1. A LETTER ON THE JEWISH QUESTION
(SEPTMBER 16, 1919)'  
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Antisemitism as a political movement should not and cannot be determined by emotional factors, but rather by a realization of the facts. And these facts are:

First, Jewry is clearly a racial and not a religious group.... All that which is for men a source of higher life—be it religion, socialism or democracy—is for the Jew merely a means to an end, namely, the satisfaction of his lust for power and money.

His actions will result in a racial tuberculosis of peoples [Rassentuberkulose der Voelker].

Hence it follows: Antisemitism based on purely emotional grounds will find its ultimate expression in the form of pogroms [which are capricious and thus not truly effective]. Rational antisemitism, however, must pursue a systematic, legal campaign against the Jews, by the revocation of the special privileges they enjoy in contrast to the other foreigners living among us. But the final objective must be the complete removal of the Jews [die Entfernung der Juden ueberhaupt].

NOTE
1. Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), Austrian-born leader of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (the Nazi Party) from 1920 and chancellor of the German Reich from 1933 until his suicide on April 30, 1945. Hitler inspired—and was the one ultimately responsible for planning and implementing—the Nazis’ “war against the Jews,” which culminated in the extermination of European Jewry. He felt himself called upon by Providence to lead the struggle against the Jews. In 1919 he joined a small nationalist, antisemitic political circle, the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (German Workers’ Party) and in 1920 he became the Führer of the party, which had been renamed the National-Socialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers’ Party—Nazi). Upon the assumption of the leadership of the nascent Nazi Party, he declared, “It is our duty to arouse, to whip up and to incite in our people the instinctive repugnance for the Jews.” Hitler’s antisemitism is an eclectic weave of motifs from Austrian and German political and racial antisemitism; his obsession with the worldwide Jewish conspiracy is apparently derived from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which was translated into German in 1920. (See document 29 in chapter 6.) With the Nazis’ accession to power in January 1933, Hitler’s impassioned call for the Aryan peoples to gather together in an apocalyptic effort to check the insidious schemes of Jewry—whom he perceived as the incarnation of absolute evil—gained expression in the policy of “racial purification” and the systematic exclusion of the Jews from German society.

In this letter, which is his earliest extant political statement in print, Hitler outlined his views on the Jewish question. At the time he was employed as a secret agent of the Press and Propaganda Office of the political department of the Reichswehr (National Defense), which was charged with checking the inroads of revolutionary politics within the ranks of the demobilizing troops. A certain Adolf Gemlich addressed an inquiry to this office regarding the place of the Jewish question within the Wehrmacht’s anti-revolutionary propaganda. Hitler was asked to write the reply to Gemlich and used the occasion to adumbrate his conception of a rational antisemitism (Antisemitismus der Vernunft), viz., a two-stage policy of first systematically and legally rescinding the emancipation of the Jews and then bringing about their total “removal” (Entfernung) from German life. (The exact nature of this “final objective” remained for the time being unspecified.) This emphasis on a two-stage solution to the Jewish question continued to characterize Hitler’s policy.

Today it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to say when the word "Jew" first gave me ground for special thoughts. At home I do not remember having heard the word during my father's lifetime. I believe that the old gentleman would have regarded any special emphasis on this term as cultural backwardness. In the course of his life he had arrived at more or less cosmopolitan views which, despite his pronounced national sentiments, not only remained intact, but also affected me to some extent.

Likewise at school I found no occasion which could have led me to change this inherited picture. 

Not until my fourteenth or fifteenth year did I begin to come across the word "Jew," with any frequency, partly in connection with political discussions. This filled me with a mild distaste, and I could not rid myself of an unpleasant feeling that always came over me whenever religious quarrels occurred in my presence.

At that time I did not think anything else of the question.

There were few Jews in Linz. In the course of the centuries their outward appearance had become Europeanized and had taken on a human look; in fact, I even took them for Germans. The absurdity of this idea did not dawn on me because I saw no distinguishing feature but the strange religion. The fact that they had, as I believed, been persecuted on this account sometimes almost turned my distaste at unfavorable remarks about them into horror. Then I came to Vienna. [Gradually], I encountered the Jewish question.

My views with regard to antisemitism thus succumbed to the passage of time, and this was my greatest transformation of all.

It cost me the greatest inner soul struggles, and only after months of battle between my reason and my sentiments did my reason begin to emerge victorious. Two years later, my sentiment had followed my reason, and from then on became its most loyal guardian and sentinel.

At the time of this bitter struggle between spiritual education and cold reason, the visual instruction of the Vienna streets had performed invaluable services. There came a time when I no longer, as in the first days, wandered blindly through the mighty city; now with open eyes I saw not only the buildings but also the people.

Once, as I was strolling through the Inner City, I suddenly encountered an apparition in a black caftan and black hair locks. Is this a Jew? was my first thought.

For, to be sure, they had not looked like that in Linz. I observed the man furtively and cautiously, but the longer I stared at this foreign face, scrutinizing feature for feature, the more my first question assumed a new form:

Is this a German?

As always in such cases, I now began to try to relieve my doubts by books.

I could no longer very well doubt that the objects of my study were not Germans of a special religion, but a people in themselves; for since I had begun to concern myself with this question and to take cognizance of the Jews, Vienna appeared to me in a different light than before. Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity. 

The cleanliness of this people, moral and otherwise, I must say, is a point in itself. By their very

exterior you could tell that these were no lovers of water, and to your distress, you often knew it with your eyes closed. Later I often grew sick to my stomach from the smell of these caftan-wearers. Added to this, there was their unclean dress and their generally unheroic appearance.

