

Abstract

In the first years of the twentieth century, an anti-Semitic document appeared in Russia that profoundly shaped the course of the entire century. Despite being quickly discredited as a plagiarized forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* spread across the world, being translated into dozens of languages and utilized as hateful rhetoric by leaders of many religions and nationalities. While the effects of the document were felt internationally, the *Protocols* also helped to reshape centuries old prejudices about Jews in a country still in its infancy, Germany. This “hoax of the twentieth century” helped to redefine age-old anti-Semitic values firmly ingrained within German society, and helped Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party justify committing the landmark genocide of world history, the Holocaust. Utilizing a variety of sources, particularly the actual text of the *Protocols* and the writings of Adolf Hitler, this examination argues that Hitler and his cabinet became progressively more radicalized towards extermination of the Jews due to their belief in the Jewish world conspiracy outlined within the *Protocols*.

Introduction: Jews in Europe

“The weapons in our hands are limitless ambitions, burning greediness, merciless vengeance, hatreds, and malace.”¹ This phrase is attributed to a collection of omnipotent Jews supposedly bent on world domination. Collectively called the “Elders of Zion,” this group outlined how it will accomplish its goals of global supremacy in a forged book titled *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The weapons these Elders claimed to hold were substantial: they asserted control over all aspects of the media and world-banking systems, and maintained their agents had already infiltrated international governments. These claims were obviously false, the result and indeed continuation of millennia of anti-Semitism that vilified Jews.

In telling the long history of the Jews of Europe, two stories emerge. The first is of a people that have contributed greatly to arts, education, politics, economics, and other social institutions. The second is a darker history that is fraught with persecution and hatred by the Christian majority they lived beside. Anti-Semitism has no real beginning and, as recent events have demonstrated, no real end. What motivates this anti-Semitism has changed over time, yet a central theme emerges: the belief that Jews aim for the destruction of Christ and Christendom.

In the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew recounts a scene between Pontius Pilate and the crowd below immediately following the condemnation of Jesus. “When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and

¹ Stephen Eric Bronner, *A Rumor About the Jews: Antisemitism, Conspiracy, and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19.

washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ All the people answered, ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’”²

Despite the fact this scene does not occur in the other three gospels, Christian leaders almost immediately declared the Jews guilty of deicide. In his letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul invokes the theme, writing “For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone.”³ These allegations of Jewish deicide are in no way historically accurate; Pontius Pilate, the Governor of Judea, condemned Jesus and the Romans carried out his crucifixion.

But Christian anti-Semitism further increased during the medieval period, as the false claim of “blood libel” emerged. When a young boy from Norwich, England was murdered in the early twelfth century, a monk named Thomas of Monmouth immediately placed the blame on a group of Jews. Gradually, the rumor spread throughout Europe; when a child inexplicably went missing, the Jews were often accused of murdering him or her, often in a mock crucifixion, as a sacrifice in order to make matzo, medicine, and other ritualistic necessities for Jewish holidays. In many cases, massive pogroms followed high profile murders, as vigilante justice frequently became the norm.⁴

Like the idea of deicide, blood libel is an unfounded myth unfairly attributed to Jews. According to kashrut, the dietary laws of Judaism, blood is not kosher; the book of Leviticus explains, “You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its

² Matt. 27:24-25 NIV.

³ 1 Thess. 2:14-15 NIV.

⁴ "Blood Libel: A False, Incendiary Claim against Jews | ADL." Blood Libel: A False, Incendiary Claim against Jews | ADL.

blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off.”⁵ Despite this, the myth of blood libel is one of the oldest, most enduring cases of organized anti-Semitism; even today, anti-Semites around the world cling to the “fact” of Jewish ritual sacrifice.⁶

Because of the allegations of deicide and ritual murder, the Jews became demonized in Christian doctrine. The connections between Jews and Satan began early; St. John Chrysostom, a fourth century Christian leader, wrote of the Synagogue as “the temple of demons” and “the cavern of devils.” Other leaders equated Jews with the anti-Christ, saying that the dreaded figure and his loyal followers would be Jewish. Jews were also targets during the Crusades, presented as Satanists whose sole aim was to de-Christianize Europe. They were further blamed for poisoning wells and practicing magic during times of great disease and famine.⁷

Medieval anti-Semitism also resulted from the economic practices that benefitted Jews. Many industries, especially those associated with craftsmen and merchants, were run by guilds. Because of their religious nature, these associations excluded Jews. However, religious doctrine barred Christians from entering the field of usury or moneylending. With no comparable religious restrictions, Jews entered this field, making some extremely wealthy in the process. However, the high interest rates Jews charged led to resentment from the Christian community, and thus a new stereotype entered the world: the money-hungry, swindling Jew.⁸

⁵ Lev. 17:14 NIV.

⁶ Candida Moss and Joel Baden, "Blood Libel: The Myth That Fuels Anti-Semitism," CNN Belief Blog RSS, August 6, 2014.

⁷ Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide* (London: Serif Publishing, 2005), 25-26.

⁸ Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism* (New York: Stimulus Foundation, 1985), 96-98.

This caricature was lampooned almost immediately, most notably in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. In the play, the titular merchant, Antonio, borrows money from a Jewish moneylender named Shylock, who agrees to lend Antonio the money interest free on one condition: if Antonio cannot repay the money within three months, Shylock will take a pound of Antonio's flesh. When Antonio cannot repay the loan in time, Shylock insists on taking the agreed upon repayment. In a thrilling courtroom exchange, the wealthy Portia outsmarts Shylock, clarifying that the deal is for exactly one pound of flesh, nothing else. Because Shylock cannot take the flesh without also taking Antonio's blood, he cannot claim his prize. Defeated and humiliated, Shylock loses his fortune and is forced to convert to Christianity.

Anti-Semitism was not unique to the Catholic tradition. The father of Protestantism, Martin Luther, wrote scathing texts against Jews when they would not convert to his reformed version of Christianity. In his treatise *On the Jews and their Lies*, Luther condemned Jews as heathens that betrayed God, warning his followers, "Therefore be on your guard against the Jews, knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in which sheer self-glory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and vehemingly on them." He further advocated setting "fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them."⁹ Despite this hateful writing, Luther did not advocate the extermination of Jews, rather conversion.

⁹ "Anti-Semitism: Martin Luther - 'On the Jews and Their Lies'" Jewish Virtual Library.

