

Historical Materialism 141

# A Jewish Communist in Weimar Germany

*The Life of Werner Scholem (1895–1940)*

Ralf Hoffrogge

BRILL

## A Jewish Communist in Weimar Germany

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# A Jewish Communist in Weimar Germany

*The Life of Werner Scholem (1895–1940)*

*By*

Ralf Hoffrogge

*Translated by*

Loren Balhorn  
Jan-Peter Herrmann



BRILL

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# List of Abbreviations

ADGB	<i>Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</i> [General Federation of German Trade Unions]
AM-Apparat	KPD 'anti-military apparatus', espionage department
BArch	<i>Bundesarchiv Berlin</i> [Federal Archives, Berlin]
BDM	<i>Bund Deutscher Mädel</i> [League of German Girls, girls' branch of the Hitler Youth]
BL	<i>Bezirksleitung</i> , KPD district leadership body
Bl. / Blatt	Page or Sheet in a loose-leaf collection
BRD	<i>Bundesrepublik Deutschland</i> [Federal Republic of Germany]
BStU	<i>Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR</i> [Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic]
BwA	<i>Archiv der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald</i> [Buchenwald Memorial Archives]
Comintern	Communist International
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CP	Communist Party
DDP	<i>Deutsche Demokratische Partei</i> [German Democratic Party]
DDR	<i>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</i> [German Democratic Republic]
DMV	<i>Deutscher Metallarbeiter-Verband</i> [German Metal Workers' Union]
DNVP	<i>Deutschnationale Volkspartei</i> [German National People's Party]
Dok	<i>Dokument</i> [document]
DVP	<i>Deutsche Volkspartei</i> [German People's Party]
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
FRG	See BRD
GDR	See DDR
Gestapa	<i>Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt</i> [Secret State Police Department, early name for the Gestapo]
Gestapo	<i>Geheime Staatspolizei</i> [Secret State Police]
GPU	<i>Gosudarstvennoe Politiceskoe Upravlenie</i> [State Political Administration, early Soviet secret police service]
GSA	Gershom Scholem Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem
GStA PK	<i>Geheimes Staatsarchiv preußischer Kulturbesitz</i> [Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation]
HA	<i>Hauptabteilung</i> [Main Department]
HStA	<i>Hauptstaatsarchiv</i> [Main State Archives]
IKD	<i>Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands</i> [German International Communists]

IML	<i>Institut für Marxismus Leninismus beim ZK der SED</i> [Institute for Marxism-Leninism at the Central Committee of the SED]
IPW	<i>Institut für politische Wissenschaft der Leibniz Universität Hannover</i> [Institute for Political Science, Leibniz University, Hanover]
Inprecor	See <i>InPreKorr</i>
<i>InPreKorr</i>	<i>Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz</i> , Comintern publication
ITS	International Tracing Service, Bad Arolsen
KAPD	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands</i> [Communist Workers' Party of Germany]
KL	<i>Konzentrationslager</i> [concentration camp]
KP	<i>Kommunistische Partei</i> [Communist Party]
KPD	<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i> [Communist Party of Germany]
KPO	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Opposition) [Communist Party of Germany (Opposition)]
KZ	See KL
LABO	<i>Landesamt für Bürger- und Ordnungsangelegenheiten</i> [Berlin State Office for Civil Concerns, Berlin]
LArch	<i>Landesarchiv Berlin</i> [State Archive, Berlin]
M-Apparat	KPD military-political department
MdL	<i>Mitglied des Landtags</i> [Member of the Landtag]
MdR	<i>Mitglied des Reichstags</i> [Member of the Reichstag]
MfS	<i>Ministerium der Staatssicherheit</i> [Ministry for State Security, 'Stasi' (East Germany)]
N-Apparat	KPD intelligence service
NKVD	<i>Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del</i> [People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, name of Soviet secret police 1934–46]
NLA	<i>Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv</i> [Lower Saxony State Archive]
NLI	National Library of Israel
Nr.	[ <i>Nummer</i> ] Number
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands</i> [National Socialist German Workers' Party]
OHL	<i>Oberste Heeresleitung</i> [Supreme Army Command]
ORA	<i>Oberreichsanwalt beim Reichsgericht</i> [Chief Prosecutor of the Imperial Court, later Supreme Court]
<i>Orbüro</i>	<i>Organisationsbüro</i> , organisational centre of the KPD
<i>Orgleiter</i>	<i>Organisationsleiter</i> , organisational leader of the KPD apparatus
<i>Polleiter</i>	<i>Politischer Leiter</i> , political leader (of a local KPD party cell or the political secretariat)
<i>Polbüro</i>	see Politbüro

Politbüro	Political Bureau, leading body of the KPD
POUM	<i>Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista</i> [Workers' Party of Marxist Unification]
RFB	<i>Roter Frontkämpferbund</i> [League of Red Front-Fighters, KPD paramilitary organisation]
RGASPI	<i>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii</i> [Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow]
RKP	<i>Russische Kommunistische Partei</i> [Russian Communist Party]
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern)
SA	<i>Sturmabteilung</i> ['Storm Department', military wing of the NSDAP]
SAP	<i>Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands</i> [Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, 1931 split from SPD]
SAPMO-BArch	<i>Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv</i> [Foundation Archives of Parties and Mass Organisations of the GDR in the Federal Archives]
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> [Socialist Unity Party of Germany, East German ruling party]
Sipo	<i>Sicherheitspolizei</i> [security police]
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> [Social Democratic Party of Germany]
StA	<i>Staatsarchiv</i> [State Archive]
Stasi	see MfS
StB	<i>Stenographische Berichte</i> [stenographic reports]
SS	<i>Schutzstaffel</i> ['Protection Squadron', NSDAP paramilitary organisation]
SU	Soviet Union
TASS	<i>Telegrafnoje agentstvo sovetskogo soyuza</i> , Soviet newswire agency
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)
USP	See USPD
USPD	<i>Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> [Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany]
VdN	<i>Verfolgter/Verfolgte des Naziregimes</i> [Persecutee of the Nazi Regime]
VKPD	<i>Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei</i> [United Communist Party of Germany], temporarily the official name of the KPD (party as well as parliamentary group) in 1920–1 after unification with the USPD left wing
Vol	Volume
VSPD	<i>Vereinigte Sozialdemokratische Partei</i> [United Social Democratic Party of Germany], temporarily the official name of the SPD (party as well as parliamentary group) in 1922–3 after the unification with the USPD right wing
ZK	<i>Zentralkomitee</i> [Central Committee]



# Introduction

Writing his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* in 1940, philosopher Walter Benjamin comments on the sad state of contemporary historiography: “The nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers. Historical materialists know what that means. Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate.”<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin wrote these lines as an exiled German Jew in occupied France, demoralised and resigned to defeat. The hopelessness of his situation would ultimately drive him to suicide not long after in September of that same year.

The Communist Werner Scholem had been shot in the back in the Buchenwald concentration camp only a few weeks prior on 17 July 1940, murdered at the age of 44. Scholem’s path leading up to this point had been long and winding. Though born into a prosperous bourgeois Jewish family, he spurned his wealthy father’s inheritance and while their elder brothers took over the family business, Werner and his younger brother Gerhard, who would later become renowned under the name Gershom Scholem, pursued more rebellious paths. Both were initially enthusiastic Zionists, and argued fiercely when Werner switched camps to join the socialist Workers’ Youth [*Arbeiterjugend*], a Social-Democratic youth organisation, in 1912. Both brothers fought, each in their own way, for an end to human history as that of the victorious and for a new society as such. They shared this aspiration with Benjamin, although his own hopes for the future would ultimately drive him to despair.

As a close friend of Gershom Scholem’s, Walter Benjamin was kept informed of Werner’s fortunes. He inquired regularly about the incarcerated Werner in his correspondences with Gershom, expressing concern for his elder brother’s wellbeing.<sup>2</sup> Werner Scholem and Walter Benjamin had both been defeated by history, yet their respective understandings thereof could not have been more different. Werner remained faithful to the kind of historical materialism that Benjamin sought to leave behind. Standing in the tradition of Marx and Hegel,

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1 Benjamin 2007, p. 256.

2 See Benjamin 1994, p. 258, p. 288, p. 413, p. 483, p. 527, p. 544. Scholem’s responses can be found in Scholem 1992.



Scholem prophesied the victorious world revolution, awaiting its imminent realisation as if by law of nature. Benjamin criticised this hope as nothing more than ideological smoke and mirrors, as a self-deception behind which the 'little hunchback' of theology lurked.<sup>3</sup>

Walter Benjamin reflected as a philosopher that which Werner Scholem had failed to achieve as a Communist: the liberated society as a utopia of reconciliation. Werner had believed in the victory of socialism since his youth, but his view of the Soviet Union as the socialist motherland soon changed to one of horror and incomprehension following Stalin's rise to power. The revolution in Russia had brought neither salvation nor reconciliation, nor had it facilitated the revenge of the disenfranchised against the oppressors and exploiters. Instead, a new group of rulers arose to claim new privileges. Their rule was total, permitting even less dissent than the previous regime. Stalin knew no scruples when securing his power, arresting countless erstwhile comrades and even entering into a temporary alliance with Hitler's Germany. By 1925, Werner Scholem had begun to describe the Soviet Union as a form of 'state capitalism' to illustrate how the hitherto revolutionary society was transforming into that which it had once sought to abolish. For this blasphemy, Scholem was condemned as a renegade and expelled from the party. He travelled to Moscow one last time in 1926 to defend his good name in front of the leaders of international Communism, but no longer found an audience willing to listen. Benjamin had travelled to Soviet Russia around the same time to write an entry on Goethe for the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, but his hopes of witnessing a social awakening had been similarly disappointed. Benjamin's sobering experience would later form a significant part of his *Theses*.<sup>4</sup>

Their differences aside, Walter Benjamin and Werner Scholem nevertheless held many hopes for humanity's future in common. Benjamin once wrote that '[n]ot man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge. In Marx it appears as the last enslaved class, as the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden'.<sup>5</sup> He considered this historical conviction to have been embodied in the 'Spartacist group' of the November Revolution, though theirs would be a 'brief resurgence'. For Benjamin, the November Revolution of 1918 represented a unique, singular act of liberation that could not be organised through the apparatus of a political party. Scholem had attempted (and failed) to organ-

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3 Benjamin 2007, p. 253.

4 A recollection of his experiences can be found in Benjamin 1986.

5 Benjamin 2007, p. 260.

ise just that as director of the party apparatus [*Organisationsleiter*] in 1924. In their own respective ways, both men failed to realise Communism as twentieth-century utopia. When the Red Army freed their native city of Berlin five years after their respective deaths in 1945, the liberation of the living would not bring with it reconciliation with the dead.

It was not Berlin but rather Jerusalem where a survivor kept memories of the two alive. Gershom Scholem erected a biographical monument to his friend Walter Benjamin in 1975 with his *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*.<sup>6</sup> Two years later he published his own memoirs under the title *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, dedicating it to his brother Werner.<sup>7</sup> Following Werner's death, memories of him had survived only in the pages of private correspondence. Over thirty years later, Gershom sought to give his brother the public remembrance and commemoration he thought he deserved. Doing so, however, proved impossible in divided Germany. Communists were regarded as non-persons in the West, irrespective of whether they had resisted the Nazis. In the East, on the other hand, an understanding of history remained dominant even after Stalin's death that Benjamin would have recognised instantly: 'The puppet called "historical materialism" is to win all the time'.<sup>8</sup> The official biographical encyclopaedia of the German labour movement, published by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism at the Central Committee of the SED [*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, the ruling party in the East], thus highlighted Werner Scholem's 'extremely sectarian-dogmatic line' and continued to justify his expulsion from the party more than fifty years after the fact. To this day, an SED party archive index card now stored at the Federal Archive lists him as 'Werner Scholem, anti-party grouping'.<sup>9</sup> In West Germany, where the KPD was banned in 1956 and its members subjected to renewed persecution, equally little reconciliation was possible. Restoration and suppression char-

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6 Scholem 2003. Originally published as *Walter Benjamin. Die Geschichte einer Freundschaft* in 1975. Another well-known friend of Benjamin's had attempted a similar project five years earlier, see Adorno 1990.

7 Scholem 2012. Originally published as *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem. Jugenderinnerungen* in 1977.

8 Benjamin 2007, p. 253.

9 Located in the SAPMO (Foundation Archives of Parties and Mass Organisations of the GDR in the Federal Archives) section, file SGY 30, *Erinnerungsberichte*, index card Werner Scholem. The index cards and inventories of East German archivists were retained following relocation to the Federal Archives. Despite its somewhat biased classification system, the meticulous groundwork laid by the East German archives, beginning in the 1960s with efforts by GDR historians to return to Berlin the stocks of the KPD's historical archive taken to Moscow in 1933, represents the basis for virtually all KPD-related research since 1990.

acterised the young Federal Republic. Communism was seen as a dangerous, alien threat hungry for naïve new recruits, a festering social rot lacking intrinsic worth. It is thus no surprise that remembrance and commemoration of Werner Scholem remained out of public view for decades, for unlike Walter Benjamin, Scholem had not bequeathed future generations a theoretical legacy challenging the historical narratives of both sides in the Cold War.

Historical memory of Werner Scholem was thus initially shaped by his brother's recollections. Gershom passed on numerous details from their childhood which would have otherwise been lost forever. Nevertheless, his depiction of Werner was a product of its time, reflecting long-lasting disagreements between the socialist Werner and the Zionist Gerhard, who by then had reinvented himself by Hebraising his name to 'Gershom'.<sup>10</sup> Gershom Scholem's memoirs serve as a record of his reinvention, the history of a journey that would reach its final destination in Jerusalem in 1923. In this narration, Werner Scholem serves as the antitype, a modern Ulysses whose tragic odyssey – in contrast to that of his ancient predecessor – never led him back home. Werner's tragic murder in Buchenwald was the end of this odyssey, confirmation of Gershom Scholem's long-held and fiercely defended conviction that a 'German-Jewish dialogue' had not taken place, and indeed could not take place, before 1933.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, Werner Scholem was never incorporated into Jewish historiography in his own right – if at all, then only as a marginal figure in the biography of his more famous younger brother.<sup>12</sup> Although Werner was politicised in the Berlin Zionist youth group Jung Juda and never denied his Jewish identity during his Communist career, he became a critic of Zionism (and an often polemical one at that) in the wake of the 1918 November Revolution. These twists and turns made him difficult to categorise for posterity: mainstream historiography viewed him as a suspicious Communist, orthodox Communism condemned him as an enemy of the party, and Zionism treated him as a wayward son.

It is thus in my view hardly coincidental that interest in Werner Scholem remained limited prior to the ideological crisis of 1989, only to grow rapidly shortly thereafter. Two editions of Gershom Scholem's correspondence pub-

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10 Gerhard Scholem mentioned his new name in a letter to his mother in November 1919, see Gerhard to Betty Scholem, 23 November 1919, Scholem 2002, p. 107.

11 Scholem 1976, pp. 61–4.

12 He became known to an Israeli audience through the Hebrew edition of Gershom Scholem's *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, published in 1982 as *Mi-Berlin Li-Yerushalayim. Zikhronot nev'rim*.

lished in 1989 and 1994 also included several letters from Werner, in which the young socialist voices scornful outrage in response to the butchery of World War I.<sup>13</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, Werner himself had wanted all of these letters destroyed for fear of political persecution.<sup>14</sup> His brother, however, ignored this request and preserved them for future generations. Werner was an avid collector himself, stockpiling papers and articles on KPD history, many of which documented his own role, in a comprehensive archive in his Berlin apartment.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, this collection was irretrievably lost after his arrest in 1933. It suffered the same fate as his diary of life at the front, confiscated by military authorities at the end of the war. Werner Scholem's legacy bears the scars of historical defeat to this day. It consists of an incomplete, fragmentary collection of letters that others received from him and preserved over the years.<sup>16</sup> The letters are largely of a private nature and tend to gloss over the political struggle Werner had sought to convey as his life's mission. Gershom, by contrast, was able to mould his image for posterity, and thus that of his brother as well.<sup>17</sup>

For decades, the only academic treatment of Werner Scholem consisted of brief entries in historical encyclopaedias.<sup>18</sup> These were only expanded upon after the turn of the millennium in the form of more elaborate articles by Michael Buckmiller, Pascal Nafe and Mirjam Zadoff. An outline of Scholem's life began to take shape for posterity, but a proper biography remained unwritten.<sup>19</sup>

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13 See Scholem and Scholem 1989, Scholem 1994.

14 He actually asked his brother to destroy the letters on two occasions, see Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 October 1916 and 5 February 1917, National Library of Israel, Gershom Scholem Archive, Arc. 4°1599 (henceforth referred to as NLI).

15 The archive is mentioned repeatedly in the *Entschädigungsakte* (compensation file) of Emmy Scholem, HStA. Niedersachsen, NDs. 110 w Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

16 Apart from the letters from his brother, which are housed in the National Library of Israel, this also includes the letters to his wife Emmy from prisons and camps, which Werner Scholem's daughter Renee Goddard donated to the Projekt Arbeiterbewegung at the Institute of Political Science of the Leibniz University in Hanover.

17 This occurred via the aforementioned youthful recollections, but also through his meticulous archive of his own correspondence, only some of which has been published. A large extent remains unpublished and is stored in the Gershom Scholem Archive (GSA) at the National Library of Israel (signature Arc. 4°1599).

18 Weber and Herbst 2008. The significantly expanded new edition from 2008 will henceforth be cited periodically. The entry on Werner Scholem is an elaboration of a text contained in Weber's 1969 *Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus*; Triendl-Zadoff 2007b.

19 Buckmiller and Nafe 2000; Triendl-Zadoff 2007a; Triendl-Zadoff 2013; Hoffrogge 2011a; Hoffrogge 2011c.

Instead, Werner Scholem entered public life quite unexpectedly in 1997 – as a literary figure. Three prominent authors of German contemporary literature – Franz Jung, Alexander Kluge and Hans Magnus Enzensberger – all adopted him as a hero of their respective novels.<sup>20</sup> The long-hidden origin of this literary tradition was in fact a novel by Scholem's friend and comrade Arkadi Maslow, whose spy thriller written during his Paris exile in 1935 was only rediscovered and published in 2011.<sup>21</sup> That said, Maslow and all later novelists showed little interest in Scholem's struggle for a better world, nor in his unique amalgamation of Jewish identity and socialism. Instead, a love affair dating back to 1933 proved to be more compelling raw material for historical fiction. According to legend, Scholem seduced Marie Luise von Hammerstein, the daughter of the Germany military's highest general, in order to steal military secrets and pass them on to Moscow. Kluge took the greatest poetic license of all, painting Scholem as a kind of Communist James Bond, able to identify 200 types of wine by taste alone, roaming Berlin's bars at night looking for information at the service of the world revolution. Though Kluge certainly took his exaggerations to the extreme, the other texts are no less fictional. Scholem appears as a tragic hero whose love life is far more interesting than the political utopia he strove for. In this regard, Franz Jung remarked with convincing sincerity that he uses historical sources only 'to the extent that they are useful in corroborating the claims outlined above'.<sup>22</sup>

Through these numerous and somewhat repetitive literary depictions, fairly unique for a KPD Reichstag deputy, the long-marginalised Werner Scholem became almost a modern day revenant, his likeness popping up at the most improbable moments. Even one of his last living contemporaries would suddenly find himself haunted by Scholem: writing at the biblical age of 100, conservative author Ernst Jünger recalled encountering his former school mate Werner Scholem in a dream. Having both been sent away by their fathers, they shared a desk at a boarding school in Hanover during the summer of 1914. Jünger wrote in his diary 90 years later: 'Why did Werner Scholem pay me a visit this morning? His presence went beyond the merely dreamlike'.<sup>23</sup>

The spectre of Werner Scholem thus appeared in the collective memory on three levels. The publication of his letters initiated a process of documentation, shifting the memory of him from the private into the public. What followed was an academic reappraisal, albeit fragmentary and reliant on unsubstantiated

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20 Enzensberger 2009; Kluge 2003; Jung 1997.

21 Maslow 2011. Here, Scholem appears under the pseudonym Gerhard Alkan.

22 Jung 1997, p. 216.

23 Jünger 2003, p. 181.

hypotheses, conducted within the disciplines of Jewish history and Communist studies. Yet literary fiction, that is, the independent existence of various Werner Scholem doppelgängers in novels and stories, attracted a significantly wider readership and proved far more influential in the evolution of his public image. All three levels intensified during the first decade of the new millennium, though their origins can be tracked back to 1989, the last year of the so-called 'short twentieth century'.<sup>24</sup>

In my view, this conjuncture is no coincidence. Werner Scholem became interesting as an historical anti-type caught between dominant ideological camps at a time in which the great ideologies and utopias of modernity entered into crisis. His first public obituary appeared in 1990 shortly before the fiftieth anniversary of his death, in the SED's former central organ *Neues Deutschland*. By that point the East German state was already in a state of collapse, ushering in a year of freedom of the press before the GDR disappeared entirely in October 1990. It was only after state socialism had suffered these final blows that Werner Scholem, an 'enemy of the party', could finally be rehabilitated in East Berlin.<sup>25</sup> Zionism, which Scholem had supported in his youth, underwent a similar ideological crisis in the 1990s, which in turn influenced views on Jewish history more generally. Symbolic of this shift was Werner Scholem's late inclusion into the English-language *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. As socialism had done in the pages of *Neues Deutschland*, Judaism now commemorated its lost son as well.<sup>26</sup>

Both processes of remembrance and commemoration were born out of crisis. The unshakable faith in grand collectives like the Jewish people or the international proletariat so characteristic of twentieth-century utopias had grown fragile by the turn of the millennium. Against this backdrop, the Scholem brothers' search for a homeland in both spiritual and spatial terms is relevant not only to the past, but to the present as well. The youngest brother a Zionist, the second a Communist, the two elder brothers Reinhold and Erich leaning towards a left-liberalism and even national conservatism like father Arthur before them<sup>27</sup> – one would be hard-pressed to find a more illustrative example of the contradictions of identification and discrimination than that found in the Scholem family history. The life trajectories of the two younger Scholem

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24 Eric Hobsbawm coined the term in his 1994 *The Age of Extremes*.

25 Zilkenat 1990.

26 It should be mentioned here that neither the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* nor Israeli historiography as such can claim to represent 'Jewry' as a whole. Rather, both represent attempts to capture and interpret the diversity of Jewish culture for the present. In this sense, their adoption of Werner Scholem is noteworthy indeed; see Triendl-Zadoff 2007.

27 See Geller 2012.

brothers, both born in the 1890s, point to questions that were posed anew a century later. Herein lies the explanation for both the long silence and the ensuing 'Scholem boom' beginning in 1989.

Nevertheless, despite Werner Scholem's literary resurgence in the 1990s and early 2000s, a complete biography was still missing. Filling this gap is the objective of this book. Scholem's life is reconstructed based on historical sources, while numerous unpublished letters and speeches give him the opportunity to speak in his own words. This depiction of Scholem is complemented and expanded through commentaries from both friends and rivals. The literary figure Werner Scholem and the legend of the master spy are related to actual historical events. Court files from 1932–5 allow for a glimpse into the time period when Scholem suddenly shifted from fighting for a better world to living as a fugitive with an uncertain future. The last section of the book then tells of the failure of his attempted escape, and of his suffering in prisons and concentration camps. Scholem's death in the Buchenwald camp, the ultimate extinguishing of his life's hopes and dreams, was intimately linked to the catastrophic collapse of German history in the first half of the twentieth century. A closer exploration of Scholem's life is therefore also a glimpse at a time that heavily influenced our own historical moment – a watershed event from which there can be no turning back. However, such a retrospective view should not invalidate the aspirations of past generations, nor relegate the struggle for a different way of life to the dusty corners of museums. On the contrary: history's openness for a different, better future represents the driving force behind the efforts that ultimately produced this book.

## Adolescent Years (1895–1914)

### The Scholems: A German Family

‘If I were Werner I would have run away from home ten times by now, run and tried to manage without the “family”. There’s obviously nothing left of the Jewish family with us. This after 75 years! I can only hope it’ll be different with me.’<sup>1</sup>

With this brief but bold line from a February 1913 diary entry, fifteen-year-old Gerhard Scholem summarised how daily life in the family home appalled him and his brother Werner, two years his senior. Both adolescents endured constant arguments with their authoritarian father and felt little in the way of familial warmth or belonging. The young Zionist Gerhard, who would later call himself Gershom, measured his family life against an ideal of authentic Jewishness he sought to derive from a distant past, devouring books on Jewish culture and history. He also learned Hebrew, fleeing further from the depressing present with every word and page. He regarded the process of assimilation and upward mobility undertaken by the last three generations of the Scholem family as misguided and ultimately self-delusional.<sup>2</sup>

In their father’s eyes, however, the Scholem family story was one of success. It signified the end of centuries-long discrimination and the family’s gradual accumulation of social recognition and prestige. The story began in the early nineteenth century when the Scholems left Glogau, Silesia to settle in metropolitan Berlin. Scholem, the Yiddish variation of the Hebrew term *shalom*, was originally a surname. The word meant ‘peace’, a rather hopeful blessing at the beginning of life’s journey. According to family legend, the name was the gift of a stubborn civil servant during the Prussian reforms.

These reforms, embodied in chancellor Karl August von Hardenberg’s edict of 1812, granted Jews certain basic citizenship rights for the first time in Prussian history, but also obligated them to adopt permanent family names. Prior to 1812, Prussian Jews had only surnames and father’s names which changed from generation to generation. Some accepted this change voluntarily, such as a certain Moshe Ben Mendel who later became a famous philosopher under the name

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1 Scholem 2007, p. 23.

2 Scholem 2012, p. 26 f.



Moses Mendelssohn, while others viewed the name change as an administrative act to be either ignored or rejected outright. Nevertheless, Jews in all Prussian provinces were ordered to report to their local municipal administration and declare their new family name, including Werner Scholem's great-great-grandfather. Gershom recounted the family legend in his memoirs decades later: 'He did not understand the question and answered "Scholem", whereupon the official entered it as his family name. When he was asked his first name, he impatiently repeated "Scholem". This is how we received our family name'.<sup>3</sup> In other documents, however, his name appears as Scholem Elias, and his date of death is listed as 1809 – three years before the name reform was enacted. According to historian Dov Brillig, it was only his widow who would adopt her late husband's surname as her family name in 1812.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of whether one chooses to believe the legend or the historical account, the name Scholem would henceforth accompany the family.

The Prussian edict of emancipation also granted Jews freedom of movement and the right to choose their place of residence. Elias Scholem's two sons, one of whom would become Werner and Gerhard's grandfather, moved to Berlin. Thereafter the family gradually accumulated a modicum of financial wealth. This development was made easier by hesitant but nevertheless growing public acceptance of Jews as German citizens. Werner's father's generation witnessed the initial highpoint of this emancipation when the 1871 Constitution of the German Reich guaranteed full legal equality to all Jews.<sup>5</sup> Although this step by no means eradicated anti-Semitism in Germany and Jews remained largely excluded from careers in the military and civil service, it at least marked the end of legal discrimination against persons of Jewish descent. At the same time, a Jewish bourgeoisie emerged that oriented itself towards the German bourgeoisie in terms of culture and education, and looked down on the destitute 'eastern Jews' [*Ostjuden*] immigrating from Poland and Russia.<sup>6</sup> Arthur Scholem and his family were part of this bourgeois ascent, as well as an example of the limits facing even wealthy Jews in the Reich. Reflecting on this, Gershom

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3 Scholem 2012, p. 2.

4 Scholem 1997, p. 10.

5 A law passed by the North German Confederation in 1869 first established this equality, which was extended to the rest of the Reich in 1871. Informal discrimination nevertheless persisted; see Meyer 1998, pp. 153–95.

6 For more on the rise of the Jewish bourgeoisie see Volkov 1994, pp. 8–21. Stephen M. Lowenstein writes in Meyer 1998 that the eastern Jewish immigrants were 'stereotyped by Jew and non-Jew alike as beggars (*Schnorrer*)' – nevertheless, their presence spurred the modernisation of Jewish charity organisations. See 'The Community', Meyer 1998, pp. 131–4.

Scholem would later write: 'In general, however, our family circle was part of the Jewish middle class and lower middle class, the bourgeoisie which around the middle of the last century had worked its way up from small and very modest beginnings, had not infrequently attained prosperity if not real wealth, and stayed almost entirely within its own socio-economic group'.<sup>7</sup>

The Scholem family's modest beginnings lay in the printing business. Werner's grandfather Siegfried had completed a printer's apprenticeship in Berlin in 1858 and founded an independent print shop three years later. The enterprise thrived, and Siegfried's son Arthur was trained to become his successor. He was even sent to London for a year to train as a typesetter, during which he acquainted himself with the liberal views of the English bourgeoisie. Before the outbreak of World War I 'he would go to a café by the Gertraudenbrücke every Sunday where for two hours he read the *Manchester Guardian*, a paper that shaped his views at least as much as the *Berliner Tageblatt* (to which we subscribed)'.<sup>8</sup> The young Arthur Scholem returned to Berlin in 1883 'with a flowing full beard, but later this gave way to a moustache twirled upward in the Wilhelmian manner' and joined his father's printing business. Father and son, both of whom 'had quick tempers, but were otherwise quite different',<sup>9</sup> did not get along well. Arthur established his own business two years after his marriage to Betty Scholem, while his brothers Max and Theobald took over the parent firm.<sup>10</sup> The print shop, Arthur Scholem Book and Stone Printing [*Arthur Scholem Buch- und Steindruckerei*], struggled after its founding in 1892 and was even forced to file for bankruptcy in November 1899. Only after a settlement was reached with creditors and the firm transferred to his wife Betty could the business be recapitalised and returned to profitability in the following months.<sup>11</sup>

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7 Scholem 2012, p. 8.

8 Scholem 2012, p. 6. Founded by Rudolf Mosse in 1872, the *Berliner Tageblatt* began as a local paper but quickly grew to a national publication of liberal orientation. It became known abroad as the first German newspaper to switch from the traditional Fraktur to the modern Antiqua typeset in 1928. The *Manchester Guardian*, founded in 1821, was a leading British newspaper by the late nineteenth century.

9 Ibid.

10 Scholem 2012, p. 21; Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 86, fn. 2.

11 Bankruptcy proceedings were concluded in 1900, and Betty sold the company back to Arthur in August of that year. See *Handelsregister Arthur Scholem Buch- und Steindruckerei*, Amtsgericht Charlottenburg, LArch Berlin, A Rep. 342–02, Nr. 42380. Gershom Scholem also writes that 'at first his firm was small and struggled with considerable difficulties', see Scholem 2012, p. 6.

The involvement of Werner's mother Betty Scholem, née Hirsch, in the business's subsequent success went beyond her status as official owner – she also assumed book-keeping responsibilities and even held power of attorney in the company.<sup>12</sup> After investing years of time and effort, the company finally began to expand, aided by an innovative business idea of Arthur's – as the gramophone became popular in Germany around the turn of the century, the Scholem print shop began selling an unfamiliar product: circular labels with a hole in the middle, cut precisely to fit the gramophone's new shellac records. According to family legend, more than half of all records produced in Germany were adorned with labels from the family business at one point. The Scholems also began expanding abroad. A report by Werner's elder brother Reinhold gives an impression of the company's output: 'When I entered the business after finishing my year of service in October 1913, father had organised the labels division very well [...] we supplied [...] a number of foreign companies – Paris, Warsaw, Beirut, etc. We enjoyed a particularly successful relationship with two (or three?) firms in London. We had their catalogues. Orders that arrived via telegraph by Thursday midday were packaged and taken to the post on Saturday and arrived in London on Monday. We were faster than our London competitors'.<sup>13</sup>

The Scholem print shop was part of a well-organised global production chain even before World War I. As orders stalled at the outbreak of the war, Arthur Scholem began printing forms, establishing a separate division to design and print them for health insurance providers.<sup>14</sup> The business was a source of great pride for Arthur, as it secured his family's prosperity and a respectable lifestyle. Nevertheless, dinner table conversations never touched upon the subjects of money or the family business. Gershom would later recall: 'That topic simply did not exist. It never would have occurred to us to ask about the situation in the print shop or the state of our finances. We only knew how much spending money we received every fourteen days and how much we would get for school trips'.<sup>15</sup>

Arthur and Betty Scholem had married on 2 November 1890. Their first child, Reinhold, was born the following year on 8 August 1891. Two more sons were

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12 Scholem 2012, p. 6; as well as the *Handelsregister* (see above).

13 Reinhold Scholem to Gershom Scholem, 10 February 1978, NLI Jerusalem. Reinhold reports that the labels were initially printed by an outside firm. Arthur Scholem first came into the record business through his personal connections and English skills in 1901, only later did he install the necessary machinery to produce the labels in his own shop.

14 Scholem 2012, p. 31.

15 Scholem 1997, p. 20.

FIGURE 1 *Betty Scholem, 1896*FIGURE 2 *Arthur Scholem, date unknown*

born in regular two-year intervals: Erich Scholem on 3 December 1893 and Werner Scholem on 29 December 1895. Grandmother Amalie was, however, only partially satisfied: ‘She waited unceremoniously for a granddaughter, and honestly resented that we kept presenting her with another boy. She found Werner insulting enough, and was so angry by the time the fourth boy arrived that she refused to see me or the child’, Betty wrote in her memoirs years later.<sup>16</sup> The fourth son, born on 5 December 1897, was named Gerhard. All four had distinctly German first names like their father and his brothers before them. The name Werner would probably not have been chosen by a more traditional Jewish family, given that the Catholic calendar already contained a holiday for a dubious character from the Christian Middle Ages by the name of Werner of Oberwesel. Werner had been a tanner’s apprentice found murdered in 1287, a crime for which local Jews were soon blamed. Over the years, this classic blood libel legend grew into an anti-Semitic martyr cult. Though never officially canonised, ‘Holy Werner’ was commemorated and honoured for centuries – indeed, the Diocese of Trier only removed his memorial day from its calendar in 1963.<sup>17</sup> It would appear that Arthur and Betty Scholem, both of whom usually

16 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 528; Scholem 2012, p. 7f.

17 Herzig 2006, p. 42; Iserloh 1963.



FIGURE 3 *Friedrichsgracht, Berlin, 1909. On the right side is the northern end of the Friedrichsgracht with the Jungfern Bridge and intersection with the Spreestraße (today called the Sperlingsgasse). Today only the section north of Gertrauden Bridge bears the name Friedrichsgracht.*

had a sharp eye for anti-Semitism, were unaware of the etymology of Werner's first name. Ultimately, Arthur simply wanted his children to have German names and feel like Germans.

The family initially lived on the Friedrichsgracht, a riverside road on the Spree Island in central Berlin.<sup>18</sup> The two brothers frequently practised spitting cherry pits across the narrow road into the river. In 1906 when Werner was ten years old, the Scholems moved into a bigger apartment at Neue Grünstraße 26. Here the four Scholem brothers shared two rooms. Erich and Gerhard shared one, while Reinhold and Werner shared the other. Reinhold left the family home to pursue an apprenticeship in 1909,<sup>19</sup> but apart from that the move changed little else in the brothers' lives, as the new apartment was located only

18 Scholem 2012, p. 13.

19 See Gershom to Reinhold Scholem, 26 February 1965, Scholem 2002, p. 407; Gershom's letter to Reinhold Scholem on 5 March 1978, and Reinhold's biographical information in his letter to Gershom on 10 February 1978, NLI Jerusalem.

a few metres further down the road on the other side of the river. The younger siblings freely explored their new surroundings and could play wherever they chose. The nearby Märkische Park, where the museum of the same name had just been completed, offered plenty of opportunities for a game of marbles with other boys their age.<sup>20</sup>

Today, the district surrounding the Spree Island – almost entirely destroyed during World War II – belongs to Berlin's new city centre, a bustling urban space dominated by office buildings and shopping complexes in which free roaming children are a rare sight. When Werner and Gerhard lived here around 1900, they experienced the city at a much slower pace: 'In those prewar years Berlin was still basically a very quiet city. In my early school years we would leave from the Kupfergraben on the horse-drawn streetcar to visit my mother's parents and reach Charlottenburg via the Tiergarten, which was still a real, large park. Only half the city was paved with asphalt, and in many parts of it, especially in the east and north, horsecars still rattled over cobblestones. The first autobuses were a great sensation, and to climb on the upper deck was a coveted pleasure.'<sup>21</sup>

The Scholem brothers heard the Berliner dialect, still very prevalent at the time, all around them, but 'Berlinerling' was strictly forbidden at the dinner table.<sup>22</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, who spent part of his youth in Weimar Berlin, described 'Berlinerisch' in his autobiography as 'a speeded-up, wisecracking urban adaptation of the *plattdeutsch* language of the north German plain, [...] primarily a demotic idiom separating the people from the toffs, though well understood by all. The mere insistence on specific Berliner grammatical forms which, correct in dialect, were patently incorrect in school German, was enough to keep it separate from educated talk.'<sup>23</sup> Arthur and Betty's efforts to encourage refined German pronunciation among their children underline the Scholems' bourgeois habitus, also apparent in carefully staged Scholem family photographs of the four brothers posing in Oriental costumes, or their uncle Theobald's 1903 wedding at which his nephews performed short theatrical interludes for the guests. In a letter to Gerhard, Reinhold recalled a wild celebration with '100 people, fancy dress, and you – albeit in protest – dressed up as a girl!'<sup>24</sup>

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20 Scholem 2012, p. 13.

21 Scholem 2012, p. 33.

22 Scholem 2012, p. 13.

23 Hobsbawm 2002, p. 46.

24 Reinhold Scholem to Gershom Scholem, 31 March 1951, NLI Jerusalem.



FIGURE 4 Reinhold, Erich, Werner and Gerhard Scholem, Berlin 1903

Gerhard's discomfort is plainly visible in the picture, while Erich, dressed up as a police constable, and Werner, simply holding a beer stein, had more bearable roles. The photographs testify to the brothers' happy adolescent years, long before the vicious conflicts with their father, and simultaneously depict an idealised bourgeois family life. The pictures of the wedding party, however, also bespeak the specific universe inhabited by the Scholem family: almost all of their friends were of Jewish descent, and family members only married within the Jewish community. Betty's sister Käte was the only family member to enter into a so-called 'mixed marriage' [*Mischehe*] with Walter Schiepan, a Christian. The youngest brother would later write that the Jewish bourgeoisie of the time socialised 'almost entirely within its own socio-economic group'. In the Arthur Scholem household, Gerhard 'never saw a non-Jewish couple in friendly social intercourse'. Their culturally assimilated father was in fact a particularly strict opponent of any sort of 'mixed marriage'.<sup>25</sup> These lines were brought to paper in Jerusalem by a person now called Gershom Scholem. Gerhard had broken with his life as a German at an early age, emigrating to Jerusalem in 1923.<sup>26</sup> His outlook, sharpened by bitter experiences of anti-Semitic discrimination in his native Berlin, concentrated primarily on that which separated Jews from the

25 Gershom to Reinhard Scholem, 29 May 1972, Scholem 2002, p. 444; Scholem 2012, p. 8.

26 In family correspondence Gershom's brothers and mother continued to address him as 'Gerhard'. In this biography he is listed under Gershom in the bibliography, 'Gerhard' is only used during his adolescent years and later replaced with 'Gershom'.

rest of German society, while Werner would place his hopes in that which Jews and Germans held in common for many years to come.

Although family life was dominated by Arthur as the family patriarch, the division of labour within the family was not necessarily traditional. Betty Scholem cultivated a strong role for herself, refusing to be reduced to either a housewife or a figurehead. She was of course responsible for child-rearing and managing the household, but nevertheless had a cook at her side to whom she dictated a daily menu every morning.<sup>27</sup>

The boys' upbringing was also assisted by household servants. The earliest picture of the young Werner Scholem shows him not with his mother but rather with his nanny 'Mimi'. Employing this sort of outside support in the home was common in upscale bourgeois households at the time. Less common, however, was that Betty Scholem used the free time she gained from employing servants to work in the family business. Although the business bore only Arthur's name, Betty sometimes ran the shop alone, such as when Arthur went on his annual spa retreat to recover from a chronic heart condition. She even worked in the print shop part-time after her children were born.<sup>28</sup> Accounting did not seem to be her true passion in life. Gerhard described his mother as a natural journalist '[a]t a time when women were not yet admitted to such professions', who thus 'undoubtedly missed her vocation'. Not only did she compose poems and family plays for the four brothers to perform at family gatherings 'with the greatest ease' while writing 'magnificent letters', she also spontaneously wrote her sons' school essays if she found the topic interesting.<sup>29</sup> Betty's letters to Gerhard were published in an anthology in 1989, and clearly live up to her son's verdict.<sup>30</sup>

Arthur Scholem did not confine himself solely to his business either. He was actively committed to the interests of his class: as a leading member of the professional association of the health insurance companies, he held a post representing the employers in the Central Commission of Health Insurances.<sup>31</sup> Healthcare was a public good in imperial Germany, established in 1883 and regarded as quite progressive by contemporary observers. It was funded by shared contributions from employers and employees and jointly admin-

27 Scholem 2012, p. 17. Betty Scholem mentions the existence of a maid in multiple letters, such as those from 5 April 1919 and 30 May 1920. See Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 40 and p. 71 ff.

28 Scholem 2012, p. 6 and p. 17.

29 Scholem 2012, p. 17 f.

30 Scholem and Scholem 1989.

31 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 21 f.





FIGURE 5 *Werner and nanny Mimi, 1896*

istered by employers and unions alike. Arthur Scholem's counterparts were therefore Social-Democratic trade unionists such as Gustav Bauer. In these relatively trivial political arenas, Bauer and other representatives of the labour movement enjoyed a degree of recognition seldom granted by the imperial government to the 'scoundrels without a Fatherland' [*vaterlandslose Gesellen*, a common epithet for socialists at the time]. Yet despite his professional relationship with trade unionists, whom he sometimes even invited to a meal of roast goose at his home, Arthur Scholem otherwise had no sympathies for the aims of the labour movement.<sup>32</sup> His loyalty was to the nation, and he considered Social Democracy to be little more than 'anti-German activities'.<sup>33</sup> Arthur continued serving as a representative of the employers' class even after the upheavals of the November Revolution elevated some of his former negotiating partners into lofty government positions.<sup>34</sup> He was elected chairman of the arbitration committee for Berlin's printing industry in 1919, responsible for mediating wage conflicts. He would later even appear at Reichstag commission sessions and serve as the lead negotiator between doctors and health insurance funds. According to his wife Betty, these meetings had always been 'a vital part of his life'.<sup>35</sup> To his sons, however, Arthur's dedication felt like a personal slight. Looking back on his childhood relationship with his father, Gershom soberly, perhaps with a hint of regret, confirmed the 'satisfaction' Arthur derived from his intense commitment to the printers' association, while acknowledging that the children's 'relationship with him was not a particularly close one'.<sup>36</sup>

In retrospect, it is reasonable to assume that Arthur Scholem's role as expert negotiator and representative of the employers provided him with a degree of ongoing personal self-assurance. Representing the interests of his non-Jewish colleagues entailed a level of social recognition unimaginable for a Jew just one generation before him, while being indispensable in business circles guaranteed respect and immunity against the accusations of parasitism that Jewish businessmen regularly faced.

Despite taking great pride in his achievements as a businessman, Arthur Scholem was nevertheless aware that, as a Jew in Germany, his social standing would never be entirely secure. He thus joined the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith [*Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen*

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32 Ibid.

33 Scholem 2012, p. 90; see also p. 42.

34 Gustav Bauer, for example, served as a state secretary in the short-lived cabinet of Max von Baden, the last Chancellor of the Kaiserreich.

35 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 51 and p. 84; Scholem 2002, p. 141 f.

36 Scholem 2012, p. 6.

*Glaubens*].<sup>37</sup> Founded in 1893, the association was the largest organisation of the culturally assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie in Germany at the time. It fought for the implementation and enforcement of equal rights for Jews, offered legal assistance to victims of discrimination and campaigned against anti-Semitic propaganda. Arthur had experienced plenty of anti-Semitism himself as a member of the Berlin Gymnastics Federation. Being the favoured sport of the German petty bourgeoisie, the gymnastics movement (also referred to as the ‘Turners’) had initially been associated with a more liberal outlook. Beginning in the 1890s, however, it increasingly fell under anti-Semitic influence. Arthur was an enthusiastic gymnast, even publishing a book on the topic under the title *Allerlei für Deutschlands Turner* [‘Things to Know for Germany’s Gymnasts’].<sup>38</sup> But the growing anti-Semitic mood within the movement soon spoiled it for him. Incidentally, similar experiences of discrimination had also driven his brother Theobald to become one of Germany’s first Zionists.

The views of their uncle Theobald left an impression on Gerhard and Werner, and both became keen followers of Zionism in their youth.<sup>39</sup> Arthur on the other hand rejected the Jewish nationalist movement, as did all members of the Central Association. After all, in addition to its many practical activities, the Central Association also stood for a political programme: the German nationality came before Judaism, which was understood as a mere religious denomination. To the members of the *Centralverein*, Judaism and thereby Jewishness was a confession of faith, not an ethnicity. They saw themselves as belonging to the German people, ‘with those prosperity in times of victory as well as defeat’ the welfare of German Jews was ‘unbreakably tied’, as the organisation wrote in its pamphlets.<sup>40</sup>

Zionism, by contrast, cited the growing anti-Semitism of the 1890s as its strongest argument against cultural assimilation. Its followers defined Judaism and Jewishness very much as an ethnicity: Jews represented a people in their own right, who would ideally settle in their own territory and allow Jewish culture to flourish once again. Consequently, Zionism enjoyed a rather tense and frosty relationship with another current popular among Jews in Imperial Germany: socialism. The latter, advocating internationalism and fraternity

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37 Scholem 2012, p. 40. On the *Centralverein* see Barkai 2002.

38 Scholem 1885.

39 Scholem 2012, p. 21, p. 30.

40 *Centralverein* handbill, ca. 1925. Reproduction available at: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5d/CV\\_Flugblatt.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5d/CV_Flugblatt.jpg) (last accessed 20 December 2015).

between peoples, regarded anti-Semitism as little more than a miserable by-product of a doomed society. There would be no place for such medieval sentiments in the socialist future, and Jews were thus very much welcome in the socialist camp. In German Social Democracy, the largest force in the Second International, Jews held many of the highest positions as theoreticians, members of parliament and party leaders. However, they were expected to leave their cultural and religious identity behind when joining the movement,<sup>41</sup> as not only religious prejudice but indeed religion itself was considered a relic of the past.

Assimilation and the struggle for equality within existing society, separation and the creation of a Jewish state, or a common battle against capitalism and anti-Semitism through the establishment of a socialist society – these were the three paths available to Jews in a world filled with prejudice. Assimilation remained the dominant current, as both the Jewish state and socialism were utopias for the time being, whereas bourgeois upward mobility represented something tangible and concrete. Nevertheless, Germany's 'Jewish question' had only been resolved superficially, for instead of disappearing, anti-Semitism intensified around the turn of the century. Zionists and socialists repeatedly clashed with the representatives of assimilation. The existence of these different paths ensured numerous conflicts, and would soon test the Scholem family as well.

Nevertheless, the family's assimilated lifestyle would go unchallenged for many years. Everything went according to its course, that is, according to the wishes of family patriarch Arthur Scholem. Although Arthur considered baptism to be 'unprincipled and servile', he harboured no objections to celebrating Christmas as a 'German national festival' or putting up a Christmas tree in the family living room. Quite ironically, Gerhard found a picture of Zionist pioneer Theodor Herzl under the Christmas tree in 1911 – a gift from his mother. 'From then on', he wrote, 'I left the house at Christmastime'.<sup>42</sup> The gift, intended as an expression of sympathy for Gerhard and a slight towards Arthur, clearly failed to have the desired effect. Admittedly, it was not Arthur Scholem who had introduced Christmas trees, assimilation and German cultural mores to the family. In fact, before him, his father had adopted the surname Siegfried out of enthusiasm for Wagner's opera based on the *Nibelungenlied*.<sup>43</sup> Siegfried's Germanophile lifestyle carried over even after he and Arthur fell out and par-

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41 See Keßler 1994b.

42 Scholem 2012, p. 11 and p. 28.

43 Scholem 2012, p. 5.

ted ways. Arthur's desire to Germanise the family went so far as to prohibit the use of Yiddish idioms in the house, arguing that such slang fed anti-Semitism.<sup>44</sup> Mother Betty, of course, did not heed this demand, nor did many other relatives. As a result, the four Scholem brothers picked up quite a bit of Yiddish in addition to the reviled Berliner dialect.<sup>45</sup>

There were, however, limits to assimilation in the Scholem home. Although Arthur regularly emphasised his Germanness and was careful to only speak a pure and proper German, he also stubbornly held on to the core of his religious identity. Baptism remained taboo, and the Sabbath as well as the Jewish holidays were always observed – however, this did not stop Arthur from working in the print shop on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Gerhard would recall later in life that ‘once or twice a year my father used to make a speech at the dinner table in praise of the mission of the Jews. According to him, that mission was to proclaim to the world pure monotheism and a purely rational morality.’<sup>46</sup> A ‘rational morality’ – to Arthur Scholem the businessman, this formula represented the link between the bourgeois world and his Jewish roots. He rejected that which he considered divisive or ritualistic, including all Jewish customs concerning diet and fasting as well as the Yiddish language itself. In doing so he transformed the Jewish religion from a completely independent culture and lifeworld into a philosophical creed. Judaism represented only one denomination among many, while its rational elements were stressed as a link to German high culture. It is easy to imagine how Arthur Scholem must have reacted to his son Gerhard's developing interest in the mystical, irrational side of Judaism and his research into messianism and the kabbalah. That said, the rationalist interpretation of Judaism was by no means unique to Arthur Scholem: it corresponded to the ideals of the *Centralverein* and was the dominant current among German Jews at the time.

Though he acted as a patriarch, Arthur Scholem was an absent father, and their mother Betty was the most important person in the lives of younger brothers Gerhard and Werner. As far as Arthur was concerned, his business and heart condition always came first; the children were instructed to ‘spare him excitement as much as possible.’<sup>47</sup> Instead, it was the mother who regularly vacationed with their sons. The three youngest brothers spent the summer of

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44 Arthur Scholem made this claim in relation to the then-popular Herrmfeld Theatre, which derived much of its humour from German-Yiddish slang. See Scholem 2012, p. 15 f. and p. 9.

45 Scholem 2012, p. 9 f.

46 Scholem 2012, p. 10.

47 Scholem 2012, p. 6.

1899 with their mother in Lehnitz, a village near Oranienburg. As the boys grew older, the distances travelled grew longer. In the summer of 1908 the family visited the Krkonoše Mountains followed by a train ride to Switzerland, where Arthur made a rare appearance. The family must have made quite an impression at the Hotel Jungfrau in Interlaken when the four boys walked into the dining hall behind their parents.<sup>48</sup> At the time, such long-distance trips were a privilege. Mass tourism was unknown and the upper class was among themselves in the resort towns.<sup>49</sup> While Werner, Reinhold and Erich went on long hikes in the Swiss Alps, Gerhard 'had no interest in sports whatsoever'.<sup>50</sup> Werner for his part enjoyed hiking and would remain an enthusiastic mountain climber for decades to come.<sup>51</sup> From 1904 on Betty was usually only accompanied by the younger boys. The trip to Switzerland in 1908 was the last family vacation they would take together. Betty would later write about the subsequent holidays: 'During the longer vacations I mostly travelled with only Werner and Gerhard. They were both bookworms, which I approved of!'<sup>52</sup> This tacit approval was important to the boys, whose relationship with their father would soon escalate into open rebellion.

