regime protected most of the Jews of central Romania and even, as of 1943, Jews who had fled German-occupied areas to Romania from German attacks. The Bulgarian regime, too, spared the lives of Jews in the core of the country. At the same time, it ordered Bulgarian police units to bring the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia, which Bulgaria had annexed in 1941, to the Treblinka death camp. In the Southern European and Baltic countries, Ukraine and Poland, the ideal of ethnic homogenization was a huge factor enabling the deportation of Jews, if not anti-Semitic genocide.

So why, in the winter of 1942-43, did Romanian, Bulgarian, Slovakian and French politicians begin to protect a portion of their respective countries' Jewish populations? The main reason was that Germany

started to suffer military defeats. To put the situation another way: the Allied soldiers who achieved victory at Stalingrad and El Alamein unwittingly saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of European Jews.

In German-occupied Western Europe, national administrations had a significant amount of leeway. In Belgium, the German invaders got their hands on around 45 percent of the Jewish population, although the numbers varied dramatically from region to region. In Flemish Antwerp, due to the assistance of the police, 65 percent of the city's 30,000 Jews were apprehended, compared with only 37 percent of the 22,000 Jews in Walloon Brussels, where the authorities and the non-Jewish population were far less prone to cooperate.

The situation was similar in Greece. In Thessaloniki, local authorities and police consistently participated in the deportation of Jews, while in Athens they didn't. As a result, almost all of Thessaloniki's Jews were murdered, whereas most of Athens' Jews survived. In Hungary, 20,000 gendarmes deported 437,402 Jews to Auschwitz using the Hungarian state rail system. Germans only assumed responsibility for transporting these people on the Slovakian border. Most of those condemned to death were from the Hungarian provinces and spoke Yiddish with one another. In early June 1944, Adolf Eichmann tried to jump start the deportation, which had been delayed, of some 150,000 relatively well-integrated Jews from Budapest. In this case, the Hungarian regime refused to support mass murder. Forced to rely solely on himself and his staff, Eichmann was only able to deport three trainloads of Jews, who had already been interned in

ghettos. After three days, he returned to Berlin in frustration. For this reason, together with the rapid advances of Allied troops, which them to bomb the train lines and water routes to the death camps, most of the Jews of Budapest survived the Holocaust.

In 1942, as the deportation of French Jews was about to commence, Germany's ambassador in Paris advised that the operation should be carried out in a way "that augments the anti-Semitic sentiment that has recently been on the rise." In France as in Germany, he wrote, "the increase in anti-Semitism can be greatly attributed to the immigration of Jews who are citizens of foreign countries." For that reason, "it would be most effective psychologically among the broad masses of the French people for the evacuation measures to target foreign Jews." With widespread help from French governmental officials and police officers, the German occupiers were able to send 76,000 Jews from France to the death camps. More than 50,000 of them did not have French citizenship. Ultimately, though, 75 percent of Jews living in France were saved. Compared with other countries occupied or subjugated by Germany, that was a high percentage. Many French people - including Catholic clergymen, nuns and Communists - protected those in danger from their German and French persecutors.

The situation was different in Poland and the western Soviet Union, where the largest number of European Jews lived. In these regions, German occupiers terrorized local populations in extreme fashion. But they were also able to build upon an anti-Semitism that had been increasing there for sixty years across party and class lines.

In 1926, the leading soviet functionary Yuri Larin, who was responsible for Jewish questions, was forced to admit that "anti-Semitism has seized broad masses of working people." By 1929, he concluded: The difference between Soviet and pre-revolutionary anti-Semitism resides in the fact that before the revolution it hardly existed among workers." Larin had previously discussed their virulent anti-Semitism with working people from Moscow and had heard, among other things, that Soviet Jews "refuse to accept hard work," "only want to advance their careers," "fake diplomas so that they'll be admitted to university," "immediately receive places to live," "don't have to stand in line," and "are expanding the Jewish bourgeoisie in Moscow."

In Poland, the intellectual head and long-term spokesman of the National Democratic Party Roman Dmowski - a national hero who is once again held in high repute - said in 1934: "If there hadn't been so many Jews in Poland, the country would never have been divided and the Prussian regime would never have been able to celebrate any triumphs in the East." Dmowski expressed his respect for Hitler's policy "of eradicating Jewish influence in Germany." Likewise in April 1933, the weekly newsletter of the diocese of Kielce, the Gazeta Tygodniowa, welcomed the new German regime in Berlin with the words: "Hitler may be Poland's enemy, but we have to admit he's right about the moral corrosion caused by the Jews." Dzwon Niedzielny, the Sunday newsletter of the diocese of Krakow, seconded that sentiment also in April 1933: "25 professors, almost all of them Jews, have lost their academic chairs in Germany. And they won't be

the last. Only now do we notice how Jewified German academia was, and it's well known that we suffer far worse from this in Poland!"

In "Europe Versus the Jews," Götz Aly enumerates why, starting in 1880, modern anti-Semitism arose in the individual countries of Europe and how it grew to the point where it was considered respectable for democratic political parties. He investigates the economic and social reasons for this phenomenon and describes the Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian and Polish pogroms, the anti-Jewish policies of ethnic cleansing in Poland, the envy of people who felt disadvantaged by educated and ambitious Jews, the French fear of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, and the connections between nationalism, democracy and Jew-hatred. Aly provides a panorama of modern anti-Semitism and opens up, for the first time, a comprehensive view of the European pre-histories of the Holocaust.