European anti-Semitism was therefore based primarily on a central theme: the exploitation and destruction of Christianity. This was accomplished through the physical murder of Jesus and faithful Christians, as well as through the symbolic desecration of Christian morals and traditions. This “us verses them” mentality led to widespread, organized riots, massacres, and forced emigration that saw European Jews move eastward; the *Edict of Expulsion* forced Jews out of England in 1290, while Spain and Portugal ordered the forced conversion and banishment of Jews after the Reconquista in the late fifteenth century.¹⁰

As liberalism emerged as a popular philosophy within Europe, traditional anti-Semitism began to wane. The French Revolution in particular was a major event in the progression towards equality. In 1789, the National Constituent Assembly adopted *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, a landmark document outlining the universal rights of human beings. Article X of the document guarantees, “No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.”¹¹ Despite this advancement, Jews continued to be a disenfranchised minority within France and the rest of Europe.

At the turn of the twentieth century, as a result of these expulsions, Jews were a minority within all of Europe. The majority of the world’s Jewish population lived in Eastern Europe. Sixteen percent of Poland’s total population, roughly 1.3 million people, identified as Jewish. Several urban centers in Poland had sizable Jewish communities, especially Warsaw (41% of the total population), Lodz (24%), and Lublin (45%). The Russian Empire ranked sixth in the world for total Jewish population, with 3.8 million Jews. The vast majority of these Jews lived in communities in what is now Ukraine and Belarus, with 150,000 in Odessa (37%) and

¹⁰ Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, 120, 139-140.

¹¹ "Declaration of the Rights of Man – 1789," Avalon Project.

50,000 in Minsk (54%). The legacy of Volkish anti-Semitism, the systemic hatred of Jews unique to Germany, led to a smaller Jewish population living in the major cities of the recently unified Germany. Berlin's 86,000 Jews were a minority at 4.6%. The Jews of Munich totaled just 9,500, less than 2% of the total population.¹²

This was the Europe in which the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* appeared. This long history of anti-Semitism, combined with German Volkish ideology, helped to secure people's belief in the document and eventually paved the way for Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party to murder six million Jews.

Germanic Ideology

Political Travail

From time immemorial, Germany's lands were ruled by strong, centralized governmental structures. In most German states, citizens possessed strong feelings of patriotism and developed total allegiance to their leaders. This allegiance led to a subservience that became known as "Prussian service," the best example of which being the mighty military of Prussia; the state's glorification of militarism allowed Prussia to maintain the strongest standing army in Europe by the end of the eighteenth century.¹³

The French Revolution of 1789 planted the seed of liberalism in many societies throughout Europe, yet it was not a popular ideology within Germany. Those who held the belief typically belonged to the university system, either as students or professors, as well as the newly emerging middle class located in urban areas. The vast majority of Germans were separated from this society, usually belonging instead to either the agricultural or militaristic

¹² "Statistics," *Jewish Encyclopedia*. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13992-statistics>.

¹³ Karen Friedrich, *Brandenburg-Prussia, 1466-1806* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 115-116.

class.¹⁴ Following unification in 1871, the newly created Germany continued its legacy of authoritarianism. At the outbreak of World War I, the German Empire enjoyed loyalty from millions, including many ethnic Germans outside of its territorial boundaries, such as Adolf Hitler.

The defeat of Germany in World War I led to a period of political and economic unrest. Hoping that the victorious Allies would be less punitive if they had a political conversion to democracy, the leaders of Germany proclaimed a new government, the Weimar Republic, in November of 1918. The plan was unsuccessful; the Treaty of Versailles imposed harsh penalties on the young nation, including reparation payments totaling billions of marks and the minimization of Germany's military.

The Weimar Republic failed to meet the needs of Germany from the beginning. Democracy was distrusted as a foreign institution in post World War I Germany. The political situation was one of extreme division; in its thirteen-year reign, many political parties gained seats in the Reichstag, though none could win a majority, leading to the formation of weak coalition governments.

Taking advantage of the political turmoil, extremist groups sought forcefully to gain control of Germany. In January of 1919, the leftist Spartacists, led by Rosa Luxemburg, joined with mutinying sailors and initiated a coup in Berlin. The Communists amassed a crowd of 200,000 workers and took control of many government buildings throughout the capital. Soon, however, many former soldiers still loyal to the Kaiser and the conservative ideals of Germany banded together in order to fight the rise of these leftist activities. These Freikorps units, angered by the outcome of World War I, felt themselves to be the frontline

¹⁴ W. N. Medlicott, *Bismarck and Modern Germany* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 7, 10.

of German defense against all enemies, especially Bolshevik Communism. Shortly after the Spartacists took control of Berlin, the Freikorps marched into the capital, crushing the revolution and slaughtering thousands, including Luxemburg.¹⁵

A year later, the Freikorps launched its own rebellion against Weimar. Thousands of troops marched on Berlin, which surrendered relatively peacefully. Despite installing a civil servant Wolfgang Kapp as the new chancellor, the government had difficulty consolidating power. Due to the anti-militarist sentiment of the citizens, widespread strikes were called. These protests caused the entire city to shut down; the Kapp regime found itself without water, electricity, transportation, and other amenities necessary to run a major city. The government collapsed soon after, and the reinstated government, headed by President Friedrich Ebert, disbanded the Freikorps.¹⁶

This crack down did not last long, however. Not long after the Kapp Putsch, Germany experienced another communist revolt in several parts of the nation. Saxony elected a Communist government and proclaimed itself a Soviet republic in 1920, and thousands of communists occupied the resource heavy Ruhr valley. The communist sentiment was strong; a leftist newspaper proclaimed “Germany must become a Republic of Soviets and, in union with Russia, the springboard for the coming victory of the World Revolution and World Socialism.” Reluctantly, President Ebert commissioned the Freikorps to suppress the rebellion, which it did brutally.¹⁷

These revolts demonstrated the problems facing the Weimar Republic. Its unique governmental system tried to ensure a pluralistic representation of all political ideologies, but

¹⁵ John Toland, *Adolf Hitler: the Definitive Biography* (New York: First Anchor Books, 1992), 75.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 100.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 100-101.

because no one party could gain a majority, the Reichstag was the weakest institution of the republic. The weak state was further complicated by the extremism of many citizens. On the right, the reactionary conservative forces, mainly composed of ex-soldiers, were unhappy with the outcome of World War I and blamed the Weimar Government for their misfortunes. On the left, many workers were swayed with the philosophy of communism and its promise of equality, an exciting prospect in depression-riddled Germany. Both groups dissatisfaction with the Ebert government and the effects of Versailles can actually be observed as a unifying force between the two, yet their central ideologies and the makeup of their constituents only furthered the divide within Germany. This divide continued to grow as the National Socialist and Communist Parties continued to grow in influence.