#### Four Distinct Brothers

All four of Arthur and Betty Scholem's sons attended the Luisenstädtische Realgymnasium in Berlin, founded in 1836 and steeped in tradition. Arthur as well as his three brothers also attended school here.<sup>53</sup> The *Realgymnasium* essentially constituted a compromise between the humanist *Gymnasium* based on notions of pedagogy from Greek and Roman antiquity, and the *Realschule* with its focus on foreign languages, mathematics and the natural sciences. In order to grant students the *Abitur* (the most advanced German school leaving certificate, required for admission to higher education), the *Realschulen* were obligated to include Latin in their curriculum, but were permitted to drop classical

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48 Reinhold Scholem to Gershom Scholem, Letter No. 94, NLI Jerusalem. Reinhold states that this trip occurred in 1908 and was the last the family took together.

49 The Jewish bourgeoisie also had its own favoured destinations, see Triendl-Zadoff 2012.

50 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 529 f.

51 Scholem 2002, p. 238 f. and p. 256. Renee Goddard, daughter of Werner Scholem, also recalls her father's passion for the sport (personal interview, 8 October 2009).

52 Ibid; see also Scholem 2012, p. 19.

53 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 529. The school's history is detailed in two commemorative publications, see Anonymous 1936; Meyer 1912.

Greek.<sup>54</sup> In retrospect, Werner Scholem criticised this as a compromise with negative consequences for students: ‘The *Realgymnasien* are an unfortunate hybrid between the *Gymnasium* and the *Realschule*, in which overwhelming course loads and fragmentation among the students is the rule. This is because here both disciplines, the linguistic-historical and the mathematical-scientific, are fused together, out of which naturally nothing good can come.’<sup>55</sup> Werner made this remark in 1922, years after his own school days. Nevertheless, that same spirit of being overwhelmed by school workloads and frustrated by irrelevant instructional content resonates here. The school’s excessive course load also meant that the practical, vocational education expected by Arthur and Betty often fell to the wayside. At their father’s insistence, both Reinhold and Erich attended private English and French lessons.<sup>56</sup>

The paths of the four Scholem brothers began to diverge significantly in their school days. Arthur had chosen Reinhold and Erich to inherit the family business, and the two of them took well to their new role. Reinhold left the *Gymnasium* after the *Einjährige*, a nickname for an intermediate leaving certificate called the *Mittlere Reife*, similar to the British O-levels. At age 17 he began an apprenticeship as a typesetter, both in his father’s print shop and in that of his uncle Theobald. This was followed by three years of professional practice in London, Paris and Turin. He returned to the family home around Christmas of 1911 and stayed to work in the family’s print shop for a few months. When Reinhold turned 21 in October of 1912, he registered for his obligatory military service as a ‘one-year volunteer’ with a telegraph battalion in the Berlin suburb of Treptow. This shortened conscription was possible through a special exception introduced by the Prussian army one hundred years prior.<sup>57</sup> This special rule permitted all young men who had completed an *Abitur* or *Mittlere Reife* to ‘volunteer’ for a one-year term of service.<sup>58</sup> Three years of military service

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54 *Realgymnasien* developed out of *Bürgerschulen* and the *Realschulen*, which were favoured by the middle class for their commercial and technical focus but insufficient to qualify for university or the upper levels of civil service. The *Realgymnasium* was introduced in 1882, although the compromise upon which they were based was already much older. See Becker and Kluchert 1993, p. 6.

55 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–4, 105. Sitzung am 23. Februar 1922.

56 The following biographical details are taken from letters from Reinhold to Gershom, see Scholem 2002, p. 438f. and Reinhold Scholem to Gershom Scholem, 10 February 1978, NLI Jerusalem. An initial comparison of the two biographies can be found in Geller 2012.

57 See Mertens 1986, p. 61.

58 Whether students without an *Abitur* qualified for the rule remained controversial for

remained obligatory for the majority of young Prussian men, who only completed eight years of public education. Barriers to education and the additional requirement that volunteers pay for their own equipment meant that only the sons of bourgeois and aristocratic families could take advantage of the rule. Despite volunteers' shorter training period, one-year volunteers remained the main source of recruits for the officer corps, as education was a strict requirement for the higher ranks.

The German imperial state, commonly referred to as the *Kaiserreich*, was a hierarchical society in which aristocratic and bourgeois officers' rule over common soldiers went far beyond the military context. Indeed, these hierarchies extended into the world of work and the bourgeois households themselves in the form of maids and servants recruited from the working classes. In her correspondence, Betty Scholem rather nonchalantly refers to Berlin's various housemaid agencies as 'slave markets'.<sup>59</sup> This may have been intended in an ironic or even sympathetic manner, but did not stop her from taking for granted the privilege of being relieved from housework. The Scholem family – with their personal chef, housemaids and *Gymnasium* education for their sons – was located at the top of this hierarchical society, in which class position was not masked by a façade of democratic equality but instead openly and conspicuously flaunted. Werner's brother Erich also began serving as a one-year volunteer in October 1914. His military service, however, transitioned almost seamlessly into the horrors of World War I, a war in which the old order of the *Kaiserreich* would come crashing down.

Like Reinhold before him, Erich also became a typesetter. Following his training he worked at the *Manchester Guardian* from early 1912 and then in Paris from 1913 until the summer of 1914. These stays abroad left a lasting impression on the two older brothers, as Reinhold would recall over sixty years later: 'I am thankful to father even today that he sent me abroad for three years, where the experiences of the different surroundings left a lasting impression on me. The differences between individual countries were much bigger than they are now, where everything more or less follows the international American example'.<sup>60</sup>

Their differences in age, the timing of their military service, and their subsequent trips abroad meant that the two older brothers soon grew apart from

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some time, until a completed *Untersekunda* degree was established as a prerequisite for the *Einjährige* in 1877. This rule persisted until the end of the *Kaiserreich*. See Becker and Kluckert 1993, p. 5.

59 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 30 May 1920, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 71 ff.

60 Reinhard to Gershom Scholem, 29 February 1972, NLI Jerusalem.



the younger siblings.<sup>61</sup> Reinhold and Erich maintained a good relationship with their father and gratefully accepted their role as successors to the family business. They were also closer to Arthur politically, which only deepened the gulf between them and their two younger brothers. Gershom wrote to Reinhold decades later: 'During your one-year service and the time spent in the room opposite our parents, we saw each other often enough, though we rarely discussed anything important. The age gap between us was too great, not to mention the differences in our opinions and life plans'.<sup>62</sup> When conversations did occur, they were often not particularly harmonious:

I still recall the torments I endured while listening to your speeches during your one-year military service in the fall of 1913. I believe you gave them before the Telegraph Regiment in Treptow during your furlough. I held my tongue, just as I did about everything expressed at home on this theme, in particular from Father. Father was extraordinarily bitter about my silence, and about my Hebrew studies (performed with three pious rabbis early each Sunday, from seven in the morning to one in the afternoon). You weren't aware of any of this because you weren't at home, with the exception of the nine months between your release from the military and the outbreak of war. So unfortunately you missed the history of my youth and development. After the war, in 1920, you were astonished to meet me, as if I'd been someone from a different planet.<sup>63</sup>

Reinhold and Werner's relationship must have been similarly alienated, as the background of age difference, long absences and youthful political rebellion applied. Gerhard and Werner could not stand their brother's nationalist talk. Reinhold was well aware of this and provoked them deliberately – for example in 1919, when he defended the 'German idea' against the Bavarian Soviet Republic, allegedly led by 'coffeehouse socialists' and 'other such luminaries'.<sup>64</sup> Gerhard reported in his memoirs that his eldest brother, now living in Australian exile, still identified as a German National [*Deutschnational*] as late as 1938.

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61 Scholem 2012, p. 32.

62 Gershom to Reinhold Scholem, 24 May 1976, Scholem 2002, p. 463.

63 Gershom to Reinhold Scholem, 29 May 192, Scholem 2002, p. 442. See also Gershom's letter to Reinhold from 24 May 1976, NLI Jerusalem: '– because I had forgotten that you were home for nine months in 1912, when we were both together with Werner in the two rooms for the four children. But there is only rarely contact between a fifteen-year-old and a twenty-year-old'.

64 Scholem 2002, p. 108.

When asked about this, he responded ironically: ‘I’m not going to let Hitler dictate my views to me!’<sup>65</sup> Reinhold himself, however, consistently denied this often-cited anecdote. He identified as a right-wing liberal [*rechtsliberal*], and had described himself as a nationalist merely to indicate his affiliation with the German People’s Party [*Deutsche Volkspartei*, DVP], that political melting pot of German conservatism founded in 1919.<sup>66</sup> Reinhold’s views changed in his later years, however, as flight and exile wore away at the nationalism of his youth. In the mostly unpublished letters he wrote at an older age, he appears not as an incorrigible German nationalist but rather as someone stranded, involuntarily cut off from the mainstream of German culture. In 1965 he wrote to Jerusalem: ‘Someone once wrote somewhere that “the *Deutschtum* we seek is an ideal that has never existed”’.<sup>67</sup> Reinhold felt a deep connection to German literature that would last his entire lifetime, although returning to a life in Germany after the trauma of the Holocaust remained out of the question for him and his family.<sup>68</sup>

While Reinhold leaned towards liberalism’s right wing, Erich Scholem became attracted to its left wing rather early in life. He was a member of Berlin’s liberal ‘Democratic Club’ and later of the German Democratic Party [*Deutsche Demokratische Partei*, DDP], of which Betty Scholem was also a founding member.<sup>69</sup> However, like his mother, Erich was not very politically active beyond nominal party membership, he ‘wanted his peace more than anything and tried to commit himself as little as possible’.<sup>70</sup> Gerhard wrote about Erich that he possessed a ‘remarkably agile mind’ and at the same time ‘a healthy and abiding mistrust of the world [...] always rather inclined to keep to him-

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65 Scholem 2012, p. 43.

66 Letter from Reinhold to Gershom Scholem, 18 July 1977, Scholem 1999, p. 391. The letter does not discuss Gershom’s *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, but rather an interview with Gershom in which the aforementioned anecdote had already appeared. The German People’s Party (DVP) inherited the legacy of the national liberals at its founding in 1919, unifying a minority of so-called ‘*Vernunftrepublikaner*’, that is, republicans out of rational (as opposed to ideological) conviction, with a monarchist majority. The most prominent republican was party leader Gustav Stresemann. The party did not officially acknowledge the legitimacy of the Weimar Republic until the murder of centrist politician Matthias Erzberger in 1921, though historian Hagen Schulze remarks that ‘the monarchist Saulus could not have morphed into the democratic Paulus overnight’, see Schulze 1977, p. 342.

67 Reinhold to Gershom Scholem, 10 October 1965, Scholem 2002, p. 414.

68 Ibid.

69 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 25.

70 Scholem 2012, p. 43.

self.<sup>71</sup> In January 1920 Reinhold and Erich became co-owners of the Druckerei Scholem and continued to run it after their father's death in 1925.<sup>72</sup> The brothers were originally intended to take over the firm much earlier, but the chaos of war and revolutionary tumult had prevented them from doing so. Reinhold described the two older brothers' respective relationships with Arthur as 'excellent'; their father soon granted them wide-ranging authority in business matters and began heeding their advice in major decisions.<sup>73</sup> When it came to business, Arthur Scholem could be very cooperative indeed, as it was a language he understood in which he could tolerate differing opinions. Reinhold and Erich were not only interested in the print shop as a business opportunity, but also enjoyed the aesthetics of the industry. Both collected artistically designed literary prints and were members of bibliophilic societies, for which they also produced artistic and special prints in their own shop.<sup>74</sup>

While the older brothers remained firmly in their parents' wake, the two younger ones were not so compliant. It was Werner who broke first ground in 1908 at the age of 12. According to his brother, he 'possessed a very nimble disposition that soon veered into opposition to our parents'.<sup>75</sup> Gerhard tells of a conflict between Werner and his parents, but the direction of his rebellion remains unclear. When reading Arthur's later letters from 1917, however, it becomes apparent that his style of childrearing practically invited, perhaps even begged for, opposition.<sup>76</sup> Arthur demanded good 'behaviour' from his sons and refused to accommodate their individual quirks. Moreover, he was particularly insistent that they prepare themselves for a life of 'real work', a 'steady job', that is, a business career similar to his own. He was unable to fathom any alternative, and continued to dismiss Gerhard's budding academic career as a 'gimmick' even after he began earning money as a Hebrew teacher.

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71 Gerhard to Hilde Scholem, 26 February 1965, Scholem 2002, p. 407.

72 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 60 and p. 539; Reinhold to Gershom Scholem, 10 February 1978, NLI Jerusalem. According to the commercial registry, Reinhold and Erich became liable shareholders on 30 December 1919. See *Arthur Scholem Buch- und Steindruckerei*, Amtsgericht Charlottenburg, LArch Berlin, A Rep. 342-02, Nr. 42380.

73 Reinhold to Gershom Scholem, 10 February 1978, NLI Jerusalem.

74 Ibid. For more on Erich and Reinhold's bibliophilic interests, see Homeyer 1966. For a catalogue of Erich and Reinhold's custom prints see: anonymous 1931, *Verzeichnis der Privatdrucke von Reinhold und Erich Scholem. 1920 bis 1931*. Berlin: Arthur Scholem.

75 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 36.

76 See Arthur to Gerhard Scholem, 14 February and 12 May 1917, Scholem 2002, p. 41.

Money was always central to these disputes. Although it rarely played a direct role in family discussions, Arthur did not hesitate to exert financial pressure on his younger sons to bring them back into the fold later in life.<sup>77</sup> Without knowing what exactly happened in 1908, we can nevertheless reconstruct a basic outline of the conflict that occurred. Arthur, who as a young renegade had once left his hot-tempered father Siegfried's house, seems to have learned little from his own rebellious phase. He adopted Siegfried's mentality of German efficiency and forced it down the throats of his own sons. Erich and Reinhold were not bothered by this and enjoyed the privileges afforded by entrepreneurship, such as travelling abroad. Arthur, however, did not work in order to enjoy the finer things in life – he lived to work. Despite his proud Jewish identity, his basic attitude in life reflected a Protestant work ethic in which labour was its own reward. The business shifted from being an economic necessity to an end unto itself, family life replaced by the professional association.

Werner and Gerhard managed to escape this doctrine in their childhood years. They searched for their own meaning, becoming bookworms and reading voraciously under their mother's tutelage. Betty conveyed security, yet at the same time communicated little of her own values, always seeking to maintain a delicate balance. Gerhard would notice as a little boy that 'at different places she unblushingly expressed opinions that were contradictory but pleased her hosts'.<sup>78</sup> Betty Scholem refrained from advocating her own ideas in favour of balancing out the distinct personalities in the Scholem family, which protected the brothers in family disputes and allowed them an invaluable degree of personal freedom while growing up. But what were they to use this freedom for? On one side they saw their father's empty and meaningless value system, and on the other their mother's laissez-faire approach to life. To Gerhard and Werner, both of whom were intelligent and quite single-minded in their own way, these surroundings offered no basis upon which to build a future. Werner began practising argument, defiance, and undirected revolt at an early age. The consequence of his behaviour would be a first, harsh turning point in his life, as Gershom later recorded: 'This prompted my parents around 1908 to send him for two or three years to the Samson School at Wolfenbittel [Wolfenbüttel], a Jewish boarding school associated with a *Realschule* that had been founded a hundred years previously when Westphalia was a kingdom'.<sup>79</sup> In fact, the origins of the Samson School extended even further. The school dated back

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77 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 13; Scholem 2002, p. 41.

78 Scholem 2012, p. 19.

79 Scholem 2012, p. 32.

to 1786 when Phillip Samson established a Beth Midrash, or house of Jewish religious study.<sup>80</sup> Its most famous graduate in 1803 was Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), the founding father of Jewish Studies, or *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as it was called at the time. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Zunz had been one of only five students at the school, all of whom lived and studied in a single room, devoting most of their time to religious and theological learning. By the time Werner Scholem attended the Samson School a century later, conditions had changed considerably.<sup>81</sup> The once tiny Talmud school isolated from city life had developed into an accredited educational institution with an emphasis on vocational training, whose roughly 150 students came from all over the country.<sup>82</sup> The Samson School was an exclusively male school, and while religion no longer dominated the curriculum, Judaism nevertheless continued to represent one of the school's guiding values.

According to the Wolfenbüttel civil register, Werner Scholem did not enter the Samson School in 1908, but rather on 5 October 1909, roughly two months before his fourteenth birthday.<sup>83</sup> He attended classes for one and a half years and lived in the adjoining boarding school before returning to Berlin on 30 March 1911. No personal documents or school certificates from this period are known to have survived, but we can still learn quite a bit about the atmosphere in which Werner Scholem became a young man from other contemporary documents.

The Samson School building exists to this day, a plain but nevertheless impressive brick building with two towers. The annual 'School News' brochure extolled the idyllic campus: 'The location of the new building is extraordinarily advantageous both in terms of physical health and for educational purposes. Far away from the bustle of the city, the school is surrounded by forests and gardens in a healthy, open space near the Lechlumer Woods.'<sup>84</sup> In other words: the school was located off the beaten path on the edge of a forest, far away from bars, dances, girls and everything else adolescent boys might find interesting. The school had its own tram station, but little else.<sup>85</sup> The building was com-

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80 Berg 2003, pp. 80–3.

81 A refoundation in 1807 marked the beginning of a series of school reforms, see Berg 2003, p. 40.

82 Most of the school's students were boarders from other parts of Germany; see Berg 2003, pp. 225–7 and the student population statistics on p. 257 f.

83 *Melderegister nach Straßen 1888–1913*, NLA Wolfenbüttel, 34N Nr. 4566.

84 *Samsonschule zu Wolfenbüttel – Bericht über die Zeit von Ostern 1896 bis Ostern 1897 erstattet von dem Direktor Dr. Ludwig Tachau*, NLA Wolfenbüttel, p. 3.

85 *Samsonschule in Wolfenbüttel – Aufnahme-Bedingungen*, Wolfenbüttel 1905, NLA Wolfenbüttel.



FIGURE 6 *Samson School, Wolfenbüttel, 1895*

pleted in 1895, the year of Werner's birth, and thus was still considered new at the time of his enrolment.<sup>86</sup>

The Samson School was a *Realschule*, however, and not a *Realgymnasium*, which meant that students could not obtain the qualifications needed to enter university. Arthur wanted to knock some sense into his son and force him into a more practical lifestyle. The Samson School seemed perfect for this task. The languages taught here were English and French, not Latin and Greek, and in the school's graduate registry most are listed as the sons of merchants, which more often than not was also the desired occupation of the graduates themselves.<sup>87</sup> Gershom Scholem would later recall, somewhat tersely, that '[m]any Jewish businessmen, cattle dealers, and master butchers in Western Germany sent their children to that school'.<sup>88</sup> A 1905 school brochure gives an idea as to what the school administration expected from everyday life in the boarding school:

86 The school news published proud, detailed reports of various technical features such as central heating, gas connections and a centralised warm water supply. See *Samsonschule zu Wolfenbüttel – Bericht über die Zeit von Ostern 1896 bis Ostern 1897 erstattet von dem Direktor Dr. Ludwig Tachau*, NLA Wolfenbüttel.

87 *Samsonschule zu Wolfenbüttel. Bericht über die Zeit von Ostern 1909 bis Ostern 1910*, NLA Wolfenbüttel.

88 Scholem 2012, p. 32.

'All pupils living in the house [...] are treated equally lovingly. Education at the Samson School is modelled on the example of family life as much as possible and seeks to fill the role of parents in the lives of the children. This is the responsibility of the houseparents'.<sup>89</sup> The 'houseparents' were an employed couple who also lived on school grounds. Their tasks were described as follows: 'They are responsible, under the headmaster's supervision, for the physical care of the pupils. The boys dine together with the houseparents and a teacher. [...] Life in the institution conforms to Jewish ritual. No instruction occurs on Sabbath days or the holidays'.<sup>90</sup> One feature was particularly emphasised: 'The pupils are under the supervision of a teacher for the entire day. One teacher lives directly adjacent to the dormitories [...]. This supervision does not disturb the playfulness of youth, but more resembles a friendly monitoring of goings on'.<sup>91</sup>

This 'friendly monitoring of goings on' was built into the school's architecture, where 'all pupils were overseen together on one floor'.<sup>92</sup> The students attended classes together, ate their meals in a common dining hall, spent the afternoons in various 'work rooms', played board and parlour games together in the evenings, and slept in the same dormitory at night.<sup>93</sup> The latter measured sixty by six metres and contained 99 iron-framed beds, while another dormitory contained 42 additional beds.<sup>94</sup> Pupils also washed up together every morning: 'The washing hall, converted from the dormitory hallway [...] contains 105 washing stations. Each sink has a separate faucet [...]. The individual washing stations are separated by wooden towel racks'.<sup>95</sup> The showers, with room for only 20 students, probably seemed almost roomy in comparison.<sup>96</sup> Based on surviving descriptions, we can assume that Werner Scholem enjoyed no pri-

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89 'Das Leben in der Anstalt', *Samsonschule in Wolfenbüttel – Aufnahme-Bedingungen*, Wolfenbüttel 1905, NLA Wolfenbüttel.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 *Samsonschule zu Wolfenbüttel – Bericht über die Zeit von Ostern 1896 bis Ostern 1897 erstattet von dem Direktor Dr. Ludwig Tachau*, NLA Wolfenbüttel, p. 4. The school director, houseparents and two single teachers also lived in the school building in addition to the 150 'pupils'.

93 *Samsonschule in Wolfenbüttel – Aufnahme-Bedingungen*, Wolfenbüttel 1905, NLA Wolfenbüttel.

94 *Samsonschule zu Wolfenbüttel – Bericht über die Zeit von Ostern 1896 bis Ostern 1897 erstattet von dem Direktor Dr. Ludwig Tachau*, NLA Wolfenbüttel, p. 6.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

vacy whatsoever at the Samson School in 1910. Not only instruction but a wide range of bodily needs and functions were performed collectively, from sleeping to teeth brushing to meals and showers, always under the supervision of at least one teacher. Could such a school really promote a daily routine ‘modelled on family life’, as promised? In many ways, life in the strictly regulated school resembled the routines of an army barracks. Accordingly, the school advertised the advantages of preparing for one-year military volunteer service, while even the brick building of the school itself resembled contemporary military architecture. This new school routine was a painful adjustment for 13-year-old Werner. He was stripped of the few freedoms afforded him by his mother, robbed of his younger brother’s companionship and placed under the watchful gaze of a distrusting faculty whose pedagogical concepts could have been devised by Arthur Scholem himself.

The importance of a patriotic education was heavily emphasised by the Samson School, teaching its pupils to ‘love this country with their hearts and hands until they reach their graves, [...] ready for sacrifice and with unshakable devotion to the Kaiser and the Reich.’<sup>97</sup> Thus, during Werner’s time at the school the headmaster gave speeches commemorating not only the Kaiser’s birthday and the anniversary of the Battle of Sedan, but the Duke Regent of Braunschweig’s birthday as well.<sup>98</sup> Judaism and the Hebrew language were both school subjects and all students and teachers were Jews, but the school did not cultivate a Jewish identity of any kind. School news includes no reports about Jewish education, but instead lists the topics of the entire class’s German essays. For 14-year-old students in the *Tertia* (roughly 7th form), more or less corresponding to Werner’s age at the time, the topics for the school year of 1910–11 reflected a Germanic orientation: ‘The Hero’s Ascent to Valhalla’, the ‘Hunnish Voyage of the Burgundians’, the Duke of Saxony Heinrich, and Konrad I. Pupils were then asked to answer the question: ‘How does the *Nibelungenlied* arouse our interest in Siegfried leading up to his battle against the Saxons and Danes?’<sup>99</sup> As the age range in a single form could reach two or three years, we do not know whether Werner was assigned these exact essay topics. Nevertheless, the romanticised nationalist orientation of the curriculum is evident. Neither Lessing, the most famous citizen of Wolfenbüttel, nor his *Ring Parable* and its calls for reconciliation between Christians, Jews and Muslims seem to have left an impression

97 From a 1906 self-description of the school cited in Berg 2003, p. 231.

98 See *Samsonschule zu Wolfenbüttel. Bericht über die Zeit von Ostern 1910 bis Ostern 1911*, NLA Wolfenbüttel.

99 Ibid.



on the Samson School. Jewishness may have signified one's outward appearance, but behind it stood the *Nibelungenlied*. Arthur Scholem was willing to pay more than 900 Reichsmarks in annual tuition to have his son educated in this spirit.<sup>100</sup>

Werner found the school's combination of social control and German chauvinism suffocating, as Gershom recalled decades later:

'My brother encountered a considerable amount of religious hypocrisy and false patriotism, which he found repulsive. The school was run along strict German nationalistic lines but some major aspects of the Jewish ritual, daily prayer and a kosher kitchen, were maintained. During school vacations I would be treated to cynical lectures and outpourings on the subject of his school by my brother, who was beginning to test his rhetorical skills on me even then'.<sup>101</sup>

It was only after three years of Wolfenbüttel exile that Werner was allowed to return home. Upon his arrival, however, he no longer attended Gerhard's school, but instead the Dorotheenstädtische Realgymnasium.<sup>102</sup> He would stay in Berlin for two full years, during which tensions between him and his father remained high.

Werner was sent away again following a quarrel around his early political engagement with the socialist Workers' Youth – this time to Hanover. From 1913 on Werner, who was now seventeen years old, attended the Gildemeistersche Institut, where he was to prepare for a subsequent *Abitur* exam in Berlin.<sup>103</sup> Moving to Hanover meant Werner would have the opportunity to attend university after all, but also that his father's disciplining through banishment would continue. The Gildemeistersche Institut operated officially as a 'Preparatory Academy for All Higher Military and School Exams'. In the parlance of the time, such academies, similar to modern so-called 'cram schools', were referred

100 *Samsonschule in Wolfenbüttel – Aufnahme-Bedingungen*, Wolfenbüttel 1905, NLA Wolfenbüttel.

101 Scholem 2012, p. 32.

102 Scholem 2012, p. 31 f. Gershom does not mention the name of the school specifically, but Werner indicated his attendance at the school during court proceedings on 13 October 1921 and again in the 1924 *Reichstagshandbuch*. See *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne in Berlin wegen Hochverrats*. 1921, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16/1921, Vol. 1; as well as Bureau des dt. Reichstags (ed.), *Reichstagshandbuch II. Wahlperiode 1924*, p. 516.

103 Scholem 2012, p. 42.



FIGURE 7 Ernst Jünger in uniform, 1922

to as 'boy presses' or simply 'presses', designed to 'press' exam material into their students in a comparatively short period of time.<sup>104</sup>

At the institute, Werner shared a desk with a young man named Ernst Jünger, who would later become a famous author after publishing a diary of his war experiences titled *Storm of Steel*. Jünger remembered: 'Werner Scholem sat next to me at a school desk in "Gildemeister's Institute". That was the name of a Hanover press for students who had either been expelled or failed at public schools'.<sup>105</sup> Classmates Jünger and Scholem were about as different from one another as two individuals could be. Werner the Jewish socialist with anti-nationalist inclinations and Zionist sympathies was a determined opponent of both the military and militarism in general, while next to him sat Ernst Jünger, a Protestant of the German nationalist persuasion, enthusiastic about

104 The school, located in Hanover's Hedwigstraße, was mostly attended by children from 'well positioned' families, and were usually 'low performing and difficult children'. See 'Die Knabenspresse', *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 July 2009. The school also had classrooms in Ludwigstraße, known as Johannsenstraße today.

105 Jünger 2003, p. 181f.

all variants of soldierly heroics. So enthusiastic, in fact, that he joined the French Foreign Legion in November 1913 to undergo desert combat training in Algeria. This episode came to an abrupt end following an intervention and forced repatriation by the German Foreign Office.<sup>106</sup> Sent away by their fathers, the two very distinct rebels attended the same Hanover school in the summer of 1914. Werner would leave a lasting impression on Jünger, who inquired about Werner's fate in a letter to Gershom Scholem decades later.<sup>107</sup> Even at the age of 100, Ernst Jünger continued to remember the time they shared together as schoolboys.<sup>108</sup>

'Our relationship was one of ironic sympathy', Jünger wrote about Werner Scholem in 1975.<sup>109</sup> In terms of Werner's outward appearance, he remembered his 'intelligent physiognomy and sceptical smile'. Jünger reported that at the time Werner 'was an adult compared to us pubescent boys' – an observation he would repeat on several occasions.<sup>110</sup> With regard to the classes they took together, Jünger wrote: 'Our German teacher was named Schmidt – we called him "Schmidtchen", probably because of a few odd features of his for which students have a keen sense. One day as he was returning essays, he said "Scholem, I am warning you for the last time". I noticed this at the time, but could not figure out what he meant by it. Scholem, who was far ahead of the rest of us intellectually, had probably used the essay to try out some nihilist or Communist slogans, which was unacceptable, even at a press'.<sup>111</sup> Werner Scholem was neither a nihilist nor a Communist at the time. He had, however, begun to develop an interest in socialism – a choice that would shape the rest of his life.

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106 For more on Jünger's life see Kiesel 2007.

107 Jünger and Scholem 2009. See also two articles by Mirjam Triendl-Zadoff in *Freitag*: 'Der unsichtbare Bruder', 25 July 2009 and 'Ob mein Bruder Werner gemeint ist?', 18 April 2004. Zadoff is particularly critical of attempts by the German press to construct intellectual commonalities between Gershom Scholem and Ernst Jünger. She rightfully emphasises the differences between Gershom's Zionism, Werner's socialism and Jünger's national conservatism.

108 He noted in his diary in 1995: 'Why did Werner Scholem pay me a visit this morning? His presence went beyond the merely dreamlike', Jünger 2003, p. 181 ff.

109 Jünger and Scholem 2009, p. 295; Scholem 2012, p. 42.

110 Jünger and Scholem 2009, p. 298 and p. 295.

111 Jünger 2003, p. 181 ff.

### Rebellion(s): From Zionism to Socialism

Werner's political commitment was sparked in 1912 at the age of sixteen. After returning to Berlin from Wolfenbüttel, he began his political career – not, however, as a socialist, but in the Zionist youth organisation Jung Juda. Werner encouraged his younger brother to come along to their meetings. Gerhard eagerly joined and would ultimately continue his engagement with Zionism far longer than Werner himself.

Gershom later described the group as consisting primarily of '[university] students who viewed us as likely new members of their wholly or partially Zionist-oriented associations'.<sup>112</sup> Werner was probably brought to these meetings by his fellow pupils, or may indeed have been recruited by older students. While Werner was primarily interested in 'the political aspect of Zionism',<sup>113</sup> Gerhard was fascinated by Judaism's religious and mystical sides. Influenced by Heinrich Graetz's seminal *History of the Jews*, he had already begun learning Hebrew in the summer of 1911,<sup>114</sup> asking his religion teacher to instruct him on the basics of the language so as to read the prescribed Torah text at his Bar Mitzvah without too many mistakes. The Bar Mitzvah is the initiation ritual marking the beginning of religious maturity and adulthood for Jewish men. It usually takes place around the thirteenth birthday, yet the sons of the Scholem family waited until the Sabbath before their fourteenth birthdays to perform theirs. Gershom would later describe the occasion as follows: 'Following the general custom of the time, Father went to the synagogue wearing a top hat. The bar mitzvah boy was called to the Torah for the first (and in many cases the last) time and had to say two brief Hebrew benedictions before and after, whereupon the rabbi admonished him before the congregation to be loyal to Judaism and its ideals'.<sup>115</sup> Unlike Gerhard, Werner had written down a phonetic transcription of the Torah text on a small piece of paper for his Bar Mitzvah two years earlier, just as Reinhold and Erich had done before him.<sup>116</sup> Thus, it was not the sound of Hebrew – which was somewhat mystical to the German ear and would remain a foreign language to him for the rest of his life – that fascinated Werner about Zionism, nor was it the tradition and grandeur of Jewish ritual or the mythical depth of the ancient traditions contained in the Torah and the Talmud.

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<sup>112</sup> Scholem 2012, p. 44.

<sup>113</sup> Scholem 2012, p. 41.

<sup>114</sup> Graetz 1853–75. Scholem likely read one of the popular three-volume editions of the book.

<sup>115</sup> For more on Scholem family Bar Mitzvahs see Scholem 2012, p. 37 f.

<sup>116</sup> Scholem 2012, p. 38.

The 'political aspect' that attracted him was the secular-utopian side of Zionism, its focus clearly on the future. This Zionism demanded a radical break with the existing order, a Jewish exodus from the societies they currently inhabited and a new beginning in their own state. Even if later historians would come to regard this utopian moment as a secular variant of a more traditional messianism (and for good reason), to Werner and many others Zionism meant a radical break with traditional Judaism.<sup>117</sup> This radical Zionist vision with its double face of tradition and modernity cast a spell over Werner and Gerhard and provided their hitherto undirected rebellion with an initial point of orientation.

Zionism was made even more interesting by how much it irritated their father. Moreover, it offered a comprehensive counter-concept to Arthur Scholem's assimilationist lifestyle, whose conspicuous patriotism could not cover up the inner emptiness of his work ethic. Nor would his patriotic behaviour have been rewarded anyway, as anti-Semitism continued to rise throughout the country<sup>118</sup> – another problem to which Zionism seemed to provide a powerful answer. Nevertheless, this new doctrine could not satisfy Werner for long. After only a few months he informed his comrades that he had 'found a broader, more comprehensive sphere of activity and could no longer be active in their midst'.<sup>119</sup>

Werner now joined the Workers' Youth, the youth organisation of the German Social Democratic Party [*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD], by then the strongest party in the European labour movement and heavily influenced by Marxist ideas. He quickly and with growing enthusiasm devoured all the short, cheaply produced pamphlets through which Social Democracy popularised Marxism; his brother mentions 'the writings of Bebel and Kautsky, *Die Lessingslegende* by Franz Mehring, as well as various pamphlets'.<sup>120</sup> Gerhard, on the other hand, remained loyal to Jung Juda, which did not

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117 See Löwy 1992.

118 See Scholem 1995, p. 10 and a letter from Werner dated 8 September 1914 in Scholem 2002, p. 23f.

119 Scholem 2012, p. 41.

120 Werner mentions the SPD's Erfurt Programme and Karl Kautsky's *Ethics and the Material Conception of History* as foundational texts of his socialist thinking. Gershom in turn recalls '[Adolph] Hoffmann's *Die Zehn Gebote und die besitzenden Klassen* ["The Ten Commandments and the Propertied Classes"], a pamphlet immensely popular at the time'. We can assume that both brothers read this canon and discussed it with each other, see Scholem 2012, p. 41 and Scholem 2002, p. 23ff. On Adolph Hoffmann's popularity before 1914 see Gorschopp 2009.

lead to particularly harmonious relations between the two brothers: 'He and I came to blows because he tried to force me to listen to socialist speeches of his own devising, which he delivered to an imaginary audience while standing on a chair – an enterprise that I resolutely opposed'.<sup>121</sup>

The working-class youth movement Werner joined in 1912 was a fairly recent phenomenon. The aforementioned SPD, the first united socialist party in Germany, was founded in 1875 as the Social Democratic Workers' Party [*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, SDAP], and changed its name to SPD following its legalisation in 1890. The party had risen to prominence through a series of fierce struggles, yet had long neglected organising among the youth.<sup>122</sup> Laws of association in most federal states of the Kaiserreich prohibited any political activity for adolescents under eighteen. Young workers, however, began entering the labour market as apprentices, maids and workers by the age of fourteen or fifteen. These young workers enjoyed no protection or representation of their interests whatsoever; they had no works councils to address their grievances and were barred from joining trade unions. In reaction to these perceived injustices, the first independent associations of trade apprentices were established in Berlin and Mannheim in 1904. Social Democrats supported these associations in some cases, but treated them with suspicion in others. The youths' brash approach, lack of discipline and semi-legal status were guaranteed to cause trouble in the eyes of many Social Democrats. This was particularly true when members of the youth movement generation, inspired by the example set by the *Wandervogel* (a German youth movement promoting naturalism, the outdoors and physical fitness) demanded political independence and an end to the patronising attitudes of the older generation.<sup>123</sup> This did not quite fit the SPD, whose members considered discipline and unity to be integral parts of their identity as a 'proletarian army'. When a new All-Reich Law on Associations [*Reichsvereinsgesetz*] was extended to the rest of Germany, the party leadership managed to arrange a compromise: 'youth committees' [*Jugendausschüsse*] comprising representatives of the party, trade unions and the youth would be established at the local level. At the Reich-wide level, a 'Central Office for Working Youth' [*Zentralstelle der Arbeitenden Jugend*] led by Friedrich Ebert and Heinrich Schulz was created. Adolescents were thereby no longer members of a political organisation, but

121 Ibid. According to oral recollections, Gerhard was even tied to a chair by his older brother during one of these sessions. See interview with Eva Nickels on 5 December 2012, who heard this version of events from Gershon Scholem personally.

122 On the following see Eppe and Herrmann 2008, pp. 19–68.

123 For more on the bourgeois youth movement see Laqueur 1984.

formally under the care of a charitable association. Many youths perceived this arrangement as an attempt to limit their political activity. The intense levels of state repression, however, left little alternative: in 1913, shortly after Werner Scholem joined the labour movement, the last independent workers' youth association in Prussia was banned. Christian and patriotic associations, on the other hand, continued to operate freely. Despite widespread repression, membership in the workers' youth movement grew rapidly in the years following its institutionalisation. No formal membership statistics exist as a result of the organisation's necessarily indirect structures, but the newly created newspaper *Arbeiter-Jugend* ['Worker-Youth'] registered more than a 100,000 subscribers in 1914.<sup>124</sup>

How, then, did *Gymnasium* student Werner Scholem become involved with this movement, intended more for the Scholem print shop's apprentices than for the son of its owner? Why did he not join the bourgeois youth movement that had spearheaded a generational revolt against the social conventions of the Kaiserreich since the turn of the century? At the first Free German Youth Day in 1913, more than 2,000 young Germans assembled and took a solemn vow, coined the 'Meißner Formula' to lead a 'self-determined, self-responsible, and sincere' life. This sort of thing was not enough for Werner. He was in search of more than a mere *ethical* foundation to the revolt against his father; he wanted a *political* answer to the 'Jewish question' posed by anti-Semites.<sup>125</sup> In this regard, both Zionism and socialism proved more interesting than a bourgeois youth movement dominated by romanticism and introspection, in which enthusiasm for nature and the homeland [*Heimat*] would soon begin to drift in an ethnic nationalist [*völkisch*]<sup>126</sup> direction. Socialism shunned emotional

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124 Epe and Herrmann 2008, p. 51.

125 Scholem wrote 'the *Arbeiter-Jugend* is not a *Wandervogel* but rather a proper movement with economic origins', thereby emphasising its social demands in contrast to the generational rebellion of other groups. See Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

126 The term *völkisch* refers to an ethnically charged nationalism. The term *Volk* means people, or rather 'a people' (hence the English word folk or folks), with *völkisch* being the (linguistically non-existent) adjective. In the Revolution of 1848, the term *Volk* was mostly used as the antipode to monarchy and tyranny, similar to the famous 'We, the people' in the American Declaration of Independence. The term was narrowed towards an ethnic connotation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Following this redefinition, the adjective *völkisch* in the 1880s and 1890s became an umbrella term for a variety of organisations propagating German superiority as well as ethnic 'purity' and thus excluding Germans of Polish or Jewish origin from the German *Volk*. Owed to the fact that any English-only translation would fail to convey the full meaning, the German word *völkisch* is retained throughout this volume.

outbursts and escapism, instead seeking relevance by being present in the day-to-day lives of its members and supporters. Public life in the proletarian metropolis of Berlin was especially influenced by the socialist movement, particularly after socialists won the ‘right to the streets’, that is, the freedom of assembly, in the course of the voting rights struggle of 1910.<sup>127</sup> Socialist and labour demonstrations could no longer be prohibited. In the Reichstag elections of January of 1912, the SPD received over four million votes – the highest vote total of any party in German history. Given these developments, Werner’s decision to devote himself to socialism in that particular year may not have been entirely coincidental. But what was it about socialism that fascinated him so much?

It was certainly not the provocative gesture of becoming a socialist that inspired him: he did not advertise his new political outlook, preferring to keep it a secret from his parents. Socialism, in seeking to replace the profit motive with collective labour for the benefit of all, offered the young Werner a purpose in life – something his family was never able to provide. Socialists criticised the authoritarian social conventions that repulsed Werner at home and in school by advocating pedagogical reform. They counterposed the bourgeois family with women’s liberation and demanded the dissolution of the army in the face of ubiquitous Prussian militarism. In short: the socialist programme stood for the establishment of a utopian society based on rationality and solidarity.

Although it remains unclear what exactly Werner Scholem’s activities as a Workers’ Youth member were in 1912 and 1913, we can conclude that he flung himself into the movement enthusiastically. He must have devoured the brochures of Bebel, Kautsky and others, for only a few months after his turn to Marxism he no longer required his younger brother’s involuntary audience and began agitating at actual gatherings of the organisation. The SPD organ *Vorwärts* even advertised an appearance by Werner Scholem before a meeting of Berlin night shift workers.<sup>128</sup> The young Werner Scholem was in high demand as an agitator. He was more educated than most members, capable of learning and disseminating socialist theory quickly and was much closer in age to the apprentices and other young workers than the older party and trade-union functionaries.

His swift entry into politics and the attention it attracted, however, did not go unnoticed. A typesetter named Ebel, formerly employed by Scholem and now working at the book publishers’ health insurance association, one day

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127 See Lindenberger 1995; Warneken et al. 1986.

128 Scholem 2012, p. 42; Betty to Gershom Scholem, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 287.



left the aforementioned *Vorwärts* article about 'Comrade Werner Scholem' on Arthur Scholem's desk. Betty would claim years later that he had done so 'to get back at his old employer'.<sup>129</sup> The unsuspecting Arthur was beside himself after entering his office and reading the report on his son's political activities, as it was not only his position as father being subjected to public humiliation: '[T]his act, which was evidently intended as an ironic comment on the "capitalist employer"', as Gershom put it, served to undermine Arthur's authority within the business as well.<sup>130</sup> The exact course of the ensuing argument remains unknown, but its outcome was drastic: 'After a great deal of trouble it was agreed that my brother, who was then in his final year of secondary school, would leave Berlin and attend Gildemeister's Institute in Hannover'.<sup>131</sup> At the 'press', he was to complete advanced *Gymnasium* courses in preparation for the *Abitur* in Berlin.

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129 The family dispute this triggered remained in Betty's memory for 20 years. When Ebel lost his position in the trade union in 1933, Betty could not help but derive some satisfaction from it, though she admitted that this was 'not a particularly kind move'. See Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 287.

130 Scholem 2012, p. 42.

131 Ibid.

## World War and Revolution (1914–18)

### War and Socialism in Hanover

Though banished to Hanover, Werner could hardly contemplate stepping away from political life. He became involved with the Workers' Youth upon his arrival, and immediately joined the SPD after turning 18 in December 1913.<sup>1</sup> Werner quickly became a noted orator in Hanover, contributing to socialist educational work as a lecturer.<sup>2</sup> He described his role to his brother rather pithily, stating: 'In Hanover, however, I was until recently the spiritus rector of the youth; acknowledged and respected by the radical minority and despised by the leading trade unionists. I was the big shot in the local party meeting, the cannon of rural agitation.'<sup>3</sup> Hanover's branch of Social Democracy, however, was not to Werner's liking. He described the local workers' movement as one of the 'most moderate in Germany', prone to electing 'hyper-revisionist delegates'.<sup>4</sup> Despite this disappointment, Werner considered himself to be 'in the middle of the party machine' and had found his place within it.<sup>5</sup>

This settling in would not last: Werner's life, which had never been a straightforward affair to begin with, would soon descend into total chaos in Hanover. For it was here that he saw the beginning of World War I in the summer of 1914, and shortly thereafter his party's support for the issuing of war bonds. Far from a mere formality, this constituted direct Social-Democratic support for the war. More importantly, it was a rather unexpected shift for a party that had passed so many peace resolutions at international conferences in the preceding years. As early as July 1914, spontaneous rallies against the looming war broke out across Germany. By the end of the month, however, the party lead-

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1 The year 1913 can be found in Weber and Herbst 2003, pp. 820–1. The biographical data on Scholem was confirmed by his widow Emmy in the 1960s (the author was directly informed of this by Hermann Weber). Because Werner Scholem only turned 18 on 29 December 1913, he must have joined the SPD in the very last days of 1913.

2 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs Werner Scholem vom 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Niedersachsen, NDs. 110 w Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

3 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 15.

4 Ibid.

5 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 and 22 September, Scholem 1994, p. 7, p. 15; Scholem 2002, pp. 22–4.

ership had put an end to these activities.<sup>6</sup> After a few days of relative calm, the trade unions issued a no-strike pledge during wartime on 2 August 1914. On 4 August the SPD Reichstag deputies voted for war credits. The same occurred in other European capitals, and the Socialist International disintegrated into national blocs in a matter of days.<sup>7</sup> Its leading force in particular, German Social Democracy, was shattered by the decision. The superficiality of the SPD's strength – in spite all of the strikes, electoral victories, May Day celebrations and parades – now became evident. Behind the powerful facade lay a mixture of powerlessness and helplessness.<sup>8</sup> Social Democracy had always presented itself as an irreconcilable opponent of capitalism in years prior, its deputies fond of giving radical speeches. Yet those speeches could not alter the fact that both the Reichstag and the regional parliaments were essentially powerless under the monarchy. The union functionaries, on the other hand, spoke of socialism but were primarily interested in being accepted as negotiating partners vis-à-vis big capital. The scene of union leader Gustav Bauer dining on roast goose with print shop owner Arthur Scholem after peacefully (that is, without striking) negotiating wage levels and health insurance contributions is much more representative of the German labour movement in 1914 than young Werner's agitational speeches to agricultural labourers in the Hanover countryside.

Perplexing as it may be, it becomes clearer as to why SPD parliamentarians and union leaders bought into the pretext of a German defensive war against Russian Tsarism in August 1914 so quickly when such tendencies are taken into consideration.<sup>9</sup> Given the grave threat facing the nation, a historic party truce [*Burgfrieden*] would temporarily suspend all social conflicts: when Kaiser Wilhelm declared 'I know no parties anymore, only Germans' in his address on 4 August, many Social Democrats sensed that the social acceptance their party had been denied for so long was finally within reach. Thus, support for the war was based not only among the professional politicians of the SPD's Reichstag fraction, but among sections of the party base as well. Werner himself would report that in Hanover 'many of the most loyal members stated before the vote

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6 On the SPD's politics at the beginning of the war see Kruse 1993.

7 There were, however, minority currents in all of the International's member parties which opposed the war. On this see Nishikawa 2010.

8 Dieter Groh coined the term 'revolutionary attentism' to denote this combination of verbal radicalism and a 'wait and see' attitude; see Groh 1973.

9 In the nineteenth century, Tsarism was regarded as a reactionary bulwark for monarchies all over Europe, any reservations towards Russia by Social Democracy from this era could therefore be re-invoked in 1914. On this see Groh and Brandt 1992.

that “we will resign from the party if the deputies don’t support the war”.<sup>10</sup> Many members placed high hopes in the new-found national unity here as well. On the other hand, workers remained largely absent from the pro-war celebrations and rallies. These were mostly attended by ‘middle-class students and young professional men’, as historian David Stevenson informs us.<sup>11</sup> While the working class as a whole was by no means swept up by the nationalist fervour, neither was it merely the leadership’s ‘betrayal’ that led to the paralysis of the movement.<sup>12</sup> The German labour movement was paralysed from above *and* below, torn between fatalism, nationalism and helpless outrage. The patriotic excesses Werner describes in Hanover were not a universal occurrence, but propaganda and uncertainty were sufficient to dampen protest. Only a minority remained faithful to the ideals of internationalism from the outset – one of these few was Werner Scholem.

News of the war’s outbreak reached him at school, right before the beginning of the summer break, surrounded by a crowd of patriotic classmates. Ernst Jünger was one of them. In a diary entry written 90 years later, he recollected events in a lesson with their teacher Herr Schmidt: “The outbreak of the war was also the last day of school for most of us; the class behaved like a swarm of bees. Schmidtchen was sad, and said “you don’t know the horrors of war”. The class shouted him down, of course’.<sup>13</sup> Jünger for his part had come to school freshly coiffed that day. He was anything but an opponent of the war and quickly became the target of Werner’s malice, who taunted his pro-war classmate as a ‘Germanic warrior anointing his head with oil before battle’.<sup>14</sup> Werner had expected this sort of nationalism and chauvinist behaviour at school, but that in turn only magnified the shock he felt when ‘sabre-rattling and bloodlust’ engulfed Social Democracy: “The reddest of Reds volunteered for service, and I – once respected for my lack of patriotism – was forced to endure being called a crazed fanatic and even a coward at a gathering of the Workers’ Youth [...]’.<sup>15</sup>

We owe the documentation of these early political statements of 18-year-old Werner Scholem to a correspondence with his brother Gerhard. After arguing intensely about the antagonisms between Zionism and socialism, the two had once again grown politically closer and rekindled an intense intellectual

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10 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 7.

11 Stevenson 2004, p. 39.

12 On the accusation of treason in history and the science of history see Kruse 2009 and Lange 2009.

13 Jünger 2003, pp. 181–2.

14 According to Jünger, see *ibid.*

15 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 7.

exchange in the summer of 1914.<sup>16</sup> The preceding quarrel between the two, though not resulting in a complete break, must have been quite severe, for it seems that at least Gerhard had a hard time beginning his letter: 'It may surprise you to get a letter from me, of all people. How awful – a letter from the mama's boy! A fanatical Jew!'<sup>17</sup> Gerhard was quoting these unpleasant expressions directly from Werner's mouth, yet nevertheless sought to re-establish contact with his elder brother. Gerhard was impressed by his steadfastness: Werner had already begun voicing his opposition to the war in August 1914, at a time when even Karl Liebknecht had voted for war credits in observance of party discipline.<sup>18</sup>

Gerhard Scholem for his part was appalled by the war euphoria. He followed the Social-Democratic press in Berlin closely and sought more information about socialism, its ideals and its philosophy from his brother. He had moved much closer to Marxism by then, going so far as to agree with the SPD's Erfurt Programme. At the same time, however, the party's organisation appeared to him as more of a 'murky sea', a corrupting straitjacket that left no room for original thinkers and the true representatives of the cause, examples of which he quite immodestly named as Proudhon and himself. What interested him far more than questions of organisation were ethics and the question of socialism as myth.<sup>19</sup>

Werner was eager to respond to his questions, opining with the relaxed attitude of an older brother who had long predicted Gerhard's turn to socialism. Werner explained succinctly: 'Every thinking Jew somewhere along the line becomes a socialist – which you now are, since you stand on the foundation of the Erfurt Program'.<sup>20</sup> Werner co-opted his brother as a matter of course and tried to lead him into the party. Conversely, Gerhard would repeatedly try to win Werner back to Zionism over the years to come.<sup>21</sup> Gerhard's ambitions were not entirely unfounded, for despite his commitment to socialism, Werner

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16 On the following see Scholem 1994, pp. 1–15. An assessment of the two brothers' correspondence can be found in Triendl-Zadoff 2007 and Hoffrogge 2011c. On field correspondence by Social-Democratic war opponents more generally see Engel 2008.

17 Gerhard to Werner Scholem, 7 September 1914, Scholem 2002, p. 22.

18 Unfortunately, Werner's statements critical of the war, to which Gerhard refers, have not survived, but can only be deduced indirectly from his reply.