All this could scarcely be called very attractive; but it became positively repulsive when, in addition to their physical uncleanliness, you discovered the moral stains on this "chosen people."

In a short time I was made more thoughtful than ever by my slowly rising insight into the type of activity carried on by the Jews in certain fields.

Was there any form of filth or profligacy, particularly in cultural life, without at least one Jew involved in it?

If you cut even cautiously into such an abscess, you found, like a maggot in a rotting body, often dazzled by the sudden light—a kike!

What had to be reckoned heavily against the Jews in my eyes was when I became acquainted with their activity in the press, art, literature and the theater. All the unctuous reassurances helped little or nothing. It sufficed to look at a billboard, to study the names of the men behind the horrible trash they advertised, to make you hard for a long time to come. This was pestilence, spiritual pestilence, worse than the Black Death of olden times, and the people was being infected with it! ...

And I now began to examine my beloved "world press," from this point of view.

And the deeper I probed, the more the object of my former admiration shriveled. The style became more and more unbearable; I could not help rejecting the content as inwardly shallow and banal; the objectivity of exposition now seemed to me more akin to lies than honest truth; and the writers were—Jews.

A thousand things which I had hardly seen before now struck my notice, and others, which had previously given me food for thought, I now learned to grasp and understand.

I now saw the liberal attitude of this press in a different light; the lofty tone in which it answered attacks and its method of killing them with silence now revealed itself to me as a trick as clever as it was treacherous; the transfigured raptures of their theatrical critics were always directed at Jewish writers, and their disapproval never struck anyone but Germans...

The development was accelerated by insights which I gained into a number of other matters. I am referring to the general view of ethics and morals which was quite openly exhibited by a large part of the Jews, and the practical application of which could be seen.

Here again the streets provided an object lesson of a sort which was sometimes positively evil.

The relation of the Jews to prostitution and, even more, to the white-slave traffic, could be studied in Vienna as perhaps in no other city of Western Europe, with the possible exception of the southern French ports. If you walked at night through the streets and alleys of Leopoldstadt, at every step you witnessed proceedings which remained concealed from the majority of the German people until the War gave the soldiers on the eastern front occasion to see similar things, or, better expressed, forced them to see them.

When thus for the first time I recognized the Jew as the cold-hearted, shameless and calculating director of this revolting vice traffic in the scum of the big city, a cold shudder ran down my back.

But then a flame flared up within me. I no longer avoided discussion of the Jewish question; no, now I sought it. And when I learned to look for the Jew in all branches of cultural and artistic life and its various manifestations, I suddenly encountered him in a place where I would least have expected to find him.

When I recognized the Jew as the leader of the Social Democracy, the scales dropped from my eyes. A long soul struggle had reached its conclusion...

Only now did I become thoroughly acquainted with the seducer of our people.

A single year of my sojourn in Vienna had sufficed to imbue me with the conviction that no worker could be so stubborn that he would not in the end succumb to better knowledge and better explanation. Slowly I had become an expert in their own doctrine and used it as a weapon in the struggle for my own profound conviction.

Success almost always favored my side.

The great masses could be saved, if only with the greatest sacrifice in time and patience.

But a Jew could never be parted from his opinions...

For me this was the time of the greatest spiritual upheaval I have ever had to go through.

I had ceased to be a weak-kneed cosmopolitan and become an antisemite.
Just once more—and this was the last time—fearful, oppressive thoughts came to me in profound anguish.

When over long periods of human history I scrutinized the activity of the Jewish people, suddenly there rose up in me the fearful question whether inscrutable Destiny, perhaps for reasons unknown to us poor mortals, did not with eternal and immutable resolve, desire the final victory of this little nation.

Was it possible that the earth had been promised as a reward to this people which lives only for this earth?

Have we an objective right to struggle for our self-preservation, or is this justified only subjectively within ourselves?

As I delved more deeply into the teachings of Marxism and thus in tranquil clarity submitted the deeds of the Jewish people to contemplation, Fate itself gave me its answer.

The Jewish doctrine of Marxism rejects the aristocratic principle of Nature and replaces the eternal privilege of power and strength by the mass of numbers and their dead weight. Thus it denies the value of personality in man, contests the significance of nationality and race and thereby withdraws from humanity the premise of its existence and its culture. As a foundation of the universe, this doctrine would bring about the end of any order intellectually conceivable to man. And as, in this greatest of all recognizable organisms, the result of an application of such a law could only be chaos, on earth it could only be destruction for the inhabitants of this planet.

If, with the help of his Marxist creed, the Jew is victorious over the other people of the world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity and this planet will, as it did thousands of years ago, move through the ether devoid of men.

Eternal Nature inexorably avenges the infringement of her commands.

Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator, by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord.

NOTE

1. In 1923 the National Socialist German Workers' Party attempted a political coup in Munich. Their intention had been to set out from the Bavarian capital to conquer the whole of Germany. The *putsch* ("uprising") failed, and Hitler and several of his comrades were brought to trial, a trial which Hitler cleverly used as a forum to publicize the Nazi cause. During the short period he spent in prison, Hitler wrote his autobiography, *Mein Kampf* [My Struggle], in which he outlined the program of his movement. The first volume of the book was published in 1925 and volume two in 1926.

2. In the 1920s Linz, the capital of Upper Austria, had a population of just under 100,000. Less than one percent of this were Jews. Hitler actually lived with his parents in various villages in the vicinity of Linz.