Anti-Semitic Ideology

The long history of Volkish anti-Semitism has been well documented. Its origins are centuries old, firmly rooted in the ideologies that make up the very definition of what it means to be “German.” But one of the central tenants of this Germanic thinking by the nineteenth century was the scientific nature of race. While originating as an anthropological concept of classification, race soon began to take the form of a competitive hierarchy, particularly after the pseudo-science of phrenology was introduced in the late eighteenth century. At the top of this order was the Aryan, an ancient race that embodied total physical beauty and intelligence and beget the English and Germanic people.¹⁸

The very nature of Volkish thinking rests in anti-modernism; Germanic ideology yearned for the values and way of life of the past, even though this nostalgia was based on a mythological history that never really existed. While rooted in the Romanticist movement of

¹⁸ George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), 88-90.

the nineteenth century, this philosophy grew in popularity as Germany was thrust into the modern, industrialized world of the early twentieth century. Many Germans rejected what they saw as a dirty, impersonal bureaucratic world around them. They viewed modern society as the product of liberal democracies like France and, even worse, the creation of Jews. To some, Christianity itself was viewed with dismay as a Jewish invention that destroyed the old Germanic way of life. Now, the Jew once again became the symbol of destruction, as modern systems like capitalism, liberalism, and socialism continued to destroy the very foundations of the Volk.¹⁹

The idea of Volkish unity against the Jew did not originate with Hitler, but was preached early in unified Germany. In his 1878 book *German Writings*, Paul de Lagarde called on his countrymen to “exterminate the Jew like bacilli.”²⁰ Philosopher Julius Langbehn called for a “bloodbath” in order to solve the perceived Jewish problem.²¹ While these calls for direct violence were rare, there nevertheless emerged an “us vs. them” mentality across all corners of the Germanic world. Even though Jews remained mostly concentrated in the lower middle class, a small number of wealthy Jewish families in urban areas led racialists to assume that the Jew was the master of capitalism, a system under which most of Germany was suffering.

This thinking was not confined to the German Reich. In the heterogeneous Habsburg lands, racial hatred was widespread, particularly against the large Slavic population spread throughout the empire. In both lands, anti-Semitic political parties and social organizations began to form, most notably the “Cult of the Swastika” in Austria.²²

¹⁹ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 188.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 189, 192-194.

²¹ D. L. Niewyk, "Solving the 'Jewish Problem': Continuity and Change in German Antisemitism, 1871-1945" *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1990): 378.

²² Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 195-197.

Youth groups were important devices Germanic groups organized to instill the Volkish traditions in children. These *Wandervögel* organizations were similar to scouting movements in other parts of the world, with hiking and nationalism among its missions. An early leader of the *Wandervogel* in Germany, Karl Fischer, was deeply influenced by the writings of Lagarde, Langbehn, and other anti-Semitic writers. The *Wandervögel* groups within the Austro-Hungarian Empire were similarly influenced by nationalistic ideology aimed at Germanic unity against the many ethnicities within Habsburg lands. Jews initially joined these groups in droves, but soon found themselves not welcomed, as these organizations were German and therefore not accommodating of Jews.²³

Volkish ideology instilled a terror and hatred of Jews into Germans of every age and region. These Germans absolutely believed in the inferiority of the Jew, and many believed Jews able to commit predatory acts, as evident from their supposed economic domination of the German Volk. Germanic ideology, therefore, was perhaps the greatest factor in the Protocol's effectiveness; because Germans believed Jews capable of evil acts, the themes of the *Protocols* were absolutely believable to readers.

The *Protocols* of the Elders of Zion

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is a short booklet outlining the plans for Jewish world domination. The titular "Elders" are made up of the most powerful Jews of the world; representatives come from world governments, the press, and the banking industry among others. The writing style of the booklet is unfocused, accusatory, and wholly illogical, but over the course of twenty-four "protocols," tells the story of the supposed Jewish plot to

²³ Walter Laqueur, "The German Youth Movement and the 'Jewish Question,' A Preliminary Survey," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1961): 194-195.

conquer the world. The first person tense of the book shows the Elders speaking in pejorative terms about non-Jews, frequently invoking the word “goyim” in a derogatory sense.

There are a number of themes that occur throughout the *Protocols*, yet for simplicity and organization, important chapters are highlighted individually, supported by direct quotes from the work.

Protocol I

From the beginning, the *Protocols* paint the Jew as deceiving and evil. Protocol I highlights the division between two groups, the Jew and the goyim. The Jewish plot is aimed not at “what is good and moral” but “what is necessary and useful,” mentioning that they will resort to bribery and deceit. The first chapter also establishes the connection between the Elders and liberalism, citing the slogan “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” as a Jewish creation. In this case, liberalism can best be described as any philosophy that is anti-autocratic, essentially any attitude contrary to the political status quo. The *Protocols* name liberalism as the vehicle in which world domination is reached; it was through the creation of democracy that the Jews were able to rise to power. According to the Elders, the old aristocracy was the “class which [were] the only defense peoples and countries had against us.” In its place, a “new aristocracy” would emerge, staffed by the educated and wealthy, a reference to the relatively new and ever growing middle class brought about by capitalism, another Jewish invention.²⁴

Protocol II

Protocol II is an important chapter within the *Protocols*, referencing three specific components of the Jewish plot. The first says that Jews are committed to waging economic

²⁴ Bronner, *A Rumor About the Jews*, 11-12.

warfare within the world, with the end result being financial supremacy. The second references Jewish control of education, with leaders creating “facts” and introducing the world to the ideas of Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche, all dangerous philosophies to established regimes. Finally, Protocol II concludes with the idea of the Jewish controlled media, saying whomever controls the world’s media controls the world’s gold. The Jews only gained control of this resource, however, from “oceans of blood and tears,” a reference to the violence and tragedy the Elders have exploited.²⁵

Protocol III

Protocol III addresses the ideology of socialism. As previously described, socialism and communism had long been associated with Judaism and the mythical Elders write how they use it to their advantage. By claiming to be the “saviors of the worker,” the Jews successfully recruit the populace into their ranks, what they dub their “fighting force.” This force, made up of organized groups of Socialists, Anarchists, and Communists, unwittingly fight for the ultimate cause of the Elders, the complete destruction of the goyim.²⁶

Protocol IV

With Protocol IV, a new concept is introduced. Previous stereotypes for Jews were based on the charge of deicide and the killing of Christians. Now, the Elders state their desire to kill Christianity and other faiths as a whole. “It is indispensable for us to undermine all faith, to tear out of the minds of the goyim the very principle of the Godhead, and the spirit, and to put in its place arithmetical calculations and material needs.” By destroying the institution of religion, Jews can effectively promote the educational and business establishments they

²⁵ Ibid, 12-13.