19 Gerhard to Werner Scholem, 7 September 1914, Scholem 2002, p. 23.

20 Ibid.

21 In a letter to a Zionist colleague, he wrote that Werner's Jewishness was 'remediable' but that 'in the course of time I intend to win him *fully* over to our side', Gerhard Scholem to Erich Brauer, 17 July 1916, Scholem 2002, p. 32.

never denied his Jewish background. After all, it was this background that had brought him to the labour movement in the first place – he had become a socialist as a ‘thinking Jew’.<sup>22</sup> Discrimination and social exclusion were fundamental to Werner’s rejection of social conditions in contemporary Germany, and thus his break with Zionism would never be a complete one, even after joining the SPD.

To Gerhard’s surprise, Werner shared his criticism of the socialist movement. He was particularly enthusiastic about Gerhard’s critique of the bureaucracy and party apparatus: ‘I also hate the organisation. You’ve no idea how right you are with your comparison to the murky sea. But what can one do? He who stands on the basis of the Erfurt Program of course knows that organisation is necessary’. Werner saw the trade unions as the main reason for this organisational torpor. ‘You can’t imagine how disgusting some of these things are. Ever since the trade unions became influential in the labour movement, the political party has been reduced to little more than a means for conducting elections. And the unions? Perhaps you know Herr A. Scholem, Berlin c. 10, Beuthstr. 6? He is also a trade unionist; one from the other side, that is. Were he a worker he might be a trade union secretary – and not one iota better than he is now’.<sup>23</sup>

In labelling his father a trade unionist for the employers’ side, Werner recognised the fundamental dilemma of economism within the labour movement more clearly than many of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, he did not regard himself as fundamentally opposed to unions: ‘I don’t fight against the unions, for without them the workers today would be a half-starved, drunk and miserable pack. I do, however, find them fundamentally unsympathetic. Their strict orientation towards material questions begets leathery people and haemorrhoids. But what do I care about unions? Am I a proletarian? I only care about the party’.<sup>24</sup>

Although Werner swore by materialism, his understanding thereof went beyond the mere struggle between economic interests, in which he felt the worldviews of the ‘employed’ and the ‘employers’ hardly differed from one another. Werner thought that the institutionalisation of class struggle, witnessed first-hand through his father Arthur Scholem, threatened to suffocate the utopian moment of the workers’ movement. Werner sought solace in the hope that the party would rectify the unions’ wrongs; inside Werner raged a fierce battle between an almost cynical pragmatism and a propensity

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22 Others, by contrast, reacted to this by stepping up their efforts at assimilation. On the reflection of the World War in the Jewish intellectual world see Sieg 2001.

23 Scholem 1994, p. 8.

24 Scholem 1994, p. 15.

for vanguardism. He took comfort in Marxism's optimistic philosophy of history: 'Economic conditions demand socialism, and so it will come; and its by-products will consist of the ennoblement and liberation of man. Whether it will bring perfect happiness to every individual, I can't say'.<sup>25</sup> Was the liberation of humanity really just a by-product of anonymous economic tendencies to Werner? Did such a determinism not render his own actions and struggles futile? It seems as if Werner used his faith in the iron laws of history to downplay the bitter disappointments of 1914. He denied his own defeat with a rather ostentatious display of detachment: 'Neither in Hanover nor Berlin was I particularly disappointed, because I, unlike Lilly Braun and other fops, did not join the party with any illusions'.<sup>26</sup>

He regarded his own position within the socialist movement positively, stating with a mix of defiance and self-confidence: 'I can be satisfied with my outward success, as my unjustified expulsion has accrued me love and respect among the party demi-gods in Berlin. [...] Only my physical illness and the subsequent war changed that'.<sup>27</sup> Yet Werner's optimism would turn into helplessness a mere two sentences later. At the conclusion of the letter, Werner reveals his true feelings: 'You think I'm being melodramatic? I tell you, within two years I will either be dead or walking through the front gates of an insane asylum. Do you know what a headache is? Luckily, you have no idea. But I could write you a poetic description of it: how it feels behind the eyes, or under the temples, on the back of your head, or sometimes on the front. It burrows, hammers and pulls, while you enjoy the pleasure of not getting a single wink of sleep. But the doctor, that camel, just shrugs his shoulders and prescribes more rest and sleep'.<sup>28</sup> Werner was overwhelmed and nearing mental breakdown. Apart from the war, the fear of *Abitur* exams the following year depressed him: 'I missed so much school this quarter that I was practically not there. You don't have to tell mother about this, as I will fail soon enough, around Easter. It's not due to laziness or stupidity, however. I have just exhausted my youthful energies'.<sup>29</sup>

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25 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 September 1914, Scholem 2002, p. 25.

26 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 14. Lily Braun (1865–1916) was a writer and leading member of the women's movement. Braun was a member of the revisionist wing within the SPD, which demanded a reform-oriented agenda for the party and abandoned thoughts of a revolution.

27 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 15.

28 Scholem 1994, p. 15.

29 Ibid.

Werner was due to take his exams as an external examinee at the Luisenstädtisches Realgymnasium in Berlin. His outsider status placed him at a disadvantage, as it meant he had not received the same preparation as other students. He also worried that some teachers were biased against him from previous altercations.<sup>30</sup> The *Abitur* thus represented not one but numerous potential failures for Werner to concern himself with. In January 1915, he reported on his efforts: 'The hopeless attempt to navigate the labyrinth that is analytical geometry, as well as my efforts to shed light on the topic of optics, have absorbed my brain's ganglia for some time now'. Wit came to Werner much more naturally than the natural sciences and mathematics. He could still recall the latter subject, in which his grades oscillated between a 3 (satisfactory) and a 5 (failed), with horror 20 years later. Only 'with God's help' and Gerhard's tutoring did he manage to pass.<sup>31</sup> Werner's dread concerning the mathematics exam was accordingly dramatic: 'The drying up of my spirit is nearly complete. My fate shall be decided in the coming weeks. Let's hope that it yet takes a turn for the better'.<sup>32</sup> His mother reports that Werner had already been fearful of the *Mittlere Reife* exam years before the actual event. His test anxiety would continue to haunt him while pursuing a degree in law in his thirties.<sup>33</sup> Although Werner was able to express himself well and practically devoured books, he never developed a relaxed approach to taking exams.<sup>34</sup> Pressure to perform and externally-determined curricula triggered paralysing blockages inside of him. Nevertheless, his uneasiness in September 1914 was related to more than simply the fear of failure, for Werner was in the midst of a life crisis in which more than just a leaving certificate was at stake. Presumably every young person feels that the world around them has gone mad at one point or another, but only few have reasons for doing so like Werner Scholem did: a world war broke out in the middle of his *Abitur* preparations, profoundly shaking the foundations of his self-image. His new life as a radical socialist was called into question by the many erstwhile radicals now enlisting in the military. Werner, once referred to as a 'hot shot' and 'spiritus rector', was now labelled a coward by his own comrades – the socialist family he had joined abandoned

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30 In order to compensate for his disadvantage, he planned to briefly attend his old school in Berlin prior to the exams; Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 January 1915, NLI Jerusalem.

31 Werner to Betty Scholem, 13 December 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

32 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 January 1915, NLI Jerusalem.

33 Scholem 1989, p. 174.

34 In his later studies he would again be haunted by exam anxiety, for more see Chapter 5.2 in this volume.



him in the worst conceivable manner. As if this were not enough, his biological family followed with a second blow: father Arthur pressured Werner to volunteer for military service. Even if he resisted, an obligatory draft was supposedly on its way. War and peace, socialism or the nation – for Werner and the generation of 1914 these were not mere theoretical creeds, but questions of life and death.

Werner reacted evasively to his father's demands, despite opposing the 'madness' of war from the beginning. As Werner explained, his sidestepping of this issue 'lies in the fact that I'm terribly tired and ill at the moment and have no desire to be thrown out of the house. You can see from this that I, too, am gradually equipping myself with a commonsensical *Weltanschauung*. Perhaps I will yet become a junior partner in "Arthur Scholem: Printer of Stationary and Lithographs"'.<sup>35</sup>

Werner was well aware that his father would immediately withdraw financial support should he speak out openly against the war. Gerhard also felt a dose of this pressure in the autumn of 1914:

Being forced to spend time at Berlin schools these days is a terrible thing. An order from above obligates all male pupils to begin military 'training' at age 16, a charming activity that will doubtlessly soon occupy my time as well. It is bleak indeed. Father needles me constantly for behaving like a 'coward' and being unwilling to show any more noble impulses. In general, I have reached that infamous dead point with father that you also know, and follow the latest developments in the Neue Grünstraße 26 attentively. Incidentally, my stay here, for the time being at least, is most preferable to yours, regardless of all the hassle and rows.<sup>36</sup>

Both brothers' relationships with their father now lay in ruins. Through constant threats to curtail their financial support, Arthur had facilitated a situation in which his sons lost all personal interest in him apart from these cash payments. Gerhard thus remained unaffected by the threats and taunts. He continued to pursue his interests and remained active in the Jung Juda circle, but was also confronted with the same disillusionment as Werner: on 5 February 1915 the *Jüdische Rundschau* published an essay calling upon the Zionist movement to enter into a similar '*Burgfrieden*' with the German war effort as the Social Democrats had done before. Under the title 'The War of Those Left

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35 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 September 1914, Scholem 2002, p. 24.

36 Gerhard to Werner Scholem 13 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 10.

Behind', Heinrich Margulies argued for participation in the slaughter.<sup>37</sup> Facing a comparable level of social exclusion as the working class, many German Jews also hoped to find acceptance in the Kaiserreich by participating in the coming conflict. Gerhard was furious and wrote a letter in protest, for which he collected signatures among his peers. He eviscerated the author's views in a harsh tone: 'This article contradicts the views of a large portion of our supporters and co-thinkers in Germany. We are not of the opinion that this war has unveiled the "secret of community", nor that a war ever could. Nor do we believe that Germany's cause, or any other country's cause, is our cause.'<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, Werner Scholem also signed the letter, despite the fact that it concluded with the phrase 'With Zion's greeting' [*Mit Zionsgruß*]. In December 1914 he responded to his brother's question as to what he thought of Zionism in light of his own disappointment with the labour movement: 'I am still, as before, a *Rachmoneszionist*'.<sup>39</sup> The Yiddish word *Rachmones* translates into mercy or sympathy. It implies brotherly love, but Rachmonic mercy could also quickly morph into pity. At times contemptuous, passionate at others – such was Werner's relationship to Zionism.

Werner's reconciliation with Zionism was rooted in his alienation from mainstream German society, as reflected in the protest letter's anti-nationalist orientation. The wording was no accident; indeed, his tone would intensify in the months and years to follow. Werner regularly referred to Germans as '*boches*' – a French insult from the 1871 war that would survive both subsequent conflicts.<sup>40</sup> Werner did not feel like a German, but rather like something else – an internationalist, a Jew, a socialist, an outsider. Werner was not even spared alienation and discrimination within his own party. As August 1914 had shown, the alleged 'scoundrels without a fatherland' of Social Democracy were also a part of German society. And though they opposed both nationalism and anti-Semitism, they were still far from expunging them from the minds of

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37 Margulies 1915. The *Jüdische Rundschau* was the central Zionist mouthpiece in Germany. On Zionism's attitude towards the World War see Poppel 1977.

38 Scholem 1995, pp. 89–90. On the letter of protest and the consequences thereof, see Scholem 2002, p. 29.

39 See Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 December 1914, NLI Jerusalem as well as Scholem 1994, p. 13.

40 See Werner to Gerhard Scholem from 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem. The date of 20 July 1914 was added by Werner in handwriting, and the letter was correspondingly placed in chronological order. However, references to World War I, the Spartacus group and a hospital stay evidence that the letter is actually from 1916. See on this also the chapter 'Hospital Reflections, 2016' in this volume.

their members.<sup>41</sup> Werner informed his brother almost casually: 'For what it's worth, the party is rife with anti-Semitism, although the people themselves are oblivious to it'.<sup>42</sup> Only upon explicit request did he write more specifically: '*Risches* in Social Democracy is of course not to be found among the leaders, many of whom are Jews, but rather among the masses. This is not particularly noticeable in Berlin where anti-Semitism is virtually non-existent, something one only truly realises after leaving the city. But it's terrible here!'<sup>43</sup> *Risches* is another Yiddish word denoting a popular, yet not necessarily ethnic nationalist anti-Semitism.<sup>44</sup>

Gerhard was very much affected by the matter, which reinforced his dim views of German society. In his diary he noted:

That is compelling proof of the correctness of Zionist doctrine. Everywhere, even where they eagerly participate from the very beginning, we get thrown out. Whether it's the capitalists or the workers, it's exactly the same. Socialism must first be established within individual national borders, only then can it truly become international. That does not contradict socialist fundamentals. Our state or polity must be established upon this foundation from the outset, then we will be able to further expand upon it, both intellectually and physically. But we need this foundation. With a bit of an anarchist veneer, even.<sup>45</sup>

Everyday experiences were to confirm his scepticism towards a combined German-Jewish movement time and again. When Gerhard went to the *Vorwärts* bookshop to purchase some socialist brochures that Werner had recommended, the clerk complained openly of alleged Jewish domination of the party, despite being fully aware of Gerhard's family background.<sup>46</sup> Both broth-

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41 On the SPD's struggle against anti-Semitic ideology see Leuschen-Seppel 1978.

42 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 December 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

43 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 January 1915, NLI Jerusalem. In his comparative study of England and Germany, Jörn Wegner confirms the first part of Scholem's analysis and verifies that in the Kaiserreich there were 'no parallels' to the sometimes explicitly anti-Semitic statements made by leading figures of the British labour movement around the same time. See Wegner 2012.

44 Historian Shlomo Na'aman distinguishes between three degrees of anti-Semitism: popular *Risches*, political anti-Semitism opposing the emancipation of the Jews, and racist annihilatory anti-Semitism. See Na'aman 1992, p. 50.

45 Scholem 1995, pp. 70–1.

46 Scholem 1995, p. 75.

ers found it difficult to fully commit themselves to the struggle for socialism in light of such encounters, yet while Werner held fast to the universalist principles of the labour movement in spite of its mistakes and failures, Gerhard became increasingly convinced of the need for a separate Jewish path to socialism.

Their distinct worldviews also resulted in divergent perceptions of the family conflict: Werner rebelled against their father's capitalist work ethic, Gerhard against the family's suppression of Jewish identity. Rather than being resolved in wider society, both found that the respective conflicts manifested themselves in even greater proportions in that context. Their rebellion superseded the boundaries of the family, and both saw socialism as its resolution. Their disagreement lay less in the question of Zionism and more in a deeper controversy over what their common friend Walter Benjamin would later call the 'concept of history'. Benjamin was a close friend of Gerhard's, and the two corresponded prolifically. He was not exactly a friend of Werner's, as they only met personally once. Werner did, however, read Benjamin's writings during the war, and Benjamin critically but keenly followed Werner Scholem's political career throughout the 1920s.<sup>47</sup>

Concerning his own 'concept' of history, Werner professed to be a historical materialist: 'Marxian socialism teaches historical materialism, which is, as well, the spirit that infuses the Erfurt Program. To put it crudely, it holds that things make man, not the other way around. Which means that economic motivations – above all, class conflicts – rather than ideals, are the driving forces in history'.<sup>48</sup> The question of history was neither theoretical nor abstract for Werner, but closely linked to morality and one's personal life conduct. Inspired by Kautsky's *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*, he noted:

those of us who follow historical materialism naturally do not believe in an innate morality. As such, the ethical stance of Marxism rejects out of hand all fixed notions of good and evil. It is irreconcilably opposed to Kant's moral law, and it views all reigning moral laws as merely an ever-changing mirror of the times. The only moral law it recognizes is a 'social drive', which is already at work in animals and which finds its highest expression in socialism. Should one regard these 'social drives' as morals, then we also believe in an innate morality. But this is of an animalistic

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47 On Benjamin's comments regarding Werner Scholem see Chapters 4 (part 2) and 6 (part 5) in this volume. On Benjamin's biography and intellectual development see Palmier 2006.

48 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 8.

origin, and ultimately only emerged from the animal's self-preservation instinct, which in turn makes this the basis of ethics.<sup>49</sup>

Such a reduction of morals and history to something purely material and essentially animalistic was deeply dissatisfying to Gerhard Scholem. Werner's materialism negated any sort of transcendence. For Gerhard, however, history was a bearer of myth and revelation, something absolute that could not be relativised by temporal circumstances.<sup>50</sup> He searched for this revelation in Jewish history and tradition. Although he rejected religious orthodoxy, he nevertheless craved a spiritual renewal in the sense of the Torah: 'The innermost comprehension of the Torah as the true living soul of Judaism is the primary requirement in order for a valid renewal – validated by God – to be possible.'<sup>51</sup> Though Gerhard had confided to his journal that he did not believe in a personal god, spiritual matters played a major role in his life.<sup>52</sup> He rejected Werner's understanding of history entirely, writing to him that 'wherever there are laws in history, history was not good enough or the laws were worthless'.<sup>53</sup> By deploying the terminology of the timeless and wordless 'experience', Gerhard turned revelation into something subjective. He described socialism as 'the most beautiful' [*das schönste*] of all experiences and pointed out that he engaged with this utopia not because but in spite of philosophical materialism – he therefore saw himself as belonging to 'the socialists, not the Social Democrats'.<sup>54</sup> The popular Marxism of his time, the economic reductionism, the talk of iron laws of nature, struck Gerhard as an obstacle, as part of the constraints from which humanity must be liberated. He saw 'contemporary humanity' as 'pressed into a system based on development and the law of causality', a fact that he did not seek to justify theoretically, but rather to blow apart: 'Not evolution, but revolution. I say this to the horror of the good sirs W. Scholem, Ch. Darwin and Asher Ginsberg'.<sup>55</sup> Gerhard had identified a major weakness in the SPD's Marxism. Would he have felt differently had he been acquainted with Marx's

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49 Scholem 1994, p. 9.

50 On the concept of history in Gershom Scholem's later work see Biale 1982.

51 Gerhard Scholem to Siegfried Lehmann, 9 October 1916, Scholem 2002, p. 36.

52 Diary entry 20 January 1915, Scholem 2007, p. 47.

53 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 11.

54 Gerhard to Werner Scholem, 13 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 11.

55 Gerhard to Werner Scholem, 13 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 12. Asher Ginsberg, also known as Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927), was a pioneer of cultural Zionism who sought to establish a Jewish community in Palestine primarily as a centre of Jewish intellectual life.

early writings focusing on the revolutionary subject, such as the *Theses on Feuerbach*? Any answer to this question would of course be pure speculation – ultimately, Gerhard could only judge the Marx of his day, and it did not please him.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond their differences on the political question of Zionism, there was another, deeper disagreement between the brothers concerning that which ‘holds the world together in its inmost folds’ – a disagreement that would continue to occupy Werner and Gerhard for quite some time. In a letter from 1916, Werner boils down the question by quoting Martin Buber: ‘What am I and what is my life?’<sup>57</sup>

This was a question that Werner could only answer as a process. He was part of an historical struggle, a development of social antagonisms which would one day lead to the emancipation of humanity. His repeated references to the animal behind human morality drew from Charles Darwin, but was simultaneously an expression of a very personal calculated pessimism that served to shield the young Marxist from disappointments. Nevertheless, ‘taking sides’ remained Werner’s practical response to all questions concerning the meaning of life.

Gerhard was similarly uncompromising, but did not see the goal of his aspirations in a universal historical struggle. History was by all means important to Gerhard, he would spend his entire later life studying it, but to him history represented, all scientific meticulousness aside, a way of exploring a Jewish heritage that stood above and outside of time. Gerhard wanted to explore anew the range of all that which contributed to Jewish thought. When asking Werner about socialism, Gerhard was in search of the myth behind it, so as to then incorporate it into his search for transcendence: ‘Since no one believes in the soul any longer, socialism naturally does not have one. But I am eager to know whether it has a myth, just as the Jews have the legends of the Nazarene, the Baal Shem, and Jehovah, or the Buddhists have their perfect Arhat. And since

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56 In his early writings such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1843, first published 1932, Marx addresses questions regarding the concept of humanity and suggests a ‘species-being’ that differentiates humans from animals. Although he later abandoned the idea of a ‘human nature’, the thought of rendering humanity the subject of history, no longer a mere object of historical development, is also influential in Marx’s later works. The emphasis on historical laws and evolution so pronounced in Werner is owed to Kautsky’s influence and was typical of the conception of history in pre-war Social Democracy.

57 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem. The quotation is taken from Buber 1995, p. 24.

I cannot find answers to these questions in books, I have turned to you. Much depends on your answer; I anxiously await it'.<sup>58</sup> For Werner the Marxist, on the other hand, religion and myth were merely an expression of underlying historical relations: a cultural surface at best, ideology and false consciousness at worst. Hence his perplexed and hostile response to his brother's inquiry regarding socialism's 'myth': 'What is a myth? Only peoples or, ultimately, religions can have fables and gods. They cannot have worldviews. When all is said and done, socialism has adopted Life itself as the true embodiment of its ideas'.<sup>59</sup> While Werner considered socialism to be something akin to a theory of life itself, Gerhard searched for the meaning *behind* this life. The basis of his pursuits was the Jewish revelation, into which he considered himself born. He sought the concealed essence, buried beneath the family's 'misguided' assimilationist lifestyle, that would ultimately be indelible. He was keen to reawaken this eternal presence in Werner, as well. Awakening or conviction, materialism or revelation, progress or transcendence – the two brothers began to form very distinct worldviews.

Nevertheless, rebellion and the struggle against hypocrisy and chauvinism in both family and society would draw them closer together time and again. There were clear parallels in their respective relationships with their father. Werner saw himself as a pioneer in his Hanover exile. In a half-cynical, half-defiant tone, he challenged Gerhard to follow suit in September 1914:

The news that you have reached the infamous dead point piques my curiosity. So you are also an incorrigible *La-usejunge* (the 'au' must be separated and growled in a sort of lasting tone, of course), although you still eat your 'slop' in the dining room and not in a 'dog kennel'. It will take a while before you decide that the free air is a more comfortable place to live than the homely family life found in Neue Grünstr. 26. As you are not familiar with my existence, it does not surprise me that you continue to cling to Egyptian fleshpots. By the way, they will certainly raise far more hell with you than they did with me, given that you are the second *Lausejunge* [rascal]!<sup>60</sup>

Werner self-confidently compared his banishment to the exodus of the Old Testament, the flight of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. That which the

58 Gerhard to Werner Scholem, 7 September 1914, Scholem 2002, p. 23.

59 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 September 1914, Scholem 2002, p. 25.

60 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 September 1914, Scholem 1994, p. 14.

father had intended as punishment was perceived by the son as liberation. Now, he sought to pull brother Gerhard onto a similar path.

It would not be long before his prediction came true, triggered by the aforementioned protest note to the *Jüdische Rundschau*. Although the strident letter had been an initiative of *Gymnasium* pupils, it caused quite a stir nonetheless. Gerhard reports that the letter 'had provoked a furore in the executive of the Zionist Federation in Germany, as many feared that our act could cause great difficulties for the Zionist movement'. Furthermore: 'The chairman of the organisation, Dr. Arthur Hantke – one of five members of the Zionist executive, who secretly shared our feelings – invited two of the signatories to meet with him and pleaded with us to be careful in any further moves, so as to avoid causing further misfortune to us or the organisation'.<sup>61</sup> The fact that Hantke would even find time for a protest letter from a group of school pupils gives an idea of just how high tensions ran at the beginning of the war. Any 'un-German' stance could be interpreted as treason, especially when it came from the Jewish-Zionist camp.

Charges of treason ultimately never came to pass, but Gerhard still encountered difficulties because of the letter. His critical remarks had already been noticed at school, as one particularly patriotic classmate was spying on him.<sup>62</sup> While rifling through Gerhard's folder between lessons, he came across the protest letter, which Gerhard had brought for his classmate Edgar Blum to sign. Instead, he was denounced to the headmaster's office for 'subversive propaganda', followed by an investigation that lasted several weeks. His expulsion was decided upon rather quickly, but he also faced the prospect of a formal certificate of expulsion, which would almost certainly prevent him from being accepted by any other *Gymnasium*. Only through the intervention of the headmaster and some of his teachers did he eventually receive a leaving certificate that neglected to indicate specific grounds for his departure.

Thus, Gerhard had also 'made it', so to speak: after the Luisenstädtisches Realgymnasium had prepared Arthur Scholem, his three brothers and his sons Erich and Reinhold for a successful *Abitur*, two Scholems had been kicked out in rapid succession. Arthur was so furious that he initially decided to deny his son the resources to finish school entirely, threatening to apprentice him to a 'herring tamer' – Berlin dialect for a grocer. It was only after his brother Theobald and Betty's sister Käthe Schiepan put in a good word for their nephew that Gerhard was permitted to continue his education. By taking

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61 Scholem 1997, pp. 65–6.

62 On the following see Scholem 1997, p. 66 as well as Scholem 1994, p. 347.



advantage of a little known special rule from the nineteenth century, the so-called *kleine Matrikel*, he was able to provisionally enrol at Berlin University while finishing his Abitur. He managed to do so by October 1915, slightly before his eighteenth birthday.<sup>63</sup> Unlike Werner, Gerhard was never fazed by test anxiety. He was not only an eloquent speaker, but also possessed a particular aptitude for mathematics.<sup>64</sup> Betty Scholem would later report that, according to his headmaster, Gerhard had accumulated enough knowledge to pass the *Abitur* exams well before his expulsion.<sup>65</sup> Both brothers were now banned from the family home, though the ultimate break with the father was yet to come.

A positive development also emerged in the middle of the epochal year of 1914, one in which world-historical tragedies converged with more private concerns for the two Scholem brothers. Werner informed Gerhard about said development surprisingly casually at the end of a letter: 'By the way, I am moving to my mother-in-law's house in Linden eight days from now (I became engaged last Christmas), Struckmeyerstr. 6 IV 1. I request that you write me at that address from now on'.<sup>66</sup> Linden was a suburb of Hanover. Werner talked of the move as if it were a mere switching of addresses, and only shared the news of his engagement nine months after the fact. This points to the gravity of the previous quarrel between the brothers, which only ceased with the outbreak of the war. Moreover, Werner did not believe it wise to inform his parents about the liaison – another reason for not letting his brother in on the news. Werner had already become engaged in October 1913, but it was only in December of 1914 that Gerhard was to learn the name of his designated sister-in-law – wrapped in a criticism of Gerhard's poetic efforts: 'Your poem is bad, my companion was forced to ingest double-sole-chewing rhinoceros after I surprised her with it. By the way, since you are so interested in her name, it's Emmy Wiechelt'.<sup>67</sup>

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63 Scholem 2012, p. 61.

64 Scholem 2012, p. 64 and, p. 114.

65 Interestingly enough, Betty did not mention the protest letter whatsoever. According to her, the expulsion was justified by the school's headmaster by the fact 'that Gerhard, back in 12th form, was dividing up his school into Jews and Germans. "Us Jews and you Germans" is what he kept saying, and that would not be tolerated', Scholem 1989, p. 531. A remark by Gerhard went along the same lines: 'In my school the Jews in the higher forms were exclusively Zionists, we were very close and made no secret of our views', Gershom Scholem to Martin Buber, 10 July 1916, Scholem 1994, p. 347.

66 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 September 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

67 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 December 1914, NLI Jerusalem.



FIGURE 8 *Emmy Wiechelt, Hannover 1912*

The 'double-sole-chewing rhinoceros' [*doppelsonhlenkauendes Nashorn*] was an allusion to 'double carbonic sodium bicarbonate' [*doppelt kohlensaures Natron*], a popular remedy at the time. Before Werner revealed her name, he

provided a brief sketch of his fiancée's character: 'My sweetheart is a nice, smart girl. Until the war began she was a member of the Hanover youth committee and often spoke at meetings. She later withdrew, embittered by the growing patriotic wave. She is a party member and a member of the Union of Commercial Clerks [*Zentralverband der Handlungsgehilfen*] and thus tends to flirt with anarchism. She is an interesting girl with an impressive talent for writing. That she is beautiful is proven by the fact that she was talked up and harassed six times in a single hour yesterday, including by a colonel, whom she spat at!'<sup>68</sup>

Werner and Emmy had met through political work. She fascinated Werner not only with her appearance but particularly with her commitment to the labour movement, in which women chairing meetings was a rare occurrence. Emmy was a year younger than Werner, and in contrast to him came from a working-class background. Her stepfather August Wiechelt was a foreman at the Continental tyre plant, her mother Emma had worked as a domestic aid.<sup>69</sup> Emmy provides a brief description of her background in a curriculum vitae written many years later, also mentioning her first encounter with Werner:

I attended the Bürgerschule 73/74 Hanover-Wülfel, and following my confirmation on Easter 1911 I attended the Handelsschule Hannoverscher und Lindener Frauenvereine e.v. in Hanover until Easter 1912. I then worked as an office clerk, a stenographer and a secretary. I joined the social democratic Workers' Youth in Hanover (Wülfel chapter, and roughly six months later Linden IV. district chapter, as my parents had moved to Linden) around Easter 1911. I became the leader of the Linden IV. district chapter in 1912 and joined the executive of the Hanover Workers' Youth in 1913. During this time, I tried very seriously to expand my knowledge base through participating in courses, lectures and various studies. Under Robert Dähling's leadership I became the director of the Workers' Youth educational department, where I met my future husband Werner Scholem, who was also a member of the Workers' Youth in Hanover before his *Abitur* and

68 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 14 November 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

69 In the marriage certificate of 'Werner Scholem – Emma Johanna Wiechelt' dated 31 December 1917. The former occupation of Emmy's mother is indicated as 'household aid', and her current status as 'now married worker Wiechelt' – which meant the same as housewife. It is the only time that Werner's fiancée appears with her official first name Emma; apart from this she is consistently referred to as Emmy or Emmi. See 'Heiratsurkunde', *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover, Nr. 1712310.

subsequent university studies in Göttingen. He gave numerous lectures and was also otherwise active in the youth movement.<sup>70</sup>

Emmy's political activity did not provoke any conflict with her parents, nor was she confronted with the threat of losing social status. On the contrary, for her the socialist movement meant educational advance and emancipation. Emmy was able to counter the two-fold discrimination she experienced as both woman and worker. She did this not only as a confession of political belief, for the educational work conducted by the Workers' Youth, which provided both self-confidence and improved employment opportunities, was the veritable engine of the socialist youth movement. Here, Werner had taken on an important role. As a *Gymnasium* student he enjoyed the privileges of the bourgeoisie, but shared his knowledge with adolescent workers instead of aiming upwards. Werner and Emmy were held together by the struggle for socialism; sharing a common utopia, they placed every possible effort into making this utopia a reality in the present.

Despite Werner's efforts to keep his new residence a secret, his parents soon learned the truth. On 14 November 1914 Werner wrote to his brother: 'As you will know, his majesty of Beuthstr. 6 was informed of my new residence by a spy he sent to watch me. He reacted angrily to this circumstance and claimed in a letter that they wanted to "lure me into a trap", which "I, in my stupidity" went along with'.<sup>71</sup> Werner's father was hardly amused to learn that his son had become engaged at the age of only 18; nor was the bride's background reconcilable with Arthur Scholem's designs for Werner's future. Eventually, Werner felt obliged to move out of the Wiechelt home again and find his own residence. He reacted to this twist humorously, commenting in the form of a song that Reinhold often sang with his bachelor friends: 'And seeing as my bride had no money, the old song seemed appropriate: "We don't need a mother-mother-mother-in-law. Shhh ... Shhh"'.<sup>72</sup>

Werner's departure appears to also have been the result of urging by Emmy's parents: 'If the mother-in-law had had some money, then I, "the son of a good

70 Emmy Scholem, 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgang, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Niedersachsen, NDs. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351. Werner completed his *Abitur* in Berlin, however, not Hanover.

71 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 14 November 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

72 Ibid. Reinhold and his friends performed the song at Arthur's 50th birthday in 1913, an event Gerhard remembered even decades later, not least because he had been forced to play the part of a sausage salesman in a play during his birthday party. See Gershon to Reinhold Scholem, 24 May 1976, Scholem 2002, pp. 462–3.

family”, as his majesty officially called me, could have continued living there. But otherwise, get out of that house! I, the son of a good family [...], thus officially departed.’<sup>73</sup> In contrast to the demanding *Abitur* exams or the feared military conscription, this conflict did not bother Werner whatsoever. Indeed, he took pleasure in acting up around his father: ‘As it is, should the old man really think he can prevent me from committing further “foolishness” with this sort of tomfoolery, I can demonstrate to him with any pedagogical schoolbook that he is standing on unstable ground. I am far from the stuck-up fool he thinks me to be, as you, dear Comrade, already know.’<sup>74</sup>

Werner had demanded from his brother that he attend to an important task in an urgent message sent three days earlier: ‘Dear Gerhard, inform yourself immediately as to the whereabouts of bank director Emil Voigt in Berlin or its surroundings. Whether or not he is still a bank director I do not know, but he most certainly lived at Spandauer Berg 8, Westend, years ago. Maybe he still lives there. The matter is terribly important and urgent. Comb the address book immediately, I expect a response on Tuesday.’<sup>75</sup> Only some days later did Werner reveal the reason behind this request. He wrote of Emmy: ‘She is the illegitimate child of an Emil Voigt, whom you absolutely must find, that is, his address’. The matter was extremely important to Werner: ‘Move Heaven and Earth: if there is no other way just go to Spandauer Berg 8, Westend, where he lived in 1906 and follow his trail. Do not, however, reveal your name. [...] He is surely still alive, as he still sends money to the mother every month. He must also still live in Berlin. I would think very highly of it should you track him down, as major opportunities shall then emerge!’<sup>76</sup>

Emmy’s mother had become pregnant with Emmy while working as a domestic aid, and only after their wedding did August Wiechelt adopt the child. Although these sorts of things were by no means a rare occurrence in the Kaiserreich, they remained systematically suppressed and hidden. Conditions for many domestic aids and maids were indeed quite bad, subjected to the Prussian ‘Servants’ Law’, a unique feudal legal construct that was only abolished in the wake of the November Revolution.<sup>77</sup> Working hours were more or less unreg-

73 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 14 November 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

74 See Ibid.

75 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 8 November 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

76 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 14 November 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

77 On conditions for domestic workers in the Kaiserreich see Ritter and Tenfelde 1992 and Kocka 1990. Servant employment contracts were set for one year and did not include the regular right to termination. Kocka therefore notes that servants hardly resembled free wage earners, for there was no exchange of precisely measured wages for hours worked,

ulated, workers lived in the home of their employer and enjoyed hardly any privacy. Domestic staff were only allowed to leave their position with written permission from their employer; without it, they stood little chance of finding future employment. Consequently, domestic workers had little recourse to defend themselves against sexual harassment. Public opinion furthermore often blamed a woman's misbehaviour for the outcome of an affair, regardless of whether it was voluntary or forced. Emma Rock had deferred to the compulsion of this questionable version of morality: Emmy's real father's name was kept secret from her, even though he sent monthly contributions to pay for her upbringing. Emmy's mother would allow no one near the cheque – Werner wrote that she 'anxiously covers the postal address, so that it is entirely obscured'.<sup>78</sup> When asked about the matter, she would 'fly into a rage marked by periodic bouts of sobbing'.<sup>79</sup>

The search for the mysterious Emil Voigt was important to Werner. Did he perhaps hope to make his bride more acceptable to his parents by finding a 'presentable' father-in-law? Or to present his father with a *fait accompli* in some sort of surprise coup? For months, he urged his brother to help locate the wanted person: 'Concerning the matter with Emil Voigt, which is incredibly significant, you have disappointed me. The man must be traceable. [...] My generosity will know no bounds should you find the man's address. Please try everything; possible and impossible'.<sup>80</sup> However, by January 1915 Gerhard's search had yet to yield results. No Emil Voigt appeared to exist in Berlin, and the mystery of Emmy's origins remained unsolved. Her mother Emma maintained her silence for almost 20 years before telling her daughter the 'saga of her birth', as Werner ironically commented on the late revelation, in late 1933.<sup>81</sup>

The mysterious father was not a bank manager, but rather the son of a Protestant pastor. In spite of his Christian upbringing, however, the young Emil Voigt was unwilling to marry Emmy's mother. His father, pastor Wilhelm Voigt, supported the decision. Though he did act as Emmy's godfather, he rejected the idea of marriage: a maid servant was certainly not befitting his son's social position.<sup>82</sup> Emma Rock was in a terrible situation, worsened by her family's reac-

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while the absence of the right to termination meant that market relations did not exist. See Kocha 1990, p. 111.

78 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 December 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

79 Ibid.

80 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 January 1915, NLI Jerusalem.

81 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 30 December 1933, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

82 I would like to thank Siegrid Dominik from the town of Neubrandenburg for her insight into the family history of the Rock family which she so meticulously studied.

tion. Her father, Heinrich Rock, was a freethinker with a longstanding grudge against the church. When his daughter became pregnant by, of all people, a pastor's son who subsequently left her in 1896, he saw all his prejudices confirmed and went through town pillorying the clergymen's hypocrisy to anyone willing to listen<sup>83</sup> – a trauma that would haunt Emmy's mother for decades. She herself kept deathly silent and, as Werner sardonically remarked, would have 'bit off her tongue before speaking about it'.<sup>84</sup> Only after Emmy spent seven months in prison in 1933 and subsequently, sickly and tired, sought recovery in Linden, did her mother break her silence and tell about her own dramatic life.

Both Werner and Gerhard, however, were unaware of all this in 1915. The mysterious father remained unknown and slowly faded from their correspondence, not least because something else was pushing itself violently to the fore: the war. The many fights around this topic had endangered Gerhard's graduation and provoked his expulsion from the family home. For Werner they were now becoming a far more existential threat. Though able to skirt his father's repeated prodding to join the military, he soon faced the prospect of mandatory conscription. He wrote to his father in November 1914: 'My friend Jansen fell at Diksmuide,<sup>85</sup> on the first day, in the line of fire, as did many of my acquaintances. All on the same day, the day the volunteer regiments undertook the infamous charge. The leader of the Hanover Workers' Youth, who was imprisoned for *lèse majesté* and inciting resistance at the outbreak of the war, was awarded the Iron Cross and promoted to corporal'.<sup>86</sup>

The fallen friend 'Jansen' to whom Werner refers was Emil Jansen, whom Werner knew from the Workers' Youth. A group photo from the summer of 1913 shows the two together on a hiking trip. They stand next to one another, Werner placing his arm around his friend and comrade's shoulders. A year later Emil would be dead.

The 'infamous charge' refers to a German offensive conducted during the First Battle of Ypres in Flanders, Belgium on 10 November 1914. In the course of the battle, German volunteer regiments captured a strip of land several kilometres wide to the northwest of the town of Langemarck while suffering heavy losses. This manoeuvre cost 2,000 lives, yet the Supreme Army Command

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83 This recollection comes from Werner's daughter Renee Goddard, née Renate Scholem, see *Manche Toten sind nicht tot – Renee Goddard über ihren Vater, den legendären Sozialisten Werner Scholem*, 45-minute TV documentary produced by Alexander Kluge, broadcast on 11 August 2008 in the programme *News & Stories* (Goddard 2008).

84 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 30 December 1933, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

85 Diksmuide, or Dixmuide, is a small city in West Flanders, Belgium.

86 Werner to Betty Scholem, 24 November 1914, NLI Jerusalem, see also Scholem 2007, p. 39.



FIGURE 9 *'Day trip of the functionaries of the Southern Group of the Berlin social democratic Youth to Tegel in spring 1913'. Caption by Werner Scholem himself. Emil Jansen and Werner Scholem stand in the first row, second and third from the left.*

[*Oberste Heeresleitung*, OHL] celebrated it as a victory. A communiqué by the OHL read: 'Westward of Langemarck, young regiments advanced on and captured enemy positions to choruses of "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles". Roughly 2,000 French infantry were captured and six machine guns seized.'<sup>87</sup> The scene was pure fiction, as no other existing source mentions singing of any kind. The whole offensive was in fact more a defeat than a victory. The strip of land was of no military significance and the German offensive ended only a few days after the 'infamous charge'. It was followed by gruelling trench warfare lasting four years, in which the actual front hardly ever moved. Yet these realities were of little significance at the time: the legend was trumpeted by the press as

87 Quoted in Hüppauf 1993, p.45. 'Germany, Germany above all else, Above everything else in the world' is the chorus to the 'Deutschlandlied', German national anthem since 1922.



a symbol of German bravery, and the Langemarck myth would remain a common point of reference for patriots, war nostalgists and right-wing ideologues of all shades well into the Weimar and even Nazi eras.

Werner, however, would not allow himself to be deluded by such triumphant boasting, knowing that his friend had died on another section of the front that same day. He was in shock following Jansen's death: 'I will soon be drafted and shot dead', he wrote to his brother.<sup>88</sup> The army physicals for the cohort of 1895 were approaching soon, and schooling was to be shortened through a special emergency *Abitur*. Werner pictured himself lying in his own grave and composed a fictional obituary for Gerhard: 'Our dear son, Werner Scholem, private (musketeer, cannoneer) in regiment x, died a heroic death for the Fatherland on the Western Front, on this date. In sadness and pride, Arthur Scholem and wife Betty, née Hirsch'.<sup>89</sup>

Werner concluded this vision of his death with the words 'And so it will come to pass, count on it'. He then went on to ponder gloomily, yet in his own way somehow hopefully: 'The war, however, will cost over 20 billion: an unbelievable sum. The state will then have no money, and I hope for a revolution that makes 1789 look like child's play, just as the wars of that time look like child's play when compared to today's. Should that occur we will become very intimidating characters indeed, should I still be alive'.<sup>90</sup> In a postscript at the bottom of the letter, his voice shifts from the deepest fatalism to a euphoric offensive: 'I've just received the news that Liebknecht has rejected the means of war. Honour to he who has earned it! We rise up to greet this man who has more courage than 1,000 of those who allow themselves to be blindly slaughtered while crying out "Deutschland, Deutschland". Provide me with Liebknecht's address immediately, on a postcard. I will prove to him that there are still people out there who refuse to speak ill of him. You should write him as well, that he has impressed you! He is true to his name, as the son of a great father'.<sup>91</sup> This 'great father' was Wilhelm Liebknecht, a founding figure of Social Democracy. His son Karl was a determined anti-militarist and supporter of the young workers' movement, who had become the first and only Reichstag deputy to vote against a fresh instalment of war credits on 2 December 1914. While he had voted for the credits in August out of party discipline, he now expressed defiance. Werner, though still living in Hanover, learned of the news that same day and was positively euphoric. It did not take him long to choose sides between Liebknecht and Langemarck.

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88 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 December 1914, NLI Jerusalem.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

Unfortunately, Liebknecht's lonely 'no' in the Reichstag was not enough to end the war. Werner therefore made other plans to save his life. Through a minor 'fiddle', he tried to at least avoid infantry service: 'You probably know that, in order to evade the conscription of the cohort of 1895 which is to begin in the coming days, I tried to find a spot in a less dangerous branch of the armed forces, since they will otherwise send me off mercilessly to the infantry. But alas, it was all for naught, as I have not been accepted anywhere and thus will have to take the regular exam in February whether I like it or not – assuming I am not conscripted before then. I tried in vain to fiddle with things in order to get around it, but failed'.<sup>92</sup> The 'regular exam' was the dreaded infantry conscription, which Werner, despite his opposition to the war, now wanted to forestall by volunteering for service, as volunteers were allowed to choose which branch they would serve in. The horrors of war, of which Werner's teacher Herr Schmidt had unsuccessfully tried to warn his students, had grown to unimaginable dimensions by 1914. The development of artillery had progressed at an unforeseen pace since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1, and the invention of the machine gun brought the art of killing to an industrial level. Historian Peter März describes the situation at the Western Front in the autumn of 1914 as follows:

The end of 'mobile warfare in the west' marked the attempt by both sides in late October/early November to outflank and encircle one another north of the frontline. [...] The German side initially employed the incipient six reserve corps which had been formed by war volunteers beginning in August 1914. Among these new, insufficiently trained (roughly eight weeks) and equipped units were noticeably many *Gymnasium* and university students. They were the victims of those compact, head-on charges through the British machine gun fire which left thousands dead within minutes. [...] Alongside the machine guns, the professional use of the British Lee Enfield Repeating Rifle, which at the time was the most powerful rifle any army possessed, when used with a high firing rate and from a well-hidden position led to the terrible losses among the German volunteer regiments attacking on the open field. Even members of the general staff spoke, at a later point – and quite critically of their own leadership – of 'child murder'.<sup>93</sup>

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92 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 January 1915, NLI Jerusalem.

93 März 2004, pp. 66–7.

Here it becomes clear why Werner feared joining the infantry under any circumstances, even going so far as to contemplate the embarrassment of volunteering. His friend Jansen, like so many others, was already dead; carelessly sacrificed in questionable military operations. Werner's fiddling failed to produce any result, however. His life continued, albeit under reserve. He passed his exam and was awarded his *Abitur* around Easter 1915. The once Earth-shaking issue was not even mentioned in his letters anymore.<sup>94</sup> Werner had also been accepted to university in Göttingen, his elective subjects being history and law.<sup>95</sup> Evidently, he was not too content with the climate in Göttingen, writing Gerhard: 'The corps student is in charge here and the free student is as dull as anywhere.'<sup>96</sup> 'Corps students' were members of fencing fraternities and other (mostly right-wing) student associations, a milieu from which Werner kept his distance, although Jewish corps existed alongside the nationalistic, anti-Semitic fraternities. These were essentially drinking clubs with militaristic fencing rituals, men's associations for the self-reassurance of bourgeois sons. Werner, in contrast, considered himself a 'free student', meaning that he pursued knowledge, not status. Regardless, his student days would not last long. School and education, issues that had previously dominated his fears and ambitions, shrank into insignificance in the face of the war's existential threat. His childhood was over, perhaps fallen alongside Jansen at Diksmuiden. Werner Scholem was assigned to an infantry regiment in Quedlinburg on 11 June 1915.<sup>97</sup>

94 'After attending the Luisenstädtische and the Dorotheenstädtische Realgymnasium in Berlin, and following private studies, I passed the school leaving examination as an external examinee at the Dorotheenstädtische Realgymnasium around Easter 1915', he soberly declared years later. See 'Richterliche Befragung am 13. Oktober 1921', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Bd 1.

95 On the subjects studied see Weber and Herbst 2003, p. 820. Though Halle is mentioned as place of study, Werner was not enrolled there until 1916–17, when he was assigned to a 'convalescence company' following an injury. See Scholem 2012, p. 96.

96 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem. In the original German Werner writes of the *Korpsstudent*, a member of a right-wing student association, and his liberal-minded opponent, the *Freistudent*.

97 See *Bescheid des Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales – Versorgungsamt, Krankenbuchlager Berlin – zu Werner Scholem*, Berlin 23 February 2010; see also Michael Buckmiller and Nafe 2000.

### A Red in Field Grey: Werner Scholem on the Eastern Front

Only fragments of Werner's experiences from the first few months of the war are known. His correspondence, preserved in the archives of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is interrupted in early 1915 and resumes only after an 18-month gap in the form of a letter to Gerhard dated 19 June 1916. At this point Werner had already been a soldier for an entire year, forced to fight and kill for a country he loathed, in a war he had opposed from the outset. He meticulously documented his wartime experiences in a journal spanning at least three notebooks – none of which, unfortunately, would survive the war. An initial version of the journal was lost during a delousing treatment in Kovno, Lithuania. In a remarkably diligent effort, Werner recorded his experiences for a second time while staying in a field hospital, only to see them confiscated by a military court in 1917. There has been no trace of them ever since. A third journal from 1918, dealing with the last months of the war, also disappeared.<sup>98</sup> It may not have survived the war, or perhaps was destroyed when Werner's apartment was liquidated after his imprisonment in 1933. The Sisyphean challenge the journal entailed for Werner was time-consuming and carried with it a certain level of risk, as both courts and police took a strong interest in such activities. Nevertheless, he continually returned to his record of events, ignoring the dangers involved, determined to document the horrors of war; if for no one else, then at least for his brother Gerhard, who received an initial version of the journal in 1916 and would become its first – and probably last – reader. Werner sent the notebooks to his brother via registered mail as he feared they might be lost on the way. He did not, however, write for his brother alone, but rather for himself as well. Werner wrote to retain his humanity in a world in which coincidence was all that separated the living from the dead, in which death was omnipresent and humans were reduced to raw material for the war machine.

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98 Numerous letters to Gerhard refer to differing versions. These include, for instance, the letters from 13 July, 2 August and 22 August 1916, in which a journal is mentioned, written in a military hospital and consisting of three notebooks, which Werner sent his brother via mail. It cannot be found in the estate, however, as it was returned to Werner upon his request (letter from 13 July 1916). These three notebooks are probably identical to the version confiscated by the military court in Hanover; see the letter from 3 June 1917. Werner mentions a first version that was lost during his delousing procedure in a letter dating 7 July 1916. A letter from 23 October 1918 mentions a third journal which dealt with the final months of the war. Therefore, at least three versions of the journal must have existed: two on his war experiences and hospital stay in mid-1916, and another one on war-related events in 1918.



FIGURE 10 *Werner Scholem in uniform, 1915*



FIGURE 11 *Reinhold Scholem in uniform, 1913*

Soldiers served as mere objects of military strategy, trapped in utter uncertainty and material dependence, devoid of perspective; creatures forced to live for the moment, whose field grey uniforms gradually melted into the jagged, wounded landscape as time wore on. This symbiosis found its horrific culmination in the grey faces of the countless unburied, decomposing corpses scattered across the craters and trenches of no man's land. Writing a journal was Werner's way of resisting this continuum of death, a profession of his belief in a humane way of life to which he stubbornly clung in spite of his own peculiar pessimism.

Tragically, nothing can bring Werner's lost written records back to us. That said, quite a bit about his time in the military can be reconstructed from the letters he wrote from 1916 on. These letters also contain gripping first-hand descriptions of daily life in the barracks, field hospitals, bivouacs, and the front line itself.

A picture of Werner Scholem in 1915 shows him newly outfitted in an infantryman's uniform, very much resembling the photograph of his brother Reinhold during his military service in Treptow in 1913. Their postures are similar, and upon closer inspection Werner appears to be smiling, albeit ever so slightly.

He does not wear the officer's uniform and sword like the one-year volunteer Reinhold, but instead the plain tunic of an infantryman. His characteristic features and protruding ears almost disappear behind his large visored cap. Jughandle ears were a characteristic feature of the Scholems; according to Gerhard, the boys suffered far more from jokes about their ears in their school days than from all 'anti-Semitic harassment'<sup>99</sup> combined. With Werner's history in mind, we can deduce that the smile in the photograph is forced, a gallows smile through gritted teeth. Indeed, the photograph as a whole is a mere pose, a role Werner played, albeit one vastly different from the costume plays he enjoyed at weddings and in the portrait studio as a child.

Reinhold Scholem was also drafted as a reservist, his service commenced on 4 August 1914 and he served as a 'Deputy Sergeant in the Reserve Telecommunications Department 187'. In September 1917 he was stationed in West Prussian Hammerstein, after being declared only fit for service on the home front due to chronic gastric and intestinal flu. In 1918, the last year of the war, he served as a reserve lieutenant in several telegraph units.<sup>100</sup> Erich Scholem, by contrast, attempted to complete his service with the mounted troops of the Bavarian Field Artillery Regiment in Fürth, which the war however prevented. Instead, he joined a 'Technical Airmen Radio Operations Outfitters Department'.<sup>101</sup> Thus both brothers served in signal detachments. As an outfitter of German war planes, Erich was not stationed particularly close to the front, while Reinhold was exempted from front duty by 1917 at the very latest.<sup>102</sup> The two older brothers had managed to acquire the kind of positions Werner had

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99 According to Gerhard, the Scholems had all had such protruding ears for generations. Arthur Scholem in fact practised long enough so as to be able to wiggle his ears – 'a work of art that pleased the people', see Scholem 2012, p. 63 and Scholem 1997, p. 68.