²⁶ Ibid, 14.

control. They do this to distract non-Jews from their plot, and in this way also separate themselves from the rest of the human race.²⁷

Protocols V, VII

These chapters highlight certain aspects of both the plan for takeover and administration of the world. According to Protocol V, Jews have already infiltrated various governments around the world thanks to their wealth. They also utilize their control of the press to keep the public apathetic towards government, thus ensuring an unchallenged ascent towards power.²⁸ Similarly, Protocol VII explains how the Elders have used the press to create “public opinion” to sway world governments in moving in a progressive, liberalist direction.²⁹

Protocol VIII

According to this section, the leaders of the plot have surrounded themselves with every important figure in the world, from high-ranking government officials such as diplomats, bureaucrats, and members of the judiciary to prominent members of the financial sector like industrialists and bankers. By keeping company with the highly influential populace of the world, the Elders hope to gain their trust and thus convert them to aiding the plot for world domination.³⁰

Protocol X

Protocol X provides more information about the process the Elders will use to take over the world. They advocate universal suffrage without discrepancy towards race, gender, or economic class, a radical proposition in a world where many actively kept disenfranchised

²⁷ Ibid, 15.

²⁸ Ibid, 15-16.

²⁹ Ibid, 18.

³⁰ Ibid, 19.

people from voting. The Elders reasoned that they needed to expand voting rights so that they might receive a majority in elections, demonstrating that world domination will come through political, not violent means. Again, they emphasize that liberalism has caused the end of the “safeguard of the goyim.” Jews will install puppet governments headed by presidents with dark pasts. By blackmailing leaders, they will enact new legislation to further the end goal of the Jewish controlled world.³¹

Protocol XI

Once in power, the Elders will strip non-Jews of rights, notably freedom of the press, assembly, and voting. The Jews are predatory, and here reference the destruction of non-Jews, saying, “the goyim are a flock of sheep, and we are their wolves. And you know what happens when the wolves get hold of the flock?”

Another important theme, the Jewish connection to Freemasonry, is introduced within this chapter. The Masons have long been a distrusted organization with many conspiracy theories attributed to them in their own right. Here, however, the Elders claim that they have recruited non-Jews into Masonic Lodges in order to create an army of faithful followers that will fight for the Elders unquestionably.³²

Protocol XII

As mass media became a powerful influence in the political, economic, and social life of the world, many leaders recognized the danger newspapers and other broadcasting outlets

³¹ Ibid, 20-21.

³² Ibid, 21-22.

potentially had. Indeed, newspapers had long been utilized to push radical agendas and ideologies aimed against the ruling class.³³

In Protocol XII, the Elders write, “Not a single announcement will reach the public without our control.” According to the *Protocols*, Jews control nearly every form of mass communication available. Their audience is from “aristocratic, republican, revolutionary, even anarchical” backgrounds, and the content produced changes depending on the reader. Everything that is written, however, is aimed at furthering progress towards the ultimate goal of world domination.³⁴

Protocols XIII, XIV

Protocol XIII explains how the Jews have introduced distractions such as games and other fleeting amusements in order to keep the masses docile and subservient. This chapter further describes the true conclusion of “progress,” the obscene philosophy that “obscure[s] truth.”

Protocol XIV deals with the destruction of other faiths. According to the Elders, once the takeover is complete, “it will be undesirable” for religions other than Judaism to exist. Jews will point out the flaws of world faiths while not allowing others to criticize Judaism’s shortcomings.³⁵

Protocol XV

Protocol XV returns to two major themes of the overall work. The first relates to the dominance of centralized authority over the Elders. Before liberalism as a philosophy took

³³ For examples of media’s use in past revolutions, see Jane Abrey’s “Feminism in the French Revolution” (1975) and Gordon Wood’s “Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution” (1966).

³⁴ Bronner, *Rumor About the Jews*, 22-23.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 24-25.

hold in Europe, the aristocracy kept the Jews in check. Within the book, the Elders specifically name the Russian aristocracy and the Papacy as the two major forces that prevented the Jews from carrying out their plan. Second, the Elders return to their discussion about Freemasonry. In this chapter, they advocate the creation and expansion of Masonic lodges internationally, as well as the centralization of leadership headed by the Elders. Besides establishing additional lodges, the Elders advocate the recruitment of every powerful and influential figure in the world into the organization, which serves not only to legitimize the Masons but also enlist the world's leaders into their ranks. Should any person, especially those affiliated with the Freemasons, attempt to stop the plot for world domination, clandestine executions will occur.³⁶

Protocol XX

While *Protocols XVI-XIX* reinforce previous chapters, Protocol XX offers an important examination of the economic side of the Elder's plot. The Elders begin by proclaiming that in order to fund the new state, a progressive tax is best, as "state needs must be paid by those who will not feel the burden and have enough to take from." These funds are then used for public works and other aspects of the welfare state. The Elders also claim responsibility for all economic crises the world has ever experienced, an elaborate ploy to force governments to remove capital from circulation, thus furthering the divide between the wealthy (in this case, Jews) and the lower classes, whom the Elders maintain are slaves to capitalists.³⁷

This chapter is an important one when examining the contradictory nature of the *Protocols* and anti-Semitism. The progressive tax has long been associated with socialism, with staunch opposition coming mostly from rightist politicians and thinkers who criticize

³⁶ Ibid, 25-26.

³⁷ Ibid, 28-29.

the burden placed on the upper class.³⁸ So while this chapter implies the Jewish connection to socialism, it also associates the Jew with capitalism.

Protocol XXII, XXIII, XXIV

In the final chapters of the book, the Elders reinforce previous themes. In chapter XXII, the Jews say that they hold “the greatest power of [the] day,” gold, claiming that within two days they can gather, “any quantity [they] may pleasure” from their reserves. As the *Protocols* have previously established the connection between Jews and both capitalism and socialism, this chapter helps to reinforce the greatest weapon the Jews hold in their quest for supremacy: economic power. The book concludes with the Elder’s thoughts on blind obedience to authority, Kingship, and how leaders will be chosen in the new world.³⁹

To better understand and refute the allegations the *Protocols* presented, an understanding of their origins is necessary.