100 On Reinhold's time in the military see Reinhold to Gershom Scholem, 29 February 1972, NLI Jerusalem, as well as 'Bescheid zu Reinhold Scholem vom 22. Juni 2010', *Versorgungssamt – Krankenbuchlager*, Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales Berlin.

101 Reinhold to Gershom Scholem, 10 February 1978, NLI Jerusalem.

102 Whether or not he was previously involved in direct combat we do not know. The 'Telegraph Troops' were considered safer than the infantry. Werner's futile 'fiddles' were aimed at achieving an assignment to these kinds of areas. However, some of the field signal units were ordered to direct front line duty, and repairing telephone lines in the trenches was considered particularly dangerous – as described, for instance, by Ernst Jünger (2004, pp. 134–5). Reinhold Scholem was awarded the Iron Cross in 1916 (see Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem), but the Iron Cross was awarded not only for distinguished performance in combat, but also for outstanding logistical work and other achievements. The numerous hints at his duty in reserve units suggest that Reinhold Scholem served mostly on base.

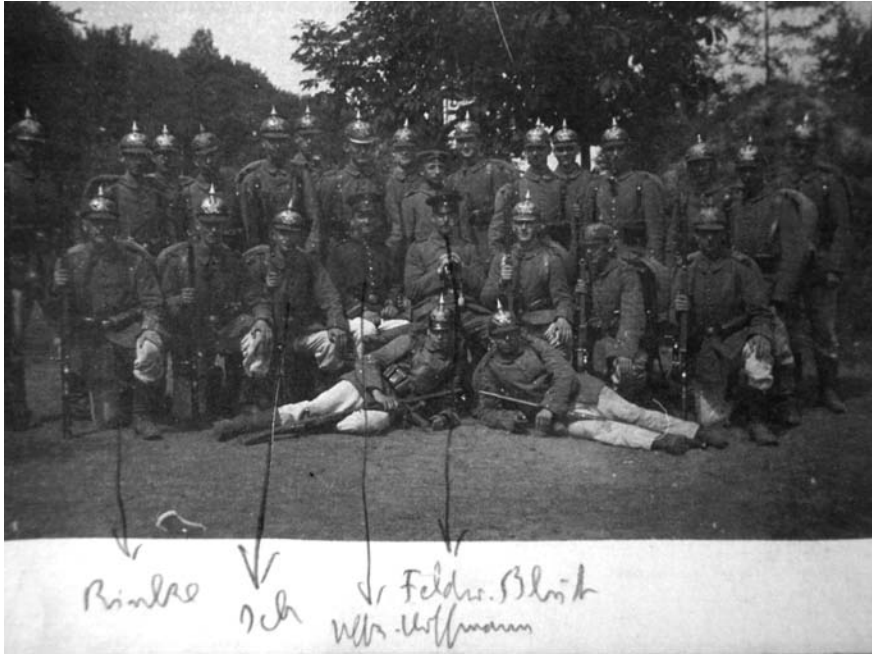


FIGURE 12 *'Rinke, I, Corp. Hoffmann, Lt. Blut,'* around 1915; caption by Werner Scholem

desperately yet unsuccessfully sought: technical tasks on base, at a safe distance from the muzzles of the British soldiers' Lee Enfield repeating rifles.

Following their investiture, Werner's infantry unit underwent basic training. A second photograph dating from this period depicts Werner standing among a group of soldiers in the classic Prussian spiked helmet. The picture demonstrates the extent to which forms of war were still influenced by ideas from the nineteenth century during the first months. While German soldiers marched into battle wearing their typical helmets (utterly useless in protecting against rifle bullets and shrapnel), the French were equipped with red uniform trousers, deeply contrary to any notion of camouflage.<sup>103</sup> Equipment was only gradually upgraded on both sides, such as the introduction of camouflage and steel helmets. Plumes, braids and spiked helmets, colours and militaristic folklore vanished from the battlefields and became confined to military parades, which themselves grew increasingly rare over the course of the war. The war's industrial nature gave birth to a new aesthetic, its colours were green grey

103 See an historical colour photograph of French soldiers during the Battle of the Marne in 1914 in März 2004, p. 57.

and grey green, reflected off ubiquitous naked steel. The new war machinery's power was best displayed in its raw form, without decorative frills. The artillery in particular set new standards in this regard, as drumfire and machine guns evoked an eerie void on the battlefield. The war appeared as a desolate *Storm of Steel*, the title Werner's school friend Ernst Jünger would later select for the publication of his war diaries in 1920. Yet the new technology was useless at close range: infantrymen were often forced to resort to their bayonets in trench warfare; quite frequently, the folding shovel served as a murder weapon. Archaic killing methods became daily routine in strange asynchronicity with the futuristic modernity of the airships, aeroplanes and submarines that expanded the war to all three dimensions of space.<sup>104</sup> The German artillery's 'Paris Gun', debuted in 1918 and possessing a firing range of over 100 kilometres, was capable of launching projectiles at an altitude of over 40 kilometres, passing through the stratosphere and thereby anticipating space travel. It signified a futurism of killing, yet was at the same time an instrument of sheer terror, as firing from such great distances made differentiating between military and non-military targets impossible. Salvoes were fired blindly into Paris to instil fear and terror in the hearts of the civilian population.<sup>105</sup> Although these and other technical innovations such as aerial combat and submarine warfare failed to yield the same military successes as armoured track vehicles, machine guns and improved artillery, propaganda images of heavy cannons, streamlined airships and submarines dominated the face of a war that had by now abandoned all decorative pretence. The twentieth century had begun, finding its aesthetic expression in the industrialisation of killing.

These developments were still in their infancy when Werner Scholem was outfitted with a spiked helmet in 1915. As an infantryman, Werner experienced the battles not from the bird's eye view of propaganda images, but rather from its most brutal and physical, archaic and pre-modern side. His first front line deployment after basic training took him to Serbia,<sup>106</sup> where the war had begun. Following the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 July 1914, an international chain reaction known as the 'July Crisis' was initiated, culminating in an armed confrontation between millions of soldiers on countless battlefields across Europe and

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104 On war techniques and strategies see März 2004, pp. 120–2, pp. 126–7.

105 On the Paris Gun see März 2004, p. 217.

106 Werner Scholem's deployment in Serbia is mentioned in Gershom's memoirs (Scholem 2012, p. 83) as well as in Werner's letters to Gerhard from 13 October 1916, 22 August 1917 and 23 October 1918.



the Middle East.<sup>107</sup> Although matters remained outwardly calm immediately following the assassination, a weeks-long process of planning and calculating was set in motion. Tensions between the great powers had been mounting for years, as Germany's ascent into their exclusive circle in 1871 severely disturbed what had once been a relatively stable equilibrium. National chauvinism dominated domestic German politics and pushed, together with an industrial sector eager to expand into foreign markets, for an aggressive foreign policy.<sup>108</sup> Meanwhile, Germany's accelerated build-up of a naval force in the North Sea had led to diplomatic isolation, and the German and Austro-Hungarian states now feared encirclement by a French-Russian-English alliance. Nevertheless, the German Reich continued to push for expansion, demanding colonies and its 'place in the sun'.<sup>109</sup> While diplomats reeled from one crisis to the next, the arms race accelerated as war game simulations of attacks and counter-attacks increasingly served as the backdrop to major political decisions. Before taking any steps against Serbia in retaliation for the Sarajevo assassination, the Austro-Hungarian Empire requested support from Berlin. Austria feared provoking Russian intervention, but the German Reich delivered a *carte blanche* for war all the same.<sup>110</sup> Subsequently, Vienna issued an ultimatum on 23 July stipulating conditions unacceptable to the Serbian side. The two great powers waited for a state visit by French president Poincaré to the Russian Empire to conclude, so as to prevent the Allies from coordinating a common response.

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107 The Bosnian city of Sarajevo had belonged to the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian state since 1908, though a significant Serbian minority existed as well. Nationalists inside and outside of what at the time was still the independent Kingdom of Serbia dreamed of a unified Greater Serbia comprising the entire Southern-Slavic Balkan region. Apart from this vision, the idea of a southern Slav, or Yugoslav, federation of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians was also popular and supported by the group of assassins, according to David Stevenson. Both variants, however, sought an end to the Habsburg monarchy. See Stevenson 2004, pp. 11–15.

108 See Fischer 1967, pp. 3–49.

109 At the end of the nineteenth century the German Reich was able to occupy several areas in Africa which were then declared 'protectorates'. They roughly encompassed today's countries of Togo, Namibia, Cameroon and Tanzania. The occupation paid little attention to the desires of the indigenous population, yet all the more so to those of the European powers: borders were agreed upon in the context of the Berlin West-Africa Conference of 1884–5, so as to reduce the risk of war between them. See Conrad 2012.

110 The myth of an involuntary German entry into the war was influential in German historiography for a long time. Fritz Fischer's evidence of German intent to go to war triggered a debate among historians in the 1960s, while Christopher Clark has conducted a more recent revision. See Fischer 1969, as well as Fischer 1967; Clark 2013.

During the French delegation's return voyage from Stockholm to Dunkirk, their radio communications were jammed by the German military. No interest in a diplomatic solution existed. The Reich wanted war, and would get it.<sup>111</sup>

When Serbia refused to capitulate to Vienna's ultimatum, Austria declared war on Serbia on 28 July. Russia now began mobilising its armed forces, which in turn prompted Germany to declare war on Russia on 1 August 1914. Two days later Berlin also declared war on France. The first act of war would be the German occupation of Luxembourg on 2 August 1914 and subsequent march through neutral Belgium towards the French border. This, in turn, brought England into the war against Germany.

Thus, the obligations and internal logics of military alliances coupled with the dispositions of nervous military apparatuses effectively set World War I in motion before the Austrian campaign against Serbia had even begun. In just a few days the war had shifted north, with Belgium and later the French Western Front constituting one epicentre of battle, and the Eastern Front in Russia the other. The Balkans were soon relegated to secondary importance, for the events there had not truly been the reason for the war but merely the pretext to launch a much larger conflict over the division of the world. The unimaginable slaughter that was about to commence was accepted with a rather bizarre fatalism – many politicians were not concerned about being drawn into a war as such, so much as about losing valuable time due to a delayed mobilisation.<sup>112</sup>

While the Eastern and Western Fronts of Central Europe were initially sites of rapid mobile warfare, very little actual combat took place in Serbia. The frontlines were largely unchanged when Werner Scholem arrived there with his infantry unit in the second half of 1915. The concentrated might of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had failed to bring the small Balkan kingdom to its knees.<sup>113</sup> The situation became even more complicated when Italy entered the war on 23 May 1915. In light of a weakened Austria, the Italians hoped for territorial gains along the Adriatic coast. The military situation for the Danube Monarchy was quite grave indeed by that point, and reinforcement by German troops was intended to bring about a quick and decisive victory. Werner Scholem involuntarily became a part of this victory, a small piece of the anonymous human mass being ground up by competing European heads of state.

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111 See März 2004, pp. 47–8. David Stevenson also confirms that Germany was fully aware of the risk of a continental war. See Stevenson 2004, p. 27, p. 42.

112 See Stevenson 2004, p. 32.

113 See Stone 1975, pp. 72–4.

Due to the destruction of his war diaries we know very little concerning Scholem's wartime experiences in Serbia. He does mention the deployment to Gerhard when hinting at a 'marauding retreat from Serbia'.<sup>114</sup> Apart from that, there is a letter from 1918 in which Werner compares the French campaign to that in Serbia: 'My life here is unchanged, though this time of increased retreat also means increased physical exertion, as we are constantly on the move, without proper quarters, often sleeping in the bivouac. I had to deal with similar circumstances during my first deployment, particularly in Serbia. But what a difference compared to now!'<sup>115</sup> Scholem makes reference to Serbia for a third time in a report from 1917 while describing a court martial held against him: '[T]hey probably won't have heard anything as horrific as what I told them about Serbia all too often', Werner wrote regarding the court's reaction to his depictions of the daily routine of war.<sup>116</sup>

Bivouac, fixed quarters, physical exertion: life as an infantryman was loathed not only because of the high risk of death; indeed, war was hardly less exhausting or dirty outside of immediate combat. Even away from the front, life was characterised by long marches, permanent mobility and thus improvised quarters; on the whole a restless, nomadic lifestyle. Werner experienced this as part of an ongoing forward attack, caught in the German-Austrian offensive which had in fact been rather successful. It began on 6 October and captured Belgrade only three days later. Despite putting up a tenacious defence, Serbia was defeated and its army worn down by heavy losses. No other army suffered as many casualties as the Serbian army relative to its size.<sup>117</sup> To the Central Powers, this spectacle of mass death represented a huge success, as it allowed them to finally establish a complete land corridor all the way to the Ottoman Empire, their major ally on the Balkan peninsula. The Turkish army could now be supplied with arms from Germany shipped by train in order to fight off the British in Palestine.

But all this was mere strategy, war games plotted on a map, so to speak. From the sparse hints in Werner's letters up to 1916 we learn nothing about the war in the streets and fields, about the actual attacks, about the act of killing as a soldier's profession. What these clues do capture, however, is that the atrocities of war did not pass Werner by unnoticed, as indicated by his talk of a

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114 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 October 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

115 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 October 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

116 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

117 März 2004, p. 105, p. 229. During the 1915 retreat alone roughly 140,000 soldiers are said to have died. See also the entry 'Serbia, Role in the War' in Tucker 1999 as well as 'Serbien' in Hirschfeld et al. 2003.

‘marauding retreat’ and reports from the front that could startle even a military court. Werner countered the war propaganda with his testimony, perhaps even alluding to war crimes he had witnessed. This possibility cannot, however, be confirmed.

The brothers’ correspondence resumes no sooner than 19 June 1916. A year after his conscription, Werner sends an emphatic letter, albeit not from the front but rather from the family home in Berlin, while sitting at Gerhard’s own desk: *‘Mensch! Let us delete the time from 15 September 1915 to 24 March 1916 from my life, undignified as it was. Let us forget this stormy existence, except when I – tace! – went to see dear Emmy in Hanover for a vacation, and once again fly the flag that was torn down on 11 July ’15. Above all, thank my leg! And thank moreover the Russian gunner at Lake Naroch who fired the 15 cm storey that allowed me to sit here at your desk and be alone.’*<sup>118</sup>

Werner was back in Berlin, alone once again and finally away from the war. The fact that Werner expressed gratitude for his wounded leg merely serves to underline the extent of his horror at the daily routine he had just escaped. The injury was no small matter, either. Still not healed three months after the fact, two x-rays were taken and Werner was due to be operated on a week later. He described his general condition as follows: ‘I hobble along wretchedly with my cane, and the people around me look on at the hero in field grey with a mix of wonder and pity.’<sup>119</sup> But Werner did not see himself as a hero. To him, his time at the front from mid-September 1915 on had been ‘undignified’. With the exception of his visit to Hanover, he wished to erase the entire year from his life, that is, from his conscription up to 11 June 1916, when he was moved to the reservists’ military hospital in the municipal gymnasium in Berlin’s Prinzenstraße, following stopovers in Kovno and Graudenz.

Details of Werner’s hospital stays can be ascertained from the archives of the *Krankenbuchlager Berlin*, where patient records from World War I are stored to this day.<sup>120</sup> Thus far all biographical outlines have indicated that Werner’s injury occurred during the Serbian campaign in the summer of 1916, based on information provided by his brother Gerhard.<sup>121</sup> However, Serbia had long capitulated to the Central Powers by that time, making this version of events impossible. Werner’s Berlin records date his injury earlier, and note a different location of origin: Werner Scholem was wounded on 21 March 1916 by a piece

118 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

119 Ibid.

120 ‘Bescheid zu Werner Scholem, 23 February 2010’, *Versorgungsamt – Krankenbuchlager*, Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales Berlin.

121 Scholem 2012, p. 83.

of shrapnel in his left heel during his tour 'as Musketeer of the 10th Company of the Reserve Infantry Regiment 227/107'. The geographical location is noted quite vaguely as 'near Yurevo', a small village in what is today Belarus.<sup>122</sup> Two days later, Werner was transferred to war hospital 131B in Kovno, then moved to a fortified barracks in Graudenz on 1 April 1916, from where he eventually returned to Berlin. Kovno is today known as the Lithuanian Kaunas, while the formerly West Prussian Graudenz is now called Grudziądz and is located in northern Poland. Consequently, Werner Scholem was not injured in Serbia, but on the Eastern Front.<sup>123</sup> He himself identified Lake Naroch in modern Belarus<sup>124</sup> as the location where his injury occurred.<sup>125</sup>

Lake Naroch is where Werner's unit had been dispatched in March 1916 after Serbia's surrender, a heavily fortified front running between German and Russian troops. The Eastern Front extended in a fairly straight line from the Baltic region near Riga through Romania to the Black Sea in the spring of 1916. The front passed almost entirely through territory belonging to the Russian Empire, although this was not the result of German military success as such. On the contrary, the year 1916 was a year of truth, in which it became clear how naïve the German high command's original assumptions had been. On the Western Front, German soldiers had failed to take Belgium by storm. Instead they encountered fierce resistance and committed numerous excesses and war crimes against the civilian population, petrified by the threat of Belgian snipers and saboteurs who only existed in the fantasies of German propagandists. In France, the Germans quickly lost the element of surprise as well. The Battle of

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122 German: 'Jurewo'; see 'Bescheid zu Werner Scholem, 23 February 2010', *Versorgungsamt – Krankenbuchlager*, Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales Berlin. See also the footnote below.

123 This is confirmed by a statement Emmy Scholem made in the year 1954. In an application for compensation for her persecution under Nazi rule, she wrote that Werner 'was drafted for military service during World War I (spring 1915 to December 1918), was injured at the Eastern Front and following his recovery was deployed to the Western Front', 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs (Werner Scholem), 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Niedersachsen, NDs. 110 w Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

124 The village of Yurevo cannot be found on modern maps, but Bräuer 1981 suggests it was a 'village near the river Olza in the Vilna Governorate, also known by the name of Yarzevo or Yarzev' (Vol. x, pp. 448 and 547).

125 In a letter from Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem, it is called 'Naratschsee', while in Werner's testimony on 8 July 1933 he refers to it as the 'Narocz-See'. See *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 8. Translator's note: this also corresponds to the variation in English orthography, where it is also spelled as both Naroch and Narach.

the Marne in early September 1914 brought the German offensive to a standstill, making the much feared war on two fronts a reality.

The Western Front hardly ever moved; territorial gains of only a few hundred metres were often paid for with the lives of thousands of soldiers. The war was stuck in a dual system of trenches, dugouts and casemates constructed by each of the warring parties, separated by a strip of grey moonscape pocked with bomb craters, barbed wire and mine fields – a sphere in which not only human life was immediately eradicated, but which even most animals and plants found uninhabitable. This small strip of land, this death zone, stretched across Europe for hundreds of kilometres, from the coast of the North Sea near Antwerp across eastern France to the Swiss border.

Mobile warfare continued somewhat longer on the Eastern Front. Russian troops had been mobilised faster than expected by the German command and were initially able to occupy East Prussia. By the end of 1914, however, the tables had turned: under the command of Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, German troops managed to encircle and rout the Russian Second Army, also known as the Narev Army, in a pincer movement.<sup>126</sup> Hindenburg and Ludendorff were celebrated as the 'Heroes of Tannenberg'. Although the battle had actually occurred south of Allenstein (known as Olsztyn today), Hindenburg insisted that the German press label it the 'Battle of Tannenberg'. By associating the battle with Tannenberg, Hindenburg sought to frame the victory as having 'avenged' a defeat of the German Order at the hands of the Polish-Lithuanian Union in 1410. This manipulation is one of many examples of the peculiar combination of archaic medieval romanticism and modern war propaganda that was used to woo the German people between 1914 and 1918. Ultimately, the 'Battle of Tannenberg' grew to a myth that would outlive the Kaiserreich.

The victory was the first in a series of successful German and Austrian operations. May and June marked a turning point, after which the Central Powers found themselves on the offensive. Warsaw, Brest-Litovsk, Grodno and Vilnius were all occupied in the summer of 1915.<sup>127</sup> In Germany, these victories stoked wild fantasies of annexation – having initially claimed to be conducting a defensive war, the political leadership now demanded conquest. A 'Professorial Petition' to the government in June 1915, supported by 325 university professors, demanded the annexation and Germanisation of Belgium, the purchase of extensive land for German settlements in Russia and the Baltic region, as

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126 See Groß 2006. On the Russian perspective see Khavkin 2006 in the same volume.

127 See Stone 1975, pp. 165–7.

well as the construction of a territorially coherent colonial empire in Africa.<sup>128</sup> These German professors, however, had sold the pelt well before the Russian bear had actually been shot, so to speak, as the Eastern Front grew increasingly immobile around the turn of 1915–16. The offensive was over.<sup>129</sup> Werner Scholem was dispatched eastwards in early 1916 as the Germans were seeking to revive their advance and Russian forces were planning their own counter-offensive. Russian strategists decided to begin their assault at Lake Naroch in Belarus, near which Werner Scholem was stationed as one of the many soldiers of the *Heeresgruppe Hindenburg*, an infantryman in the 10th German Army under the command of Hermann von Eichhorn.

The front ran directly through the middle of the lake, its western shore occupied by German troops who also maintained strong positions on the northern and southern shores. The real target of the offensive, however, was the Lithuanian city of Vilnius. The planners of the assault had chosen to approach the city via the neighbouring lakeland area because that particular section of the frontline was comparatively under-manned. They estimated that a forward assault combined with heavy artillery fire stood a good chance of breaking through.

Artillery would in fact be a key term throughout the First World War. Although centuries old, the deployment of this means of warfare changed dramatically over the course of the war. This resulted not so much from the existence of individual superweapons like the infamous 'Paris Gun' as from the sheer quantity of shelling conducted by both sides. One tactic for countering seemingly insurmountable waves of machine gun fire, developed in 1916, was to respond with continuous battery fire over a matter of days. Non-stop artillery fire served to wear down and demoralise the enemy, while hopefully damaging their fortified dugouts enough to poke holes in the machine gun-lined death zone. The concept was first successfully executed in Verdun in February 1916: the Germans initiated a so-called 'drumfire' by firing 1,200 cannons simultaneously, damaging French positions to a degree that allowed them to capture Fort Douaumont. The fort, however, was retaken by the French in October of that same year; months of fighting and suffering had been for naught. Still, this naught exacted a high price: 600,000 deaths and injuries. Verdun quickly

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128 This text spoke of the Flemish town's liberation from their 'artificial Romanic encirclement' and the 'Germanification' of conquered land for settlement in Poland and Russia, thus foreshadowing the Nazis' plans for eastward expansion. The text can be found printed verbatim in Müller 2011a, pp. 185–7. On the legitimization of German expansionist policy by university lecturers and philosophers from 1914–18 see also Flasch 2000.

129 See Khavkin 2006, p. 82.

became the paragon of the war's senselessness. Germany's adversaries were soon able to adapt to the drumfire and the 'battle of attrition' that cost so many lives and so much material, eventually adopting the tactic as their own. In the Battle of Arras in 1917, the British deployed 2,200 cannons, firing 2.5 million shells in rapid succession.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, the German war machine was running at peak performance and exerted considerable military pressure on its adversaries. The French, stretched to the limit in Verdun, repeatedly urged their Russian allies to undertake an offensive in the east to relieve them and tie the hands of additional German forces. The 'bleeding out' of France, as General Falkenhayn of the German Supreme Army Command put it, was to be prevented at any cost.<sup>131</sup> The Russian charge at Lake Naroch in March 1916 was thus directly linked to the war of attrition at Europe's other end. It aimed to divert German troops from the Western Front and thereby prevent Germany from concentrating its war machine on one location any longer. World War I was decided by productive capacities, logistics, transportation capabilities, technical innovations and the industrial application thereof – ultimately, by the capacity to fire the largest quantity of steel in the shortest amount of time. It was a kinetic war in which the soft human body appeared utterly out of place.

This aspect of the war proved particularly challenging for the Russian Empire. There was certainly enough 'human material' to be found, but Russia's industrial potential remained severely underdeveloped. Military officers blamed their 1915 defeats on the army's persistent lack of grenades, and the attack in the east to relieve their western allies did not commence until one month after Verdun.

That offensive began on 17 March with intense shelling at Lake Naroch.<sup>132</sup> The Russian army adopted tactics from the Western Front, attempting to crush German positions with barrages of drumfire; ground troops only began marching the following day.<sup>133</sup> A German war report from the period reads: 'the Russians are being solidly repelled while suffering extraordinarily high casualties at all points.'<sup>134</sup> The attack was repeated between Lakes Naroch and Vishnyeva the next day, but was beaten back once again. On 20 March the Russians broadened their offensive and attacked south of Riga and along the Western Dvina river, while the assault at Lake Naroch continued day and night. Here,

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130 On Verdun see März 2004, pp. 135–7 and p. 161.

131 See Langer 2009, p. 55.

132 See Stone 1975, pp. 144–64.

133 On the chronology see Jäcky and Hönn 1921, p. xxi; for more detail see Pulitz 1916, pp. 442–3.

134 Pulitz 1916, p. 442.



the destructive power of the war was concentrated in a very small geographic area. Some 350,000 Russian soldiers, a previously unimaginable order of magnitude, deployed along the lake's shore. Opposite them stood a mere 75,000 German defenders. The attacking Russian army used 982 guns and cannons in its drumfire assault,<sup>135</sup> but achieved very little. The attacker's light and heavy artillery were often poorly coordinated, and a lack of reconnaissance made it difficult to identify where exactly German positions were located. Russian fire proved largely ineffective.<sup>136</sup> German troops were forced to retreat a few hundred metres from the southern shore into a hill range, but no breakthrough was achieved. The following entry in the same war report dates from 21 March: 'points of attack are growing in number, and charges occur at different points day and night without interruption'.<sup>137</sup> The offensive retained its breadth, as attacks continued south of Riga, near Pastavy and repeatedly at Lake Naroch. It was on this very 21 March 1916, at the height of the Russian attack, that Werner Scholem was injured by shrapnel in his right heel. Flesh met steel, a central and daily occurrence of war. Werner Scholem was removed from battle – the war continued.

The following days witnessed repeated artillery fire and Russian attempts to break through, all of which were repelled. Meanwhile, Werner was transferred to the interior, placed on a train headed west. Two days after being injured he reached war hospital 131B in Kovno where his wounds received professional attention. After this moment of contact between steel shrapnel and human flesh came the inevitable administrative act of contact between a steel nib and paper: Werner's patient record was compiled. The human body may be fleeting, but steel and paper are very patient indeed. A century later, they provide us with bits of informational shrapnel from which we can reconstruct, to a degree, what happened to Werner Scholem in March 1916.<sup>138</sup>

While Scholem recovered in Kovno, his brothers-in-arms continued to fight at Lake Naroch, living or dying in defence of an imaginary line on the general staff's map. And they succeeded: the Russian breakthrough ultimately faltered, despite overwhelming numeric superiority. One hundred thousand Russians were dead, 20,000 Germans lost their lives. The frontline was left unchanged. Was this a German victory? A Russian defeat?

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135 The figures are taken from Stone 1975, p. 228.

136 Stone 1975, p. 229.

137 Pulitzer 1916, p. 443.

138 'Bescheid zu Werner Scholem, 23. Februar 2010', *Versorgungsamt – Krankenbuchlager*, Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales Berlin.

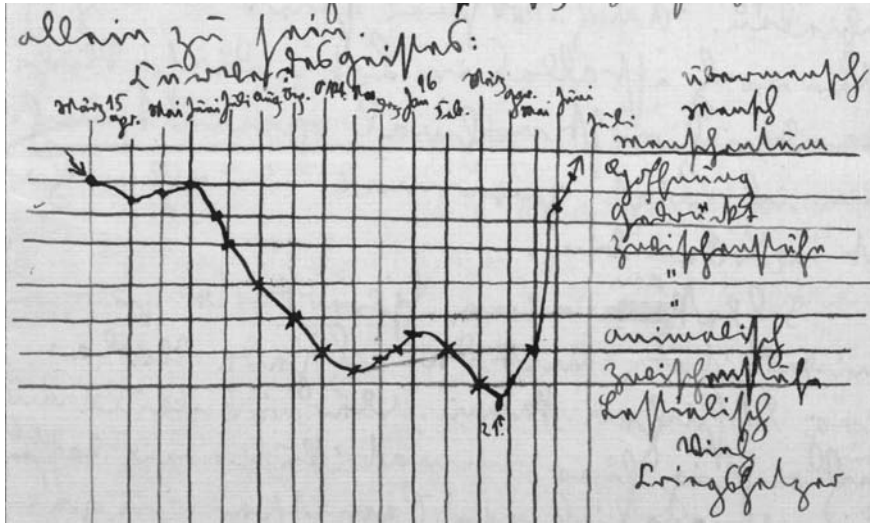


FIGURE 13 'Curves of the spirit' – Werner to Gershom Scholem, 19 June 1916

Werner Scholem had long ceased to ask himself such questions. In his first letter to his brother from this period he addresses him with *'Mensch!'* instead of the usual 'Dear Gerhard'. He also begins his second letter from 23 June with a euphoric and bewildered *'Mensch, Mensch!'* This word for 'human being' appears again and again in their subsequent correspondence, as both an evocation as well as a cry of being alive – of surviving. A challenge to himself to preserve and rediscover human qualities he had risked losing during the war.

Werner was quite thankful to the Russian cannoneer for the bit of shrapnel in his heel, and drew a 'curve of the spirit' for his brother on which he plotted his emotional state on a scale. This scale begins with *'Mensch'* (human being) and *'Übermensch'* at the top, followed by the intermediary steps of *'Hoffnung'* (hope) and *'Gedrückt'* (depressed). The curve extends from March 1915 to June 1916. His conscription coincides with the beginning of a long descent into the lower depths of the scale that Werner describes as *'animalisch'* (animalistic) and *'bestialisch'* (bestial). Below that is only *'Vieh'* (brute) and *'Kriegshetzer'* (warmonger). War as dehumanisation, patriotic warmongering as the bestial dregs of the spirit, the very lowest of all mental states – the graphic curve says more than lengthy descriptions ever could.<sup>139</sup> Unlike his schoolmate Ernst Jünger, who saw the war's Storm of Steel as an opportunity to prove himself

139 The experience of dehumanisation was a collective experience during the war. See Hirschfeld et al. 1993.

a man as hard as the metallic weapons of war themselves, Werner sought fulfilment elsewhere. A piece of steel lodged in his body gave him the chance to escape the madness. On 21 March, the day of his injury, his 'curve of the spirit' makes a steep ascent to the levels of '*Hoffnung*' and '*Menschentum*' (humanity).

The Battle of Lake Naroch marked a turning point in Werner Scholem's life, but also in the war. Although its counterpart, the Battle of Verdun, plays a much more significant role in the collective memory of the war, the battle in the east was part of the same fight, a desperate attempt to end the slaughter in France through an attack on the other end of the continent. Correspondingly, British historian Norman Stone identifies the confrontation at Lake Naroch as one of the decisive battles of World War I. In March 1916 the Russian military command had no choice but to face the fact that, despite possessing four times as many troops and excellent equipment, they had failed to achieve a breakthrough and lost five times as many soldiers as the Germans. Indeed, the Germans did not mobilise any reinforcements whatsoever from the Western Front. The offensive had utterly failed to reduce the pressure on Allied forces in the west. According to Stone, this was due to the inefficiency of the Russian army, in which not capitalist rationality but feudal structures continued to dominate, and an aristocratic background often counted for much more than military ability. The same Russian army had tried to emulate the successful tactics of the German and French forces at Lake Naroch, but failed miserably.<sup>140</sup>

The common Russian soldier, sent into the field following supposedly devastating drumfire only to find German machine gun positions fully intact and nestled in deep dugouts protected by up to 15 rows of barbed wire, quickly lost any remaining faith in the military and political leadership of his country. He had been forced to endure on the frozen ground for hours, under constant shelling and unable to act or even move, perhaps wounded and in need of medical attention, waiting for a breakthrough that never came.<sup>141</sup> It was only a question of months before the majority of Russian soldiers would come to hate the war as much as Werner Scholem already had in 1914. Although Tsarist troops did manage a few breakthroughs along the Austrian front in June 1916, they were far from the kind of turning point needed. On the contrary: heavy losses accelerated the erosion of fighting strength and overall morale in the Russian army. In this sense, we can identify a continuity between the Battle of Lake Naroch and the Russian Revolution.

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140 See Stone 1975, pp. 227–31.

141 The example refers to the experience of a Russian infantryman on the Austrian front, see Stone 1975, p. 224.

But the year 1916 was not progressing well for Germany, the supposed victor of the confrontation, either. How many more battles resulting in the loss of 20,000 lives could they afford to ‘win’? War fatigue was spreading, reinforced by the dramatic deterioration of food supplies in the major cities. In the pre-war period, Germany had been largely independent of food imports, but a combination of poor planning, labour shortages and the military usage of horses and draught animals had created a situation by 1916 in which Germany’s agricultural production was insufficient to feed the population.

The Scholems, however, were not affected by this food shortage. While general rationing was the rule, wealthy families purchased additional rations on the black market. A letter from Betty to Gerhard from 1917 gives us an idea: ‘I will send you a parcel of food as soon as I have some. We ordered a goose (even the animals have disappeared!) and when it lands you shall receive half of a breast as your birthday package. I will send a lump of fat as well. Bread is hardly possible anymore, as no crumbs can be given without a stamp.’<sup>142</sup> Along with the roast goose, Gerhard also received some spending money.<sup>143</sup> The situation for the majority of the population was very different, as Betty’s remark about disappearing animals suggests. We learn more from a report in the *Vossische Zeitung* from April 1917:

When at the beginning of the previous year a decree of the Agricultural Ministry declared rooklets to be a suitable food for the population, these small animals were sold in most larger cities at an average price of 1 Mark, sometimes cheaper, depending on the size of the animal. [...] But how it is this year! Old rooks, namely smoky and black rooks, have been sold in a number of Berlin shops over the last few weeks at prices ranging between 2.30 and 2.90 Marks per piece. Such prices are unheard of, especially for animals the taste of which stands in no relation to that of the rooklet and which the farmer once shot and threw onto the manure pile. The authorities must devise a rule against such prices immediately.<sup>144</sup>

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142 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 16 November 1917, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 17 f.

143 Ibid.

144 *Vossische Zeitung*, 8 April 1917, quoted in Dieter and Glatzer 1983.

### Hospital Reflections, 1916

As a patient in a former municipal gymnasium in Prinzenstraße in the summer of 1916, Werner did not rely on dead crows for food, for his aunt Hedwig supplied him with much tastier things to eat.<sup>145</sup> Even Arthur Scholem appeared happy about the lost son's return. As Werner ironically summarised 'The *mischboche* scramble to embrace me! Father is touched: "Hero!" Reinhold was awarded the Cross!<sup>146</sup> Although not quite the Iron Cross, Werner himself was awarded a Purple Heart, which he never bothered to mention in his letters.<sup>147</sup> Both the military distinctions as well as his family's sudden affection left Werner cold. He describes his uncles as 'drones', while referring to his family snidely as '*mischboche*' – a combination of '*boche*' and '*mischpoche*' (Yiddish slang for 'family'). He rejected his father's hero worship with a triple under-scored '*Nebbich!*' – a Yiddish word meaning 'humbug'.<sup>148</sup>

The old arguments had not been forgotten. Werner got on well with his mother, and his aunt Hedwig was more than a supplier of his meals, as both were also fond of one another. Hedwig Scholem, née Levy, was the wife of Arthur's brother Theobald, and like him was a committed Zionist. She therefore had a special connection to Gerhard and Werner.<sup>149</sup> Hedwig, who mostly went by the nickname Hete, frequently brought Werner the latest news as well as books to read.<sup>150</sup> Werner, however, maintained his distance to the rest of the family, his father in particular. His real point of reference in the family was Gerhard, to whom he would resume writing long letters about his life. What he missed was the direct interaction with his brother, who was currently residing in the town of Oberstdorf in the Allgäu region. Nevertheless, Werner was happy to be in his home town, he wanted to 'at least spend the summer in Berlin and hang around the garrison in the autumn'.<sup>151</sup> As it turned out, his hospital stay would extend into August. Werner was determined to make use of the

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145 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

146 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

147 German: *Verwundetenabzeichen*. He mentions the badge in a police interrogation on 8 July 1933, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 8.

148 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem. The word 'nebbich' can also refer to an unimportant person.

149 On this see the written correspondence between Hedwig and Gerhard Scholem in the NLI Jerusalem.

150 See letters from Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

151 Ibid.



FIGURE 14 *Municipal gymnasium in Berlin Prinzenstraße, converted into a hospital during World War I*

time he had. In his first letter to Gerhard he already formulates elaborate and ambitious plans regarding his further education: 'I received a listener's pass for the university, with which I can visit every lecture. But I also want to properly matriculate here in order to perhaps win a semester. Not much is to be gained from the lectures, as they have all long since started. I attend a few historical lectures and "Hygiene of the Male Sex Life". I spent a semester studying "unhygiene" in the field. I hope you have nothing against me using your room as a study and using your library (oh yes!) a bit. Everything will be treated properly. Where else am I supposed to go? Our dear brother Erich's place reeks of semen, pyjamas and intellectual decay!'<sup>152</sup>

Werner's thirst for knowledge was great – his year as a soldier had been a lost year particularly in this regard, and he thus sought to resume his interrupted studies as quickly as possible. Education was a living contrast to the rawness of soldier life. The 'unhygienic' activities in the front's brothels seemed to have aroused Werner's deepest disgust. In a later letter he wrote: 'It is after all the most moral to have one (1) woman. In fact, I did not touch a single woman

152 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

in the field!<sup>153</sup> But Werner was unable to resist all of the crude temptations of a soldier's life. A brief, almost bashful concluding remark at the end of his euphoric letter speaks volumes: 'I have really given up the schnapps.'<sup>154</sup> Like many others, Werner was unable to endure the war in a sober state of mind. Though alcohol could not help him process the horrific experiences, it could at least keep them suppressed. Only in hospital was Werner finally able to give up schnapps, and he was eager to make up for lost time. However, hospital routine also took its toll: 'You're quite mistaken, by the way, if you believe that I have as much time as you do. Listen to this. We wake up at half past six, make the beds, wash, dust, write letters, bandaging, and so forth. Then lunch at 12 o'clock. Back to the hospital by 9 o'clock, and since they don't turn the lights on there, all is lost by 10. In the afternoons I teach my sergeant's son English. So there isn't much [time] left.'<sup>155</sup>

Werner used what little time remained to read and write as much as possible. During the day he had permission to leave and was able to limp over to Neue Grünstraße, as the hospital was only a few blocks from the Scholem family home. To walk the distance with just one functioning leg and crutches, however, proved quite a challenge, albeit one Werner was happy to accept if it meant he could use Gerhard's desk and read his books. He soon stopped attending university, as its rigid schedules prevented him from attending the interesting lectures, half of which he had already missed, as he began attending in the middle of the semester. 'I thus wish to read Plato and study your library', he wrote to Gerhard, and went on to ask: 'Will it be possible to make it through multiple sections of Kierkegaard over the course of a few weeks?'<sup>156</sup>

Werner flung himself into his self-directed studies, cultivating a particular interest in history alongside philosophical inquiries. Back from the war, the two brothers now resumed their debates from 1914. Neither viewed history as a mere academic interest; for them, to study history was to study life itself. Werner wrote:

I was pleased by a line of yours that is very much consubstantial with my own existence, 'the courage to be truthfully dogmatic'. But can truthful dogmatism really mean only seeing through the Jewish lens? Of course I see things, even consciously, through the Jewish lens, but I say, for example, the dogma of historical materialism, which is more firmly

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153 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

154 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

155 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

156 Ibid.

rooted in me than ever before. I want to view history through its eyes. Which brings us to the question of whether I may study history. As it stands I have not read Görres,<sup>157</sup> and you must also remember that I stopped everything on 11 June '15, but it seems to me that history is an erratic development of things, certainly worth observing through the lens of historical materialism.<sup>158</sup>

Though Arthur Scholem continued to view his son's intense curiosity with suspicion, their relationship eased for the time being: 'The boss treats me completely differently at the moment', Werner noted.<sup>159</sup> Some sporadic suggestions to take up studying law instead of history aside, Arthur Scholem restrained himself and in fact made a real effort to connect with his son. Werner's physical condition was not nearly as well as his intellectual flights of fantasy may suggest. On 13 July 1916 he wrote:

I was operated upon on Monday, and my leg is in great pain. I now must certainly spend a long time in bed. Thus I must first inform you that I cannot send you your things personally, as I am unable to leave the house, but I want to tell father that he should. This important personality expresses an interesting concern for me, as he turns up to my bed daily. [...] Moreover, I have seized a bed desk that was lying around here and work the whole day, as long as my leg does not give me too much trouble. I wrote Brauer again today that he should come here, then we intend to discuss everything. I was unable to do anything from Saturday until yesterday, as my wife visited me on Saturday and Sunday, and on Monday and Tuesday my brain reeked of ether. [...] I have the following books here: *The Goal, Main Problems of Philosophy* (Simmel), *Sociology of Religion* (Simmel), *The Legend of the Baal-Shem* (Buber) – although it should be noted that I took this book before you recommended it, Monrads v. Kierkegaard,<sup>160</sup> *Stages on Life's Way* (Kierkegaard), *Kierkegaard as Philosopher* (Höffling), and lastly your dear Weininger, although I have already read him.<sup>161</sup>

157 Joseph Görres (1776–1848), Catholic publicist and historian, erstwhile supporter of the French Revolution.

158 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

159 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

160 Monrad 1909.

161 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 13 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.



An impressive reading list indeed. Werner was especially fascinated by an anthology published in late 1915 entitled 'The Goal. Appeals To an Active Spirit' [*Das Ziel. Aufrufe zu tätigem Geist*], a collection of essays by prominent authors including Heinrich Mann, Leonhard Nelson, Alfred Kerr, Max Brod, Franz Werfel, Ludwig Rubiner, Hans Blüher, Rudolf Leonhard, Hedwig Dohm, Alfred Wolfenstein, Walter Benjamin and Kurt Hiller.<sup>162</sup> The volume was banned shortly after its publication due to its pacifist outlook. Werner pored intensely over each contribution and took them as an opportunity to develop his own thoughts. He praised Walter Benjamin, but was especially taken by Heinrich Mann: 'I need hardly mention that Heinrich Mann struck a particular chord with me. I particularly liked that the *boches* also got their share of criticism. Anyone who comes to know this people cannot help but vomit!'<sup>163</sup>

Werner rarely used stronger expressions than in this passage to refer to that festering *völkisch* nationalism that had poisoned German political culture for decades. His experiences over the preceding year had only served to further reinforce Werner's feeling of alienation in his own country. At this point he eagerly turned to Gerhard's collection of Jewish literature, and was particularly impressed by Martin Buber's *The Legend of Baal-Shem*, in which Buber uses Hasidism to provide the reader with an introduction to Jewish mysticism: 'I am currently reading *The Legend of Baal-Shem*. Thus far I have finished *Hitlahavut* and *Avoda*. Here again, in *Avoda*, that same question: "what am I and what is my life?"'<sup>164</sup> *Hitlahavut* and *Avoda* were two terms, each of which Buber had dedicated an entire chapter of his book to. They describe the ecstasy of divine experience as well as the individual's service to the divine, respectively. In Buber's words: '*Hitlahavut* is the mystical meal. *Avoda* is the mystical offering. These are the poles between which the life of the holy man swings'.<sup>165</sup>

Such passages would have prompted little more than a wry smile in Werner while explaining socialism to Gerhard in the autumn of 1914. Only historical materialism mattered to him at the time, and Werner reacted to his brother's questions on myth and ethics with sheer incomprehension. Clearly, one year of war had changed him. 'What am I and what is my life?' assumed a discomfiting immediacy through Werner's recent proximity to death and dying. He became more open to spiritual questions and sought to follow Buber's approach in

162 Hiller 1916. The volume was the first in a series of five annual volumes.

163 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

164 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

165 Buber 1995, p. 24.

grasping Judaism's myth as the source of a cultural rebirth. A fellow patient who also got his hands on the book was similarly fascinated by it:

'Something odd happened to me there. While I was sleeping, a *boche* started reading the book and asked to be allowed to finish it. He was quite enamoured, and said he had never read anything like it. Since then he has immersed himself in Buber. But the man is otherwise fully *boche*! I can tell that it is a peculiar book'.<sup>166</sup> A book that proved equally moving to both Jews and German '*boches*' alike? This possibility struck Werner as more than bizarre. He felt more like an outsider than ever before, and longed for an exchange with Gerhard on the matter: 'Make sure that you come back soon. You're growing dull in Oberstdorf. I think of Palestine'.<sup>167</sup>

Werner's thinking would bear fruit. He met with Gerhard's friend Erich Brauer to speak with him about contributing to the youth magazine *Die Blau-Weiße Brille* ['The Blue-White Spectacles', although 'spectacles' in this sense denotes the publication's ideological lens]. The paper, secretly produced in the Scholem print shop, was co-edited by Brauer and Gerhard Scholem and published a total of three issues. The *Brille* was aimed at the Jewish youth movement, rejecting the World War and its support by Zionist groups, which was also one of the reasons why Werner was interested.<sup>168</sup>

Erich Brauer, however, was not particularly impressed by his meeting with Werner. He wrote to Gerhard shortly afterwards: 'I met your brother with the wounded foot. I didn't recognize him very clearly. Among other things, he'd had to have his hair shaved off. Between you and me, he did not give me the impression of being a particularly logical man or one with firm convictions. I may be wrong, but I had the feeling that his socialism was somewhat snobbish. It seemed clear that for us Zionism is something very different from what socialism is for him. Beyond this, I do not *believe* that he can be as *Jewish* as we are – even if he presents himself as such. Judging by the state of his Judaism, I consider his present condition to be thoroughly cockeyed. Do you agree?'<sup>169</sup>

To Brauer, Werner's constant reading and searching for knowledge was a weakness; he preferred pure doctrine to a combination of Judaism and socialism. It was, however, by no means common for Zionists to be enthusiastic about socialism at the time. The first Zionist congresses near the end of the nineteenth century were bourgeois affairs at which delegates appeared in tailcoat

166 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

167 Ibid.

168 On the *Blau-Weiße Brille* see Scholem 2012, p. 77 and Scholem 2000, pp. 130–1. The originals are located at the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

169 Erich Brauer to Gerhard Scholem, 15 July 1916, Scholem 2002, p. 30. Emphasis in original.

and top hat; Zionist-socialist groups could only be found in Eastern Europe,<sup>170</sup> while German Social Democracy continued to shun Zionism as a form of bourgeois nationalism.<sup>171</sup> Karl Kautsky, theoretical chief of Social Democracy as well as Werner's idol, was especially hostile on this question. In his essay *Are the Jews a Race?*, Kautsky demanded Jewish assimilation as a precondition for universal emancipation,<sup>172</sup> and could do so with reference to Marx, who had expressed similar sentiments in his 1843 *On the Jewish Question*. Following this tradition, Marxism remained trapped in a rigid universalism for quite some time, viewing cultural difference as an irritation rather than an asset due to its emphatic concept of equality, which in turn was precisely why Social Democracy failed to convince Gerhard. He read Kautsky's essay in 1914 and found it appalling. In his journal he recorded: 'Kautsky's ideas about Zionism are terrible.'<sup>173</sup> This was one of the issues that made Gerhard feel particularly removed from the German labour movement, although he continued to be fascinated by the idea of socialism.

Both Gerhard and Werner were unique phenomena in terms of the intellectual life of their day. Albeit from different perspectives, both attempted to conceive a Jewish-socialist utopia. Werner placed more emphasis on the socialist aspect, Gerhard on the Jewish. They often talked at cross purposes, only to join up again and agree with one another at other junctures. Gerhard therefore defended his brother against Brauer's accusations – his response, however, was by no means free of attempts at co-optation:

I consider your opinion of my brother unjustified, and on crucial points. For even if everything were as you say, you should not forget *one thing*: that he is *on the right path*. He left us four years ago, and now he's returning again. He wrote me that, once the war ends, in order to play an active role he will have to take a *close* look at the Jewish movement. His Judaism is 'remediable' because he is not smugly content with himself, which is something I can't say for many 'Zionists'. The more you work on him – and in the course of time I intend to win him *fully* over to our side – the more he will consciously turn to the *one* way. I know, for instance,

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170 Whereas the intellectual history of early Zionism does indeed exhibit socialist influences, such as Moses Hess, who began as an intellectual companion of Karl Marx and whose 1862 *Rome and Jerusalem* served as a foundational text of Zionism.

171 One exception was the reform-oriented current of 'Revisionists'. See Morgenstern 2012.

172 Kautsky 1926. On the relationship between Social Democracy and Zionism see Kessler 1994a, 1994b; see Na'aman in Heid and Paucker 1992.

173 Scholem 1995, pp. 75–6.

that he has gone through a religious change; I know that he wants to raise his children *Jewish*; and I'm convinced that he will soon arrive at the Hebrew language. *My brother and I basically see eye to eye on things*. We both have a truly honest ideal of a 'movement' and of 'radicalism'. You are *without question* mistaken about his socialism. I know this for certain; and precisely *because* I know this, I also know it will lead him to Zion. His opinions are changing as all of ours are, shifting to the left. You, I and he. And all of us! Hopefully everything has been taken care of by the time you receive this letter, and we can begin to work. Please remember that my brother first found his way to the B[rau] W[eisse] B[erlin] alone, I would almost say against me.<sup>174</sup>

Was Werner, who had introduced Gerhard to Zionism and the Jung Juda in the first place, now finding his way back? As it were, he had in fact informed Gerhard of a change in attitude:

I have reached a certain conclusion concerning religious matters. But if I say that I have turned my back on crude atheism – and permanently, as I believe to have – then my life as a warrior had neither direct nor indirect influence on this decision. Not that I need to reassure you of that anyway. But my belief has become accursedly similar to Neohellenism. I must read Plato – he is up next week, when I am confined to my bed – I hope to receive influences from him. Oddly enough, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, to name an example, actually pushed me towards rather than away from my new disposition. I spoke – this is important to me – with Emmy about it when I was in Hanover. She is oddly areligious, but this is also owed to her development up to now. I explained to her my decision not to leave the Jewish community. And to perhaps even raise my children Jewish. She was not only in agreement with this, she clearly found it touching. She can really be considered worthy of bringing my children into the world. She is free from the Christian spirit and from Germanic imperfections.<sup>175</sup>

Could it be that Werner's 'life as a warrior' really had no influence on his turn to religion? His tirades against the German '*boches*' spoke volumes. Additionally, he reported already in his first hospital letter that 'wretched Jew hatred' had

174 Gerhard to Erich Brauer, 17 July 1916, Scholem 1994, p. 42; Scholem 2002, p. 30.

175 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem, emphasis in the original.

dogged him in the field.<sup>176</sup> Widespread suspicion of Jewish soldiers on the front was not just Werner's subjective perception, but in fact official policy. In November 1916 the Prussian Minister of War compiled an official census of all Jewish men serving in the war, the so-called 'Jew census' [*Juden-zählung*]. A headcount of all soldiers of Jewish background on the front was taken, justified with the following: 'The Ministry of War regularly receives complaints from the general public that a disproportionately high number of members of the Israelite faith liable to conscription have either been excused from or are shirking duty under various pretexts'.<sup>177</sup> The survey's results disproved the anti-Semites' claims but were never published, which in turn gave the rumours fresh impetus. While the war was a collective experience for many, Werner found himself more repelled by German society than ever.

In spite of this turn, Werner remained somewhat unconvinced by his meeting with Brauer – the feelings of aversion were mutual. Werner wrote that their conversation had not been 'entirely satisfying'.<sup>178</sup> This did not, however, deter him from wanting to participate in the *Blau-Weiße Brille*. Werner continued to reflect upon the relationship between the Zionist and socialist youth movements: 'Some sort of collaboration, or better yet co-thinking, must be possible. I have been uncertain about this since 1912. I must decide this if my political ground is to bear fruit'.<sup>179</sup> The question bothered him, and in late July 1916 he sent his brother a manifesto on this matter which he sought to publish in the *Blau-Weiße Brille*:

On the unconditionality of youth. Some rules.

Go and leave your fatherland, your friendship and your father's house for a country which I will show you. One day you will have a fatherland! We will show you the way. But you must go yourself. Always try to run head first through walls! A Jewish skull is harder than most walls. Do not prepare handkerchiefs for German snottoses, for that is the task of the socialist youth movement! Go and fight the Jewish snot! Vent your spleen while doing so! Fight the seriousness of life! Screw your face up in a broad smile whenever anyone speaks to you about matters of money! Whenever

176 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

177 The decree's specific wording can be found in Rosenthal 2007, p. 63. On the German-Jewish war experience during 1914–18 and the processing thereof in terms of a politics of remembrance see Grady 2011 and Sieg 2001.

178 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

179 Ibid.

you are told about World Wars, vomit three times until you taste green bile in your mouth! This bile is bitter and will have an adequate effect on your vocal instruments. Then go and buy that person who told you of the World War a butcher's knife or – a stink bomb! Be intolerant! As you also contain a major opportunist within yourself, fight him with fire and brimstone! Be fanatic! Be ascetic! Be loud-mouthed! Cherish the dreams of your youth and offer sacrifice to your sacred future on the altar of the present. That is the sense of a youth movement! Say: 'These are humans!', as you hear of the socialist youth movement. Grow, and they will be your brothers! Honour the man Liebknecht! May his name be the symbol of unconditionality!<sup>180</sup>

This manifesto, erroneously dated 1914 until now, summarises Werner's intellectual development over the summer of 1916.<sup>181</sup> 'Unconditionality' [*Unbedingtheit*] was both final word and key concept, a declaration of war on any half measures or assimilation to the 'seriousness of life' under his father's roof. Werner's conflation of his father's house with the Fatherland more generally is quite revealing, and reflects his loathing of his father's pressure to choose a 'sensible' profession and subordinate his personality to the day-to-day operations of business. At the same time, the manifesto's opening line makes reference to something much older: a direct allusion to the Book of Genesis, in which God tells Abraham to leave his father's house and kin to travel to 'the land that I will show you'. In the First Book of Moses, this promised land was Canaan.<sup>182</sup> But what exactly was Werner's promised land?

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180 The manifesto can be found in Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem. As mentioned above, Werner dated the letter 20 July 1914, while the references to the Spartacus group, war and military hospital can only mean that it is from July 1916. A line from Werner's letter to Gerhard on 13 July 1916 (NLI Jerusalem) confirms this: 'My hospital reflections on the youth movement are only illustrations of my "path". This path is obviously unclear. I read some good words on this in the *Jude*: leave your fatherland and your friendship and your father's house for a land which I will show you!' *Der Jude* was a monthly journal published by Martin Buber and Salman Schocken between 1916–28. On the interpretation of the manifesto see also Triendl-Zadoff 2007 – unfortunately, the letter is also misdated here.

181 On the date, see footnote above.

182 Genesis 12:1–2: 'Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing"' (quoted from New Revised Standard Edition, 1989). Werner cites this passage after making an allusion to the newspaper *Der Jude* (see footnote above).

His search for transcendence was only made more difficult by his father's petty bourgeois existence, for Fatherland and father's house also stood for the murderous nationalism of German society in wartime. Werner reacted to this immense pressure with a longing for the promised land, for a utopia he was determined to realise. He referred to those who accompanied him on his journey as brothers. A new family, and simultaneously a new kind of humanity, in stark contrast to the de-humanisation he had seen during the war: 'a revolting, bestial existence',<sup>183</sup> one of his more drastic formulations of life as a soldier. The precise nature of Werner's counter-utopia remained, however, an open question. Was the new fatherland in Palestine, a future socialist state, or a combination of both? As vague as Werner may have been with regard to the ultimate goal, his path was clear: he opposed the opportunism of his time with the ethical stance of unconditionality, and with respect for the dreams of the youth. He saw this spirit embodied in Karl Liebknecht. In an album, Werner kept a picture postcard of his idol dated 1915: Liebknecht in a common soldier's uniform, marching purposefully.

Liebknecht wore the same uniform as Werner. As a socialist, he had been drafted into the military, albeit as a trench digger instead of an armed soldier. He was only exempted from duty for parliamentary sessions. He had by no means, however, abandoned his opposition to the war: on 1 May 1916 Liebknecht organised an anti-war rally on Potsdamer Platz in central Berlin together with the Spartacus group and was immediately arrested. He was sentenced to prison on 28 June 1916. Werner wrote to Gerhard on this matter: 'Liebknecht's sentence surprised you? *Mensch*, here people make a fuss about his resurrection, and it is generally believed that the dangerous ferment it triggered spared him ten years in prison [...] the workers of the munitions and airplane factory struck in sympathy, as I am sure you know'.<sup>184</sup> Indeed, on the day of Liebknecht's trial 50,000 workers in Berlin's metal industry had staged a walkout – the first political mass strike in German history.<sup>185</sup> The state had attempted to make an example of Liebknecht, but instead his trial functioned as a springboard for an increasingly active opposition to the war. Thousands of injured veterans had brought their stories home with them, among them many patriots who were now beginning to have doubts. The armed forces no longer had enough volunteers, and adolescents feared the military physical. All of this,

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183 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

184 Ibid.

185 The sympathy strike was not organised by the Spartacus group, but rather by oppositional forces within the union of metal workers led by lathe operator Richard Müller, see Hofrogge 2014. On Liebknecht's role see Laschitzka 2007.



FIGURE 15 'Karl Liebnecht 1915,' Caption by Werner Scholem



combined with the increasingly acute food shortage, was the source of the aforementioned 'dangerous ferment' felt all over Berlin.

Werner had in fact gone back and underlined his praise of Liebknecht in his final sentence following the actual manifesto. Under no circumstances was Brauer to delete this line out of political consideration: 'I consider it absolutely necessary for this name to appear in a magazine such as *B[lau] W[eiß]*'.<sup>186</sup> Werner's concerns were ultimately for naught, as a fourth issue of the magazine never came to pass.<sup>187</sup> Whether this owed to growing political differences or the impact of the war remains unclear.

Although the publication never actually published a statement of its political principles, the manifesto represents a snapshot of Werner's political outlook in mid-1916. Regardless of his re-discovery of Jewishness, Werner remained a socialist – a socialist who sought refuge from the opportunism he saw in his own movement, and in doing so renewed broken connections. Time and again he reported to his brother on the state of the movement and on the efforts of anti-war activists to gain a hearing in the party. At the same time, he was horrified by the extent of nationalism's reach:

In the socialist youth almost everything vanished into Orcus! But one thing will interest you! Heinz Jansen, my old friend, who distinguished himself back in the day with his delicate intellect and a certain philosophical talent, has become a Heinrich, and a very poor one, too. You see, because in the Augusta Hospital in Breslau, where he has been for three quarters of a year, he found his Damascus. Without any explanation, he wrote to me that he no longer considered an exchange of letters wise. But to Emmy he sent an oily letter in which he – he, Jansen the Jew – attacked my unfortunate Jewish way of thinking and expressing myself, in a very pitiful move. [...] Moreover, he praised to the skies this 'kind, magnificent' German people, these 'simple, wonderful' people whom he has met. Well, whoever considers these pig-headed *boches* (what a fitting expression!) wonderful people, I must certainly lay to rest. So I buried Heinz Jansen, and then there is Kalischer, the Jew, the Zionist, the dialectician, the placeless Marxist, the clear spirit.<sup>188</sup>

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186 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

187 Scholem 2012, p. 77 speaks of only three issues.

188 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

Gotthold Kalischer was a mutual acquaintance of both Gerhard's and Werner's, and had also been one of the signatories to the *Jüdische Rundschau* protest letter.<sup>189</sup> Now Werner harboured reservations whether Kalischer would continue to stand by his views: 'I received notice from his parents that he is not only an Austrian guardsman, the equivalent to our cadet, but also that he welcomes the campaign as an act of liberation. But I will have to hear it from him in person before I bury him, that is if the Russians haven't already relieved him of his earthly burdens, for he is positioned in Volhynia. *Barbarus hic ego sum!*'<sup>190</sup> Werner borrowed the Latin from Ovid: *Barbarus hic ergo sum, quia non intellegor ulli* – 'I am a barbarian here, for no one understands what I say', and anxiously added: 'Am I now foolish for not relearning when everything around me does, or wise?' Upon further consideration, however, he chose not to write his friend off: 'We ought not yet bury Kalischer, as I have heard only the testimony of his parents. Imagine if someone came to Arthur Scholem while I was in the field! Maybe he thinks that I have become "sensible" as well. Given that a *Mensch* is such a rare thing, he cannot be disposed of without his approval'.<sup>191</sup> Werner's hunch was to prove correct in the end – months later he would learn that Kalischer had stayed true to his beliefs. He had become a lieutenant 'only by coincidence'; in fact, he even maintained contacts with the Russian Bolsheviks in early 1918.<sup>192</sup>

Endless speculation about comrades' fates, the uncertainty as to whether they were still alive and whether they were still committed to the cause – Werner's letters demonstrate the overwhelming confusion and paralysis the war had brought upon the labour movement. Despite Liebknecht's example and the Berlin mass strike of June 1916, no organised anti-war movement had yet taken shape. Only slowly did oppositional forces begin to coalesce, with Werner contributing as best he could. He joined a circle of anti-war Social Democrats as early as early 1915. The group met in the restaurant 'Karls-garten', a popular destination in the street of the same name in Berlin's Neukölln district. Before being renamed in 1912, this working-class district of Berlin had been known as Rixdorf, which is why the group referred to itself as the 'Rixdorf Conspirators' [*Rixdorfer Verschwörer*]. Werner took his brother along to the meetings. Gerhard was so impressed by the socialist circle that his relationship to his Zionist friends and comrades became strained. On

189 See Scholem 2000, p. 461. In the NLI Jerusalem's register he can also be found under the Hebrew name Gershom Kalischer.

190 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

191 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

192 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917 and 10 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.



FIGURE 16 'Karlsgarten' restaurant in Berlin-Neukölln, around 1905

20 January 1915 he wrote in his diary: 'Yesterday, [a] Jung Juda [gathering]. The alienation between me and the Judeans grows more palpable since I joined the Rixdorf Conspirators. We no longer understand each other as we once did, and I am once again becoming used to remaining silent'.<sup>193</sup>

This alienation would not last. Gerhard was back with the 'Judeans' by the summer of 1916, but Werner tried ceaselessly to reignite his brother's fire for socialism through frequent updates from the movement. In his second letter, he presents a long report on the state of Social Democracy, in which he emphasises the role of the youth:

Concerning the 'internal' matters, I don't know much myself. Because all of my friends and contacts have long disappeared, and those few hangers-on that are still here are difficult to get in touch with. In the Workers' Youth everybody has of course become slaves of war, good people like Böhme and Tetzlaff have fallen. The youth has fortunately – as there was a good seed planted in this regard thanks to Liebknecht, Haase<sup>194</sup> and all the

193 Scholem 2000, p. 79.

194 Since 1913, Hugo Haase (1863–1919) had been the party's co-chairperson alongside Fried-

prophets – abandoned the rudderless course. I don't know any details yet, but it is the same as everywhere. The completely infested *Arbeiterjugend* [Workers' Youth newspaper] was cancelled, then the 'driving' instances removed the youth's leaders, after which of course followed the '*secessio plebis*'.<sup>195</sup> What is noteworthy about this is only the completeness with which the entire youth switched over to new, Spartacus-controlled educational associations. [...] As a man of my youth movement I needn't tell you what this means. Imagine the entire Jewish youth once again forming a movement in your radical sense, no gridlock! But this is the case with the Workers' Youth. My sense of hope, so depressed by the ghastly *boche*-dom of the German people in the field, was joyfully raised when I realised that the work for the socialist youth movement has not been in vain. If you now consider that this youth, which is tinted by the beauty of the act, this guard of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, will control the party tomorrow, for it is this group out of which the functionaries and protagonists of the party emerge, then you will be all the more moved when I tell you that the crisis of the movement during the overall decay of organisations has not deepened, but actually been alleviated. I have written much about that, because hopeful factors must be considered with utmost importance, be they of a socialist or of a Zionist nature.<sup>196</sup>

Personal disappointments aside, Werner hoped for a rebellion of the youth that could crack open the ossified structures of the workers' movement. He had good reason to believe so as well, considering that in April 1916 a secret Social-Democratic youth conference disguised as a hiking trip had voted to secede from the mother organisation and reject its pro-war policy after an address by Karl Liebknecht. Werner was unable to attend due to his war deployment and injury, but must have heard about the resolution afterwards. The young comrades critical of the war were not in the majority, however – it is estimated that

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rich Ebert. He voted for the war credits in observance of party discipline, but was expelled from the SPD's Reichstag fraction when he and others changed their stance in March of 1916, while Haase was also sacked as party leader. 'Böhme' probably refers to Fritz Böhme, who (like Curt Böhme) also attended the oppositional youth conference in Jena in April 1916. Curt Böhme survived the war and later became the mayor of Jena in 1948. On the youth conference see Luban 2010, p. 2.

195 The 'secession of the plebs', a legendary means of mass struggle dating back to the Conflict of Orders in ancient Rome; historically, this more likely referred to a kind of general strike rather than the complete departure of the lower classes from the city's borders.

196 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

they represented about a quarter of Workers' Youth members.<sup>197</sup> As Werner received more information in July 1916, his reports became correspondingly more sceptical and tactical: 'You are mistaken about the power of the party executive. Even if it represents a minority – and by now that is certainly the case – it still has enough power to blow up the party, for it has the Mammon. And it also has the required brazen ruthlessness, with that rascal Scheidemann as its questionable soul. To fight against him, and to remain a member of the party at least until minds have cleared, is what I would recommend to you. I myself, however, am struggling for clarity right now! When you read the *Spartacus Letters* you will find that it contains very justifiable attacks against the Working Group [*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*]. Really, there are no major differences between the Ledebour-Hoffmann and Spartacus-Luxemburg groups. Though they do differ heavily in their tactics'.<sup>198</sup>

Growing war fatigue led to a spreading, albeit diffuse, opposition to Philipp Scheidemann as chairman of the SPD Reichstag fraction. Apart from the Spartacus group, which had considerable influence among the youth, another group of deputies around Georg Ledebour and party leader Hugo Haase withdrew support for further war credits, and were summarily excluded from the SPD's parliamentary group as a result. They now formed their own fraction in the Reichstag, the Social Democratic Working Group [*sozialdemokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, SAG]. They were joined by others outside of parliament, among them Adolph Hoffmann, author of *The Ten Commandments and the Propertied Classes*, the very brochure that had left such a strong impression on both Gerhard and Werner. A split within Social Democracy was beginning to emerge, but its exact contours remained unclear to Werner for the time being: 'I am gradually becoming more involved and continue to waver. My heart immediately draws me to Rosa, and I also believe that all of the 18 [deputies] in the Reichstag should have proceeded like Liebknecht. My intellect, however, tells me that they are correct in the important matter of the withholding of membership dues'.<sup>199</sup>

Withholding of dues was a proposal by radical war opponents for members to cease dues payments until the party turned away from its pro-war course. Though Werner was actually quite fond of the idea, he harboured tactical reservations:

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197 This would correspond to about 13,000 persons, out of a total Workers' Youth membership of roughly 53,000. Estimate by Siegfried Scholze, quoted in Luban 2010, p. 5.

198 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

199 Ibid.

Be reasonable for the time being! My reasons against this you can surely imagine. There is still some hope of an agreement with the Left, which has become obsolete with the withholding of membership dues – see Stuttgart. The most radical wing of the party includes people who demand that in those places where the Liebknecht people are being silenced, removed from honorary offices, etc. one should leave the party. Now tell me please whether such a thing is beneficial. No, it's not! I am willing to leave the party *in corpore*,<sup>200</sup> after the great battle at the party conference has been waged and the Scheide-Men have triumphed. But not now, it's too early. And to me, in fact there is no justification for a withholding of membership dues, or else the Scheide-Men would have the same right to call for a party conference on those grounds this very moment. In the general assembly, all of Berlin fell prey to the Ledebour-Hoffmann people. Rosa Luxemburg had 1/5 versus 4/5 for [Lebedour-Hoffmann].<sup>201</sup>

The so-called 'Scheide-Men' [*Scheide-Männer*] were influential not just inside parliament but also among the party base. Conditions in Berlin, where anti-war members constituted a majority, were not representative of the whole country. Werner was aware of this, and warned of a mass exodus from the party. He wanted to operate within the party for as long as possible, in order to shift the balance of forces there: 'I therefore lean towards Adolph Hoffmann in substance, towards Liebknecht and Rosa in form. Concerning the spread of the Spartacus group I can also tell you that Teltow-Beeskow is, through the tremendous progress of the movement in Neukölln, the best evidence thereof. That Neu-Kölln, intellectually speaking, marches at the fore of the German workers' movement, is something you have experienced yourself.'<sup>202</sup> Werner's comments about Neukölln allude to the meetings of the 'Rixdorf Conspirators'. Teltow-Beeskow, on the other hand, was a left-wing electoral district in south Berlin, where Werner hoped that local nuclei of opposition would grow and spread. Apart from Berlin, he also praised the efforts of his comrades in Bremen: 'Of the assorted organisations, Bremen seems to possess the most radical outlook, beyond which is only suicide. I spoke with Hans Pesch about this curiosity. It truly appears that in this case two individuals, Pann[e]koek and Radek, the "High Priests" of Steadfast Marxism, were at work here.'<sup>203</sup> Anton Pannekoek and Karl Radek were influential leaders among

200 Latin for 'in the body', as a closed group, collectively.

201 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

202 Ibid.

203 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

the so-called Bremen Radical Leftists [*Bremer Linksradikale*] who had already opposed the party majority at the war's outset.

Werner's hopes for a left turn within the workers' movement were not completely unfounded given the ongoing shifts in parliament and the new-found publicity for the war's opponents they generated – what he could not predict, however, was the impact internal conflicts would have within the opposition itself. In tactical terms, Werner agreed with the Working Group in the Reichstag, but he also read the *Spartacus Letters* and corresponded with Ernst Meyer, a leading member of the Spartacus group. Werner planned to begin work on a new youth magazine with Meyer in Braunschweig.<sup>204</sup> Interesting is that Werner, whose manifesto had included a litany of socialist boasting, proved to be a sober tactician. His heart guided him towards Rosa Luxemburg, his hatred for the war and the patriotic '*boches*' knew no limits. Nevertheless, Werner's political activity remained doggedly focused on winning over a majority of the membership. His approach was informed by heart and mind in equal measure, by passion and realism alike.

Time and again, Werner was shocked by the sluggishness of the party apparatus and its accommodation to the nationalist zeitgeist. Once again, he railed against the trade unions: 'The German trade unions have a loathsome spirit, a German-militarist [one] that is disgusting. Little can be done with these *boches*. Weimann, that fantastic Berlin youth secretary, now speaks openly of "reforming" the youth movement, perhaps under the direction of the trade unions. But believe me, the Worker-Youth is no *Wandervogel*, but rather a proper movement with economic roots. Herr Weimann will have little success'.<sup>205</sup> A rebellious youth movement stifled by trade union functionaries? To Werner, this was the stuff of nightmares. With regard to the 'economic roots', the contradiction between capital and labour, Werner detected a fundamental difference between the bourgeois *Wandervögel* and the socialist youth. Correspondingly, the latter's desolate state worried him all the more, and he dreamed, somewhat immodestly, of a powerful storm to cleanse the party ranks: 'I wish I could speak for the prosecution at the approaching party congress'.<sup>206</sup> Yet Werner's political reckoning remained a distant wish, while the war continued to pose a concrete danger: 'If only I knew a means to avoid sitting in the field again next year, as the slaughterfest will not end before autumn 1917. There I will surely yet meet an accursed hero's death'.<sup>207</sup>

204 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

205 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

206 Ibid.

207 Ibid. Werner was referring to a newspaper article from 1914 with a view to the predicted

Werner wrote this shortly before his surgery, after which he could not leave his bed for weeks.<sup>208</sup> Surgery remained very risky at the beginning of the twentieth century, as the lack of antibiotics meant that even minor operations stood a good chance of developing life-threatening infections. Werner emerged from his surgery without complications, but was far from delighted when making his first attempts to walk again in early August 1916. He found himself buried under a veritable mountain of sorrow – triggered, paradoxically, by his own recovery. Once again, he confided in Gerhard:

I am currently sitting in the Scholem family residence, in your woeful hole, since yesterday I'm once again allowed to leave every day. I've grown quite tired lately of the constant lying in bed which lasted 3 weeks. It irritated me and my bottom grew sore. So the only thing I advanced was my war journal which has now exceeded 2 notebooks. All of my wailing from the six months of war jumped out at me! [...] It was revolting! [...] You just be ready for the next round of military physicals which will be very soon, as they've drafted anything that moves around here again. 80,000 men from Berlin alone! And when you return from Zernsdorf all healthy and recovered, they will get you, as sure as death. Listen to what I tell you!! And you don't know yet what it means to be devoured by a juggernaut, that can only be understood by someone who has had the experience first-hand. I'm warning you because it would truly be sad if you caught a bullet to your head.<sup>209</sup>

Werner was concerned for his brother's life and urged him: 'Moreover, one of us has to remain so that the Scholem genus is able to create new human beings. I for my part am doing my utmost of course, walking around come hell or high water, despite horrible pain and against all orders from the doctor, but who knows! The wound is hardly festering anymore and it seems as if I have to go down again next year. Therefore, once again: damage your health, that way you'll take care of it best. Develop a habit of heavy smoking and, last but not least, return to Berlin as fast as you can. Don't be daft!'<sup>210</sup>

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end of the war: 'I calculate that Germany will have invested its last penny, its last bite and its last man, but that's how long it's going to take! 3 years, as the *Times* wrote so prophetically in August '14', Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

208 See Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 July und 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

209 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 2 August 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

210 Ibid.



Werner's advice in many ways encapsulated the madness of the war. His strange joy in light of his injury was followed by horror at his successful recuperation, and he seriously contemplated self-mutilation to escape a second round of front duty. He would not write another letter for three weeks, and in that next one, dated 21 August 1916, he is no less pessimistic than before:

I am in a very depressed mood, for my wound has now healed up, and completely healed up at that, so that I don't even require a dressing anymore. I will likely be discharged this week or the next. I want to get 14 days of leave then and go to Hanover. And after that I will once again step into the depths only to perhaps take up quarters in that mass grave sometime next winter or spring after all. This summer's dream will be over soon. In the meantime, the old man has also noticed once again that I am no more than an animal and prohibited me from showing myself to the relatives so that I wouldn't get up to any mischief or even embarrass him. The reasons were that I 1) mocked Herr Reinhold's Iron Cross (!! ) and 2) read the *Vorwärts* while in hospital. But I told the old man the truth quite forcefully this time, and afterwards he was somewhat rueful. I was amused when he told me that Gerhard, this bright person, would surely still become a businessman. 'Wait and see if the boy doesn't change over to banking once he has his doctorate'. I congratulate you, oh future man of the bank! What is really bad is the matter concerning your physical, though. This time they'll take you, no doubt, because they need cattle for the slaughter. I warn you and advise you to not come home on 3rd September, because you won't have the time to make the necessary arrangements in 2 days!<sup>211</sup>

All of a sudden the problems of 1914 had returned: war and fear of death, complemented by pressure from his family. But Werner himself had changed. He had only derision to spare for his father – that which had made his life so difficult during his school days was now little more than an amusing side-anecdote. Aged 20, he faced his father almost from a position of superiority. Werner had become an adult during the war. But what use was his intellectual independence in a scenario where every plausible future converged into a dead end? The endpoint he feared was the mass grave of the war, an endpoint that threatened the younger Scholem as well. This proved particularly upsetting to Werner. His words of advice to his brother became shorn of all patronising condescension, driven solely by concern for Gerhard's survival.

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211 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

The only bright spot to be found in his letters from August 1916 is a hint at a vacation with Emmy in Hanover, to whom he had been engaged for three years by then. The image that Werner painted of his fiancée, however, was far less starry-eyed than could be expected from a young man in love. From the outset, his descriptions of her took on a rather patronising tone, as Werner saw himself as his female companion's mentor: 'Little Emmy is doing well, she has gained quite a bit of wisdom and knowledge. Her latest hobbyhorse is to complete her *Abiturium* on the side. [...] She studies come hell or high water, and could easily compete with an 8th or 9th form pupil'.<sup>212</sup> Werner sent her books from Gerhard's library and wrote of her eagerness to learn with a mixture of respect and feigned superiority: 'I now believe, after having observed her intellectual capacities for three years, to be able to ascribe to her a great aptitude for anything learnable – for anything conceivable, I don't know. She will therefore not have children before she fails the first time. It's just a shame that she is not well at all. Why that is, is something to be told rather than written down'.<sup>213</sup>

Werner again refers to the gap in education between his fiancée and himself – could it be that he found her aspiration to catch up and be equal to him displeasing? Werner is also vague regarding Emmy's illness, only from a compensation file compiled in the 1950s complete with patient records do we learn that Emmy suffered from 'strong periods with intense pains and migraines' from age 13 to 21.<sup>214</sup> Werner refrained from addressing such matters in his written correspondence. Sexuality as such was only hinted at, albeit quite overtly at times: 'I was interested to learn that you were about to hop into the "Party of Growth". *Ceterum censeo vaginas homines esse delendas!* Or have they perhaps already been destroyed?'<sup>215</sup> Gerhard had evidently feared the prospect of an unplanned fatherhood. Who the unexpected almost-mother was we do not know, as Gerhard's letters to Werner have been lost for the most part. Might it have been kindred spirit Julie Schächter, with whom he had maintained intense written contact since 1915?<sup>216</sup> Certain is that Gerhard would not meet his later wife Escha Burchhardt until 1918. Gerhard and Julie, however, retain the formal address of 'Sie' (as opposed to the informal 'Du') in their correspondence, and mainly exchange ideas relating to Zionism. Moreover, main-

<sup>212</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>213</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>214</sup> *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDS. 110 w Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351, Bl. 52.

<sup>215</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>216</sup> She was the only woman with whom Gerhard corresponded during this period. See Scholem 1994, pp. 17–28.

taining a purely written exchange is probably the best form of contraception to this day. Ultimately, it will remain a secret as to what Werner's hints may have meant. More interesting is the Latin phrase he adds. He refers to a quote from Roman Senator Cato: '*Cetero censeo Carthago esse delendam*', commonly translated as 'Furthermore, it is my opinion that Carthage must be destroyed'. Werner replaces 'Carthage' with 'vagina' – did he really seek the downfall of all women?

In a letter from 14 July 1916 he is more explicit, and airs some reflections on the issue of women's rights in general, with regard to Emmy in particular:

That women lack any sense for goodness and greatness is true, but that women's emancipation should somehow be the victory of the 'prostitute's principle' [*Dirnenprinzip*] seems a bit odd to me. This would be the point to talk about my own wife, whom I'll have been together with for three years soon which is quite a stretch of time at our age. I don't simply look at her with honey-moon eyes, even though I love her as dearly and need her as much as is humanly possible. She is what people call a very bright girl, meaning she learns very quickly, she even has an inner urge to learn things. She is surely far superior to me concerning all that school stuff. And yet I don't really trust her to think my thoughts, I don't consider her capable of the slow yet surely grinding millstone of my intellect, and therefore I still feel mostly superior to her. But as she is the first woman who likes to make a mystery of herself to me, it is not so easy for me to let her fully participate in my thoughts. Of course, that is never entirely possible! She claims to be unreligious, but she assures she is superstitious, as everything that has long hair is. It may also be that women simply don't understand real religion. To them, everything is un-nuanced, either they are subservient or cheeky, or often both. Be it as it may! We require this half-human, not only in sexual terms, for that alone would be nonsense, but as a complement. And in that sense I have found a good choice for myself, for she has neither the disadvantages of a Berlin Jewish girl nor that of a Linden working class girl. She is well-built, both on the outside and the inside, and once she has learnt a few things she will surely be a good mother, rather different to what we are familiar with in this respect.<sup>217</sup>

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217 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

To Werner, women were only 'half-humans', although life without them was also unimaginable, 'not only in sexual terms'. Such words sound peculiar coming from a self-proclaimed rebel who considered himself ahead of the prejudices of his time, yet Werner cultivated a deep-seated form of chauvinist resentment. Many of his statements could just as well have come from much-loathed soldiers or corps students, and were commonly heard in army barracks and drinking halls.

Werner did not reject women's liberation, which was an essential component of his party's political programme, nor did he consider it the triumph of some kind of 'prostitute's principle'. Beside Karl Liebknecht, his political role models also included Rosa Luxemburg, the leading theoretician of the SPD's left wing. That said, he remained unable to accept women in general and his partner in particular as equals: 'I have the deepest contempt for womanly thoughts, and you will agree with me as soon as you are wed. It might be wise for us to introduce polygamy in Palestine, as a matter of principle. Do not get the impression that I have had bad experiences in this area. No, I have one of the smartest girls there is. And yet how foolish she is towards me, and how incomprehending.'<sup>218</sup>

In fact, his personal experiences with Emmy largely contradicted his prejudices – a fact he verbosely glossed over. Moreover, he dismissed those areas in which she was more capable than him with nasty asides: what only two years prior Werner had described as the dreaded, earth-shattering *Abiturium* becomes mere 'school stuff' when Emmy is confronted with it. He describes her as one of the cleverest girls around, but incomprehending and foolish at the same time. Time and again he passes judgement on his fiancée from a position of perceived superiority, as when he concludes that she could be 'considered worthy' of bringing his children into the world.<sup>219</sup> One wonders whether Emmy considered Werner worthy of her. She certainly returned his affection, yet her political commitment and drive to educate herself suggest she also had plans of her own. In spite of it all, Werner loved his fiancée very dearly. He wrote that he needed her as much as was 'humanly possible'. She provided him with an anchor and stability in a world of crisis and uncertainty.

Werner was by no means the only progressive socialist who thought and acted within patriarchal norms. His hero Karl Liebknecht was hardly any better. Liebknecht's wife Julia took care of the household and children, and without her sacrifice Liebknecht would have been unable to pursue his course as cease-

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<sup>218</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>219</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

lessly as he did, for who would have looked after his sons when he was sentenced for high treason in 1907? Liebknecht uncritically accepted this division of labour and availed himself of additional liberties. From 1906 on he spent more and more of the little time he had with a second lover, although friends and even his own mother appealed to his conscience. The outward appearance of an intact family was to be preserved at all costs, a task which was cynically left to the betrayed Julia Liebknecht. A divorce, that is, formalising the separation that already existed, was out of the question. This dilemma was only 'solved' when Julia died in 1911 following an operation on her gall bladder. Karl Liebknecht could then officially marry his new lover Sophie.<sup>220</sup> The bourgeois family, ridiculed by Marx and historically deconstructed by Engels, was outside the realm of practical critique for most socialists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>221</sup> Given the double standards commonly found among leaders of the socialist movement, it is hardly surprising that real equality was fairly uncommon among ordinary workers. Nevertheless, proletarian living conditions, and the growth of female and child labour in particular, provided working-class women and daughters with a much more self-confident household position than the daughters of the bourgeoisie – a tendency that the *Communist Manifesto* had already embraced as progressive.<sup>222</sup>

Emmy Scholem was a prime example of how wage labour and a woman's control over her own income could break up traditional role models. As a commercial clerk, she worked in a profession that had long been closed to women. The expansion of capitalism, however, made this gendered barrier impractical, as the demand for secretarial workers, accountants and administrators, which had remained negligible during the patriarchal capitalism of the early nineteenth century, was to reach previously unknown dimensions in the era of organised monopoly capitalism. In order to employ women as cheap labourers in these areas, a new occupational profile of the working woman as secretary and office worker emerged. This made it possible for women like Emmy to complete vocational training and facilitated the representation of their interests by the political organisations, such as the Union of Commercial Clerks, a Social-Democratic-led trade union of which Emmy was a member.

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220 See Laschitzka 2007, pp. 97–9.

221 See Engels 1990.

222 'In the conditions of the proletariat, those of old society at large are already virtually swamped. The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations', Marx and Engels 1976, p. 494.

Werner did not come from a working-class background, but rather encountered the socialist movement as a son of the bourgeoisie. It was in the bourgeois family that the separation of public and private spheres had evolved, a social norm that exerted a powerful influence on the proletariat and its party as well. Measured against what may have been considered the norm among Social Democrats in the Kaiserreich, Emmy's political engagement and hunger for education certainly represented an exception. Werner, by contrast, was much closer to the norm as far as his incomprehension of her desire for independence is concerned; in fact, his remarks often fell short of the SPD's views as outlined in August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism*. Nevertheless, they both got along fine with one another. Surely Werner did not express his views as bluntly as he did 'among men', but his general attitude could hardly have remained a secret to Emmy. Overall, she was quite capable of asserting herself and resisted being limited to a housewife role in the years to come.

In any case, frictions in their daily life together were yet to develop in 1916. The engaged couple only met during occasional visits, as Werner's military service disrupted not only his political ambitions but his private life as well. As was true for so many others, Werner's daily life was put on hold during the war years, a time in which the state of exception became the rule.

This made the two weeks of vacation in Hanover all the more pleasing, even though they marked the precursor to his return to soldier life. Werner did not mention his stay in Hanover to his father, even traveling to a nearby health resort just to write a letter to his parents: 'One ought to think I am in Rehburg', he informed Gerhard.<sup>223</sup> Betty Scholem was in on the plot, however – Werner asked her via Gerhard for some additional spending money to be sent directly to Struckmeyerstraße. Werner was pleased to learn that the Hanover Workers' Youth had broken with the SPD's pro-position entirely. According to him, 'old August' was in charge, a reference to August Bebel, one of the founding fathers of the SPD who had died in 1913.<sup>224</sup>

Werner's next letter dates from October 1916. Its exterior form alone speaks to a drastic change in his living conditions. The summer in hospital was over, and Werner was a full-time soldier once again. He wrote a brief postcard from the field, the sender's address of which consisted of a series of military abbreviations:

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223 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 31 August 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

224 Ibid.

Füs. W. Scholem,  
 Füs. Reg 36, 2. Ers.  
 Bat., 2.Gen. Komp,  
 6. Korp,  
 Diemitz- / Halle a. S.

Fusilier Werner Scholem of the 6th Brigade of the 2nd Convalescence Company in the 2nd Reserve Battalion of the Fusilier Regiment 36 in Diemitz near Halle on the Saale – this series of numbers signified Werner’s new reality. Gerhard, on the other hand, remained ‘Herr Scholem’ the private citizen.<sup>225</sup> Although the horrors of the front remained far away, Werner despised the daily routine of the barracks. He sorely missed the comforts of civilian life, and his tone towards Gerhard grew impatient: ‘*Mensch*, your letter astonished me! What should I do here without money and clothes? Am I to continue living in the barracks and wearing these filthy military outfits? Please ensure that I receive money, as I am starving and have already incurred significant debts. You can tell that to father. I expect 100 M[arks] immediately, as here I am considered a first-year again. You cannot imagine how bored I am here. If only the captain would not come but the money would! Please also ensure that father takes care of my petition for release quickly.’<sup>226</sup>

Werner still hoped to be excused from military duty due to injury. In an afterthought he asks Gerhard to visit him in Halle and relieve him of his intense boredom. A mere two days later he begins to complain about stress: ‘Outwardly I am quite well. But I underestimated the nerve-wracking breathlessness of the service. Now that I am fully trained, I work so much that I am utterly exhausted in my free time. Nevertheless, I will certainly finish the journal as time goes on, for it means a great deal to me as well, otherwise the memories will become blurred and I will be unable to capture the right “colouring” of events.’<sup>227</sup>

Despite the taxing nature of his military service and his sparse leisure time, Werner enrolled at the University of Halle to resume his interrupted studies.<sup>228</sup> Following Göttingen and the lectures he had attended in Berlin, this would be Werner’s third place of study, and he was as eager to learn as ever. Apart from military duty, university studies and his journal, Werner also kept himself informed with regard to politics – though he no longer wished to participate actively. ‘Incidentally I have subscribed to the “*Vorwärts*”, because it was

225 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 11 October 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

226 Ibid.

227 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 October 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

228 Scholem 2012, p. 96.

banned. I will also, seeing as there is no intention to lift the ban, subscribe to the Halle "*Volksblatt*", a very sympathetic paper of the Left. I will not, however, get involved with local party life, this time I'm not going to challenge the devil, because it would be pure suicide'.<sup>229</sup>

As a soldier, Werner was subject to military justice. Any statements opposing the war were dangerous enough for civilians, as the furore surrounding the protest letter to the *Jüdische Rundschau* in early 1915 had illustrated. Gerhard's expulsion from school showed that divergent opinions were also persecuted outside of the official legal system, freedom of speech was more curtailed than ever in Kaiserreich society during the war years. This was even more the case for soldiers. The obligation to follow orders, submission to military justice and the censorship of personal correspondence suspended the few remaining legal guarantees that applied to civilians. Werner knew this to be true from the example of his idol Karl Liebknecht, who had been court martialled. As a soldier, he was banned from participating in political gatherings and was to refrain from any 'spoken or written agitation'. Liebknecht had broken both of these rules and was imprisoned for treason.<sup>230</sup> Werner was right to suggest that the sentence of two years was rather mild, as treason could be punished with up to ten years, and high treason carried the possibility of a death sentence according to §57 of the military penal code.<sup>231</sup>

Given the situation, Werner was afraid to freely speak his mind and asked his brother to take strict precautions when writing him: 'It would be wise for you to immediately dispatch the letters I write you down to Orcus, lest snooping noses extract awkward conclusions from secret odours'.<sup>232</sup> Gerhard's disregard of this instruction to destroy the letters is of course a stroke of fortune for readers today. Beside their many philosophical and political debates, Gerhard's disobedience also preserved numerous depictions of everyday life, such as Werner's complaints about the boredom of life in the barracks or his mundane attempts to arrange for a little bit of comfort with regard to his attire: 'Please induce mother to send me 2 underpants, 1 nightshirt and if possible 1 bow tie. Concerning the underpants, she is not to take the long ones that reach to my chest! I would also appreciate it if you arrange for shipment of a chess game complete with board'.<sup>233</sup> It would not be long, however, before Werner would have bigger problems than his dirty military clothing.

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229 Ibid.

230 See Laschitzka 2007, pp. 265–7 and 308–10.

231 Laschitzka 2007, p. 308.

232 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 13 October 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

233 Ibid.



### Lèse-majesté: A Soldier's Day in Court

Werner's vow to take a break from politics would only last a few weeks. Despite the risk entailed, he established contact with the Workers' Youth in Halle, even participating in illegal agitation. Emmy mentions in a letter to Gerhard that Werner gave several 'anti-war speeches' to adolescents.<sup>234</sup> She was referring to a group around Reinhold Schönlink that had successfully fought for a Social Democratic youth centre in Halle in 1913. In his memoirs, Schönlink describes how he sought to cohere the opposition beginning in 1914: 'In order to still be able to conduct the illegal distribution of leaflets against the war and the education towards a revolutionary attitude, I formed a group of trustworthy young people that met every Wednesday under the pretext of playing chess in the location designated for that latter purpose. Here Marxist problems were discussed, so far as the young comrades were not drafted for army service. [...] Later, the group was joined by young student W. Scholem who had been conscripted into the infantry in Halle and participated diligently in the tasks described'.<sup>235</sup>

Now we know why Werner desperately needed a chessboard: Schönlink's circle was the same audience Gerhard was to address on New Year's Day 1917. Werner informed him in December that 'the elite of the Halle W[orkers'] Y[outh] await anxiously the "great theoretician" from Berlin'.<sup>236</sup> The term 'elite' indicates that Werner's circle of contacts in Halle consisted of a select group; similar to the Rixdorf Conspirators, they met secretly. The letter suggests that Gerhard's name was already known in certain circles, foreshadowing the famous professor Gershom Scholem of later years. Werner thus reminds the 'theoretician' to deliver a thoroughly political presentation: 'So that you don't finish your performance too quickly, I would advise you to add a bit more, which surely couldn't hurt a socialist youth [organisation]. We are expecting something very special, I would advise you put on a highly educated appearance'.<sup>237</sup> Werner's sarcasm sought to mask his own insecurity – was the younger brother about to overtake his elder? After all, the relationship between the two was never completely free from rivalry.

Unfortunately, we are left in the dark as to whether Gerhard's speech was well received. Werner does not mention it in his letters, and as usual a gap in the brothers' correspondence follows their encounter, when personal conversation

<sup>234</sup> Emmy to Gerhard Scholem, 5 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>235</sup> *Erinnerungsmappe Reinhold Schönlink*, SAPMO-BArch, SG Y 30 / 1603.

<sup>236</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 26 December 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

replaced the tedious writing of letters for at least a short while. Gaps like these also remind us that the two brothers' extensive correspondence only depicts a part of Werner's life. Not only have almost all of Gerhard's responses been lost, certain aspects of their relationship are simply absent from the letters. Some issues were reserved for face-to-face conversation, as both were usually too mindful of government censors to discuss anything political.<sup>238</sup> Sometimes, however, there was simply no way around it. On 5 February 1917 Werner wrote a despairing letter, stating he was in grave trouble:

Dear Gerhard, I'm writing to you in a peculiar state. In short, I'm close to the abyss that will surely devour me. On the Kaiser's birthday there was a socialist demonstration at which I was denounced. At first, nothing happened, so I became careless. Yesterday the criminal police searched my place with the permission of the garrison command and unfortunately found quite a bit. I expect my arrest today or tomorrow. In any case, my plans to study are ruined, and you can probably imagine the penalty I will receive from a court martial. I cannot write anything more specific for now, but my near future is taken care of. My bride knows. Don't tell the parents anything yet, I will notify them once I'm in custody. But keep in mind that they have found letters you have written as well, and draw conclusions from that immediately!<sup>239</sup>

Gerhard ignored Werner's second request to destroy their letters. He was still careful, however, and gave everything that could have looked suspicious to his friend Harry Heller.<sup>240</sup> Originally, Werner's letters were to be hidden in Walter Benjamin's home, but Benjamin was already on the run from the draft himself, complicating the arrangement.<sup>241</sup>

For Werner, however, it was too late. He was arrested immediately after dispatching his written cry for help, under investigation for the crime of *lèse*

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238 This mostly pertained to the military mail submitted to the censor, whereas Werner's private letters from hospital speak freely on political matters. Discussed in person was, for instance, Werner's question about a possible career as a journalist; see Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 6 August 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

239 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 5 February 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

240 Scholem 2012, p. 83. Gershom's account of events contains several inaccuracies. Werner's injury is indicated as occurring in Serbia, although he was actually injured on the Eastern Front. It also states that Werner had been in hospital in Halle, but Werner only later relocated to Halle while serving in a Convalescence Company.

241 Scholem 1997, p. 92.

majesté. Initially, he was accused of treason [*Landesverrat*], which could have entailed up to ten years in prison, as described above. These charges were later dropped.<sup>242</sup> Werner spent the following months in police custody. The charges were not related to the lectures he had given for the Workers' Youth, but to his participation in the demonstration on 27 January – the Kaiser's birthday. This day functioned as the German Reich's unofficial national holiday, as no other such day existed. Military parades, public addresses, singing performances, gala dinners and other festivities were held throughout the Reich in honour of the monarch's birthday. During the reign of Wilhelm II the holiday fell in January and was celebrated as a collective national event. In schools, children sang 'The Kaiser is a Dear Man' to mark the occasion:

*Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann  
er wohnt in Berlin  
und wär das nicht so weit von hier  
so ging ich heut noch hin*

*Wisst ihr, was ich beim Kaiser wollt'  
Ich gäb ihm eine Hand  
und brächt das schönste Blümchen ihm  
das ich im Garten fand<sup>243</sup>*

The Kaiser is a dear man  
He lives in Berlin  
And were that not so far from here  
I'd go there yet today

You know what I'd do when I meet him  
I'd give him my hand  
And bring him the nicest flower  
I could find in the garden.

<sup>242</sup> Scholem 2012, p. 83.

<sup>243</sup> A third verse read: 'And then I said: "in faithful love / I bring you this flower" / And then I ran away quickly / so as to be here again'. The text appeared in Prussian schoolbooks under the title 'The King is a Dear Man' as early as 1856 and was sung to a melody by Karl Gotthelf Gläser (1784–1829), as well as to the melody of Mozart's *Üb immer Treu und Redlichkeit* ['Be Always Obedient and Honourable'].

Many members of the Workers' Youth were forced to sing this classic tune themselves just a few years earlier, as the central newsletter of the Prussian Ministry of Education had recommended it for pupils in the fourth form. That said, it was intended 'primarily for girls' schools', as boys could certainly not be expected to pick flowers.<sup>244</sup>

As it was, neither Werner nor his friends brought flowers to the Kaiser's celebrations. Scholem's comrade Reinhold Schönlink recollected their performance years after the fact:

When a large gathering of the bourgeoisie, the students and other sections of the population was set to take place at the Hallmarkt, where the liberal pastor from St. Paul's Congregation was due to speak, we decided to recast this demonstration for our own purposes. We handed out leaflets among the densely packed crowd to 50 reliable youths who were instructed to yell, at the appropriate moment, 'Long live Liebknecht!', 'Down with the war!' A grating whistle sounded as Pöcker was getting ready to cheer Wilhelm II. He fell silent in horror and we, after performing our Liebknecht cheer, began to sing the Internationale. The police, present in large numbers, started a wild chase for the youths, but most of them managed to escape arrest. Werner Scholem and I were arrested [...].<sup>245</sup>

Werner had attended the demonstration in his infantryman's uniform. Needless to say, he could have worn civilian clothes and the bow tie requested from his mother. But Werner wanted to send a message: a soldier in the Kaiser's army singing the Internationale basically amounted to a call for insubordination.<sup>246</sup> Werner managed to escape the scene amidst the ensuing commotion and was only arrested later; he claims to have been denounced by a female student.<sup>247</sup> She must have been a classmate from Halle – a woman Werner knew and who probably attended classes and lectures with him. She must have given his full name directly to the police, for the authorities would otherwise have been unable to determine the identity of an unknown infantryman so quickly.

244 *Zentralblatt für die gesamte Unterrichtsverwaltung in Preußen* 1912, pp. 623–6, cited by [www.volksliederarchiv.de](http://www.volksliederarchiv.de) (accessed 11 April 2017).

245 *Erinnerungsmappe Reinhold Schönlink*, SAPMO-BArch, SG Y 30 / 1603.

246 Werner does not report any details of the demonstration, but does mention the singing, and in fact admitted to singing along during his court martial in Magdeburg. See Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

247 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

It was in Halle that Werner had his first experiences with denunciation and political persecution, though more such episodes would follow. Werner spent his time in custody in the Halle Penal Facility I, also known as Kirchtor prison, which had opened in 1842 as a 'Royal Prussian Penitentiary for Long Prison Sentences'.<sup>248</sup> Due to its thick brick walls, the building was commonly referred to as the 'Red Ox' [*Roter Ochse*] by local residents. In 1885 anarchists August Reinsdorf and Emil Kùchler were executed in the prison's interior courtyard following an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Kaiser Wilhelm I.<sup>249</sup> Following the end of the Kaiserreich, the Red Ox served as a prison facility for the Weimar Republic. Executions were resumed by the Nazis in 1942; ultimately, more than 500 opponents of the regime would meet their fate here. After 1945 the facility was handed over to the Russian military, and in 1950 the notorious East German state security, or 'Stasi', returned the building to its original use: the incarceration of political dissidents. The political climate shifted once again in 1989, and while the political prisoners were freed, the Red Ox remained. The main part of the building still functions as a prison with a large number of inmates, while a smaller section was converted into a memorial for 'The Victims of National Socialism and Stalinism' in the 1990s.<sup>250</sup> There is no official commemoration of political prisoners prior to 1933.<sup>251</sup>

Werner spent a significant amount of time in the Red Ox while appealing his initial *lèse majesté* conviction by a local military court in Halle, prolonging his pre-trial detention. Daily life in prison was extremely dull, although his friends made an effort to raise his spirits, as evidenced by a postcard marking the 1917 May Day demonstrations: the socialist youth had marched past the prison in solidarity and sent a photograph to Werner's cell. But despite such gestures, imprisonment wore Werner down considerably. In a message he managed to smuggle out of prison 'on a mysterious, crooked path' in August 1917, Werner tells his brother: 'Honestly, dear boy, I have been in solitary confinement without anything to do for nearly 7 months now! You can only grasp what that means when you've been through it. Schönlank and others are

248 Werner's following letters are sent from 'Am Kirchtor 20 A', the address of the aforementioned sanatorium.

249 On this see also Schütte 1983.

250 On the conception of the memorial see the websites of the Federal State of Saxony-Anhalt and of the town of Halle: <http://www.halle.de/index.asp?MenuID=715> as well as <https://stgs.sachsen-anhalt.de/gedenkstaetten/gedenkstaette-roter-ochse-halle-saale/> (retrieved 26 June 2017).

251 Literature on the prison's history is also limited to the years 1933–45 and 1945–89, see Boshe and Sperk 2008; Fricke 1997, 2006; Sperk 1998; Viebig 1998.



FIGURE 17 'May Day demonstration in Halle Volkspark 1917'. Bottom row, third from the left: Anna Schönlank (with child), beside her Reinhold Schönlank. Addendum by Werner Scholem in the photo album: '[...] May Day demonstrations of the Free Socialist Youth [Freie Sozialistische Jugend] (F.S.J.) in Halle 1917. The card was sent to me in the Kırchtor Prison. Demonstrators passed by the prison where I was held in custody.'

sending me food.<sup>252</sup> But books must first pass through court, which has withheld all scientific works. Today they even withheld Freiliegenrath's poems! Even after my sentencing, nothing has changed – even though I am actually serving my term now. They have left me in the remand prison and treat me as before. On the one hand, that is quite good, for my guards treat me far better than the others due to my status as a political prisoner, and in Spandau they *kujonier*. But this terrible solitary confinement wears everyone down in the long run. You sit in the cell every day staring at the 4 walls, and have been for 200 days!<sup>253</sup>

The dreaded '*kujonieren*' was an antiquated German phrase meaning something like bullying or harassment.<sup>254</sup> It is interesting that Werner was spared this treatment – despite all persecution of political opposition in the Kaiser-

252 The political police also noted that Anna Schönlank was providing 'the student Scholem' with food – proof of how closely the youth movement in Halle was being watched. See BArch Berlin R 3003 – C 21/1918, Nr. 3, Bl. 124. I would like to thank Ottokar Luban for pointing this out.

253 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

254 '*Kujonieren*': unnecessarily and maliciously harass, treat unworthily, intimidate; derived from the Latin substantive *coleus* (testicle) and the French *coïnnier*, which has the same

reich, there was a distinct code of honour with respect to political offences. Even the founding fathers of the SPD, August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, had been sentenced to 'honourable' detention in a prison fortress after standing trial for charges of high treason in Leipzig in 1872. This entailed privileged conditions of incarceration in a military facility separate from the prison's 'petty criminals'. On the other hand, Werner's example demonstrates that an informal code of honour also applied in the prison system: guards distinguished between political and criminal inmates, making life a little bit easier for the former through special favours such as smuggling letters.<sup>255</sup> However, this sense of honour still common in the Kaiserreich would not hold: the Nazi regime, which otherwise went to great lengths to portray itself as restorer of Germany's alleged former greatness, put an end to this practice. In the Nazi state's prisons and camps, political prisoners were systematically denigrated and abused, as Werner would later experience first-hand.