Origins

The leaders of Europe made decision with the help of their closest advisors. In many cases, these consultants were mouthpieces of the aristocracy, ensuring the status quo remained. Some advisors, however, pushed for more liberal policies. One such person, Sergei Yulievich Witte, was Czar Nicholas II’s most trusted confidant. Witte’s modernist viewpoint and strong influence on the Czar made him extremely unpopular within the Russian court. Fearing their positions of power and seeing the growing revolutionary activity within Russia,

³⁸ For more on the economic and political side of progressive taxation, see Walter J. Blum and Harry Kalven, Jr.’s “The Uneasy Case for Progressive Taxation,” (1952).

³⁹ Bronner, *Rumor About the Jews*, 30-31.

the powerful aristocracy sought a solution to help discredit Witte and the leftist groups that were gaining popularity, such as the Bolsheviks.⁴⁰

The *Protocols* were penned under the supervision of the Okhrana, the secret police force of Czarist Russia. The organization maintained a special office located in Paris, headed by an ultra-rightist man named Pyotr Rachkovsky, who utilized his position to quash anarchist Russian groups outside of Russia. One of the major ways he did this was through forging documents. By writing fake editorials, letters, and pamphlets, Rachkovsky assumed the role of disillusioned revolutionaries; he provided an inside look at the inner workings of these radical groups and his writing often containing claims that Jews were the head of these terrorist organizations.⁴¹

While liberalism had always been a dirty word within the elites of Europe, Rachkovsky helped to connect Jews with the ideology. In 1892, he published an essay entitled *Anarchism and Nihilism*, a work that can be viewed as an outline for the *Protocols*. Here, he claimed that because of the French Revolution, the Jew had established himself as “governing by discrete means both monarchies and republics” throughout the world. When revolutionary activities intensified in Russia in 1905, Rachkovsky published pamphlets advocating violence against Jews, and he also founded the Union of the Russian People, an anti-Semitic league whose membership vastly increased during the troubles of the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁴²

Actual authorship of the *Protocols* has been attributed to a Russian exile named Mathieu Golovinski, an expert forger living in Paris. Golovinski was commissioned by Rachkovsky to

⁴⁰ Will Eisner, *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 22.

⁴¹ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 86.

⁴² *Ibid*, 88, 90.

create a manifesto proving that the Jews were responsible for the revolutionary fever sweeping through Russia. Plagiarizing largely from a book called *The Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu* by the mid-nineteenth century French satirist Maurice Joly, Golovinski successfully produced the work that became *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁴³

Reactions

Though the *Protocols* were released early in the twentieth century, they did not receive international prominence until the conclusion of World War I. Within Russia, however, the *Protocols* caused a sensation, particularly within the circle of the Romanovs. Nicholas II owned a heavily annotated copy of the book, reportedly writing, “Our year 1905 has gone as though managed by the Elders. There can be no doubt as to their authenticity.”⁴⁴ This logic has been cited as the reason why the *Protocols* eventually became popular internationally; aside from antiquated terms and ideas, the non-specific writing style made the *Protocols* a timeless and spaceless work, meaning it could be applied to any scenario in any region of the world.⁴⁵ As it was disseminated through the world, many high-ranking government officials, including Winston Churchill, spoke out about their belief in the Jewish conspiracy.⁴⁶

Not long after the first publication of the *Protocols* in 1905, many dismissed the book as a hoax. This heterogeneous mix of Jews, Protestants, Catholics, government officials, and journalists discovered the textual similarities between the *Protocols* and other sources.⁴⁷

Philip Graves, the Constantinople correspondent for the London newspaper *The Times*, was

⁴³ Eisner, *The Plot*, 57-59.

⁴⁴ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 125.

⁴⁵ Michael Berenbaum, *Not Your Father's Antisemitism: Hatred of the Jews in the Twenty-First Century* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 2008), 172.

⁴⁶ Eisner, *The Plot*, 70.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 73-89.

among the first to actively write on the likeness of wording, sometimes verbatim, between the *Protocols* and Maurice Joly's work, thus establishing the document as a forgery.⁴⁸

Despite the almost immediate consensus that the document was a forgery, the *Protocols* have experienced a lasting impact in the world of anti-Semitism. Because of its immediate translation into every major language in the world, the *Protocols* have grown to become the most circulated anti-Semitic text of all time. In its heyday of the early twentieth century, the writing was popular in areas that had sizable Jewish populations such as Poland and Russia and even those that had virtually no Jews, such as China and Japan. Today, the *Protocols* are more accessible than ever; the text is free from many websites, most of them conspiracy or hate groups, on the Internet, and it is cheaply available in book form from online shopping websites such as Amazon.⁴⁹

The *Protocols* in Germany

Violence in Weimar Germany

Despite evidence of its inauthenticity, the *Protocols* spread rapidly in the early twentieth century. The first foreign publishing occurred in Germany in 1919 as *The Secret Ways of Zion*. The timing of the publication could not have been more perfect. Germany's defeat in the First World War and the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles were often blamed on *Dolchstoßlegende* or the "stab in the back legend;" bitter Germans accused not the Allied Powers, but rather their enemies at home, most notably Jews, for their loss in the Great War.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 78.

⁴⁹ Berenbaum, *Not Your Father's Antisemitism*, 165, 173.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 340.

The great war-hero General Erich Ludendorff, a keen believer in the *Dolchstoßlegende*, vehemently defended it. “The supreme government of the Jewish people [worked] hand in hand with France and England. Perhaps it was leading them both,” he said, an opinion shared by thousands within Germany. When *The Times* published its 1921 exposé on the fallacious nature of the *Protocols*, popular newspaperman and future Nazi Count Ernst zu Reventlow published a rebuttal in the magazine *La Vieille France*, saying, “the revelations of *The Times* cannot touch, let alone destroy, the genuineness of the *Protocols*. On the contrary, these revelations throw a most interesting and valuable light on Jewish manoeuvres [sic]...Let the people of Germany draw the practical conclusion and see to it that the book, which is already widely distributed, is distributed as widely as ever possible!”⁵¹

Soon after arriving in Germany, the violent effects of the *Protocols* were seen in an assassination that shocked the world. In the summer of 1922, ultra right wing nationals gunned down Weimar Minister of Foreign Affairs Walther Rathenau, a Jew. Prior to the war, Rathenau had been a successful industrialist, well read and respected as an authority in politics and economics. He utilized these talents during the war, faithfully serving his country as an administrator of natural resources, ensuring Germany’s provisions maintained throughout the conflict. He also was instrumental in the drafting and implementation of the Rapallo Treaty of 1922, essentially concluding an agreement of status quo ante bellum with the Soviet Union.⁵²

However, these accomplishments were overshadowed by the fact that Rathenau was Jewish; anti-Semites portrayed his background in industry as the stereotyped Jewish

⁵¹ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*. 149-150.