But even absent torture, and despite the undeniable benefits of not being ordered to the front, Werner suffered greatly from the curtailment of his freedom in 1917. The monotonous emptiness and dearth of intellectual stimulation weighed heavily on him. Aside from that, he had once again fallen out with Gerhard. At a time when Werner needed solace most, their letters grew increasingly infrequent. Gerhard blamed this on the censors, but Werner refused to believe him: 'You need not lay such a thick cushion. Particularly when it comes to my expulsion [from Father's house] and [personal] integrity, I expect explicit communication. As I already wrote you in my previous letter, you can most certainly write freely, at least as far as your private matters are concerned. Emmi could have written me just the same as you do, so that a correspondence now seems pointless. Don't be surprised if I think that you were afraid in the end'.<sup>256</sup>

The ill-humour had deeper roots, for Werner not only demanded information in 'private matters', but was in fact pushing his brother to state his political convictions. He wanted Gerhard to join the Independent Social Democrats [*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, USPD], founded in April 1917 in opposition to the ongoing war. The USPD, sometimes also referred to as the USP or USD, had grown out of the anti-war Social Democratic Working Group in the Reichstag. The discussions revolving around party unity and withholding dues were made redundant as soon as the majority voted

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meaning as the German *kujonieren*, see <https://de.wiktionary.org> (last accessed 12 April 2017).

255 Which potentially points to corruption, but even then a basic sympathy was necessary.

256 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 17 June 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

to expel the Reichstag war opponents in March 1916, thereby initiating a split within the party. The response to the expulsions was the founding conference of the USPD the following year. The new party united war opponents of all varieties, from the radical leftist followers of Rosa Luxemburg, the oppositional networks around Berlin metal workers, to the reform-oriented 'revisionists' led by Eduard Bernstein. Bernstein came from a Jewish family and had joined the SPD as an office clerk. After contributing greatly to the dissemination of Marxism within the party throughout the 1880s, he developed into one of the left wing of the party's fiercest opponents around the turn of the century. Bernstein's aim was a 'revision' of Marxism, by which he understood the adaptation of the SPD's revolutionary theory to its reform-oriented praxis.<sup>257</sup> Bernstein refused, however, to take responsibility for the war. He protested against it as early as 1915, and joined the USPD two years later.

While Werner had chosen to idolise Liebknecht, Gerhard was enthused by Bernstein's heroic refusal. He noted in his diary in June 1916:

'Yes, by devil! I have developed towards Marxism! The other side is not for me, for Marxism alone guarantees a permanent rebirth of the movement. 2 types: revisionism and Marxism! What a wretch he is who doesn't align with Marxism fully and undividedly (Honour to Ed. Bernstein, the profound contemplator and seeker, the most honest man of Judah, who at the age of 65 made a choice, deciding against the confusion he himself had caused. That is true conversion – Teshuva!<sup>258</sup> Bow down, you Jews!) That is true movement: the overcoming of revisionism through its own *Heros* and leader, may the Zionist revisionists follow suit! Bernstein's path is longer than that of Liebknecht. Physically and mentally. Liebknecht was never confused, but Bernstein was for 15 years! But I stand by both of them, and since the Bernsteins cannot be found in the Zionist camp, there is but one thing: the Liebknechtians!<sup>259</sup>

<sup>257</sup> See Groh 1973.

<sup>258</sup> Hebrew in the original, RH.

<sup>259</sup> Diary entry from 28 June 1916, Scholem 1995, p. 327. Gerhard overestimated Bernstein's turn. He was an opponent of the majority SPD as far as the war was concerned, but Bernstein never altered his revisionist outlook. Interestingly enough, Bernstein's revisionism, which included a softening of the Marxist critique of colonialism, was open to Jewish colonies in Palestine, a debate that was largely conducted in the pages of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, a popular revisionist publication at the time. The debate led to widespread acceptance of Zionism among revisionists, who were largely pro-war, during World War I. See Morgenstern 2012.



Given Gerhard's enthusiasm, it hardly comes as a surprise that Werner thought his brother won over to the USPD's brand of socialism by the summer of 1917. He wrote to him from his prison cell: 'You once had much different views concerning membership in a party, and I know that you stated last year that in the case of a split in Social Democracy you would join the left wing. Nor did you think differently then about the relationship between revolution and politics. It pains me that you have obviously not drawn any nearer to this great question, the question of the International, the only thing that could have prevented the current circumstances under which you also suffer. The higher planes you believe yourself to inhabit seem to have pulled the ground out from beneath your feet. Perhaps the next 2 or 3 years will be enough to rudely remind you where you are situated, and I won't give up the hope of meeting you on my hunting grounds before then.'<sup>260</sup>

Werner was forced to admit, however, that the new party was dogged by numerous controversies. Reservations about joining the new formation were widespread in radical circles: 'To be sure, a large portion of my friends also didn't, and unfortunately neither did my bride, who is now back to practising in Hanover. These people, inspired by Bremen, deride the Independents as the "Party Centre". But it's my impression that they have already overstepped the line between Marxist and anarchist to a considerable degree. Alas, I can't write as freely as I'd like to. It's unfortunate that you weren't here.'<sup>261</sup>

Ultimately, Werner had to acknowledge that writing openly under the threat of censorship was not as easy as he had claimed, which in turn made him all the more agitated when Gerhard failed to visit him. Werner felt left out and cut off from developments: 'I know nothing about the things that concern you', he wrote. He also hoped to hear political news: 'I would have liked to ask you, what do Jews and Jewish comrades say about the latest developments in Palestine?'<sup>262</sup> The news from Palestine was the British military operation against the Ottoman Empire, Germany's ally in the Mediterranean. At this point in life Werner was still interested in Zionism and everything related to it. His enthusiasm for the Bremen Radical Leftists, however, had ebbed. He now regarded their politics as little more than oppositional posturing, which

<sup>260</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 17 June 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>261</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 3 June 1917, NLI Jerusalem. The mention of Bremen refers to the Bremen Radical Leftists [*Bremer Linksradikale*], a current in the SPD that later left to become the German International Communists [*Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands*, IKD] before dissolving into the much larger KPD in 1919. See Engel 2011 and Fröhlich 2013.

<sup>262</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 3 June 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

he found insufficient. Werner prioritised the questions of organisation and feasibility over the abstract purity of radical concepts.

The brother's disagreements also extended into family quarrels, as Werner once again accused Gerhard of failing to fully break with their father: 'At the very least it seems despicable to me that you continue to accept money from a certain Herr, long after I was thrown out of the family as anticipated'.<sup>263</sup> Werner exaggerates, however, for Gerhard had clearly sided with Werner at the family dinner table. In his memoirs he goes into detail on this matter: 'Two days later my father received official notification that his son had been arrested and would be court-martialed for treason. A terrible scene ensued at the dinner table. When I raised a mild objection to one of my father's assertions, he flew into a rage and said he had now had enough of the two of us, that Social Democracy and Zionism were all the same, anti-German activities which he would no longer tolerate in his house, and that he never wanted to see me again. The following day I received a registered letter from him in which he demanded that I leave his house on the first of March and henceforth shift for myself'.<sup>264</sup>

Gerhard preserved this letter, along with countless other documents, bringing it with him on his arduous 1923 journey to Palestine and storing it in his archives for over 60 years. Only in 1989, seven years after his death, would the letter be published. It shows the extent of the alienation and interpersonal breakdown between Arthur and his two younger sons as no other document does: 'I have decided to cut off all support to you. Bear in mind the following: you have until the first of March to leave my house, and you will be forbidden to enter it again without my permission. On March first, I will transfer 100 marks to your account so that you will not be left without means. Anything more than this you cannot expect from me. [...] Whether I will agree to finance your further studies after the war depends upon your future behavior'.<sup>265</sup>

Although Gerhard and Arthur lived in the same apartment, their respective bedrooms only a few metres apart, Arthur chose to deliver the letter via registered mail. Gerhard heeded the order and arranged for a room in a guest-house.<sup>266</sup> Only after months of pleading by several family members was Arthur's heart softened enough to at least finance his son's university studies, albeit only with another written condition: 'But if you come out with any of

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263 Ibid.

264 Scholem 2012, p. 83 f.

265 Arthur to Gerhard Scholem, 15 February 1917, Scholem 2002, p. 41.

266 Scholem 2012, p. 84.

your anti-German attitudes, I will break off all contact between us – just as I did with Werner, though unfortunately too late'.<sup>267</sup>

Like Werner predicted, Gerhard found himself unable to dodge the looming conflict with his father. In this sense, the brothers' respective paths of rebellion ran parallel to one another, albeit never in uniform motion. Both protested against patriotism and petty bourgeois attitudes, and both of their efforts fell on deaf ears. Arthur would demonstrate once again how little he understood his sons when disciplining them, as when he gave his son Gerhard one last bit of advice concerning his work ethic: 'And real work will do your arrogance a world of good. What you call work is nothing more than a game. No doubt the people who must come up with money to support your literary activities and discussion groups are secretly angry about it. Money is something very concrete, and those people who busy themselves merely with abstractions consider earning it indecent'.<sup>268</sup>

'Real work' and 'concrete' money – these were lodestars in Arthur Scholem's universe. Of course, as a print-shop owner he could have known that money was itself an abstraction made of paper. It is therefore striking how strongly he emphasises *real work*. Was this his way of confronting the anti-Semitic cliché of the Jewish speculator? After all, Arthur did not consider himself a capitalist, but rather a craftsman who had learned the skill of printing from scratch. His labour had established the business and was now turning a profit. This corresponded to the patriarchal mindset of entrepreneurs during Germany's rapid industrial expansion in the late nineteenth century, when the labour, talent and ideas of a business's founder were still critical to its success. The contributions of common workers were largely ignored. More than anything, Arthur's understanding of commerce had grown anachronistic by 1917. His own business had outgrown the familial structures of a craft enterprise through its application of 'just-in-time-production' for the London market, while actual big business was another matter entirely. Anonymous joint-stock companies such as AEG were hardly concerned with performance or 'real work', seeking to maximise profits through the consolidation of monopolies. Said profits were then distributed to shareholders, most of whom had never seen the actual factory. Arthur was either unimpressed by all of this or consciously chose to keep his distance, as the contradictions of this abstract, faceless capitalism were all too often attributed to the harmful influence of 'the Jews'. Perhaps this is why Arthur swore by the concrete and tangible in life. Regardless, he had learned his trade from nothing and expected his sons to do the same.

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267 Arthur to Gerhard Scholem, 12 May 1917, Scholem 2002, p. 41 f.

268 Ibid.

That said, even Reinhold and Erich cultivated a certain eye for the artistic in their professional work. As bibliophiles, they collected artistic prints, produced some of their own, and later also printed Gerhard's works. Naturally, they read the books they published – Reinhold in particular maintained a lifelong interest in German literature. For Arthur, by contrast, books appeared as mere warehouse inventory, their content irrelevant, the writing of literature nothing but 'games' – he made his money printing health insurance forms. His remarks concerning money show that it was not only Germanness as such that Gerhard and Werner rebelled against, but also the meaningless work ethic and world-view of a petty capitalist. Consequently, Gerhard's interest in his father increasingly limited itself to when he could expect 'concrete money' from him. Cash payments were the only shred of family ties that remained. Therefore, Werner's accusations were out of place when he demanded that Gerhard cease accepting money from their father for the sake of his socialist honour. Ultimately, the conflict with their father would be a similar episode for both brothers, but each of them came to terms with it in their own way. Werner, however, was ill-informed of the goings on at the Scholem family's kitchen table from his prison cell. Additionally, there existed a deeper dimension of the row behind Werner's complaints about Gerhard's silence at such a difficult time, the political disagreement and the family disputes.

Werner not only felt neglected, but downright betrayed, as he did not hesitate to tell Gerhard directly: 'Another part of this "integrity" is that one does not renounce his friend languishing in prison in order to save his own skin.'<sup>269</sup> The 'integrity' or '*Ganzheit*', which crops up numerous times in their correspondence, was closely linked to the 'unconditionality' Werner demanded in his 1916 manifesto. The brothers sought to articulate the sincerity and consistency they had chosen for their respective lives in opposition to the ubiquitous opportunism of the pushovers and war profiteers. This unconditionality extended across all political differences – what hurt Werner the most, therefore, was the fact that Gerhard criticised his conduct in court: 'On the one hand you carefully state that I should not get excited that you accuse me of, to put it lightly, "unsocialist conduct", although this, as you know, is the gravest accusation you could make against me, and I then became excited after all. I was gobsmacked, as I had expected more or less the opposite!'<sup>270</sup>

Unsocialist conduct was the last thing Werner wanted to hear. He had sat in solitary confinement for months as a consequence of his socialist conduct, only

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269 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 3 June 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

270 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 17 June 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

to be accused of the opposite. Werner was furious: ‘Now you write to me that you know no details about my trial, only “remarks” that you have “heard” about my conduct, which lead you to pass judgement on me worse than the local court, portraying me as a thief who has stolen something but is too cowardly to admit it later and attempts all sort of things to be released again. [...] But where did you hear these remarks? Most likely from Hedwig, whom you will hardly appoint as witness, or from the *mischpoche*, who only spread what our progenitor wisely and calculatedly disseminates. It seems to me this clever man has achieved his objective, for only he knows that he can debase me vis-à-vis certain people – by simply praising my behaviour in court. Do I really have to defend myself against such distortions and prove once more that my conduct was that of a socialist?’<sup>271</sup>

Werner now went on the offensive, his honour as a socialist was dearer to him than any trouble he may encounter as a result: ‘But still, your sentences alert me to a danger that seems worse than that miserable year I have to spend in a Prussian fortification. I will counter this danger by ensuring that my defence at the appeal trial in Magdeburg, which will take place on 10 July, is such that no one can accuse me of unsocialist conduct, unless they want to slander me! You are also invited to listen to the speech I will give for the defence.’<sup>272</sup> He instructs Gerhard not to allow himself to be impressed by rumours or hearsay: ‘Should something reach your ears in the future, then I must firmly beseech you to first ask my bride whether the odd sounding pronouncement that casts me in a poor light truly originated from me!’<sup>273</sup> Despite the accusations, Werner did not seek a break with Gerhard; at the conclusion of the letter he inquired about Gerhard’s ‘Sword of Damocles’, meaning his military physical. Lastly, he asks him to keep him informed of all future changes of address, because ‘we lose sight of one another too easily, yet still have many wonderful years ahead of us’.<sup>274</sup>

Werner’s concerns would soon be confirmed. The next postcard from the field was sent to: ‘*Musketier Gerhard Scholem, Res. Inf. Reg. 18, 1. Ers. Bat. Rekr. Dep. 1. Abteilung Allenstein (Pr.)*.’ As of 18 June 1917, Gerhard was also reduced to a mere number in the military system.<sup>275</sup> He was at least initially stationed

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271 Ibid., emphasis in the original.

272 Ibid.

273 Ibid.

274 Ibid.

275 Regarding the change of address see Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 1 July 1917, NLI Jerusalem. On Gerhard’s date of enlistment see Scholem 2012, p. 96, as well as the files of the Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales, *Krankensbuchlager Berlin*, ‘Bescheid zu Werner Scholem, 22. Juni 2010’.

on base, but this was subject to change at any time. ‘Musketeer’ was the lowest military rank in the Prussian infantry, meaning Gerhard, like Werner, failed to enter a less dangerous branch of the armed services. Werner’s tone turned more conciliatory, not least because Gerhard no longer believed what his relatives were telling him but instead had requested a transcript of Werner’s appeal. Regardless, Gerhard no longer enjoyed the freedom of movement needed to pay Werner spontaneous visits and discuss matters personally. His only option was to ask for written progress reports on the trial. He also was obliged to interrupt his studies. Werner regretted this in a conciliatory letter, in which he struck a friendlier tone altogether: ‘I was overjoyed to hear that you are called “stubborn and insolent” and that “Hedwig Scholem has incited the boy”. Such news always fills me with Mephistophelean delight. I hope that you remain stubborn and insolent, and take an example from your exceedingly stubborn brother.’<sup>276</sup> The quarrel between the two brothers was thus laid to rest. As announced, Werner would demonstrate his capacity for stubbornness at his appeal trial before the high court martial in Magdeburg on 10 July 1917, after which he sent a detailed report to Gerhard worth quoting at length:

I want to tell you a few things about the trial at the high court martial, otherwise you’ll be told filthy lies again! So, the public was excluded due to the threat to public safety, but Arthur Scholem was admitted by special request. Emmy had to leave! The actual offence wasn’t even dealt with this time, as I admitted right at the beginning that I had sung. Consequently, the witnesses, who were the student who had denounced me, her mother and a policeman, weren’t even heard. For an hour we pored over the journal, during the course of which I dealt the prosecutor several blows. For this Herr, who was very sharp, indeed too sharp to be successful, had apparently not prepared himself very well and misquoted me. You can imagine how I jumped up at every wrong quote and demanded that the whole passage be read, which then sounded very different than he had said. Of course he clung to the *boche* and to that famous sentence about those ‘few rulers’ with which the court in Halle found proof of my premeditation and my malicious stance towards the Kaiser. The pleas took 3 hours! First, my lawyer spoke quite well about the legal aspects. You can surely imagine how weak the prosecution’s case was, because according to the amendment of 1908 to P[aragraph] 91, *lèse majesté* can only be punished if it is committed maliciously, premeditatedly and with

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276 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 1 July 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

the intent to libel. That is to say, all three factors must converge. You would probably laugh your head off if you read in the verdict's explanation from the 1st instance how the maliciousness is established. Likewise, no one was able to prove that I had done what I did premeditatedly, which is not the case anyway, for I never wished to besmirch the Kaiser's honour, I care far too little about him! The prosecutor asked me why I hadn't, if I was so keen to demonstrate, attended a Social Democratic gathering, in response to which I asked him to let me know when a gathering of the radical socialists was permitted in the 4th corps's field of activity [...] You should have heard the speech of the prosecution's representative in Magdeburg. Being too spicy can lead to burning oneself, I think he embarrassed himself quite badly in court, as he tried to portray me as a plotter, savvy in every trick in the book, one of 'those conspirators and traitors of the Fatherland, who treacherously undermine Germany's greatness'. But he overstretched himself very often, besides contradicting himself. For instance, he once painted a very rosy picture of me as a highly intelligent person, and then another time, when we were going through my diary, as wet behind the ears and a parroter. [...] Well, at least the man was not entirely successful in court. [...] It was my turn afterwards and I gave a roaring speech that was allegedly heard throughout the entire building. I was very amused inwardly while mimicking Danton. Incidentally, the old Herra at the high court martial sat there with their mouths and eyes wide open, for they don't seem to witness such very often. But at least they were decent and never interrupted me, even though I was cursing terribly. My defendant assured me that the speech alone must have cost me an additional two months! It must have been good then! What they tried to interpret as particularly aggravating was that I had worn the 'tunic of the Kaiser', which was precisely the grounds on which I pleaded mitigating circumstances, by depicting quite colourfully how I felt deeply coerced into being a soldier. I tell you I was damn happy that I was not a volunteer in the telegraph unit, or I wouldn't have been able to shoot my mouth off like that. Then again, they probably won't have heard anything as horrific as what I told them about Serbia all too often. Well, in short, as you can imagine, I had a big mouth. I was surprised by the verdict myself, I hadn't expected to get less, let alone a full 7 months less. Really I should have appealed, but then I would have had to wait until November for the decision of the court martial. By that time, my sentence is over anyway!<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

Despite his epistolary derision of the ‘*boches*’ and the savage portrayals of the war found in his journals, despite his ‘big mouth’ and a performance approaching that of a Danton, Werner was only sentenced to nine months in prison, in part owed to the prosecutor’s weak performance and the extremely narrow legal definition of *lèse majesté*. Restrictions on freedom of expression and a climate of political persecution were certainly characteristic of the Kaiserreich, but dissidents like Werner could nevertheless invoke certain existing legal norms.<sup>278</sup> Because the four months of pre-trial detention were deducted from his sentence, Werner could expect to be released on 17 December 1917.<sup>279</sup> The verdict seems to have propitiated Arthur Scholem – in any case, he attempted to re-establish contact with his son following the trial – but Werner declined: ‘The old man met me at the train station and offered me 20 M[arks], in the presence of Emmy. That I did not accept them offended him terribly. But I’ve had enough, I refuse to get on with him again’. Regardless of the scene, he did not hold Gerhard’s own path against him any longer: ‘But I don’t reproach you for letting them pay, as I believe that you now have them under your thumb. They are very frightened of you, and you can be sure that the boss will not bother you anymore. At most he will scoff about the “meshuga lad” behind your back.’<sup>280</sup>

Even though Werner’s sentence appeared mild, nine months of solitary confinement was still quite a long period to spend incarcerated. While in prison, Werner had plenty of time to think. In August 1917 he informed Gerhard on a plain field postcard of two important decisions. Firstly: after four years of betrothal, he wanted to marry Emmy, with or without the family’s approval. Arthur was not the only parent resisting the liaison; Betty was also displeased: ‘I don’t know why mother is upset about my intention to wed on Christmas. First they throw me out of the house and then they wonder why I take the appropriate steps in response. Moreover, the matter cannot be reversed. You are invited to the ceremony, but that means without money, for I have now permanently gone over to the proletarians’.<sup>281</sup> Though Werner may have exaggerated a little bit, his *mésalliance* to a working-class woman definitely signified a break of some sort. Without his family’s support it was unclear how he would finance his studies after the war. The legendary banker Emil Voigt, whom Werner had sought so urgently in 1914, never arrived, and with him the hope of procuring Emmy a middle-class background receded. Irrespective of his hardship,

278 On the Kaiserreich judiciary see Wilhelm 2010 and Goldberg 2010.

279 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 12 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

280 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

281 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 12 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.



he implored Gerhard to keep up his resistance: 'I hope that you don't return to Neue Grünstraße once you are freed, just to have yourself kicked out with the next mood swing. I could also *zopp*<sup>282</sup> now, if I cancel the marriage project, but I've finally had enough. I will cross the Rubicon.'<sup>283</sup>

For now, Werner chose to only hint at his second decision, or rather realisation: 'What is your comment on the fact that the erection of a Jewish state in Palestine is among the British war objectives? Do you think that's a bluff? I don't! And I have drawn some intellectual conclusions. And have arrived at a standpoint I have so far rejected!'<sup>284</sup> The British would elaborate further on their war objectives in Palestine three months later in what became known as the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, pledging support for the 'establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'. Werner was deeply impressed by the apparent shift in policy, refining his conclusions in a subsequent letter: 'My insinuation intended to express the following: until now I was of the opinion that the war would and indeed must end in a draw. Now I hope and believe that it must end with the total annihilation of Germany. No other alternative is possible nor desirable, neither for the international proletariat nor the Jewish people. And only with England's total victory will Palestine become Jewish!'<sup>285</sup>

These words left no room for ambiguity, and only made it out of prison in the form of a smuggled note, while the aforementioned insinuation was delivered by the regular military postal service. The difference in tone is obvious; through all of his anti-German tirades, Werner had never gone this far in his advocacy of Zionism. Yet despite this militant declaration of support for a Jewish Palestine, Werner would at no point become involved in the Jewish national movement after his release. He followed Zionist debates, but 'our movement' to him still meant the socialist Workers' Youth.<sup>286</sup> Before he could even contemplate involving himself in politics, however, he had to complete his prison term. Following the appellate trial in July 1917, the nature of his sentence was established and his pre-trial detention ceased, and he was transferred to the military prison in the Berlin suburb of Spandau in August 1917 after all.<sup>287</sup>

282 Rhineland dialect: submerge, immerse, dip in.

283 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 12 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

284 Ibid., emphasis in the original.

285 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

286 Werner wrote, 'I know the Jewish youth movement far too poorly to pass judgement whether it's really utterly confused or not. I only know our socialist [youth movement]', Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 25 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

287 The precise date of the transfer is unknown, but Werner indicates in his 22 August 1917

The prison building had been brought into operation in 1879, and its capacity to hold 522 inmates made it the largest Prussian military prison at the time. The building returned to civilian use until 1920 and was already in a decrepit state by that point, prompting numerous complaints.<sup>288</sup> When Werner completed his involuntary stay there in 1917, he probably found the facility in a correspondingly poor condition. However, we learn nothing about the conditions of his prison detention from his writings.

While Werner languished in prison in Halle and Spandau, Gerhard was coming to terms with the harsh reality of a soldier's life. He immediately loathed basic training in the barracks, and needless to say the prospect of being sent to the front proved even more horrifying. But unlike Werner, who served for almost three years, Gerhard's stint as a soldier would remain brief, as he later recalled in his memoirs: 'My military period in Allenstein, East Prussia was short and stormy, and I do not wish to discuss it here. I rejected everything that occurred there, leaving only two options: either to try me in front of a military court or declare me mentally unfit and release me. The latter was chosen, and I was declared a "psychopath" and released after two months.'<sup>289</sup>

Gerhard nevertheless endured quite a bit in these eight weeks. After receiving his first medical certificate he was frequently harassed, often facing anti-Semitic abuse. A letter to like-minded friend Erich Brauer dated July 1917, which has never been published, reveals details about which Gershom chose not to write even 60 years later: 'Only now, if before I never saw it with such clarity, am I absolutely certain that it is impossible for me to live together with these people for a somehow lengthier period of time. Only their bare fear that I may have a seizure and in such a moment beat one of them half to death is what keeps them from carrying things to extremes. [...] You cannot even imagine the despicable cruelty with which Germans are capable of spoiling even those brief moments one must spend among them. You cannot speak to them reasonably, for they're not even capable intellectually of thinking straight and interrupt you if you speak more than two sentences. Anti-Semitism is surely fast approaching behind my back, but because I have already passed a great test here by beating the living daylight out of one of the men in the barrack yard in front of all the soldiers and officers in a fit of rage because he had started to

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letter that he expected the relocation any day now. See Werner to Gerhard Scholem, NLI Jerusalem.

288 The condition of the building is taken from Fülberth 2010. On the history of the building from 1920 see Welzing 2007.

289 Scholem 1997, p. 108.

“yiddle” [*jüdeln*] at me, they prefer not to do these things when I’m present’.<sup>290</sup> Harassment and anti-Semitism often pushed Gerhard to his limits, and his diagnosis of a nervous disorder was real – both the violent outbursts, which had not occurred prior to his conscription, as well as his nervous convulsions. They would start, for instance, during a disciplinary measure, after which Gerhard would be treated a little less harshly. He wrote to Brauer: ‘Nervous convulsions are a terrible weapon, but they work. Unfortunately I’ve no control over them, as one must undergo considerable torment to get such convulsions.’<sup>291</sup>

In light of such unpredictability, Gerhard’s superiors became less and less able to handle him; the new recruit was simply too strange. On 21 August Gerhard was ‘discharged and sent home due to continuous war unemployment’.<sup>292</sup> Werner promptly congratulated him: ‘Receive my congratulations, you poor emotionally disturbed soul. Yes, should truly capable, perceptive psychiatrists observe you, how could they decide otherwise? Unfortunately with me, as I also had conflicts with the military authorities, they refused to accept visions and instead sent me mercilessly to a place where weeping and gnashing of teeth is the rule.’<sup>293</sup> The latter was a metaphor for the ‘outer darkness’ of hell, taken from the Gospel of Matthew. It described a state which struck Werner as not far removed from that of his cell.<sup>294</sup>

A sanatorium seemed far more comfortable in comparison. Some of Werner’s friends chose this path and had themselves committed to a mental ward in Dresden.<sup>295</sup> However, escaping the military in this manner required sit-

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290 Gerhard Scholem to Erich Brauer, 15 July 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

291 Gerhard Scholem to Erich Brauer, 25 July 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

292 ‘Bescheid zu Gerhard Scholem vom 22. Juni 2010’, *Versorgungsamt – Krankenbuchlager*, Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales Berlin.

293 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

294 Matthew 8:12: ‘I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (quoted from the New Standard Revised Edition 1989). Some translations read ‘wailing and gnashing of teeth’. By describing the non-Jews from ‘east and west’ with the progenitors of Israel while excluding the Jewish ‘heirs of the kingdom’, Jesus, or rather his mouthpiece in the form of Matthew, cancels the promise to the Jews that they would be the ‘chosen people’. This passage of the New Testament is open to Christian anti-Semitic interpretations concerning the ‘impentence of the Jews’ who refuse to accept Jesus as their saviour. It is however unclear whether Werner quoted this passage in relation to himself as a Jew, or if the ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ simply struck him as an appropriate way to express his current mood.

295 See Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 29 June 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

ting through an elaborate medical-psychological examination. Gerhard's evaluation was rather interesting: 'The doctors actually wrote that I had been under their supervision for a little over a month, that years of developments and the crisis with my father had triggered a bout of schizophrenia (known as "dementia praecox" back then), which I learned three months later through an error of the Jena city administration. The doctors called my father to Allenstein and explained to him that the domestic conflict was to blame for my condition. To be honest I cannot recall ever having seen things clearer in my life than during these few weeks. In any event, my father and I met and agreed upon a resolution that entailed my no longer living at home.'<sup>296</sup>

Despite these positive side effects, the patient was displeased with his diagnosis. Gerhard feared being declared mentally incompetent and refused entry to university. His mother continued to comfort him months later: 'Your agitation is completely unnecessary, lacking all foundation! We did not fight the diagnosis but welcomed it, because now you won't be called up once again and can remain free of burdens. And this is what counted. Otherwise we wouldn't have felt comforted by Dr. Liebermann's opinion, which is wrong. But what difference does it make? The main thing is that his diagnosis has freed you for good. Dr. Meyer has also written to say that he made his medical report with the express purpose of getting you free, but that you are *completely healthy*. There is no danger for you in studying, though naturally within limits. You're a nervous person, after all. Don't throw yourself immediately into a hundred seminars.'<sup>297</sup> Gerhard now moved to Jena to study, which also meant that he could visit his imprisoned brother in Halle. They were able to settle any remaining differences when they finally met up again.<sup>298</sup> Until Werner's transfer to Spandau they found time for conversations and a gap in their written correspondence sets in, but he nevertheless dedicated his last letter on the day before his release to his brother. Werner was delighted when the prison gates opened: 'Should you ever have to spend 10 months behind bars, you will understand that I am happy, although a terrible life awaits me in the garrison.'<sup>299</sup>

Along with the grim monotony of military service that awaited him, Werner also received a second piece of bad news: the University of Halle had initiated his expulsion and sought to exmatriculate him. He suspected the worst: 'Of course I will be expelled, so that I will later be forced to go to Zurich if I

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296 Scholem 1997, p. 108.

297 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 16 November 1917, Scholem 2002, p. 62, emphasis in original.

298 Scholem 2012, p. 96.

299 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 9 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

can't enrol at any other university'.<sup>300</sup> His pessimism was not unjustified. The universities of the Kaiserreich were a hotbed of conservatism, expulsion from one university on political grounds could grow into a ban from all universities in the country. Nevertheless, Werner was determined to win this battle, nor did the potential costs of his studies deter him: 'Together, Emmy and I will surely manage to make it possible for me to complete my studies. I'm tired of this permanent *Zobbelei* with the *mischpoche*. By the way, by the time I study you will – your head full of moss – long be done. In the 6th semester, at age 20, that's what I call fortunate!'<sup>301</sup> Werner was obliged to watch his younger brother overtake him, while his own educational trajectory was interrupted again and again. He did, however, ask Gerhard to accomplish something using his network of contacts: 'I hope that you, either in written form or otherwise, can do good for my sake. [...] I want to inquire as to whether you could perhaps attend my appointment as a guest-listener. How would it be if you submitted a petition to the rector of the university concerning the matter? It would mean very much to me if you were there'.<sup>302</sup> Gerhard seized the opportunity and demonstrated practical solidarity: 'At the behest of my brother I paid two calls on the rector, the well-known philosopher Hans Vaihinger, author of *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* [The Philosophy of As If], in order to plead his case, and as I recall, not without some success'.<sup>303</sup> Werner was expelled from Halle but was able to avoid a general university ban.<sup>304</sup> Even so, there was no time to think about his studies for the time being, as the military still had a tight grip on him. Moreover, since he was already considered a troublemaker, it was impossible for him to shirk duty on health grounds. He was, however, at least granted permission to leave the battalion for his wedding.

### Werner and Emmy Scholem: A Mésalliance

According to their marriage certificate, Werner Scholem and Emmy Wiechelt were married in Linden, Hanover 'on the thirty-first of December One Thousand Nine Hundred Seventeen'. After four years of engagement, they were finally due to be married two days after Werner's 22nd birthday. Witnesses to

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300 Ibid.

301 Ibid.

302 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 25 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

303 Scholem 2012, p. 96.

304 See Emmy to Gerhard Scholem, 5 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

the marriage were locksmith Johannes Rock, an uncle of Emmy's, and the carpenter Karl Kirchmann.<sup>305</sup> As previously announced, it was to be a proletarian wedding, in stark contrast to their uncles' pompous celebrations about which both Reinhold and Gershom waxed nostalgic decades later. When Werner and Emmy were married, there was no sign of '100 people, fancy dress and performances'.<sup>306</sup> Not even a photograph of the event exists. It simply was not a Scholem wedding. Only the bride's parents attended, as Werner's remained opposed to the union. Gerhard was also absent, although he sent his best wishes.<sup>307</sup>

Not only the circumstances but also the ceremony itself was kept modest: 'The registrar directed the question to the engaged couple, separately and one after the other: whether they desired to enter into marriage with each other. The engaged affirmed this and the registrar thereupon pronounced that they were now a legally married couple by act of the Civil Code'.<sup>308</sup> The text of the marriage certificate describes a modest event; they indulged in no romantic ceremony. Werner had consciously chosen to retain his Jewish faith, but Emmy had not converted to Judaism nor would Werner ever ask her to, although she had in fact left the church,<sup>309</sup> and the wedding was thus held at the civil registry office. Was it a contradiction in the eyes of *enfant terrible* and socialist Werner Scholem to marry someone 'by act of the Civil Code' granted by the bourgeois state he so reviled?

To Werner, this was not a contradiction. Despite his occasional arrogance towards her in letters to his brother, Werner by all means stood by Emma and wanted to formally enshrine their relationship once and for all. He considered children from the outset, a continuation of the Scholem family legacy. He and Emmy spoke about it, and Werner mentioned that he had considered raising

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305 See 'Abschrift Heiratsurkunde Werner und Emmy Scholem', *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover, no. 1712310. Johannes Rock (born 25 October 1882 in Moritzburg, today Hildesheim) was a brother of Emmy's mother. I would like to extend my thanks to Siegrid Dominik for this information.

306 Reinhold to Gershom Scholem, 31 March 1951, NLI Jerusalem.

307 Emmy to Gerhard Scholem, 5 February 1918. Gerhard visited Werner shortly before the wedding but had already left by Christmas 1917; see Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 19 and 25 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

308 'Abschrift Heiratsurkunde Werner und Emmy Scholem', *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover, no. 1712310.

309 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 12 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem. Werner himself was not particularly interested in Emmy's conversion: 'If I wanted, she would become a Jew, but what for!' Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

the children 'Jewish'. Emmy found it 'very touching' and saw this as a sign of trust between the two.<sup>310</sup> Werner's announcement that he wanted to use the marriage to 'burn all ships to the bourgeoisie behind' him was more than just revolutionary pathos, for the marriage ultimately compelled his family to break with Werner. In this way, their marriage was more a rebellion against bourgeois moral codes than any form of open or informal relationship, so popular with later generations of rebels, ever could be.

Although Gerhard and Werner were disappointed by the reality of their own family, the notion of a Jewish family tradition remained an intellectual and spiritual point of orientation for both of them. Gershom himself never had children, but occupied himself with his own family history extensively and maintained written correspondence with the most distant of cousins around the world well into old age. Initiatives to collect information on the Scholem family history usually came from him. This was more than the obsession of a childless uncle: to Gershom Scholem, Jewishness was not only an intellectual legacy, but also a genealogy. He was practically obsessed with Jewish ancestry, often asking fleeting acquaintances about the names and birthplaces of their grandparents so as to reconstruct their ancestral lineage.<sup>311</sup> Descent represented a crucial aspect of Jewish identity to him, although he did not regard it as the only factor – Gershom Scholem, the most important scholar of religious history of his time, hardly would have contemplated denying the relevance of culture and religion to the Jewish identity. Yet even in old age, he remained unable to provide an answer to the question as to 'what is a Jew?' It was his German nationalist brother Reinhold, of all people, who caused him to think about the question again in his later years: 'Attached you will find an article from the 29 Nov. issue of *Time*', Reinhold wrote in 1968, 'on the question: are we Jews a race, a nation or a religion. I find the question cannot be answered in a general way, it depends on the feelings and religious attitudes of each individual'.<sup>312</sup> Gershom rejected the notion of a Jewish 'race' and delivered a response in line with the attitudes of secular Zionism: 'I am inclined to regard them as a nation and have taken the appropriate measures in my own life as a result'.<sup>313</sup> The Jewish nation had been Gerhard's answer to the dilemma of a Jewishness caught between assimilation and anti-Semitism, to the precarious tension between ethnicity, religion and culture.

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310 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

311 Habermas 2007, p. 14.

312 Reinhold to Gerhard Scholem, 2 December 1968, NLI Jerusalem.

313 Gerhard to Reinhold Scholem, 23 January 1969, NLI Jerusalem.

At the same time, the Jewish nation was itself an answer that raised many new questions. What was the relationship between nation and ethnicity? Did such a nation require an ethnically and culturally homogenous population upon which to base itself? Was a multi-ethnic state possible, or even desirable? Gershom Scholem answered this question in the affirmative through his involvement in the peace initiative *Brit-Shalom* in 1926, which advocated for accommodation and reconciliation with the Arab population in what was then British Palestine.<sup>314</sup> But the organisation was a small forum, as relatively few of Gerhard's fellow travellers agreed with him on this matter. The controversy surrounding what constituted Jewishness remained a lasting contradiction within Zionism. It permeated more than just the political sphere, and affected more than just the Jewish settlers in Palestine. The concept of an ethnic lineage had real implications for the personal lives of Jews, including German Jews. Weddings, starting a family, romantic relationships – the question of identity encroached upon life's most intimate spheres.

Although he steadfastly rejected the idea of a Jewish 'race', Gershom Scholem was nevertheless concerned about the increasing number of so-called 'mixed marriages' between Jews and non-Jews since the turn of the twentieth century. In his memoirs he refers to them as a 'growing problem' and positively points out that hardly any mixed marriages or baptisms occurred in the Scholem family prior to World War I, the only exception being Betty's sister Käte and her husband Walter Schiepan.<sup>315</sup> In one of his later letters to Reinhold, he addresses this question in more detail: 'The mixed marriages are advancing all over the world, even – just that you don't kid yourself – in Israel. In the year 2000 the Jews will likely have disappeared to a large part. At the same time we must not forget that in contrast to the mixed marriages before 1900, the results of which were lost to Jewry almost completely, now a large share of the children consider themselves to be Jews.'<sup>316</sup> Betty Scholem had voiced concerns similar to those harboured by Gershom in 1975 forty years earlier. She also regarded mixed marriages as a problem, even going so far as to declare the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 a comparatively minor burden: 'No Jew can be against the ban on mixed marriages. [...] I only now see and with the utmost horror how terribly many mixed marriages there are.'<sup>317</sup> These statements must be understood in light of the burning question of emigration; Betty remained relatively mild in her

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314 Gershom Scholem was active until the organisation's dissolution in 1933. See Biale 1982, p. 99.

315 Scholem 2012, p. 23.

316 Gershom to Reinhold Scholem, 10 February 1975, Scholem 1999, p. 113.

317 Betty Scholem to Escha Scholem, 10 May 1935, Scholem 1989, p. 402.



assessment of Nazi terror so as to avoid confronting the prospect of leaving her German life behind. Despite her wilful obfuscation of the political climate in mid-1930s Germany, her comments demonstrate that the discourse around mixed marriages was not purely an anti-Semitic construct, but in fact cultivated by generations of Jewish families as well, driven by fears of dissolution through assimilation. The emancipation of German Jews in the second half of the nineteenth century in particular brought newfound urgency to the issue, and now Werner entered into a mixed marriage with a non-Jewish woman.

Viewed from this angle, his marriage was improper in a double sense: not only her proletarian, but also her Christian background earned the family's disapproval. This prejudice was deeply ingrained, even in family members who otherwise wished them well. Even decades later, German philosopher Jürgen Habermas would witness a 'moving scene' in his Starnberg apartment, in which Werner's daughter Renee, long an adult and a successful actress, 'struggled for her recognition as a Jew' in an emotional argument with Gershom Scholem, who contested his niece's Jewish identity.<sup>318</sup> Nevertheless, despite these deep-seated reservations towards mixed marriages, both Gerhard and Betty made an effort to improve their respective relationships with Emmy and Werner immediately following the wedding in 1918.

In fact, the real opponent of the liaison was once again Arthur. He was, in spite of his professed Germanness, paradoxically the most vehement opponent of mixed marriages of all, at least according to Gerhard: 'Our own father, in whose house I never saw a non-Jewish married couple exchange pleasantries, had refused to even see the wife of our brother Werner, a non-Jew – and this was a consciously assimilated Jew'.<sup>319</sup> As a consequence of starting his own family, Werner felt compelled to break off contact with his relatives. At age 22 he followed his own rules of the 'unconditionality of youth' and left his father's house. After all, Arthur Scholem *was* the family. As patriarch, he decided on all important matters and tolerated little resistance to his will. After the wedding, Arthur ensured that Emmy and Werner were virtually boycotted. He even forced Betty to cease contact with her son. Werner was disappointed: 'Additionally, I received a harsh letter from father in which he explains that he

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318 Habermas provides no exact date for the scene, but it must have occurred in the early 1980s while Werner's second daughter Renee Goddard, born Renate Scholem in 1923, worked at Munich's English Theatre. See Habermas 2007, p. 15.

319 Gerhard to Reinhold Scholem, 29 May 1972, NLI Jerusalem. In his memoirs Gerhard notes that at least a 'brief formal meeting' between the two occurred, but it is clear that Arthur broke off relations with Werner shortly following the wedding, and never initiated contact with Emmy in the first place. See Scholem 2012, p. 24.

will divorce mother if she does not abandon her written correspondence with me. Mother is of course too weak to object, which one can't hold against her. She sent me a goodbye letter and asked me not to write her anymore. Oh well, for all I care'.<sup>320</sup>

Arthur also exerted pressure on other relatives, all of whom complied for the most part, and Werner still found himself isolated months after the wedding. By the summer of 1918, Reinhold was the only relative – beside Gerhard, of course – to break through the blockade: 'Reinhold wrote me, the commotion around the civil servant's daughter probably filled his heart with a bit more sympathy for my predicament. Evidently the civil servant's daughter had no money, as I can hardly imagine that her confession would have been an obstacle provided an adequate dowry was presented'.<sup>321</sup> It turned out that Reinhold also intended to marry outside the Jewish community, incurring significant resistance at home. Once again, the brothers' respective interpretations of this family row is telling: while Gerhard saw Emmy's Christian background as the chief reason for Arthur's disapproval, Werner thought it was an excuse and suspected her proletarian background to be the real motivation.

Whatever the case, their relationship with their father was damaged beyond repair, while Arthur's boycott continued to have an effect: 'I am of course hardly connected to the family, with the exception of Käte and Hans, who send me a bit of lolly from time to time. Hans wrote mockingly that the expulsion Arthur hurled at him for the wedding present has yet to be revoked'.<sup>322</sup> Käte Schiepan and Hans Hirsch were Betty's brother and sister, who ignored Arthur's prohibitions. Werner's family was therefore comprised of only an aunt and uncle and one brother – or perhaps one and a half brothers, if Reinhold's rapprochement is also taken into account. Gerhard remained his most important contact in the family, however, which none of the prior disputes had changed. Nor was the 'lolly' from his aunt and uncle negligible, for he no longer received anything from his parents, a state of affairs that Arthur was determined to maintain indefinitely – even beyond the grave. In his will, he named only Reinhold, Erich and Gerhard as heirs. Werner was only to receive an 'obligatory share' – the law prevented a complete disinheritance, stipulating a legal minimum in the case of a parent's death, even for disowned offspring.<sup>323</sup> The disinheritance was

<sup>320</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>321</sup> Reinhold seems to have had a liaison with the daughter of a privy councillor, see Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 29 July 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>322</sup> Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 October 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

<sup>323</sup> 'Testament Arthur Scholem vom 24. September 1921', *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover. An earlier version of the will did not survive, there is however hardly any doubt

renewed and confirmed by a notary public in a second draft of the will four years later. Arthur was intent on cementing the break in the family.

Werner and his wife were thus obliged to eke out an existence on their own. As an office clerk, Emmy earned much more than Werner on his meagre infantryman's allowance. He soon was compelled to beg his brother for money to at least be able to afford a decent meal from time to time: 'Otherwise I will feel awful. I have no money and am starving. Mother sends me nothing out of fear of father. Please send me 5 M immediately, which as a wealthy student you could grow to 10 M, by the way, and do a good deed.'<sup>324</sup> Those with no money went hungry in the war year of 1918, and even as a soldier Werner received only basic rations. His outlook was grim, including with regard to the obscured horizon beyond the war. In contrast to Gerhard, whose studies were progressing well, Werner had relatively few options and little formal education. Though his *Abitur* had been a good start, he had only been trained in the detested profession of a soldier since then. In late 1917, Werner was of course unable to anticipate that his family's boycott would relax at a certain point. For him, his commitment to Emmy meant bidding the middle class farewell and taking a step into an uncertain future.

### All Quiet on the Western Front: Werner Misses the Revolution

His marriage leave was brief, a full 14 days, after which followed his return to soldier life and its peculiar dualism of boredom and the fear of death. By Christmas Day 1917 Werner was writing wistful letters to his brother, painting a grim picture of what was to come: 'I only wish that I would be granted my freedom soon as well, for if I am forced to play soldier for three more years the last bits of nous I have managed to retain will certainly vanish entirely, and a being will once again don civilian clothes that eats, talks and screws, last but not least with the dark notion that this could have been different. But are you aware of a means of protection against Prussian militarism? I wish I was mentally ill.'<sup>325</sup>

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that the disinheritance already occurred in 1918. The reason for a redraft of the will was the appointment of Reinhold and Erich as partners in the family business beginning in 1919. The minimum legal share to be paid out was specified in more detail later on – 50,000 Reichsmarks were listed in 1921. A noteworthy sum, but only payable in the case of Arthur's death, before which Werner was to receive no support whatsoever.

324 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 10 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

325 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 25 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

The monotonous, dull routine of military life exhausted Werner's nerves and depressed his mood. Yet when a bit of variation did actually occur in 1918, he longed for the life of boredom to return: 'I am faring quite terribly. Perhaps you know that proceedings are being initiated against me for charges of treason. They had to be dropped as no evidence was found, and I was declared fit for active service. Until then I had a nice life; I stood guard and performed office duties. But all hell has broken loose here since then! It is clear that I will be leaving with the next transport, and I'm only here because none have left yet. Of course I called in sick constantly, but it's useless, as I am always declared fit for duty'.<sup>326</sup>

The new accusations of treason against Werner were part of a wider wave of repression against the Workers' Youth that began in 1917. After finally leaving prison, Werner now learned that his comrades were being imprisoned one by one: 'Moreover, all of my friends have now been arrested, Schönlank in Halle, Becker in Hanover, Plettner in Hamburg'.<sup>327</sup> Wherever Werner looked, he saw a familiar scene: 'In the nick! In preventive custody!'<sup>328</sup> Around the turn of 1917–18, two more friends were to be arrested in Halle and charged with 'treason': Werner's former landlord Anna Schönlank, Reinhold Schönlank's wife, and a comrade Werner named 'Hauschild' who would later become known as KPD military expert Robert Hauschild.<sup>329</sup> Looking more closely at the list of arrested friends, numerous similarities can be identified.<sup>330</sup> With the exception of Robert Hauschild, all were born in the 1890s, were active in the first generation of the radical Workers' Youth, and all came into conflict with the state during the war. Additionally, almost all of them would later become leading cadres in the KPD.<sup>331</sup>

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326 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 10 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

327 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 9 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem. 'Plettner' refers to Karl Plättner.

328 Ibid.

329 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 25 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem. The youth was accused of distributing handbills for a strike on 15 August 1917. The senior prosecutor opened multiple proceedings on charges of treason, see BArch Berlin R 3003 – C 21/1918, Nr. 1–3; BArch Berlin R 3003 – J 171/1918, Nr. 1; BArch Berlin R 3003 – C 147/17, Nr. 1 and 2. I thank Ottokar Luban for making me aware of these sources.

330 Robert Hauschild, born 1900, was five years younger than Werner. He later worked as an editor and military expert for various KPD newspapers, was arrested in the Soviet Union in 1937 and murdered in the Gulag. See Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 350 f.

331 Of the individuals mentioned in the letter, only Anna Schönlank's later career remains an open question. The rest would all re-emerge in the ranks of the KPD, see Weber and Herbst 2008.

Take 'Becker from Hanover', for instance, born in 1894 as Karl-Albin Becker.<sup>332</sup> Like Werner, he had been active in the Hanover chapter of the Workers' Youth since his school days. Karl and Werner were almost the same age and shared similar views: Becker was a leading figure in the Bremen Radical Leftists by 1917, and became editor in chief of the Communist-run *Hamburger Volkszeitung* after the war. 'Plettner' from Hamburg was born in 1893 as Karl Plättner, one of the most active Workers' Youth functionaries in Hamburg and a staunch opponent of World War I.<sup>333</sup> After the war he also joined the KPD, only to leave it again in 1920 following a split in the organisation. Plättner's task in the newly founded Communist Workers' Party of Germany [*Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, KAPD] was to organise a paramilitary fighting force that waged an armed guerrilla struggle against capital in 1921–2, making headlines with bank robberies and hold-ups of factory cash offices.<sup>334</sup> Yet they both took their first political steps in Social Democracy: Karl Plättner and Karl Becker were both elected to an editorial commission drafting 'guiding principles' for the oppositional youth at an 'All-Reich Conference of Oppositional Social Democratic Youth' around Easter 1917 – an idea Werner had already pursued one year prior.<sup>335</sup> Werner probably would have attended the conference himself had his political commitments not been interrupted by military service and pre-trial detention.

Reinhold Schönlank, born in 1890, was three or four years older than his comrades and led the aforementioned Workers' Youth centre in Halle. Schönlank was a trained chemist and had worked as a hotel clerk, a brewer and a pharmacist. He lost his eyesight in an accident in 1910 and was admitted to a home for the blind in Halle as a 'pupil', until he was kicked out for his political activity in 1913. Schönlank would later become quite active in the KPD despite his physical impairment. He served as a delegate to several party conferences and represented the district of Halle-Merseburg in the party's *Zentralausschuss*, a

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332 Younger brother Ernst Becker was only 17 at the time of the arrests and did not yet move in leading circles. It is thus safe to assume that Werner was referring to Karl-Albin Becker, see Weber and Herbst 2008, pp. 93–4.

333 Ullrich 2000; Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 678 f.

334 Ibid.

335 German: *Reichskonferenz der oppositionellen sozialdemokratischen Jugend*. See Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 678. Plättner and Becker ignored the leadership formed at a conspiratorial youth conference with Karl Liebknecht and Otto Rühle in attendance in April 1916, as they sought a more action-oriented approach. See Ullrich 2000, p. 36. On the youth conference see Luban 2010, p. 2.

leading political body of the KPD.<sup>336</sup> In 1917 Werner had frequent contact with Schönlink, even lodging at the home of him and wife Anna for a while. She later supplied him with food parcels while he served time in prison.<sup>337</sup> Yet when Werner was allowed to leave prison in December 1917, his friends were gone. Becker, Plättner and Reinhold Schönlink would spend the rest of the war as political prisoners, and were only freed by the revolution in November 1918.

The wave of arrests had left the network of the radical Workers' Youth in tatters. Werner concluded that the movement was 'either dead, where the Scheide-Men control it, or killed, in that its representatives sit in prison'.<sup>338</sup> He could not resist adding a minor sideswipe at the Zionist youth movement: 'A reign of terror as is taking hold here would make for a good test of your youth movement's convictions. Surely some would disappear from your ranks as well when the real struggle comes'.<sup>339</sup> Werner's optimism of the previous year had dissipated; it no longer appeared as if a younger generation was about to take charge of the labour movement, at least not in the near term.

In retrospect, the other arrested activists probably felt like Werner when he wrote on the last day of his prison term: 'I will continue to think back on the last quarter year that I've spent sewing sacks for a long time'.<sup>340</sup> Imprisonment proved to be a formative experience for this entire generation of politically active youth. Military physicals, military drills, class justice and forced labour behind prison walls – these were experiences none would soon forget. Those who came of age in these surroundings expected neither social reforms nor democracy from the state, and believed in neither the parliament nor the rule of law. Karl Kautsky's ideas of a gradual economic development towards socialism, developed in times of peace, appeared just as unconvincing to these radical youth as Eduard Bernstein's thesis of the SPD as a democratic-socialist party of reform. The situation was rather different for the war generation. Many had already been dissatisfied with the youth movement's dependence on the party and the latter's ossified structures before 1914, as Werner's letters from the autumn of 1914 clearly confirm. The war had both stiffened their convictions as well as transformed them into a life experience. While trade unionists and deputies who complied with the party majority's line were exempted from military service, radicals were drafted in order to silence them. If this proved ineffective, a prison sentence usually followed. The combination of military and

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336 Werner and Herbst 2008, pp. 819–20.

337 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 August 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

338 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 25 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

339 Ibid.

340 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 9 December 1917, NLI Jerusalem.

prison befell prominent figures like Liebknecht just as much as it did adolescents Becker, Plättner, Schönlank and Scholem. It is therefore no coincidence that Werner and his friends did not return to Social Democracy after the war. Werner's vision of a radical Workers' Youth that would steer the party back onto its revolutionary course had failed by the foundation of the USPD at the latest, although Independent Social Democracy was itself only a transitional stage that would collapse by 1920. Werner was thus, in a sense, proven right when predicting that the Workers' Youth, as 'Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg's guard', would soon lead the movement in 1916, as the 'functionaries and protagonists of the party' came from this layer.<sup>341</sup> In fact, the radical youth born in the 1890s with their specific experience would later become the founding generation of an entirely new movement: Communism.

The Communist Party of Germany, founded on 1 January 1919, took its name from the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels. The organisation was intent on making a new beginning while simultaneously drawing on past revolutionary traditions. Within the new party, erstwhile adolescent radicals often acted as a part of the party's ultra-left wing, as the biographies of Werner Scholem and Karl Plättner demonstrate. This term was in fact an insult, coined by their intra-party opponents – the 'Ultra-Leftists', on the other hand, simply understood themselves as revolutionaries and acted accordingly. Their radicalism represented more than an ideological current, but rather a fundamental contradiction which would determine the KPD's policies over the course of several waves. The experiences of war and revolution had not only been a moment of awakening for the cadre of the Workers' Youth, but in fact for countless members of older generations as well.<sup>342</sup> Experiences of war and repression in the Kaiserreich thus became a crucial component of the political culture of the Weimar Republic. In the eyes of police and prosecutors, the wave of repression in late 1917 had calmed things down. But this calm was an illusion, as years of unrest were soon to follow.

In early 1918 Werner only barely eluded a second prison sentence. A letter from Emmy to Gerhard tells us more, and for the first time we actually read a few lines written by Werner's young wife: 'all our friends from the party in Halle have now been picked up, and from the various testimonies of a few youths they have established that Werner gave speeches against the war in the winter of 1916. They wanted to build a case of treason out of that, but they didn't

341 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

342 David W. Morgan describes this using the example of *Vorwärts* editor Ernst Däumig, born in 1866. See Morgan 1983 as well as Weir 2010, pp. 143–4.

manage, as the evidence was not sufficient. – So now they have tried to take care of him in a different way, they simply declared him *k.v.* and it's actually quite possible that he'll be sent to the field this very week. Of course, it is nothing but harassment, because Werner is far from *k.v.* for the infantry, for he's not even capable of enduring longer marches etc. and any other person with that kind of injury would have been able to dodge service for years. Unfortunately though, in this blessed Germany of ours one only has the right to shut up and therefore Werner has no choice but to go into the field – or to prison'.<sup>343</sup>

Those two letters: '*k.v. – kriegverwendungsfähig*', fit for active duty. No other abbreviation in the military's unwieldy language of war evoked as much fear and terror as these two letters. In Werner's case, his '*k.v.*' status was a punishment for his political convictions – the tenacity that had survived prison was to be smashed on the front. However, a political crisis delayed his deployment: 'I have not yet performed much actual service, due to a raised alert around the strike incident. The companies were armed with live ammunition and conducted exercises in the city. I wasn't brought along to this, but rather sent away beforehand'.<sup>344</sup>

The incident in question was the January strike of 1918, already the third mass strike against the war and the peak of an escalating wave of resistance.<sup>345</sup> The first mass strike had been in sympathy with Liebknecht, witnessed by Werner in Berlin in June of 1916. In April 1917 a second wave erupted, this time broader and on a national scale, motivated by the disastrous food situation. January 1918 marked a further escalation. The reason for the strike was the Russian Revolution of November 1917, which had led to the Bolsheviks' offer for immediate peace negotiations. The German generals, however, insisted on peace through victory, with annexations in Poland, the Baltic region, and Ukraine, and peace negotiations soon ground to a halt. The ideology of a defensive war, cultivated for years by conservatives, liberals, monarchists and Social Democrats alike, was now irrevocably exposed: not defence, but conquest was the war's true objective. Anger and bitterness mounted in the streets, fuelling an explosive atmosphere.

Street battles raged across Berlin for days in January 1918, prompting authorities to declare a state of siege. The state regained the upper hand after several days, passing this test of strength for the time being. Negotiations were rejected and the strike unconditionally suspended. When the army was sent in against

343 Emmy to Gerhard Scholem, 5 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

344 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 10 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

345 On the January 1918 strike see Boebel and Wentzel 2008.



civilians, unreliable elements like Werner Scholem were naturally 'sent away beforehand'. This arrangement functioned as long as the majority of soldiers continued to follow orders. Troublemakers and unemployables like Werner and Gerhard were still exceptions in the military machine of early 1918, although this state of affairs would soon change. Real and alleged 'ringleaders' of the strikes were drafted into the army, while war fatigue mounted across the military as the myth of the war of national defence became increasingly obvious.

Werner did not detect this shift in mood at first. In Halle he was left with an impression of utter defeat: his comrades rotted away in prison while the military conducted live ammunition drills and kept the situation under control. In the letter to Gerhard, he admits to having overestimated the movement: 'I am the one who is deceiving himself and admit straightforwardly that we greatly deluded ourselves concerning the mood among the German working classes. The majority really is the majority, and should elections be held today the Independents would vanish from the Reichstag. But what can one do but continue labouring and blowing the spark of the socialist spirit into a flame once more. But the German people really are a most interesting people'.<sup>346</sup> Finding little in Halle that was revolutionary, he looked abroad: 'What is happening in Switzerland? Supposedly there is nothing going on there anymore either? – I would like best to go to Russia and enlist as a soldier of the revolution in "Karl Liebknecht's Socialist Department". One can still achieve something there'.<sup>347</sup>

Gerhard, for whom these lines were intended, had travelled to neutral Switzerland for his studies in the spring of 1918. It had meant a great deal to him at the time: 'I cannot describe the sense of euphoria that suffused me as I stood on the Lake Constance steamer and looked back at Germany. The war was over for me'.<sup>348</sup> Gerhard secured Arthur's approval through his mother Betty, his time abroad justified by his failing health. Werner, on the other hand, was stuck in the military and wistfully looked to Russia, where the brutal life of a soldier at least served the socialist cause.

The movement against the war was also visible in Halle, although it took a different form than expected. The trade unions, which Werner had written off entirely as early as 1914, were sites of particularly strong resistance. Werner witnessed the January strike but underestimated its significance. Instead he looked eastward, where the desired revolution had already become a reality, and feared a German offensive could suffocate the young Russian revolution.

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346 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 26 March 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

347 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 11 April 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

348 Scholem 2012, p. 106.

‘The events in Russia move me very much indeed. The working class of Germany watches on while the military boot destroys everything that is underway there. Were I in Russia now I would be in the Red Guard, and it would give me the greatest pleasure to behead Baltic barons’.<sup>349</sup> Werner harboured a rather traditional understanding of revolution – like a Jacobin, he too wished to see heads roll. Though he opposed the war, he was never a pacifist.<sup>350</sup> Werner hated the war with every fibre of his body, but he approved of revolutionary violence in the service of liberation, even glorifying it from time to time. If Werner really sought to behead Baltic barons, then it was less his thirst for blood speaking than the daily feeling of powerlessness that he experienced again and again between the grindstones of military justice and the war machine. Verbal radicalism was intended to compensate, at least once in a while.

A slow, gradual subversion of authority from below, already visible in the form of the mass strikes, did not correspond at all to Werner’s vanguardist conception of revolution. At the same time, his neglect of these events was in part owed to his personal situation: in Halle the fear of death and the struggle for his own political future simply overshadowed other current events. Still, Werner also had a positive aspect to report: his efforts to obtain a deferment had finally borne fruit, although it had not been easy: ‘As long as I was *k.v.* I reported sick every single day, tripping myself during every marching exercise, etc. On Saturday, finally, we had the company’s inspection by the battalion commander, a very strict lieutenant-colonel. During the individual march-past I limped so wretchedly that he immediately called me out and ordered that I be promptly examined for my fitness for duty. And lo and behold, I was re-categorised and now I’m off the hook, because obviously I’m no longer going on any duty on foot’.<sup>351</sup> Werner was not decommissioned entirely, but exempted from marching and assigned the position of driver.

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349 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

350 It is thus only partially correct when Mirjam Triendl-Zadoff emphasises pacifism as a unifying thread between the brothers in her essay ‘Unter Brüdern’ (Triendl-Zadoff 2007, p. 59). The brothers were united by their opposition to the killing of World War I, but not by a rejection of violence in all its forms, as Gershom also saw the use of weapons as a legitimate means of self-defence in the Jewish settlements in Palestine, and defended the deployment of the Hagana militia against the Arab uprising of 1929. At the same time, he distanced himself from acts of revenge or provocation as spokesperson of the peace organisation Brit-Shalom; see his letter to Robert Welsch, 22 September 1929, Scholem 2002, pp. 176–7.

351 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 20 February 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

For the next few weeks, then, the fear of death was again replaced by his second dearly beloved, boredom: ‘Considering the circumstances, I am doing very well for the time being. Our new sergeant is treating me decently. I now act as the assistant to the gas-corporal and run small errands for the typing room. In short, I’m doing nothing and wish I could use this time that is so wasted for work and reading, but you never get anything done because as soon as you start anything some fop comes along: “you, what are you doing there, come here and carry this bucket over there”’.<sup>352</sup> A bit later Werner was able to report that he was ‘even ascending to exalted positions, such as member of the kitchen commission’,<sup>353</sup> although this did little to counter his general boredom. Furthermore, he was concerned about Emmy’s recent illness. Her condition was so bad that she had stopped working and was without income for a period of time. After Werner had sent her the appropriate military-issued certificate, she at least began receiving the government’s ‘Warrior’s Wife Support’.<sup>354</sup> This was a form of social security for the numerous wives of working-class soldiers encountering difficulties feeding their families.<sup>355</sup> The allowance was not paid out to all those in need, but only to the wives and children of soldiers. As the archaic title indicates, the provisions were meant to ensure the lower classes’ support for the government’s war. At the same time, they reinforced the image of the male breadwinner being destabilised by the increasing number of women in the workforce. Emmy was now officially recognised as a ‘Warrior’s Wife’, and the young couple were reliant on welfare provisions less than a year into their marriage.

Lack of funds aside, Werner was also worried about his mother’s ongoing correspondence boycott. He tried to convince her, through an intervention of Gerhard’s, to secretly visit him in Halle so he could explain himself in person.<sup>356</sup> But even though she passed through Halle on her return from another sojourn, she ignored Werner’s proposal and paid him no visit. This disappointed him greatly: ‘She is, however, truly cowardly if she is afraid to interrupt her returning train journey. She seems to see herself as constantly surrounded by spies’.<sup>357</sup>

Another permanently recurring theme in Werner’s letters is the lack of provisions. Fortunately, the Jewish Passover was approaching in April: ‘I gorged myself during Passover. The community donated 2 evening dinners and 2

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352 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 11 March 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

353 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 26 March 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

354 Ibid.

355 See Kundrus 1995; Daniel 1989.

356 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 26 March 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

357 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 11 April 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

lunches for the Jewish soldiers, which were tip-top, 8 M[arks] per dinner, and apart from that me and another fellow were invited twice at places where no kind of food shortage could be felt'.<sup>358</sup> When no holiday was in sight, Werner purchased additional rations with donations from Gerhard that arrived in regular instalments of five or ten marks. In mid-April Werner was transferred to another barracks where he was due to be trained as an artillery gunner – he had finally escaped the infantry. He encountered no immediate change in the daily routine, but reckoned he had 'done quite well' and hoped for permission to reside outside the barracks.<sup>359</sup> Then, barely a week later, all plans were cancelled: 'I'm in a great hurry and can therefore only briefly inform you that I have just been accoutred and will leave for the field tomorrow, as they've sent me to a light ammunition column. Even though I've only been with the artillery for 6 days. But I'm very pleased to be with a column, for now I don't have to be trained and will always only be the escort of the trucks taking ammunition from the base to the artillery unit'.<sup>360</sup>

Even though the dreaded front line deployment would now become a reality, Werner was of a pleasant disposition. He considered his job as a driver safe and hoped to have avoided the worst. He was stationed in Belgian Flanders, where the front had been more or less locked in a war of position since the first months. At first, his expectations were confirmed: 'Unfortunately, I have been sent from one formation to the next because no one wanted to have me, with the effect that my address has kept changing. But after a few random episodes I am now back with the Light Ammunition Column 1301. I am doing quite alright, at least a lot better than in the garrison, for here you can at least get enough to eat. For now, I've even been commandeered as telephonist at our regiment's detachment staff. That would be a great post to keep, but currently I am merely an aid'.<sup>361</sup> Apart from the worry of being sent directly to the front line, food was an issue once again. Werner succinctly commented on the recurring theme: 'All organs except the stomach, belly and ... become rudimentary out here'.<sup>362</sup>

In late June 1918, happier news from his family reached Werner for the first time in a while: a letter from his mother. Betty wrote him from Montreux, Switzerland, on Lake Geneva, where she had probably visited Gerhard. The time away from Arthur's watchful gaze gave her an opportunity to contact Werner. Through Gerhard, Werner was able to send his mother an elaborate

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358 Ibid.

359 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 15 April 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

360 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 21 April 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

361 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 15 April 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

362 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 29 May 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

report: 'I already wrote you that at the time, on 15 April, I had been sent to the artillery in Halle, but only remained there for 7 days because people there were eager to get rid of me again as soon as possible. That is how I came to an ammunition column that was in Flanders at the time. There they also attempted to send me away again, placed me in a different column, and from there I was ordered to the battery as a gunner, meaning I had to join the firing positions'.<sup>363</sup> Given his political past, Werner was not exactly popular with his superiors. The firing position, however, was not a place he wanted to remain. This was where the artillery cannons were stationed, hurling their ammunition behind enemy lines – the production site of the dreaded drumfire, so to speak. Needless to say, the enemy repeatedly fired their shells at these positions and it remained a life-threatening place, as far from the actual front as it was. Werner was not inclined to sacrifice his life for the Fatherland, and tried to get away from here as quickly as possible: 'A certificate which exempted me from marches and duty on foot caused my immediate redeployment to the initial column, where I have stayed to this day. [...] At first, at the beginning of May we came to Flanders for rest and were based in a very pretty village where milk and honey streamed about, or rather butter and eggs, and we stayed until early June and I was initially commandeered to the division's staff as a telephonist for 7 days, a post I hope to keep for good one day. After that, until we received marching orders, I got a very nice assignment as librarian and overseer of a reading post [...] But once again the division departed and I returned to a column, which is back in the inhabited French countryside. It won't be going on for very long though, as we only just had our rest in May. We'll be heading for another area of the front'.<sup>364</sup>

For the time being, Werner was stationed on the Western Front in France.<sup>365</sup> The German military leadership had selected this area in spring and summer of 1918 for an offensive with which it hoped to end the years-long war of position. The backdrop for this decision was the United States' entry into the war, which Germany had provoked with its unrestrained submarine warfare against American ships in early 1917.<sup>366</sup> As the US had maintained only a small army since the end of the American Civil War in 1865, mobilisation and shipping troops to Europe would take several months.

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363 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 29 June 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

364 Ibid.

365 On the Western Front and the traumatic effects of World War I on German-French relations see Becker and Krumeich 2010.

366 On the US entry into the war see März 2004, pp. 168–9.

At the same time, a change on the Eastern Front favoured the Central Powers: the October Revolution had swept radical opponents of the war into power, while the Russian army itself was unravelling in the face of mass desertions. In March of 1918, Lenin and Trotsky felt compelled to sign the separate peace treaty with Germany at Brest-Litovsk. By doing so, Russia abandoned its claims to sovereignty in Poland, Lithuania and Courland, and accepted the independence of Ukraine and Finland.<sup>367</sup> At the same time, broad stretches of Belarus remained occupied by German troops. Following the implosion of the Russian Empire, a German colonial empire in the east had become reality, and more than one third of the former Russian Empire's population now lived under German rule. The war objectives in the east had been fulfilled and the war on two fronts ended, both good reasons to renew long-abandoned hopes of a German victory. The situation on the ground remained, however, precarious. Regardless of the victories on the Eastern Front, German troops were overstretched, industrial reserves depleted and war fatigue widespread. On 19 July 1917 a majority of SPD, the Catholic Centre Party [*Zentrumspartei*] and the liberal Progress Party [*Fortschrittspartei*] passed a resolution in the Reichstag demanding an end to the war that would ultimately bring down Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. That said, it remained a mere resolution, as parliamentary decisions in the Kaiserreich were of a purely advisory character.<sup>368</sup> Moreover, the Social Democrats' call for peace left much to be desired: they also approved a bill for new war credits the very next day,<sup>369</sup> suggesting that their opposition was less than categorical. Additionally, victory in the east soon allowed the propaganda experts of the Supreme Army Command to renew public hopes of a German victory. It was now the desire for peace that motivated the troops, as war-weary soldiers desperately hoped for an end to the conflict, whether through negotiations or victory – but peace, above all. Despite these potential difficulties, the military viewed the situation favourably: Russia had been eliminated, England and France were demoralised and worn

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367 On the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as the realisation of German war aims see Fischer 1967, pp. 475–509. The policy of occupation and its orientation towards long-term rule is described by Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius with reference to the Ober-Ost military state, see Liulevicius 2005.

368 A detailed and worthwhile analysis of the peace resolution and its impacts on the parliamentaryisation of Germany was authored by historian, KPD functionary and personal friend of Werner Scholem's, Arthur Rosenberg (1991, p. 134 ff.). Originally published in two volumes: *Die Entstehung der Weimarer Republik* in 1928, and *Geschichte der deutschen Republik* in 1935.

369 Winkler 2006, p. 301.

down, American reinforcements had not yet made an impact, and calm dominated on the home front. But instead of seeking a negotiated arrangement in the west following the victorious peace in the east, Germany's Supreme Army Command was determined to risk everything: one last offensive would decide the war in France and crown Germany the ruler of Europe.<sup>370</sup> Under the code-name 'Michael', forces were regrouped and concentrated as a gigantic assault wave was prepared. Operations began in March 1918 and continued into the summer. Over the course of this offensive, Werner Scholem would again be plunged into the depths of war – his days of relative quiet were over.

At the end of July 1918 he reports: 'We participated in the last offensive in the Champagne region. [...] I have again been through the worst shelling ever, because the point of approach was particularly hard-hit and our column had to deliver ammunition to a point right behind our infantry positions. We have several casualties, 9 wounded, 30 horses killed. The most strain came from camping outdoors since 4 July up to now. You just can't imagine what a great joy that stuff is when it rains. Now we still have to deliver ammunition to the positions but, firstly, it has gotten a lot quieter here, and then we are in hospitals in which at least the beds are made of wood. I found the description of your life over there very interesting, for it shows that there are still humans living as cultural beings. I am close to forgetting that you can actually live any other way than like a hunted animal. And for the years to come there is no prospect of change anyway. You'll have long finished your studies and be *schlepping* the honourable doctorate through that bourgeois world, while I won't even have begun to study. How unequally the roles are distributed!'<sup>371</sup>

The casualties of July 1918 included gunner Wetzels, who filled in for Werner on short notice that day. Had Werner been at his position, he would have died. The war struck him with all its might, subordinated to a machine for which human lives and bombshells alike were mere raw material. Time and again Werner looked enviously on Gerhard's life in Switzerland: 'When I read your letters, it is always as if I catch a distant glimpse of the land of milk and honey. I have stopped thinking about the fact that as a matter of law I should have it just as nice.'<sup>372</sup> Werner's unit endured the fiercest of battles in August 1918: 'For in the night from the 19th to the 20th we got away from there and headed for a

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370 Peter März emphasises that the offensive 'was not only about military breakthrough', but rather was closely related to securing imperial conceptions in Eastern Europe, see März 2004, pp. 208–9. A negotiated peace would have required the Germans to make concessions, while their negotiating position in 1918 was arguably better than ever before.

371 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 29 July 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

372 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 1 September 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

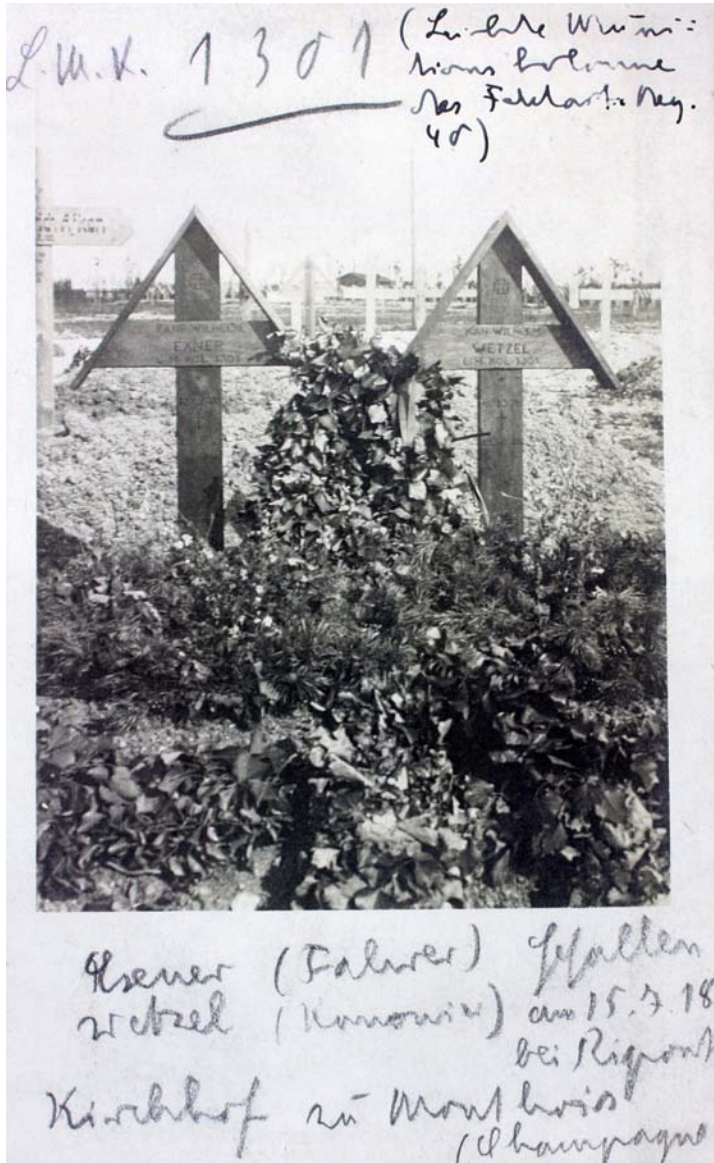


FIGURE 18 *Caption by Scholem himself: 'L.M.K. 1301 (light munitions column of Field Artillery Regiment 40) – Exner (driver), Wetzel (gunner), fallen 15 July 1918, churchyard in Montbois (Champagne): Scholem added next to the picture: 'the graves of my driver Exner and gunner Wetzel who was ordered to join him in my place [...] Had I not been ordered to the storm battery because they hoped I would fall there, I would be the one lying there, but I made it through in the storm battery in one piece [...].'*



different front section, in the most beautiful of Foch offensives.<sup>373</sup> I have put a few dreadful days behind me, and an end is nowhere in sight. Your comparison to Uriah is correct, only that here we're not dealing with a Bathsheba. We had hardly arrived when I was once again commandeered to the 21st battery of our regiment of an infantry escort battery, and I had to endure the fiercest firefight for 6 days. Eventually the battery had to be positioned 800 m behind the trench as a tank battery and so I was returned to base, where yesterday evening I again had to bear up against the most terrible episode while on the ammo truck. 2 of our people were wounded yesterday, as had been the case with driver and horse of my battery earlier. I myself was still lucky though, but who knows if I make it out of all this alive. In any case, this current battle won't be going on much longer, as the Entente is suffering high death tolls while advancing very little, at least in this area.<sup>374</sup>

Uriah was a figure of legend from the Old Testament, a soldier whom King David sent to the front array because he coveted Uriah's wife. Yet this comparison was questionable: Werner's wife was not being courted by the Kaiser, no conspiracy lay behind his suffering. Werner found himself aimlessly and randomly thrown onto the front lines, but was never able to make sense of the battle so many others chose to glorify. The war had no regard for questions of sense and nonsense or the opinions of an ordinary soldier. It was simply there, operating according to its own intrinsic rationality. Many people therefore viewed the World War as akin to a force of nature, in which only the strongest would prevail – a fateful choice that would strengthen the German national corpus as a whole, albeit through untold death and suffering.

Werner's old school friend Ernst Jünger embodied this vision with definitive expressiveness. He also served at the Western Front in the spring of 1918, but in contrast to Werner considered himself a fighter of a new age. Ultimately it was not Werner's journals but Jünger's war reports that would shape the image of the war in German collective memory.<sup>375</sup> In order to better grasp the mindset against which Werner fought during and after the war, it makes sense to take a closer look at Jünger's depictions.

As the title *Storm of Steel* already suggests, metal represented the central metaphor of Jünger's war recollections. The steel helmet in particular, introduced in 1916, represented the regalia of a new generation to Jünger, a symbol

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373 French Marshall Ferdinand Foch (1851–1929) was the commander in chief of the Allied troops and the Western Front in 1918.

374 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 1 September 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

375 On the popular memory see Kramer 2007 and Korte et al. 2008.

of the merging of flesh and steel in the hardened body of the soldier: 'A runner from a Württemberg regiment reported to me to guide my platoon to the famous town of Combles. [...] He was the first German soldier I saw in a steel helmet, and he straightaway struck me as the denizen of a new and far harsher world. Sitting next to him in the roadside ditch, I question him avidly about the state of the position, and got from him a grey tale of days hunkered in craters, with no outside contact or communications lines, of incessant attacks, fields of corpses and crazy thirst, of the wounded left to die, and more of the same. The impassive features under the rim of the steel helmet and the monotonous voice accompanied by the noise of the battle made a ghostly impression on us. [...] Nothing was left in this voice but equanimity, apathy; fire had burned everything else out of it. It's men like that that you need for fighting'.<sup>376</sup>

The actual human effects of the war were not lost on Jünger. He saw how sensitivity and vitality, human sympathy and civilising habits eroded away until only basic needs mattered. At some point even those vanished, as even the question of life and death yielded to a metallic indifference. In contrast to Werner, who was horrified by the deadening of society and felt like a 'hunted animal', Jünger idealised the metallic rigidity of war. The total unity of flesh and steel, however, was consummated not in the bodies of living soldiers, but in the fatal gunshot. Lifeless metal coalesced with lifeless bodies across the corpse-strewn battlefields of Europe, evoking the definitively grey sameness of dead matter.

Jünger by no means denied the spectre of death, the ultimate horror of war, in *Storm of Steel*. With a mixture of attraction and disgust, he described the victims of the war of the trenches, the unburied corpses in the bushes, trenches, and all over the grey no man's land between the lines of the front: 'As I was making my way through a thicket once, on my own, I was dismayed by a quiet hissing and burbling sound. I stepped close and encountered two bodies, which the heat had awakened to a ghostly type of life. The night was silent and humid; I stopped a long time before the eerie scene'.<sup>377</sup> Jünger was fascinated not in spite, but rather because of death. Such an engagement with the notion of death as ultimate human boundary enjoys a long tradition, ranging from Greek tragedy to the gloomy novels of Edgar Allan Poe. Death yearning and a fascination with decay reached a high point during the fin-de-siècle atmosphere at the end of the nineteenth century. Even before 1914, literature as well as avant-garde art repeatedly painted, depicted, illustrated and even championed fight-

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376 Jünger 2004, pp. 91–2.

377 Jünger 2004, p. 152.

ing and war as signifying the beginning of a new era.<sup>378</sup> During World War I, this primordial death drive was ominously conflated with the collective German experience. Prussia, the leading power in the Kaiserreich, had always been a military state, but even it had never witnessed a period of such intense, ongoing war and death as 1914–18. This experience was processed and transfigured by both war propagandists and nationalist artists alike into a question of common national destiny. Death in the trenches was the necessary precondition for the community of survivors, the inseparable bond between brothers who had trusted each other with their lives. Death could strike anyone, officers and common soldiers alike. The army's aristocratic structure had already broken down during the first year of the war, as many officers of noble descent were killed within months of the war's outbreak. Younger troops from the lower classes took their place, and the trenches, despite an unforgiving chain of command, became a kind of democracy of death.<sup>379</sup>

The front facilitated the creation of a patriotic community of feeling, compensation for the lack of meaningful social participation in the semi-feudal Kaiserreich. Both death as well as the equally ubiquitous material devastation carried in themselves this element of democracy, even anarchy. One frontline experience of Jünger's illustrates this: 'In the morning, we moved to our new basement. As we were about that, we were almost crushed by the debris of the church tower, which was quite unceremoniously – and without any prior notification – blown up by our engineers, to make it harder for the enemy artillery to get their bearings. [...] That one morning saw over a dozen church towers in the area bite the dust. We settled into our spacious cellar, and furnished it pretty much as we pleased, helping ourselves equally to items from the rich man's castle and the poor man's hovel. Whatever we ended up not liking, fed the fire.'<sup>380</sup> Neither God nor church, neither peasants' huts nor French aristocrats' castles were spared from the levelling down brought by war. Anything standing in the way of its logic was diverted, flattened, or destroyed. The soldiers, even the most common frontpigs and recruits, functioned as instruments of this destruction, and were accordingly freed from all peacetime social conventions. As long as they submitted to the demands of war they could challenge even God himself, blowing up a dozen church steeples if they saw fit. Nihilism as the absolute negation of convention and culture had culminated in the war experience. This civilisational rupture had far-reaching implications, and

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378 See Kirchoff 2008.

379 This common front experience, which would later be retrospectively glorified, did nothing to alter the very unequally divided chances of survival in war society, see Kocha 1982.

380 Jünger 2004, p. 133.

fostered an attitude towards life carried on by subsequent generation of Germans. This zeitgeist is reflected in the Hitler Youth song 'The Rotten Bones Are Trembling' [*Es zittern die morschen Knochen*]:

*Wir werden weiter marschieren  
Wenn alles in Scherben fällt,  
Denn heute gehört uns Deutschland  
Und morgen die ganze Welt.*

We will march on  
When all is shattered,  
For today we have Germany  
And tomorrow the whole world.

In this sense, death was not just a threat, but also a source of strength for the survivors of the battles of World War I. They themselves were the assassins, the bringers of death, the murderers and warriors – abrogating the biblical commandment of 'thou shall not kill'. Ernst Jünger confirms the fascination with this breach of taboo when describing how he and his comrades felt a 'twinge of arousal' when filling their clips with live ammunition.<sup>381</sup> He who could kill had power. 'Arousal', a sexual feeling of omnipotence, united the men on the battlefield. Weakness, doubt, powerlessness, vulnerability – these characteristics were divorced from one's personality as 'female' and suppressed. Male 'equanimity' was the cardinal virtue of Jünger's young warriors.<sup>382</sup>

Jünger chose not to speak of the countless broken male bodies and souls lying in military hospitals and psychiatric institutions across Germany. This silencing of weakness points to a certain artificiality, a constructedness in Jünger's depictions. Nevertheless, for a long time they were regarded as an authentic testimonial of daily life on the front, and only in 2010 was a critical edition of the unedited journals published by Jünger's estate.<sup>383</sup> After studying both texts, literary scholar Peter Uwe Hohendahl identifies the retrospective endowment of the war with collective meaning as a key finding of his textual comparison: 'Literary edits to the journals lead to, among other things, the constitution of something resembling a collective war subject in *Storm of Steel*,

381 Jünger 2004, p. 8.

382 See above. The ideal of masculine strength corresponded to the mockery and derision Jünger's comrades often directed at the disabled ('hunchbacks', 'goblins'). Jünger 2004, p. 157.

383 Jünger 2010.

while the journals still show a multiplicity of acting and suffering individuals. The idea of a total military subject first emerges during the editing process, as it is only in this process that the crowds of individual soldiers are made into mythical warriors who stand outside normal human life'.<sup>384</sup>

Power and masculinity represent essential elements of Jünger's 'mythical war subject', but in retrospect, the common experience of powerlessness and passive subjection to the omnipresent threat of death also served as a source of unity and meaning to survivors. The community of trench survivors pertained not only to small groups of frontline fighters, but indeed to the army as a whole and later even to the concept of the German nation as such. The many class distinctions and regional peculiarities of the semi-feudal Kaiserreich blurred in the trenches: the Rhineland peasant fought alongside the son of a Berlin civil servant, various dialects ranging from Low German to Swabian encountered and understood each other on the front lines.<sup>385</sup> The war carried nationalist sentiment into social layers where it had traditionally been frowned upon, such as into Werner's party, Social Democracy. Both the joy and celebrations of 1914 as well as the subsequent misery of the war helped to construct a masochistic community of suffering. The German Kaiserreich was only one generation old and, as a federal state, lacked both a national hymn as well as a coherent form of national citizenship. However, a new kind of national unity, based upon a collective glorification of death, was being forged in the fires of the World War. This manifested not only in literature, but particularly in the day to day practice of hero worship, the construction of war memorials, and later the introduction of a national day of mourning [*Volkstrauertag*] in the Weimar Republic. Opponents of the war were excluded from this narrative, considered 'un-German' and seen as traitors. Jünger's recollections were crucial to the construction of a national community of suffering. Tens of thousands of copies of *Storm of Steel* were sold, and it continues to be republished today.

Jünger himself was a survivor, he died in 1998 at the biblical age of 102. He gave a voice to his time, something countless fallen soldiers no longer could. Yet every dead soldier in turn elevated the status of the survivor's voice. To endure, to remain undefeated both individually and as a people – that was the message of Jünger's war journal. He also emphasised the sheer contingency of survival, the senseless inevitability of headshots, shrapnel, artillery accidents and misdirected friendly fire.<sup>386</sup> At the same time, however, this blind fateful-

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384 Hohendahl 2011.

385 Jünger often recorded the dialects, such as the Low German found in Jünger 1933, p. 155.

386 'Towards morning, the machine-gun suddenly started rattling away, as some dark figures

ness reinforced the survivors' sense of belonging to a chosen elite of warriors. This new type of human certainly bore racial connotations, as when Jünger juxtaposed the 'almost sportsmanlike' conduct of English troops with the fearful behaviour of Indian colonial troops who grovelled for mercy in voices 'like the noise that frogs make'. When Indian prisoners of war, badly injured and screaming for fear of death, are taken away, Jünger and his comrades-in-arms for their part feel 'primordial', as if living 'ancient history'.<sup>387</sup> Although Jünger himself became a conservative opponent of the Nazis, the theme of the Master Race is present throughout his writings.

Werner Scholem also experienced 1918 on the Western Front. He witnessed the same misery as Jünger, yet the conclusions he drew from what he saw could hardly have been more different. Werner Scholem was not one of the strong, he had no desire to belong to a steeled elite. His body was weak and maltreated, as he was not afraid to explain: 'As it were, my wound has burst open again and festers sporadically, yet therefore any thought of leaving this place is cancelled. Please try and visualise this: I've been in the bivouac, meaning in the dirt, for 57 days and nights since 9 June, and continue to lie here. For instance, as I am writing this I am sitting on the ground with a downpour expected any minute. This bivouac-ing is the worst exertion in my current life thus far. I'd rather lie on a pile of manure in a pig stall than in the nicest of all bivouacs. You will hopefully believe me if I tell you that my patriotism you are so familiar with has not suffered a bit. The thought of fighting for a just cause by all means alleviates the strain somewhat'.<sup>388</sup>

Werner had only cynicism to spare for Jünger's German community of suffering. He had never belonged to a German collective and the war isolated him more than ever, encouraging his heretical ideas about Palestine and socialism. To Werner there was nothing exalted or sacred whatsoever about daily life on the front. On the contrary, he cultivated his own brand of pessimism while living the soldier's life, a tactic that repeatedly helped him through desperate situations. By expecting nothing, he forestalled disappointment.

At the end of October 1918 there were still no prospects for improvement in sight: 'My life here is unchanged, though this time of increased retreat also

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were approaching. It was a patrol from the 76th Regiment come to get in touch with us, and one of them was left dead. Mistakes like that happened quite frequently at that time, and one didn't spend too much time anguishing over them', Jünger 2004, p. 165.

387 The French are also characterised as cowardly and less than heroic, while Jünger also detects an ancient 'enmity between Germany and France'. Various racist depictions are scattered throughout the book.

388 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 1 September 1918, NLI Jerusalem. Emphasis in original.

means increased physical exertion, as we are constantly on the move, without proper quarters, often sleeping in the bivouac'.<sup>389</sup> Although the German offensive started off strongly in the spring, retreats were becoming increasingly frequent. In light of impressive initial victories, the mood was at times similar to August 1914. A belief in imminent victory and homecoming served to motivate soldiers at a point when the majority of troops otherwise desperately longed for peace. In this sense, hopes for peace drove the war forward. The initial success had been made possible, apart from reinforcements from the Eastern Front, by a further development of the drumfire tactic, the even more concentrated 'creeping barrage' [*Feuerwalze*]. This mathematically optimised simultaneous firing of up to 6,000 artillery cannons was intended to break open the enemy's positions systematically; after years of standstill, new charges would again be possible. Werner, one of many caught in the gears of war, was to supply the artillery with munitions. But these victories were illusory, as the material costs incurred by creeping barrages were tremendous, and the enemy was able to adjust to the new tactic far more swiftly than anticipated. Only two weeks into the offensive, the German side counted total losses of 230,000 dead.<sup>390</sup> The families were left to mourn, as the Supreme Army Command was only concerned with how to replace the discarded human material. Germany was literally bleeding out, whereas the US was sending 100,000 freshly trained, well-fed and fully rested soldiers into battle every month.<sup>391</sup> In July 1918 the German offensive came to a halt, followed by the enemy's advance shortly thereafter.

The war had reached a turning point. Only a few months after all war objectives had been achieved in the east, affairs in the west threatened to collapse entirely. Generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff of the Supreme Army Command were both fully aware of this looming defeat, as much as they would deny it later. In order to save what could be saved, the Supreme Army Command took the initiative to begin peace negotiations in October 1918. Was peace close at hand?

The US took over from the devastated European war parties and led peace negotiations. An exchange of notes between the German leadership and US president Woodrow Wilson discussed conditions of an armistice. The battles and associated propaganda continued to rage, however. Specifically, the hopeless state of German defences was systematically kept secret from the public. This may have been one of the reasons why Werner was only once briefly

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389 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 October 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

390 März 2004, pp. 214 ff.

391 März 2004, p. 218.

cheered up by the news on the radio: 'I was very hopeful for the first few days after reading the government's note and Wilson's queries. But since the 2nd note of Wilson's I have buried my hopes, and am now preparing for the national war of defence a la Gambetta. Incidentally, how it will end is clear to me, but it could take 1 year to get there'.<sup>392</sup>

Indeed, the ongoing retreats could not have gone unnoticed by the common front soldier in October 1918. Werner nevertheless could not fathom a quick end to hostilities. A national war of defence, lasting at least another year – that was what Scholem expected on 23 October 1918. French statesman Léon Gambetta, to whom he refers, had organised an army for the liberation of Paris in the countryside during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1. A remarkable act of improvisation, which, however, failed after multiple defeats on other fronts. Werner considered the German generals more than capable of pulling a similar stunt. After all, Walter Rathenau, industrialist, chairman of AEG and former head of the raw materials department in the Ministry of War, had publicly called for a people's war on 7 October 1918.<sup>393</sup> The backdrop for these developments was the parliamentarisation of Germany as a result of the October Reforms of 1918: on 3 October a government accountable to the parliament, incorporating two Social Democratic ministers, was formed for the first time in German history. The Kaiser and the elites of the Reich had abandoned their decades-long resistance to any and all democratic reforms in a matter of weeks. The calculus behind Ludendorff and Hindenburg's move was to present a democratic Germany to the Allies during negotiations and thereby spare the generals the humiliation of defeat.<sup>394</sup> Faced with a militarily imposed democratisation, Rathenau considered conditions favourable for a renewed wave of national euphoria and the continuation of the fight for the fatherland. Walter Rathenau was a German Jew and a patriot, just like Werner's father.

Seen in this light, Werner's scepticism towards an imminent end to the war becomes more understandable. More importantly, he viewed the esprit de corps among the soldiers as so strong that he was sure they would follow the national cause at their own peril. His experience of order, obedience and daily harassment brought him to the following conclusion: 'Yesterday I even had

392 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 October 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

393 Rathenau 1918.

394 Thus, the stab-in-the-back myth [*Dolchstoßlegende*], which claimed that anti-war activists rather than the military were responsible for Germany's defeat, was in this way prepared even before the military defeat became public. The initiative also shows how the Supreme Army Command was able to determine politics more or less by itself in the final stages of the Kaiserreich, see Winkler 2006, p. 329.



to report to the military authority about some brute who physically attacked me. Apparently I haven't turned completely besotted otherwise these morons wouldn't be so damn angry at me'.<sup>395</sup> Even in 1918, as desertions became more frequent and the mood shifted, Werner was unable to fraternise with his fellow soldiers. He had nothing to say to them. Looking around him, all he could expect was war to the bitter end.

But events were to take an unexpected turn. On 4 November 1918 a tipping point was reached: a spontaneous uprising of sailors in Kiel, provoked by orders of the Naval Warfare Command to prepare for a final battle in the North Sea. The sailors refused. In order to avoid being detained for disobeying orders after going ashore, they carried their mutiny into the city. The news spread quickly and with it the revolt, which soon grew into a revolution. All over Germany, workers' and soldiers' councils were spontaneously established, while resistance to the uprising was surprisingly restrained. The war-weary troops refused orders, and by 9 November the revolution had reached Berlin – with the active support of the Revolutionary Stewards in the war industries.<sup>396</sup> The Kaiser was forced to abdicate, and on 11 November 1918 an armistice was signed. Overnight, Werner's wildest dreams had come true: the revolution had arrived, the war was over.

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395 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 October 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

396 While the influence of the Spartacus group in the anti-war movement and the November Revolution was artificially exaggerated by GDR historiography and underestimated by West German researchers, the Revolutionary Stewards' role as organisers of the mass strikes beginning in 1916 and also of 9 November 1918 only occupied a secondary role in both research traditions. This lop-sidedness is corrected in Luban 2009b.

## A Rebel at the Editing Desk, a Rebel in Parliament (1919–24)

The November Revolution became the guiding star of Werner Scholem's career as a socialist politician, the modest beginnings of which took place in Linden, a suburb of Hanover. The following chapter details his path as a journalist within Independent Social Democracy (USPD) and illustrates how Scholem, later derided by his opponents as 'ultra-left', acted very pragmatically and majority-oriented at the time, aiming to preserve the USPD and build it into a mass party. This project failed, however, and when the USPD broke apart at its party convention in Halle, Werner and Emmy Scholem followed the left wing into the Communist Party.

This party, which Werner initially viewed with a degree of scepticism, would soon become the premier organisation of the revolutionary left in the Weimar Republic, and Scholem's name would in turn become inseparably tied to it. His first task within the KPD was a post as an editor of the *Rote Fahne* (*Red Flag*, the main party newspaper) in Berlin, which would earn him charges of treason and high treason in the first year alone. Werner Scholem's case is a prime example of the continuity of a political judiciary from the Kaiserreich to the Weimar Republic, a topic which will be dealt with in more detail in the section titled 'Journalism and Law'.

His career as a journalist was cut short, however, as Werner was soon tasked with occupying a seat in the Prussian Landtag, or state parliament. Scholem assumed this post from 1921 to 1924 and became known to a national audience for the first time due to his talent as a polemical orator. The central dilemmas confronting the KPD at the time were the limited nature of the scopes of action offered by parliament, that is, the contradiction between government participation and the revolutionary blasting apart of existing conditions – a topic addressed in the section 'Reform or Revolution? A Parliamentarian in the Prussian Landtag' with a view to Scholem's positions on school reform, anti-Semitism and right-wing terrorism. The dim expectations Scholem harboured for his time in parliament were further disappointed by his practical experiences, not least the countless personal anti-Semitic slurs hurled at him by deputies from other parties. Ultimately, Scholem decided against all forms of government participation, advocating the KPD act first and foremost as a vanguard of a revolution yet to materialise. His efforts to popularise this idea

within the party's structures, however, will be omitted for now and returned to in more detail in the fourth chapter, 'Communism – Utopia and Apparatus'.

### **Independent Social Democracy and More: Werner Scholem as Agitator in the USPD**

On Boxing Day 1918, Werner Scholem wrote his brother a letter about his personal experience of the war's end: 'For as long as I live, I will regret not having participated in the German Revolution. What bad luck that during this time I was absent from all these events, while back home everyone only slightly politically active in the past became a minister. For me the collapse of the system of lies meant, first of all, an arduous march on foot back home with my regiment, which took us from the Champagne to Burg near Magdeburg, via Wallonia, Luxembourg, Koblenz, Giessen, Fulda, Eisenach, Sangershausen. I never would have thought that I would march out of this war like in the times of "Old Fritz"<sup>1</sup> [...] Early on the 24th I arrived here, with the past few years essentially thrown to Orcus and a rather bleak future ahead of me.'<sup>2</sup>

This sober assessment was made by a man who had missed the revolution's decisive hours and therefore thought he had missed everything. But social struggles, strikes and armed insurgencies – ultimately, attempts to alter or at least influence the outcome of the November Revolution – would continue to dominate the political life of the young republic for years to come and Werner would play a role in many of them, brimming with hope and expectation. Yet these political twists and turns remained very distant in late 1918. Although Werner was now free, he did not travel to the heart of revolutionary activity in Berlin, but instead headed to Hanover-Linden with his wife Emmy. Family was his top priority for the time being, for Werner had recently become a father.

He informed his brother of this development, albeit in a more laconic than euphoric tone: 'Among other things, I found my girl here, along with your congratulations. Well, what can I say about this fact! At first, I demanded we put an end to it, that is, at the very beginning of the pregnancy, but as my wife was already overwhelmed with maternal sentiments, there was no chance of me

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1 Here, Scholem refers to Frederick the Great, King of Prussia in the eighteenth century. After its total defeat, the Prussian army that had waged a war with the most modern trains, aeroplanes and even submarines lacked the capacity to transport its surviving soldiers home. Scholem and his unit had to walk home on foot.

2 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 26 December 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

objecting. And it's turned out well after all anyway, the child is in good hands with her grandmother, and Emmy received full pay even for the time she was on leave from the business. That's why we didn't want the matter to be known, so that the *mischboche* wouldn't turn up their noses at us and get their malicious pleasure out of me having "messed up" again already. But unfortunately you were not too overly discrete, or how else would the matter have leaked. By the way, mother has written some very nice letters and also sent some parcels with baby items'.<sup>3</sup>

As a fledgling grandmother, Betty Scholem was no longer prepared to follow Arthur's ban on contacting her rebellious son. Without her husband's permission, she supported the young family and met with Werner in Berlin again in February.<sup>4</sup> The child, born 27 September 1918, was named Edith Scholem. Werner first had to find his footing as a father, and would encounter difficulties in doing so. Although he speaks of a future family in his letters repeatedly, these were abstract scenarios concerned with the 'Scholem genus'. As it turned out, Werner had little use for an actual child of his own, nor did the circumstances of the child's birth make his adjustment any easier. While Emmy had been preparing for the new baby during her pregnancy in Linden, Werner, still caught in the chaos of war, feared for his life on a daily basis.

Emmy, too, had worried whether Werner would return home alive. In a letter to Gerhard from October 1918, she is only partially able to express her concern and the associated mental strain: 'I'm not really that worried about the future, if only Werner were safely out this d... These days, I'm even more worried, because the last letter I received on 5 October was from 30 September and in this letter he writes of continuous battles and major casualties. And it's never been this long that I've gone without news from him. Now I've probably scared you too, I will write you as soon as I receive a letter from Werner'.<sup>5</sup> Gerhard was the only member of the Scholem family Emmy trusted with the news of the new baby: 'You must excuse my late reply to your card, but you caught me at a bad time, as I was ill, or rather, not really ill, I had only a little baby girl, a tiny delicate black thing, "a proper Scholem". There's not much of me in her, at least not outwardly, though she does seem to have my sharp tongue and energy and stamina. It's so wonderful to have a little baby'.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Werner, Emmy did not view the child as a burden, but she did rely on her parents' help

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3 Ibid.

4 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 February 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

5 Emmy to Gerhard Scholem, 14 October 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

6 Ibid, emphasis in original.

in raising her.<sup>7</sup> Emmy received four months of paid leave as of September 1918, an extremely generous arrangement for the time, and returned to her job as a commercial clerk on 1 January 1919. Werner was unemployed for his part, but had no intention of becoming a homemaker. The support from Emmy's parents in raising little Edith was very much appreciated and would become a permanent arrangement in the years to come.

Politics was what really concerned Werner, after all. The revolution had blown up the foundations under every current in the labour movement, provoking a reaction from Werner far more emotional than family life ever could: 'For the first time my emotions and my intellect have come into conflict, which remains ongoing. Because my feeling drives me towards the Spartacus people, whom, by the way, all my friends and my wife have joined, yet my clear intellect allows me to see the futility and senselessness of this politics, preventing me from joining. The left wing is essentially synonymous with the Spartacides, while the right wing only differs from the old party in nuances. This party will therefore dissolve.'<sup>8</sup> The period of illegality in which Werner began his political life had ended for the Workers' Youth, and he had outgrown the youth movement by that time anyway. Werner sought to join a new party, yet was unsure how the various fragments of the shattered labour movement would reconstitute themselves. The Spartacus League's split from Independent Social Democracy, predicted by Werner, would in fact occur mere days after he sent his letter.