⁵² *Ibid*, 157.

capitalist who exploited the hard work of the Volk, while his dealings with the communist Soviet Union made him a target as a friend to Bolshevism.

The *Protocols* certainly had a hand in this criticism. In his 1922 book *A Critique of the Age*, Rathenau made a statement that proved very easy to take out of context. “Three hundred men, all of whom know one another, guide the economic destinies of the Continent and seek their successors among their followers,” wrote Rathenau, a reference to the oligarchy that controlled finance and business. This context was completely altered by those who believed the message of the *Protocols*, however. General Ludendorff, one of Rathenau’s most vocal critics, led the charge with his claim that these “three hundred men” mentioned must be the titular Elders, and if Rathenau knew the precise number, he must be one of them.⁵³

His assassins also believed that Rathenau was connected to the *Protocols*. The driver in the shooting, Ernst Techow, testified that the mastermind of the attack, Erwin Kern, believed that Rathenau had himself confessed, and boasted, that he was one of the three hundred Elders of Zion. Kern went on to accuse Rathenau of marrying his sister off to Karl Radek, a vocal communist leader with close ties to Vladimir Lenin.⁵⁴

Still, not everyone was convinced. The judge in Techow’s trial concluded the session by saying, “Behind the murderers and their accomplices the chief culprit, irresponsible, fanatical antisemitism...irrespective of the individual, with all those means of calumny of which that vulgar libel, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, is an example.” Various libel and slander lawsuits prosecuted journalists for maintaining that Rathenau was indeed a part of the plot.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid, 159.

⁵⁴ David Fraham Williamson, “Walther Rathenau: Patron Saint of the German Liberal Establishment (1922-1972),” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1975): 213.

⁵⁵ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 162-163.

Yet while the vast majority of Germans remained untouched by the *Protocols*, the document did help radicalize some of those on the right, proving the document fueled emotional response and violence. Further, the *Protocols* helped to further establish the theme of anti-Semitism within German politics during a period of extreme political instability.

The Protocols and Hitler

Even before his introduction to the NSDAP, Adolf Hitler aspired to become politically involved within his new country. Just after the end of World War I, Hitler wrote a letter to a colleague in which he complained that the ideology of the Volk lacked any real way to develop into a political movement. This was completely necessary to Hitler, as the Jews' desire for wealth is what makes them "the racial tuberculosis of the peoples" and the only clear solution must be the "the removal of the Jews altogether."⁵⁶

Germany's economic crisis of the early 1920s furthered Hitler's paranoia about Jews. In 1923, Hitler explained that, "According to the *Protocols of [the Elders of] Zion* the peoples are to be reduced to submission by hunger. The second revolution under the Star of David is the aim of the Jews in our time."⁵⁷ When Germany was again in economic despair during the Great Depression, Hitler blamed his country's, and indeed the world's, problems on the Jewish "invention of genius," capitalism.⁵⁸ Hitler attributed Germany's other woes, especially the punitive Treaty of Versailles, on the Jewish interests he saw as controlling major world powers.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid, 199.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Jacobson, *The Protocols: Myth and History* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1981), 118.

⁵⁸ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 200-201.

⁵⁹ Eisner, *The Plot*, 95.

While serving time in prison for his failed 1923 coup, Hitler compiled his autobiography and political platform into a book he titled *Mein Kampf*. An ill-focused and rambling tome, *Mein Kampf* utilizes many of the principles listed in the *Protocols* to demonstrate how the Jew is bent on world domination.

Mein Kampf begins with Hitler's origins in Austria, particularly focused on his disdain for Vienna. The capital, and indeed entirety, of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was quite heterogeneous, a result of the vast amount of territory it held. To Hitler, the "motley of Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, Serbs and Croats, etc., and always bacillus which is the solvent of human society, the Jew" made the Dual Monarchy an unlivable place.⁶⁰

Austria was not the only country Hitler distrusted. Hitler devoted many pages to the newly formed Soviet Union, decrying, "In Russian Bolshevism, we ought to recognize the kind of attempt which is being made by the Jew in the twentieth century to secure dominion over the world."⁶¹ The Jewish desire for world domination became quite clear to Hitler with the fall of the Czar and the emergence of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution of 1917. The connection between Lenin and Judaism was not one invented by Hitler; indeed, rumors about the familial history of the founder of the Soviet Union existed even before 1917. One of Hitler's greatest influences, Dietrich Eckart, wrote an essay titled "Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin," which attempted to show the connection. Recently, evidence has come to light that Lenin's maternal great-grandfather was Jewish.⁶² Despite this, there is nothing distinctly "Jewish" about Vladimir Lenin as Harvard's Dr. Ruth Wisse notes. His ancestors converted to Russian Orthodoxy in the mid-nineteenth century, and Lenin did not

⁶⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Translated by James Murphy (Boring, Oregon: CPA Book Publisher, 2000), 78-79.

⁶¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 364.

⁶² See Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern's *Lenin's Jewish Question*.

associate with definitions of ethnicity or religion, famously writing, "Once you join the Bolsheviks, you think class, not ethnicity. Moreover, when you join the RSDRP [Lenin's party], you obliterate your ethnicity and become a class."⁶³ Based on this evidence, Lenin does not even fit the criteria established by the Nazis in the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws for defining Jewishness.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the association of Jews with Lenin, and therefore the Soviet Union, remained an important part of Nazi doctrine.

Mein Kampf devotes only one paragraph to the *Protocols* itself, yet the paragraph is a damning one. To Hitler, the fact that many notable sources denounced the document as a forgery proved the document's authenticity.⁶⁵ The only source he references by name, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, was a leftist, Jewish owned newspaper highly critical of the rise of reactionary factions within Weimar Germany. It remained the only Nazi-era newspaper not directly controlled by Goebbels' propaganda ministry until it was dissolved in 1943.⁶⁶ Because of the views held by the newspaper and its audience, Hitler saw the *Zeitung* as an agent of the Zionist controlled media, a reference to numerous sections of the *Protocols*, especially protocol seven. By placing the newspaper in the hands of the Elders, Hitler reached the conclusion that because the media was attempting to suppress the document, it must be true.

One of the biggest correlations between *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols* is Hitler's connection of Jews with Freemasons. The *Protocols* claim that Jews created Masonic lodges in order to recruit gentiles into a subservient army full of disposable, ignorant soldiers who will fight for the goals of the Elders without question. According to *Mein Kampf*, Jewish

⁶³ Ruth Wisse, "Was Lenin Jewish?" My Jewish Learning.

⁶⁴ "The Nuremberg Race Laws," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁶⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 174.

⁶⁶ "Wissen Für Kluge Köpfe: Porträt Der F.A.Z." FAZ.NET.

leaders overcame barriers previously placed before them by utilizing Masonic lodges to infiltrate government and economic circles. Members of these social classes, many of them Freemasons themselves, did not suspect that the lodges “had fallen completely into [Jewish] hands.” However, Jewish controlled Freemasonry only “caught” a small percentage of the population. While Masons comprised the wealthy and influential, the majority of the population was, in the words of Hitler, “glove-manufacturers and linen-weavers.” Because they were outside the Masonic sphere of influence, the Jew turned his attention to the press, dominating that industry in no time and dictating public opinion in favor of more progressive policies, a pejorative term to conservative Germans.⁶⁷

In 1928, Hitler penned another treatise that was not published in his lifetime. The *Zweites Buch*, also known as *Hitler's Second Book*, is an outline of Hitler's foreign policy objectives, notably his ultimate plan of a military alliance with Italy and England against France. In this volume, Hitler managed to write a great deal on the “Jewish question.”

He grossly and incorrectly oversimplifies the First World War, blaming the conflict and Germany's defeat on the “enormous war propaganda campaign” of international Jewry. Clinging to the Volkish notion of Aryanism, Hitler asserts that because Jews have never had a state of their own, they are incapable of establishing and maintaining a country; the parasitic nature of the Jew renders them completely dependent on the strong, productive Aryan race. It is this parasitic status that led the Jew to become the owners of factories, therefore the rulers of capitalism. Both the press and the Freemasons assist Jews in carrying out their plans, as both were controlled by and totally dependent on Jews. It is through these

⁶⁷ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 178-179.

means, Hitler claimed, that Jews sought to destroy various governments across the globe, most importantly the German Reich.⁶⁸

Just as he did with *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's ramblings in his second book echo many of the themes of the *Protocols*. To Hitler, the Jewish plot for world domination began with the establishment of democracies. He saw the abolition of the Second Reich and the creation of the Weimar Republic as proof of a Jewish conspiracy; in Hitler's words, the Jew fights "first for equality, then for superiority."⁶⁹ Hitler's governmental *Weltanschauung* was completely shaped by his belief that all products of liberalism, particularly democracy and socialism, were Jewish inventions aimed at establishing a new world order.

One of Hitler's greatest influences was Friedrich Nietzsche, whose writings Hitler discovered when he grew tired of his first philosophical idol, Arthur Schopenhauer. Hitler was especially fond of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* theory and soon appropriated it into National Socialist doctrine, albeit with some changes. Hitler racialized Nietzsche's theory, prophesizing "the coming 'master race' led by an all-powerful 'superman.'"⁷⁰ In Hitler's view, it was the destiny of the Aryan, his *Übermensch*, to wage war on the *Untermenschen*, the derogatory classification attributed to Jews by Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg.

To Hitler, the *Protocols* helped to justify war in 1939. In his mind, it was the Jews that had ignited the Great War, creating an international hatred of Germany through the Marxist (that is, Jewish) controlled media.⁷¹ In a speech from early January 1939, Hitler claimed, "If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the

⁶⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf*, Edited by Gerhard L. Weinberg (New York: Enigma, 2003), 229-232.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 230.

⁷⁰ Yvonne Sherratt, *Hitler's Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 27.

⁷¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 154.

nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”⁷² To Hitler, World War II represented retaliation against these Jewish “financiers,” an obvious allusion to the Elders, and their control over every facet of life, from the economy to the media. His entire philosophy was built upon the belief that Jews were capable of great evil and possessed huge amounts of power that kept non-Jews in check. While the broad idea of “Jews” had been used as scapegoats throughout Germany’s history, Hitler finally had a specific group of people he could focus his rage and hatred on. Even if they were mythical, the Elders of Zion provided an explicit group that Hitler waged a crusade against. Any nation that resisted this campaign was already a pawn of the Elders.

Other Nazi Leaders

The opinions of those around Hitler was also tainted by the *Protocols*. While unpopular amongst the leadership because of his anti-Christian stance, one of the most influential men within the National Socialist movement was Alfred Rosenberg. A Russian by birth, he fled to Germany after the Bolshevist Revolution. He is often credited with connecting Bolshevism to the world Jewish conspiracy. His book *Myth of the Twentieth Century*, a tome similarly as unorganized and rambling as *Mein Kampf*, soon became part of the scriptures of the Nazi movement. Rosenberg also wrote many tracts on the international Jewish conspiracy.⁷³

In a preface to his 1933 commentary on the *Protocols*, Rosenberg wrote, “The German Reich stands in the focus of the world, and a purified nation reveals itself for those who can

⁷² Ernst K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda: 1925-1945* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1965), 392.

⁷³ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 215-216.

These pamphlets were published and celebrated just before the assassination of Walther Rathenau; because his assassins held these views, a connection between Rosenberg’s pamphlets and the assassination of the foreign minister is quite strong.

see, shining brightly, like a new dawn of creation... The circle of the Jewish plans for world-domination was not yet quite closed... May the new edition of this book reveal yet again to the German people in what delusion they were imprisoned, before the great German movement shattered it.”⁷⁴ Rosenberg certainly believed in the message of the *Protocols*, and he was determined that the National Socialist movement should stop Jewish domination. While the Jew was trying to imprison and destroy the world, Hitler and the Nazis were Germany’s, and indeed the world’s, only hope.

One of the most powerful members of the Third Reich was Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels’ used his position to create many pieces of anti-Semitic propaganda, mostly aimed at the belief in the malicious, ulterior motives of the Jew. Goebbels shared Hitler’s view that the Jew was responsible for many of the evils in the world, including World War II, and he utilized this throughout his propaganda campaigns. Many of these pieces were targeted at Allied audiences; the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp once produced English stamps with the printed phrase “This War is a Jewish War.” Yet even though Goebbels believed in the devilish ambitions of Jews, he stopped short of accepting the *Protocols* as gospel. “We cannot speak flatly of a conspiracy of the Jewish race against western man; this conspiracy is more a matter of race than of thought-out intentions,” reads a 1943 Goebbels diary entry.⁷⁵ Thus, while Goebbels’ rabid anti-Semitism is apparent, he appeared never to have fully believed in the organized Jewish conspiracy laid out within the *Protocols*.

Another top Nazi official who embraced the message of the *Protocols* was Nuremberg gauleiter Julius Streicher. To advertise the Nazi mandated boycott of Jewish stores in 1933,

⁷⁴ Ibid, 217.

⁷⁵ Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*, 391.

Streicher referenced the *Protocols* in an advertisement in the official party newspaper *Der Völkischer Beobachter*. Referencing the “Plan of Basel,” a sobriquet of the *Protocols*, Streicher excitedly announced that with the boycott, “the German people begin defensive action against the Jewish world-criminals! National Socialists! Strike down the world enemy!” Streicher continued to reference the *Protocols* in his tabloid *Der Stürmer*, writing sensational accounts of Jews raping and murdering the people of Germany.⁷⁶ Streicher’s role in publicizing the *Protocols* was unsurpassable. Posted in cities all over the country, Streicher’s propaganda made the *Protocols* even more widely known.

While anti-Semitism and at least a fractional trust in the validity of the messages of the *Protocols* were the core of the beliefs of the leaders of the Nazi movement, the German Volk were less convinced, at least at first. Nazis were elected not because of their anti-Semitic rhetoric, but rather the orations against the poor economic and political state of the country. In fact, most scholars agree that 1933 Germany was not a nation that was engrossed with anti-Semitism and certainly not a country that believed in the world Jewish conspiracy. As historian Norman Cohn notes, 100,000 copies of the *Protocols* were sold in twelve years, a pittance when compared to the 250,000 copies that *All Quiet on the Western Front* sold in one year. According to sociologist Theodore Abel, who interviewed hundreds of Nazis in 1934, only thirty percent of respondents explicitly mentioned anti-Semitism as a reasoning for joining the Nazi Party; many answers explicitly stated that anti-Semitism was the one facet of the ideology that they did not agree with.⁷⁷

Slowly, however, the *Protocols* were disseminated throughout society. Because of *Der Stürmer*’s constant mention of the document, sales increased tremendously, and unlike

⁷⁶ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 221.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 218-219.

Hitler's writings, the *Protocols* were actually read. Soon, Reich Minister of Science, Education, and National Culture Bernhard Rust prescribed the *Protocols* as a textbook in German classrooms.⁷⁸ Rust was a zealous Nazi and used his post to indoctrinate an entire generation of loyal German youth, stating that the purpose of textbooks was "the ideological education of young German people, so as to develop them into fit members of the national community...ready to serve and to sacrifice."⁷⁹ This placed Rust among the most influential Nazis in the regime; his steadfast hold on education allowed the Nazis to promote their racist, nationalistic ideology within the classroom, thus controlling German youth of all ages.

Slowly, the content of Nazi leaders speeches about Jews changed. Initially, the Jew was an enemy that had to be separated from the strong German race. As Germany set the scene for World War II, however, the Jew became the most dangerous enemy combatant who had to be exterminated. Propaganda pieces and speeches during the war were careful not to hint at the reality of mass executions and organized gassing, however. *Der Stürmer* wrote of the Jew "Bacteria, vermin, and pests cannot be tolerated. For reasons of cleanliness and hygiene we must make them harmless by killing them off." German Labor Front head Robert Ley determined that it was "not enough to isolate the Jewish enemy of mankind – the Jew has got to be exterminated."⁸⁰

By 1944, the tides of war shifted and Germany found itself decimated by the Allies. Yet this seems to only have furthered the rationale for the Nazi crusade against the Jews; in December of 1944, the press returned to the famous Rathenau quote, saying, "The central issue of this war is the breaking of Jewish world-domination. If it were possible to checkmate

⁷⁸ Ibid, 222.

⁷⁹ Lisa Pine, "Nazism in the Classroom," *History Today* 47, no. 4, 24.

⁸⁰ Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 225, 227.

the 300 secret Jewish kings who rule the world, the peoples of this earth would at last find peace.”⁸¹ The closer defeat came, the more intensely Hitler and the Nazis clung to the message of the *Protocols*.

Conclusion: Into the 21st Century

Typing the phrase “The *Protocols* of the Elders of Zion” into Google returns the searcher with a number of diverse results. While some information comes from legitimate websites, notably the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and a number of universities, countless others direct readers to conspiracy theorists.

The websites have various affiliations. One of the first websites Google offers is “Educate-Yourself.org,” an entity that writes on conspiracies ranging from the dangers of vaccines to the John F. Kennedy assassination.⁸² Online message boards from white supremacist organizations such as Stormfront feature discussions about the Jewish conspiracy in the world today, with many threads featuring “proof” of their authenticity.⁸³

One of the world’s leading anti-Semites is former Louisiana congressman David Duke. Duke’s website is filled with articles denouncing the worldwide Zionist conspiracy and the major world politicians who supposedly put it into effect. In a shocking turn of events, however, Duke has declared that the *Protocols* do not recount a real historical meeting. Instead, he calls it a “highly predictive work of ‘fiction’ – much like George Orwell’s ‘1984,’ or Aldous Huxley’s ‘Brave New World.’” Because of this, Duke has started a crowd-funding campaign to produce an illustrated copy of the *Protocols*, complete with a portrait of David

⁸¹ Ibid, 230.

⁸² "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Educate Yourself.

⁸³ “Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion,” Stormfront.

Ben-Gurion on the cover, filled with what he claims to be modern day examples of the *Protocols* in action.⁸⁴

Today, the *Protocols* is used as a political tool all over the world, but remains very concentrated within the Middle East, where it is often utilized as a way to defame and discredit Israel. Article Thirty-Two of the Hamas Charter decries the combined forces of “World Zionism” and “imperialistic powers” in the destruction of Arab states. Hamas explicitly names the document, saying, “Their plan is embodied in the ‘*Protocols* of the Elders of Zion’, and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying,” a reference to the perceived warmongering nature of the State of Israel.⁸⁵

Up until the end, the Nazis maintained the war they waged against the Jews was a righteous campaign aimed at breaking the hold of the world Jewish conspiracy. Even when it became obvious they could not win the war against the Allies, Germany escalated the war against the Jews, culminating in the murder of six million and the destruction of an entire culture within Europe.

When examining the *Protocols* in the context of Nazi Germany, the sentence, “The weapons in our hands are limitless ambitions, burning greediness, merciless vengeance, hatreds, and malice” takes an entirely new perspective. Anti-Semitism in Germany did not begin with the introduction of the *Protocols*, nor did it end with Hitler in 1945. Yet *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* fueled and justified the atrocity that was the Holocaust, and continues to be a major source of anti-Semitism today.

⁸⁴ David Duke, "Help Us Publish This Incredible New Book! & Watch New Video: The Illustrated Protocols! - David Duke.com," June 3, 2014.

⁸⁵ "The Charter of the Hamas (1988)." Palestine Center.

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