On New Year's Day 1919, the Communist Party of Germany was founded in the halls of the Prussian Landtag. Spartacus supporters around Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg constituted the core of the group, backed by a radical left group known as the German International Communists, adherents of Bremen left radicalism, including two comrades from Werner's youth, Karl Plättner and Karl Becker. Both were present at the founding conference in Berlin as representatives of the Dresden branch.<sup>9</sup> At the time, Communism meant, firstly, a return to the *Communist Manifesto*, 70 years old by then, and secondly, pushing forward the six-weeks-young revolution. Tradition and future of the workers' movement would enter into a combative fusion in the new party. Werner viewed these developments positively, but tactical considerations were to win the upper hand in his internal dialogue. Although Emmy and many of his old friends leaned towards the KPD, Werner remained in the USPD,<sup>10</sup> choosing

7 Betty Scholem occasionally helped Emmy Weichelt care for the daughter in February 1919; see Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 26 December 1918 and 7 February 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

8 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 26 December 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

9 Ullrich 2000, p. 57. On the founding conference see also Weber 1969a.

10 The precise date of his joining is unknown. Emmy Scholem reported in 1954 that Werner

to stick with the majority and avoid further fragmentation of the left's forces. As Werner had clearly ascertained, the KPD was no more than a splinter party for the time being. It did not enjoy a broad base of support among workers, nor had many relevant protagonists such as the Revolutionary Stewards – the backbone of the anti-war movement – joined.<sup>11</sup>

Werner Scholem nevertheless understood that the left party landscape remained in flux, and decided to work towards a radicalisation of the Independents: 'I've already told you that this party is not stationary for the time being, but rather still approaches its pivotal crossroads. I for my part now consider a socialist centre superfluous as well, but first we must also establish what is to the left of us. Our party will then most likely join the radical left united front'.<sup>12</sup> In this spirit, Werner argued for closer cooperation between the different groups: 'Unfortunately, our movement is separate from the Spartacus movement here, while in Braunschweig they work hand in hand. But our comrades here are also pushing to the left. The next party convention, which is coming soon, will bring about the decision as to whether the Independent Party will become Communist or majority-Social Democratic, whether it promotes the council system or parliamentarianism. I believe the decision will fall to the left'.<sup>13</sup>

Werner, who would often be derided as irrational and 'ultra-left' in his later party career, proved a pragmatic strategist at this point. His aim was not to split off a radical left vanguard, but instead to work towards a coalescence of revolutionary forces through a common political praxis.<sup>14</sup> It would not be long

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joined the USPD after his 'return from the field'. In 1921, Werner indicated having joined the USPD in 1917. However, given his prison sentence and deployment at the front, it is more likely that he merely sympathised with the party in 1917 without actually joining. See Emmy Scholem, 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs (zu Werner Scholem) vom 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Niedersachsen, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351; as well as *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne – Richterliche Befragung am 13.10.1921*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Vol. 1.

11 The KPD's founding conference was interrupted in order to convince the Stewards to join. Negotiations between Richard Müller and Karl Liebknecht were to collapse, however, around the central question of the electoral boycott; see Weber 1969a.

12 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 February 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

13 Ibid.

14 According to his aunt, Werner did not even join the left wing of the USPD: 'He writes that he joined the right wing of the Independents and wants to fill the time until the Constituent Assembly keeping busy with agitation, which pays 9 M per day. His wife belongs to the Spartacus group', Hedwig to Gerhard Scholem, 4 January 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

before Werner received a task in which he could act on his ambitions. While the thought of pursuing studies in Berlin had preoccupied him around the turn of the year, by now he was drawn elsewhere: ‘Since 1st February the Braunschweig “*Volksfreund*”, the well-known medium of our local Independents who, as you may know, are still in government in Braunschweig, is being published in expanded form for Hanover as well, and the Hanover party comrades have elected me local editor.’<sup>15</sup>

Entering a career as a party journalist, a new era began for Werner. He even changed his handwriting from the old German to the international standard Latin alphabet.<sup>16</sup> This was a break with the past, a leap into modernity. Werner wrote about initial successes in his work with noticeable pride: ‘Though I’ve not been photographed yet, I am reviled in all of the Province of Hanover’s rags, and the “*Volkswille*”, the majority publication, is honouring me with the attribute of “inexperienced” (“One needs to see how rotten this inexperienced young man treats seasoned leaders of the proletariat under the deafening cheers of his followers!”). That’s worth something, too.’<sup>17</sup> Werner relished his role as the disrespectful and brash newcomer stirring up the old men of the workers’ movement, and flung himself enthusiastically into his new responsibilities: ‘The task of agitation in Hanover rests on me alone, as I am the only speaker, meaning that I work as my own reporter in the mornings, as editor in the afternoons and then as orator in the evenings. For example, Saturday I’m giving a talk in Göttingen, Sunday in Hameln, Monday evening in Linden, and so forth. On the 23rd there will be local elections in Linden, in which I will likely be elected to the city council, as I am the first name on the list. Considering I’ve only returned to being a *Mensch* for a few weeks now, this all deserves a mention.’<sup>18</sup> There it was again, the word *Mensch* – human. Werner had recovered from the horror of the front line and felt reborn. Not only had he escaped the threat of death that loomed over him for so long, but he also finally joined the kind of revolutionary upheaval he had anticipated for years, and was now firmly convinced that the German revolution had a future after all – in which he would play a part. He was politically active at the local level, but also kept his eye on the national arena: from 2 to 6 March 1919 he found himself in Berlin, a delegate for Hanover-Linden at the USPD’s first party conference since the outbreak of the revolution.<sup>19</sup>

15 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 February 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

16 Beginning with his letter to Gerhard on 7 February 1919, ‘ß’ is replaced by ‘ss’.

17 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 30 March 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

18 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 February 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

19 Krause 1975, p. 278.

This was to be his first appearance on the national political stage. The gathering was long overdue, as the Independents had not held a single party conference since their founding in 1917 and had more than a few issues to discuss.<sup>20</sup> In November 1918 the USPD went from being a semi-legal opposition to the leader of the government, only to switch back to the opposition camp with flying colours one month later following fierce conflicts with the old SPD. Additionally, because the party had boycotted the elections to a new Central Council in December 1918, the young party was now absent from all crucial bodies of the revolutionary government.<sup>21</sup> The USPD was forced to watch from the opposition bench as the majority-SPD redirected the course of the revolution away from the system of workers' councils and towards a parliamentary system.<sup>22</sup> After all, the USPD had received only 7.6 percent, while the SPD won 37.9 percent of votes to the constitutional assembly in January 1919, the first election in which women also participated. The Independent Social Democrats were clearly in a deep crisis. The party had not even finished consolidating itself before witnessing its first leftwards split in the form of the KPD. This crisis-ridden but also open-ended situation inspired Werner to become more involved in strengthening the revolutionary forces within the USPD, which at the time meant strengthening the council movement. Werner Scholem had studied the council system that emerged in 1918–19 carefully, and even prepared his own motion on the topic for the party conference. Together with two other delegates he called for a more democratic voting system at the planned second national council conference.<sup>23</sup> Drawn up in a six-point catalogue of demands, Scholem called for representation for the unemployed and the exclusion of 'party and trade union officials', among other things. Otherwise, he demanded, the USPD ought to boycott the conference. This may have been why Scholem's motion garnered little enthusiasm. The party had already isolated itself with its boycott of the Central Council, and now the membership wanted to revolutionise, not merely remain in opposition. According to the minutes of the meeting,

20 On the importance of the party conference see Krause 1975, pp. 124–32; Engelmann and Naumann 1993, pp. 105–15. On the USPD in general see Morgan 1975 and Wheeler 1975.

21 See *Allgemeiner Kongress der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte Deutschlands vom 16. bis 21. Dezember 1918 im Abgeordnetenhaus zu Berlin*; Stenographische Berichte, Berlin 1919.

22 Hartfrid Krause describes an opposition 'removed from all praxis-relevant decisions', Krause 1975, p. 116.

23 *USPD – Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages vom 2. bis 6. März 1919 in Berlin*, in Krause 1975, p. 31.



Scholem's motion was 'not sufficiently supported' nor even discussed, let alone passed, at the party conference.<sup>24</sup>

Werner Scholem's first intervention into national politics thus ended with a whimper, but did little to detract from his enthusiasm. The excitement evident in later reports on the party conference written to his brother<sup>25</sup> was authentic, for although Scholem's motion had been defeated, the workers' councils dominated conference debates and even attracted support from party moderates. Georg Ledebour and Ernst Däumig, who had been involved in creating the council system and now advocated for what they considered a purer version thereof, exerted a decisive influence over the gathering.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, as the Independents debated, workers were going on strike all around them. The striking masses demanded a council republic and the nationalisation of industry, while decrying the Social Democratic government's reluctance to undertake major reforms; centres of protest included the Ruhr region, the Central German industrial region surrounding Halle-Merseburg, and Berlin, where the USPD was holding its party conference. Fritz Zubeil's opening address described the situation: 'Germany is up in flames all over. At one end of the Reich they try to extinguish the fire with hand grenades, machine guns and cannons; at the other end the flames flare up anew even more forcefully [...] The government and the majority parties do not realise that they are sitting on a volcano, and that an eruption burying them under lava could occur at any moment'.<sup>27</sup> Zubeil was referring to the violent attacks on strikers by paramilitary forces.

In the midst of such dramatic upheaval, the council idea proved exciting and compelling to most USPD members. The Independents had ostentatiously adopted the SPD's old 1891 Erfurt Programme at their founding in 1917, as the USPD understood itself as the 'true' manifestation of Social Democracy and therefore in no need of its own programme. This changed in March 1919. The council system and 'self-management in the workplaces' to prepare for the 'transformation of the capitalist economic order to a socialist one' became the new slogans,<sup>28</sup> reflecting goals the party would express in very clear terms: the party 'aims for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the representative of the

24 USPD – *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages vom 2. bis 6. März 1919 in Berlin*, p. 268.

25 See Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 30 March 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

26 See Krause 1975, p. 126 f.

27 USPD – *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages vom 2. bis 6. März 1919 in Berlin*, Krause 1975, p. 28.

28 USPD – *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages vom 2. bis 6. März 1919 in Berlin*, pp. 3–7.

great majority of the people, as a necessary precondition for the realisation of socialism. Only socialism will bring an end to any class rule, the end to any dictatorship, and true democracy'.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note that the contradictory formulas of 'council democracy' and 'dictatorship of the proletariat' were understood as an indivisible unity at the time. 'Dictatorship' was understood as rule by the working majority of the population. Followers of the 'pure council system' around Däumig and Ledebour, for example, specifically defined this dictatorship as the exclusion of capitalists from council elections.<sup>30</sup> The dictatorship of a single party or person, on the other hand, was widely rejected. Understood in this form, even old Social Democrats like Karl Kautsky and Hugo Haase could support the new programme. It formulated clear socialist aims, but also included a careful assessment of the measures of struggle required: 'In order to achieve this goal, the USP[D] will avail itself of all political and economic means of struggle, including the parliaments. It rejects aimless violence. Its objective is not the destruction of persons, but the abolishment of the capitalist system'.<sup>31</sup> These formulations should not be read exclusively as a critique of leftist fantasies of violence as, for example, even Werner formulated in his wartime letters. In fact, they refer primarily to the forces of counter-revolution whose practices of political murder and terror had become very real by early 1919. Even the radicals in the USPD denounced violence. Just like the moderate wing of the party, they stood firmly in the tradition of the old Social Democracy, which had always advocated for political struggle and not civil war.<sup>32</sup>

Werner was part of this awakening. In a letter to Gerhard, he excitedly informed him of the programmatic shift: 'I was a delegate to the party conference and must say: independent Social Democracy has, as was its duty, crossed over to the Communist camp with drums beating and trumpets sounding. In

29 *USPD – Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages vom 2. bis 6. März 1919 in Berlin*, p. 3.

30 For a summary of the theory of the 'pure council system', see Müller 1921; see also Hoffrogge 2014, pp. 127–9.

31 *USPD – Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages vom 2. bis 6. März 1919*, p. 3.

32 The KPD, on the other hand, would integrate the notion of civil war into its propaganda, with militaristic metaphors growing increasingly dominant in party rhetoric as time went on. Ultimately, however, the party failed to mobilise its members for armed uprisings in both the March Action of 1921 as well as in 1923. The left's preferred method of struggle remained the strike, to which the counter-revolution more often than not responded militarily; see Lange 2012. On the party's civil war rhetoric see Wirsching 1999.

fact, only with this departure does it become possible for me to remain in this party. But differences between us and our brothers to the left can only be seen with a magnifying glass. I can't go into detail on all this right now, but don't go thinking about parliamentarism! Its death sentence has been proclaimed among our ranks as well.<sup>33</sup>

Communism – for Werner, this meant a socialism of councils, a proletarian democracy, and he encouraged his brother to adopt the same position: ‘The council system is very interesting indeed, I certainly recommend you take a closer look at it. Meanwhile, I was voted into the greater workers’ council of Hanover during the last elections. As much as the government has tried, it hasn’t succeeded in eliminating the system in its entirety. The nucleus of an elaborate council system remains, which is why the current regime’s downfall is inevitable. For you cannot mix the two, one of them has to fall. And that can only be this splendid government of ours.’<sup>34</sup> Werner cultivated an accordingly ironic relationship to parliamentary democracy: ‘Since 23rd February I’m now a full-fledged city councilman, may God be my witness, even chairman of the Independents’ fraction, I’ve already delivered a speech in the budget debate, pushed through 10 wonderful motions, am a member of the most interesting committees (such as that for higher schools!!) and should by now wrinkle my parliamentarian brow when commencing with the dictum: “Ladies and Gentlemen! Dear party colleagues, etc.” That is what they call democratic expression of the free will of the people!’<sup>35</sup> But Werner saw his true calling elsewhere: ‘Besides, I have received a task which I take by all means much more seriously, namely the organisation of the revolutionarily inclined elements in the City and surrounding Province of Hanover. And we have indeed been astonishingly successful. While we were physically struck and heckled in January 1919, and it was virtually impossible to speak up as an Independent in most meetings, we are now cheered.’<sup>36</sup>

In Werner’s eyes, the revolution was well underway. He also witnessed much of the counter-revolution’s violence. While visiting Berlin, he saw the brutal repression of the March strikes that had proven so inspiring during the USPD conference.<sup>37</sup> In the process, the headquarters of the revolutionary People’s Navy Division [*Volksmarinedivision*], the famous ‘red soldiers’ of the revolution, was also seized. Werner, however, did not believe the revolutionary wave to

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33 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 30 March 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 See Lange 2012.

have ended just yet. When writing to his brother about the events, his tone grew downright buoyant: 'I was at the Spittelmarkt when the Navy quarters was stormed, and you should have seen those government troops! One had to take just one look at those inimitable lieutenants, the fat sergeants and the heel-clapping divisions to know everything'.<sup>38</sup> Werner was convinced that the era of sergeants and lieutenants was over. His detached pessimism of the war years gave way to a newfound revolutionary optimism.

Paradoxically, it was precisely this optimism and new lease of life that contributed to Werner's growing alienation from his brother. Gerhard could muster at best a passing enthusiasm for the revolution. In his memoirs, he describes his departure for Switzerland in May 1918 as a turning point that marked an increased intellectual and spiritual detachment from events in Germany: 'I stayed in Berne for about a year and a half and thus experienced the great events – the end of the war and the so-called German revolution as well as everything that followed – only from the outside and without deeper involvement'.<sup>39</sup> A letter to his fiancée Escha Burchhardt makes clear that Gerhard's distance was not only of a geographic nature: 'There is a crystal-clear difference between my position on the war and my position on the revolution. I confess that I participate in neither; still, I rejected the war from the start, whereas the revolution I at least look on as a spectator. There's no doubt that it has historical justice on its side, and as such I take it into my field of vision – nothing more than this, though also nothing less. And I will consider it my duty not to abandon my "benevolent neutrality" so long as the new order does not impinge on the role of the spirit'.<sup>40</sup> Instead, Gerhard pursued what he called a 'theocratic' revolution, a quality he did not see in the November Revolution, 'even if it naturally has something messianic about it'.<sup>41</sup>

Although he had always adhered to a different understanding of revolution than Werner, these phrases stand in stark contrast to earlier letters in which Gerhard had professed a commitment to socialism. His passion for the blasting apart of existing social relations had cooled noticeably, and now more than

38 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 30 March 1919, NLI Jerusalem. The People's Navy Division was a unit of revolutionary sailors, initially housed in the royal stables on Schlossplatz and in the 'Marinehaushaus' at Märkische Ufer 48 beginning in January 1919, roughly three streets away from the Spittelmarkt. Werner probably witnessed the advance of government troops. For more on March 1919 see Lange 2012.

39 Scholem 2012, p. 106.

40 Gershon Scholem to Escha Burchhardt, 23 November 1918, Scholem 2002, pp. 81–2.

41 Ibid. The German '*theokratisch*' is inaccurately translated as 'theological' in Scholem 2002 and has been restored to the original here.

ever revolution implied a spiritual act to him. He began calling himself Gershom Scholem, searching for a unique, specifically Jewish spiritual and cultural renewal. Yet when Gershom spoke of 'theocracy', he by no means implied the political rule of some priestly order. He had previously criticised the dogmatism of both Orthodox Judaism and Zionism elsewhere. When speaking of Jewishness, he emphasised its searching nature: 'For whoever is in motion must not teach, but search. The movement searches within him. The divine'.<sup>42</sup> To him, theocracy meant the spiritual rule of a divine principle, not the rule of a human priestly caste that, far from behaving in a searching manner, arrogantly claimed to have already found divinity. Gerhard failed to find this kind of spiritual transcendence in the November Revolution, although it 'somehow' appeared vaguely messianic.

Werner sensed his brother's indifference and confronted him about it: 'It is not by coincidence that I only now reply to your letter from 23rd February. As you may have heard, we're currently having a "revolution" in Germany, and politicians during times of revolution have damn little time to write letters. And you, on your little pleasure island, probably don't have much of an image of what's going on here, indeed, I get the impression that you don't hold much of getting such an image in the first place'.<sup>43</sup> Werner blamed his brother's lack of interest in the revolution on his personal quest for Jewish meaning. Moreover, Werner's ego was likely bruised by his brother's lack of appreciation for his political activity. He responded in kind, criticising Zionism harshly: 'You may end up in revolutionary turmoil yourself one day, when you found the Jewish state and your fat cats commit the horrendous mistake of establishing a capitalist branch of London there, with a Jewish proletariat. A Jewish-Communist proletariat in Palestine, you just wait and see!'<sup>44</sup> Werner continued to associate Jewishness with pride, strength and a resilient spirit, which makes his stance on the political ambitions of Zionism all the more astounding. It stands in sharp contrast to his wartime prison letters with their hopes for the destruction of Germany and a Jewish Palestine. By this point, Werner had returned to the position he held in 1912: socialism represented the more universal emancipatory project and was thus more important than a specifically Jewish perspective. Werner's shift in opinion was a direct result of his experiences in the revolution. In a Christmas letter written in 1918, he had already formulated a rigorous

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42 Letter to Julie Schächter, 26 March 1915, Scholem 1994, p. 24. On Gershom Scholem's understanding of the relationship between religion and emancipation see Biale 1982.

43 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 30 March 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

44 Ibid.

volte-face: ‘So how is the realisation of the Zionist “war objectives” in Palestine coming along? Is there a Jewish party of annexation yet, which, following a tried and tested pattern, seeks to occupy Syria and parts of the Sinai Peninsula, too, as these areas historically once belonged to the Crown of David?’<sup>45</sup> Werner had of course championed these same war objectives during his year in prison in 1917, but this was no longer the case. To him, Zionism represented not hope but political confusion, ultimately little more than a Jewish variant of an already rapacious imperialism.

Gerhard was shocked. After reading Werner’s Christmas letter, Gerhard would record in his diary: ‘It is Werner’s birthday today. I haven’t even written him. Mountains of unfamiliarity stand between us, but be it as it may: *what* could possibly be exceeded in him any further? He is possessed and guided at the bottom of his heart by demonic laws. But we will die without having spoken to one another. I don’t know him, I don’t know his wife, I don’t know by what right he has her – ultimately I stand towards him in what I call benevolent neutrality. With him, I live under reserve, so to speak.’<sup>46</sup> ‘Benevolent neutrality’ – Werner received the same sympathetic distance Gerhard reserved for the November Revolution.

The synchronicity of the revolution and Werner’s abandonment of Zionism is evident, for it was not until 9 November 1918 that his hopes of a socialist turn in Germany were confirmed as being, if nothing else, at least possible. During the war, this kind of political turn had been out of the question – militarism, chauvinism and anti-Semitism seemed too deeply rooted in the German population. Only with the coming of the revolution would these foundations begin to crack. Yet the old ideologies of Kaiser and fatherland had not disappeared; indeed, they had radicalised and taken up arms in the form of the brutal paramilitaries of the *Freikorps*.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, mass strikes, the revolution and the councils movement had reinvigorated a tradition buried in Germany for many years: the tradition of rebellious people’s movements, the peasants’ revolts and the barricades of 1848, the tradition of disobedience, the struggle against tyranny, the long-suppressed cry for freedom and equality. Werner was convinced that socialism and the emancipation of the lower classes were within reach. Zionism, a distant utopia in Palestine, no longer seemed necessary in light of the new historical situation. Gerhard, on the other hand, still longed for a ‘messianic’ revolution.

45 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 26 December 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

46 Diary entry from 26 December 1918, Scholem 2000, p. 427.

47 See Krüger 1971.

The brothers thus returned to their pre-war disagreement, but this time there would be no rapprochement. The split was permanent. Gerhard pursued emigration to Palestine and began using the Hebrew version of his name, 'Gershom', around 1918,<sup>48</sup> while Werner remained equally stubborn and entrenched in his own position. In parliamentary debates he described Zionism as bourgeois nationalism, polemically lamenting 'that the nationalists of peoples are one heart and one soul'.<sup>49</sup> In 1930, long after Werner had retired from active politics, he still teased his brother as a 'servant to English imperialism'.<sup>50</sup> Gershom considered this to be 'a remark insulting and insinuating of me', but chose to leave it at the level of irony.<sup>51</sup> Despite major differences, the two brothers continued to interact with one another. In the spring of 1919 Werner encouraged Gerhard repeatedly to resume his studies in Göttingen so the two could meet in person more often,<sup>52</sup> but it would not come to be. Gerhard chose Munich for his further studies and would then reside in Berlin and Frankfurt for short periods before departing to Jerusalem in 1923.<sup>53</sup> Aside from a few visits, the brothers communicated mostly through letters, which did not make resolving their differences any easier. Though contact would grow increasingly sporadic over the years, it continued into 1933. Never again, however, would Gershom and Werner Scholem be as close as they were during those catastrophic war years.

Gerhard was not alone in his scepticism about the revolution. Indeed, the Scholem family as a whole kept their distance from the more radical revolutionary currents. Although some family members would become politically active, they never did so in ways that were to Werner's liking. He wrote about his elder brother: 'Good old Reinhold, whom thank God I didn't meet, is agitating for the German People's Party, but did not volunteer as Noske was arming the *jeunesse dorée*'.<sup>54</sup> Reinhold's party of choice was the German People's Party [*Deutsche Volkspartei*, DVP], a conservative formation with strong monarchist

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48 See Zadoff and Zadoff 2013, p. 641.

49 *Protokolle des preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, 189. Sitzung am 30. November 1922.

50 Written by Werner in a letter from Betty to Gerhard Scholem dated 21 January 1930, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 216, fn. 3.

51 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 215.

52 See letters from Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 February 1919 and 30 March 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

53 Scholem 2012, *passim*.

54 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 February 1919, NLI Jerusalem. The *jeunesse dorée* refers to the 'golden youth', a term used to describe the hedonistic and pleasure-loving offspring of the upper class, originally used to describe the anti-Jacobin monarchists in the French Revolution.

leanings. Although Reinhold may have shared the *Freikorps*' nationalist convictions, he disagreed with their violent tactics.

Betty Scholem also welcomed society's turn towards democracy, but felt no sympathy whatsoever for Werner's council republic. As so many others, she considered it little more than a constant source of unrest: 'The total chaos we have here can scarcely get any worse. No one commands, no one obeys. Conditions are miserable. The only surprising thing is the way the sense of order among the population keeps the minutiae of public life from falling apart. I'm deeply disillusioned with the Social Democratic party. [...] it vacillates as much as the old regime, or even more. In no time at all, Herr Müller from the Executive Council deluded himself into thinking he was some kind of Caesar. A handful of Spartacans now threaten to completely disrupt all economic life, which would only bring everything to a grinding halt. A dictator would then eventually appear on the scene'.<sup>55</sup>

The 'Herr Müller' she referred to was the same Richard Müller who had organised mass strikes against the war with his Revolutionary Stewards movement since 1916, now fighting alongside her son. Regardless of her scepticism vis-à-vis these sorts of radicals, she was by no means apolitical. Betty declared emphatically in November 1918: 'I am joining the great Democratic Party, called for by Theodor Wolff. [...] In my old age I now have to worry about politics, for I don't intend to vote as a mere fellow traveller, but to look at my candidate very carefully!! Apart from that, I have my own views on the woman's right to vote and don't consider it capable of any determining impact. Aunt Frieda Bauchwitz is nevertheless triumphant, she sees her lifelong dream coming true'.<sup>56</sup> The 'great Democratic Party' was the later German Democratic Party [*Deutsche Demokratische Partei*, *DDP*], a liberal formation. A woman's right to vote – a topic about which Betty Scholem had her 'own views' – became a reality overnight due in no small part to the revolution. Prior to that, both proletarian and bourgeois women's movements had spent decades fighting for this right in vain. Regardless of Betty Scholem's scepticism, her letters testify to the fact that a wave of politicisation rippled across all classes and layers of society in 1918. The respective understandings of democracy held by the middle classes and the workers' movement, however, were worlds apart. While the latter sought to democratise not just politics but also the economy through the council system, the former regarded even the mildest version of such a system as dangerous chaos. The tragedy of the November Revolution was that the major-

55 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 11 December 1918, Scholem 2002, pp. 82–3.

56 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 18 November 1918, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 25.



ity Social Democrats would ultimately come to share the latter assessment. The SPD's top priority was to establish 'orderly conditions'. The council republic supporters in the USPD and KPD were met with incomprehension at best, and violence at worst; after all, it was Social Democratic Minister of Defence Gustav Noske who ordered the violent suppression of the March strikes in 1919.

But nevertheless, despite severe organisational breaks and several political defeats, the situation at the outset of 1919 remained undecided, and Werner Scholem devoted everything he could to the realisation of his ideals. All his energy and strength went into politics, while his wife was tacitly expected to support him by focusing on the household: 'I am on the road day and night, of course. My wife is at home and is exhibiting remarkable talents as a housewife, is basically highly unpolitical and wishes I become a street sweeper, but not a politician. These days it is indeed highly dangerous, but I don't see why I ought to be scared now, after I've had to risk my head time and again for nothing at all for 4 years.'<sup>57</sup> Werner did not see why the domestic division of labour should change in any way. His desire to make up for lost political time prevented him from reflecting upon his own role in the family, while brazenly ascribing his wife's objections to her allegedly 'unpolitical' consciousness, even though it was Emmy's politics that had drawn him to her in the first place. Only with the help of Emmy's parents in raising the child was the conflict defused and Emmy able to reconcile her work life with family life. This arrangement would begin to unravel, however, when Werner accepted a position as editor of the Halle *Volksblatt* in July 1919.

Although the change occurred rather unexpectedly, Werner was thrilled with his new position: 'Since 1st June I am the well-appointed editor of the *Volksblatt* in Halle, known to be one of our largest party publications. I was offered the post via telegraph without even having applied, so last week I faced the option of either being the party secretary for the Hanover region or editor in Halle. It was a tough choice for me. If I was more of an ambitious show-off, I would have remained in Hanover where I was known all over town and carefully dissected by the majority bigwigs' papers. But ultimately I decided in favour of Halle, because I really don't feel like becoming a party secretary. So I was happy to flout that minor regional fame I enjoyed in Hanover, and I was particularly delighted to vacate my "honourable" post as councilman for the District of Linden! *Nebbig!*'<sup>58</sup>

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57 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 30. March 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

58 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 4 June 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

Werner knew Halle from his time in the military. He had been stationed here as an infantryman with the convalescence company in 1916 and spent several months behind the brick walls of the Red Ox prison. But even there, his comrades' solidarity had not been far off – the 1917 May Day demonstration passed by the prison, and he was frequently the recipient of care packages.

This solidarity was rooted in a long tradition. Halle had already been a Social Democratic stronghold under the Kaiserreich; it was here that, following 12 years of illegality, the party held its first conference in 1890 at which it renamed itself the Social Democratic Party of Germany. The city was one of the centres of the Central German industrial region encompassing Merseburg, Leipzig and the Leuna chemical plant built seemingly overnight during the war. It was one of Germany's three major industrial centres along with the Ruhr region and Berlin, and was home to millions of workers. Here, Werner encountered dramatically different possibilities than in Hanover. He proudly reported of his party's strong position on the ground: 'In Halle we of course play first fiddle. Right-wing socialists are almost completely absent here. The entire administrative district of Merseburg, 8 former electoral constituencies, has become independent and honestly revolutionary!'<sup>59</sup> This was no sudden outburst of revolutionary optimism, for a majority of Halle workers had in fact turned their backs on the old SPD and lined up behind the Independents, while Ebert's Social Democracy remained in control of the party majority in almost all other parts of the country.<sup>60</sup> In the national assembly elections of 1919 the USPD received 44.3 percent of the votes in Merseburg; the SPD took a mere 16.3 percent.<sup>61</sup> This change represented a real opportunity for Werner, who made the decision to relocate with little regard for Emmy's wishes. Werner wrote nonchalantly: 'I have a nice apartment in Giebichenstein, furnished of course. Emmy will follow in the next days; she is reluctant to leave Hanover because she has to leave the child behind.'<sup>62</sup> That he was also leaving his daughter behind does not seem to have crossed his mind.

Emmy, on the other hand, gave the division of labour within the Scholem household plenty of thought. She was even less inclined to conform to Werner's housewife ideal once childrearing had been temporarily delegated to the grandparents. Though Werner ultimately backed down, he did not fail to get in a

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59 Ibid.

60 See Krause 1975, p. 174 f., as well as Engelmann and Naumann 1903, p. 102.

61 Schröder 2011, available at: <http://www.wahlen-in-deutschland.de/wrtwmerseburg.htm> (last accessed 5 August 2011).

62 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 4 June 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

few words of mockery and derision before doing so: 'My wife has turned rebellious and refuses to do any more housework, even though she's a very dainty housewife. She is going to the Halle District Miners' Council on 1st September, a very influential body that is closely linked to the rising council system. We will be making quite good money then, together round about 100 M, but of course we spend it like dirt'.<sup>63</sup> Her job at the miners' council not only gave Emmy economic independence, but also brought her back into the political life that Werner had so thoughtlessly kept her from. In Werner's letters to Gerhard, we find only hints of the young couple's conflicts. The picture becomes somewhat clearer in a letter written by Emmy herself, sent to Gerhard in Munich on the occasion of his 22nd birthday:

Werner is at the party convention in Leipzig and will hardly find time to write you. He is extremely busy and works day and night. I originally wanted to go to Hanover to see my little Edith, but then had to stay to finish Werner's work. My little girl has developed marvellously, she repeats everything she hears and walks more than just a few steps now, every tree, every cart or car evokes the greatest delight in her. In March I will definitely fetch her. I'm so proud of my little daughter! Dear Gerhard, unfortunately I am too dumb to be able to formulate my congratulations well. I expect very much of you and your life. You are my dearest person of all, as a human being I care for you more than Werner, which has nothing to do with Werner being my husband, of course. You understand that, don't you? I think that many people like you very much. And I hope that you don't wish to disappoint anyone.<sup>64</sup>

Emmy and Gerhard got along well from the outset. Gerhard always had a sympathetic ear for her worries, and she trusted him in moments when she felt misunderstood by Werner.<sup>65</sup> Emmy wanted to dedicate herself to her daughter's upbringing, but Werner urged her to maintain the 'practical' arrangement with the child's grandparents that gave Werner, whose demanding workload

63 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 6 August 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

64 Emmy to Gerhard Scholem, 3 December 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

65 Gershom Scholem would later recall in his memoirs that he and Emmy had enjoyed 'quite a good relationship'. An independent exchange of letters between the two exists for the years 1918–19 and 1943–68; see Scholem 2012, p. 31 as well as Gershom and Emmy Scholem's correspondence at the NLI Jerusalem. In a letter to Werner Kraft written in April 1919, Gershom expresses his preference for Emmy, of whom he thought 'very much', over his brother. See Scholem 1986, p. 106.

remained unchanged, more time for political responsibilities. He wrote that his time was 'filled with worldly matters to such an extent that often enough I don't even see my wife for several days'.<sup>66</sup> Werner in turn considered it appropriate to include Emmy in his work plan, informing his brother that she wrote articles for him, yet showing little appreciation for her efforts: 'Some is from my wife, who helps me here and there by writing smaller reports, for example today she's reporting on a women's meeting, etc.'<sup>67</sup> In contrast, he never failed to speak highly of his own journalistic achievements.

Emmy nevertheless resisted Werner's egotistical behaviour. First she reclaimed her professional life, and later she brought her daughter back to the Scholem household. Her letter to Gerhard indicates how fiercely she struggled for personal emancipation. Alongside her fights with Werner, she was also challenged by her own feelings of inferiority. Although she had organised advanced educational courses for the Workers' Youth for years, she still considered herself 'too dumb' to compose a decent letter compared to the intellectual Scholem brothers. This insecurity would limit the extent of her rebellion time and again. In turn, apart from professional life, education also remained an important question for Emmy. In a later résumé she would write: 'Unable to pursue my vocation in Halle, I worked as a volunteer in social relief during that time. In that same period I also gave training courses for women and adolescents, as well as attending a public speaking course hosted by the Reichstag deputy for Halle at the time, Fritz Kundert, and participating in various working groups. I was requested on many occasions to speak at political meetings in Halle, Bitterfeld, Merseburg, Weissenfels, Eisleben and other places, and I always accepted these engagements'.<sup>68</sup> Educational work with other women was a way of breaking out of ossified gender roles. From 1919 onwards Emmy began participating in politics more actively again, joining the USPD and even serving as a delegate to the party conference in December 1920.<sup>69</sup> This would remain her only appearance outside of regional politics, however, as Werner remained the aspiring politician of the family. While Emmy attended to his political tasks in Halle

66 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 6 August 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

67 Ibid.

68 The original text speaks of a 'Fritz Kundert', however the parliamentary deputy was actually named Kunert. See Emmy Scholem, 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs (zu Werner Scholem) vom 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Niedersachsen, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351. The remark concerning her inability to pursue her chosen profession suggests she only worked at the miners' council for a brief period, as the full-time structures of the council movement were dismantled across the country in mid-1919.

69 On the party conference in Halle, see Krause 1975, Vol. 5, p. 208.

and wrote her birthday letter to Gerhard, Werner attended the third major USPD party conference in Leipzig from 30 November to 6 December 1919.

The USPD at the Leipzig party conference could look back on a much more successful period of activity than it had in Berlin the previous March. Its structures had grown stronger, numerous new chapters had been founded, and the party produced a total of 55 daily newspapers – one of which was the *Halle Volksblatt* where Werner worked. Membership had more than doubled to a remarkable 750,000, ten times that of the KPD. The Communists for their part had failed to live up to claims of representing the vanguard of the working class.<sup>70</sup> The USPD had not only grown in quantitative terms, but also consolidated itself ideologically on the basis of council socialism.

At its Leipzig conference the USPD elaborated its 'Programmatic Declaration' from March 1919 into a more comprehensive 'Action Programme' that adhered to the councils as the optimal organisational form for socialism. Demands for nationalisation of the mining, banking and insurance industries, energy production, communal housing markets as well as coal and steel production were also adopted unanimously.<sup>71</sup> Werner's strategic decision had born fruit: the USPD, once a ragtag collection of anti-war oppositionists, was now consolidating itself on the basis of a revolutionary programme.<sup>72</sup>

Werner Scholem did his part by giving a voice to the concerns of the youth at the party conference. The oppositional Workers' Youth, forcefully dismantled during the war, had been replaced by the Free Socialist Youth [*Freie Sozialistische Jugend*, FSJ], a group with close ties to the USPD, and out of which the KPD sought to recruit members to its own organisations. In a motion signed by 'Scholem and comrades', he proposed granting the youth movement far-reaching organisational autonomy.<sup>73</sup> Scholem had supported a different position as recently as the previous summer, when members of the Free Socialist Youth in Halle had complained that Scholem tried to force the USPD's youth organ on them, and threateningly 'guaranteed he'd have them against the wall in 14 days'. Scholem later disavowed his remarks, stating that he had been 'forced' to act in this way due to 'false information'.<sup>74</sup>

70 See Krause 1975, p. 150.

71 *USPD – Protokoll der Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages in Leipzig vom 30. November bis 6. Dezember 1919*, Krause 1975, p. 33 ff.

72 Hartfrid Krause speaks of a 'common theoretical platform' that, although temporary, brought together the various forces within the party. See Krause 1975, p. 153.

73 *USPD – Protokoll der Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages in Leipzig vom 30. November bis 6. Dezember 1919*, Krause 1975, p. 48.

74 'An die Wand gedrückt', *Die Junge Garde*, 14 June 1919; 'Erklärung', *Die Junge Garde*, 5 July

Perhaps this somewhat embarrassing affair was one of the reasons why he eventually changed his mind, for at the party conference Scholem argued passionately for the youth movement's independence. Unlike March 1919, his motion was not ignored and he gave an elaborate speech: 'We attach great importance to the fact that in the youth organisation we do not wish to be a party youth, but a revolutionary proletarian youth organisation, in which the 14-, 15-, and 16-year-old adolescent workers are not separated according to party programme into USP[D] and Communists; adolescents who have not yet developed the capacity to fully distinguish the two party programmes, which even adults are having a hard time grappling with. We therefore demand that our party declare straightforwardly at the party conference that it stands in amicable and supportive relation to the youth organisation, without demanding any kind of affiliation or subordination in terms of party tactics. [...] Anyone remotely familiar with the nature of the youth movement knows that there is no other way to forge a youth made up of socialist fighters'.<sup>75</sup> Scholem's motion was approved following a brief debate. The USPD thereby committed itself to supporting the youth movement particularly through assistance in establishing youth centres.<sup>76</sup> In his speech, the almost 24-year-old Werner Scholem spoke of 'we' when referring to the youth movement. Werner still considered himself part of this milieu in spite of his newfound status as editor of a party publication.

The main arena of Werner Scholem's political career as Independent Social Democrat in 1919 and 1920 was not party gatherings, however. His contributions were brief, when they occurred at all. These meetings were dominated by established party leaders from the pre-war era, and Scholem took only cautious first steps at best. He cultivated his actual milieu in his work as a journalist and agitator in Hanover and Halle. Here, he openly challenged the 'seasoned leaders of the proletariat' when their line of argument displeased him.<sup>77</sup> His imperious and confident demeanour secured him the attention of others, while regular mandates to serve as a party conference delegate represented first expressions of faith in the ambitious young man's abilities. When it came to making a living, however, Werner continued to rely on his job in the Halle *Volksblatt* newsroom.

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1919. I would like to thank my colleague Axel Weipert for making me aware of these two articles.

75 *USPD – Protokoll der Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitagés in Leipzig vom 30. November bis 6. Dezember 1919*, Krause 1975, p. 450. In doing so, Scholem supported an independent youth movement as had existed in the old Social Democracy until 1908.

76 Krause 1975, p. 539. The question of the newspaper's autonomy was also received positively and forwarded to the central leadership in the form of a resolution.

77 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 30 March 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

He viewed his work as a challenge: 'As I am not exactly a universal genius, I am forced to be a quill driver, and what better job could there be for me than working for a big newspaper. I'm a provincial editor, certainly the bottom-most step, but one can make a lot out of it'.<sup>78</sup> As was common at the time, Werner wrote most of his articles anonymously, but provided Gerhard with a brief overview of his pieces: 'The top articles written in corpus heading in the Halle-Saalkreis and Province section are mostly mine, and also the timeless pictures from among city council deputies, and finally all of the columns containing much mockery of the students and Nosketeers. [...] Should you have read the programme of our educational committee, do keep in mind that your brother w. is a member of said body. [...] Since I've had the opportunity to actually have an impact in my department at this paper, I have, by the way, made a great effort to not produce lies, and as you will have noticed as an attentive reader, neither have I spared our own people whenever necessary. It's quite difficult to leave an impression on the provincial section of a newspaper, as one is partly tied to things, such as the obligatory public announcements, etc.'<sup>79</sup>

Werner insisted upon a journalistic ethos, albeit by no means a neutral one. He had his own political views and intended to argue for them. At one point, he approached his brother Gerhard to discuss a series of questions relating to journalism; Gerhard, however, was less than enthused by the idea. In his diary he reached a strikingly negative verdict concerning the *Volksblatt*: 'A proper demagogue shivaree of the mediocre variety, so that one often thinks: ah, how much better it would be if I did it for those people!! You can tell that they can't write, and resort to such defamatory language so absurdly quickly to disguise this fact, although in doing so they instead reveal it'.<sup>80</sup> Gerhard had only reluctantly subscribed to the *Volksblatt* after abandoning his position of not reading such papers 'on principle'.<sup>81</sup> The agitational language directed at workers with little or no formal education was not quite Gerhard's *métier*, accustomed as he was to a different level of discourse from his correspondences with friends such as Walter Benjamin.

In August 1919, Gerhard authored a general reckoning with Werner of sorts, several pages long. He notes that the entry is addressed 'to Werner', but, like many other harsh words found for his brother, only appears in the seclusion of his private diary.<sup>82</sup> Gerhard took the business of writing very seri-

78 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 4 June 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

79 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 6 August 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

80 Scholem 2000, p. 476.

81 Ibid.

82 Diary entry from 10 August 1919, Scholem 2007, p. 319.

ously. To him, a student of the kabbalah, the word was something sacred; not something transient casually tossed aside, but an ephemeral shell for the eternal *logos*, the pure spirit behind all material things. In his monologue to his brother, Gerhard wrote: 'I read your newspaper with an open mind. I looked for something that could produce a *pure* spirit – upright, uncommon (in the moral sense of non-vulgar), and forward-looking – but in the last four weeks I have found *nothing* of the kind. To the contrary, I have come across the most pitiable and depressing evidence of deceit'.<sup>83</sup> Gerhard criticised the paper's numerous 'self-contradictions' whose '*only* rule seems to be not to state the truth, but only those things that can harm Noske and the other conservative socialists'. He spoke of 'a *lack of purity*' and a '*shocking baseness*' of language that corrupted its readers and differed in no way from the 'nastiest of bourgeois rags'. To him, this style of writing proved 'that nothing can be expected from the communism of a party that speaks *in this way*'. Gerhard sympathised with Communism as an idea, just as he had once professed to embrace socialism; indeed, the two terms were synonymous to many at the time. He was absolutely appalled, however, by the depths of agitation and propaganda in which actual politics took place. In his view both the *Volksblatt* and the USPD were manipulative and '*Jesuitical* in the negative sense of the word'. Gerhard believed to have understood the USPD's true nature: 'I now understand this unfortunately all too well, even if I *fail* to understand it from the standpoint of the *pure, unadulterated struggle* for communism. My hope in your party was an illusion. If one of these days you ever gain power (which is a good possibility), then the entire lack of purity, demagoguery, and all the evil you have gratuitously injected into workers (who trust you) [...] will present a terrible obstacle *against* any serious work. Nothing is more pernicious for a community than demagoguery'. Accordingly, Gerhard wrote emotively, the rule of Werner's party would one day 'unavoidably drown itself in a sea of blood'.

Gerhard rejected the argument that ends could justify means in the struggle for communism. He condemned all shades of tactical manoeuvring, instead demanding an absolute purity of convictions and the unity of actions and words, essentially the same 'integrity' or 'unconditionality' about which the brothers had argued in previous letters.<sup>84</sup> In his manifesto, 'On the unconditionality of youth', Werner had summarised these ideals in a rather fierce tone. Gerhard now accused him of abandoning this ethos and betraying his own

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83 Ibid, emphasis in original.

84 See Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 3 June 1917 and 17 June 1917, NLI Jerusalem.



cause: 'In Halle, where 100,000 or more people are to be trained, if one takes your word for it. *Do you not understand* what responsibility you have?'<sup>85</sup> Gerhard's diary entry, in many ways a letter to his brother, concluded with the words: 'I swear to you: write purely or don't write at all. The lowest form of work is better than that of an editor who destroys the language of humanity with his meaningless words.'<sup>86</sup>

The severity of Gerhard's assessment can in part be attributed to a clash between the brothers' respective writing cultures, and to misunderstandings emerging from the attempt to conduct philosophical critique within the melee of the daily struggle of the labour movement. Gerhard humbly respected the movement's goals, but precisely because of this connection to the movement identified a problematic aspect in Werner's rise. The idealist Werner Scholem, who fought against war, violence and oppression, was inseparable from the politician Werner Scholem, who was always looking for ways to make his ideals reality. As a journalist, his task was not simply to report, but to agitate, to think and act in tactical terms. Any intervention had to be conducted pragmatically, measured not according to the purity of the idea behind it but rather its political effect. This behaviour was unacceptable in the eyes of Gershom Scholem the philosopher. Purity was an absolute value in itself not to be corrupted. Gerhard, who was not a member of any political party, was not obliged to make compromises in his daily life. Werner's situation was rather different. He also professed a desire to 'not produce lies',<sup>87</sup> and took his role as an educator seriously, demanding the youth movement's independence – but as a journalist he had to take sides in party infighting, and as a politician he had to push for his positions. The dilemma between ends and means would remain a central contradiction throughout Werner Scholem's political career, and a fundamental dilemma in the history of Communism itself. Gerhard identified this tension at an early stage of his philosophical critique, but Werner would confront and endure it in his daily political practice.

The brothers' relationship remained strained, although it did not remain as bad as Gerhard's diary entry from 10 August may suggest. He would visit Werner in Halle only a month later, and a report from this meeting in Gershom's later *Memories of My Youth* strikes a considerably more conciliatory tone: 'On my way to Berlin I visited him in Halle, where he was working as an editor at the local party newspaper. It was natural that the discussion of whether a man like

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85 Diary entry from 10 August 1919, Scholem 2007, p. 319.

86 Ibid.

87 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 6 August 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

him could really be a representative of the proletariat [...] would arise between us. My brother was demagogically not unskilled. Don't convince yourself of silliness, I told him, they clap after your speech and will vote for you (his ambition) at the next election according to the party's recommendation, but behind your back you will remain what you are. I heard a worker say to his colleague, "the Jew (not: the Comrade!) talks quite well".<sup>88</sup> In Gerhard's *Memories*, his damning criticism of Werner's way with words recedes in favour of the almost admiring remark about the latter's 'demagogic' talent. Gerhard's main criticism, then, was of Werner's choice to conduct organised politics together with non-Jewish Germans, something Gershom Scholem would retrospectively come to view as a dangerous self-delusion.

Werner, however, had become a socialist precisely because he saw himself as a 'thinking Jew'. In the USPD he had found a party that not only tolerated Jewish members, but even used its political and social weight to combat anti-Semitism. The Leipzig party conference in December 1919 passed a resolution 'Against Jew-baiting' [*Gegen Judenhetze*]. It read: 'The party conference recognises that anti-Semitism, baiting the Jews as Jews, has become the weapon of choice of the monarchist reaction in Germany as well. [...] The party conference calls on the class-conscious, revolutionary proletariat of Germany to oppose and fight all forms of such baiting with all determination and the knowledge of its international reactionary character'.<sup>89</sup> This resolution condemned any and all 'fear-mongering against immigrated Jewish class-conscious proletarians' and called for resisting anti-Semitism in the workplaces. That this motion was passed during the days of revolutionary turmoil in 1919 was no coincidence. Leaflets and inflammatory pamphlets disseminated by the counter-revolution were directed not only against 'Spartacists' and 'Bolshevists', but took on heavy anti-Semitic overtones, as well.<sup>90</sup> Historian Ludger Heid evalu-

88 See Scholem 1997, p. 180. According to a letter from Werner, the visit occurred in mid-September 1919; see Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 15 September 1919, NLI Jerusalem.

89 Krause 1975, p. 455 and p. 539.

90 Such as the pamphlet *German Men and Women*, published by the monarchist *Bund der Kaisertreuen* group, which proclaimed: 'Oh, you poor, betrayed German people! At your fore stand no longer Junkers, at your fore stand Bernstein, Cohn, Eisner, Fliedner, Grandauer, Haase, Haas, Hirsch, Heymann, Herzfeld, Löwengard, Lipinski, Preuß, Rosenfeld, Wurm. In the German Reich there are only 3 Jews for every 200 Germans, yet in the current government we have 80 Jews to every 100 men. [...] And did the Jews earn the right to govern the German people in the war? [...] Only a few were to be found in the trenches. [...] And while Germans bled and died out there, the Jews sat in the Interior, running businesses, hoarding treasure upon treasure and war profits upon war profits, planning how

ates the resolution's text as follows: 'Of all leftist parties, the USPD opposed anti-Semitism the most forcefully. Its stance most accurately represented traditional Social Democratic understandings of the "Jewish question"'.<sup>91</sup> Heid emphasises the resolution as the first time that a German workers' party explicitly committed itself to protecting Russian and Polish 'eastern Jewish' [*Ostjuden*] workers from persecution. Werner took this resolution to heart. Years later, long after the USPD had fallen apart, he would continue to defend the rights of eastern Jewish immigrants in the Prussian state parliament.<sup>92</sup> The USPD conference delegates passed the resolution against anti-Semitism unanimously, without an opposing speech. This likely reinforced Werner's decision of December 1918 – that is, should such reinforcement have been needed in the first place.

Gerhard's criticisms thus could not stop him, and Werner deepened his involvement in the socialist movement. The party's development over the subsequent few months would prove turbulent. The consolidation of new local chapters and publications intensified in 1920, and membership numbers rose even higher. At the same time, the Independents were learning to adapt to altered political conditions. Although the national assembly in Weimar had ratified a new constitution for the German Reich on 31 July 1919, the USPD considered the revolutionary process far from complete – after all, the constitution passed by a majority of Social Democrats, DDP and the Catholic Centre Party guaranteed private property and the continuation of the capitalist mode of production. The March strikes of 1919 may have secured the legalisation of works councils, but their authority remained extremely limited.<sup>93</sup> The nationalisation of key industries, demanded by a cross-party majority at the first council conference, was relegated to a 'Socialisation Commission' whose deliberations were inconclusive. Measured against the realities of life in the Kaiserreich, the eight-hour workday and the works councils doubtlessly constituted real improvements. Measured against the revolutionary hopes of those days in November or the old SPD's Erfurt Programme, however, the outcome remained

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to avoid criminal prosecution after the war. Only in the revolution did they find their salvation', documented in Müller 2011, p. 516 f.

- 91 Heid 2009, p. 35. In the controversy surrounding the 'Jewish question', Edmund Silberner propagated the thesis of a thoroughgoing left anti-Semitism, while Enzo Traverso contradicted him with a reconstruction of Marxist debates on the topic. See Silberner 1962 and 1983, as well as Traverso 1994.
- 92 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, 188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922. See also the section 'Reform or Revolution? A Parliamentarian in the Prussian Landtag' in this chapter.
- 93 See von Oertzen 1963.

deeply unsatisfying. Not only radicals like Werner Scholem, but indeed even the Independents' moderate wing had expected more. Criticism of the Weimar Constitution was thus by no means confined to the 'extreme' margins of the party, but emanated from the broad middle of the labour movement and thus from the heart of society itself. Owing to the popularity of its action programme, the USPD managed to secure 17.9 percent of the vote in the first Reichstag elections on 6 June 1920 and received 84 mandates, only 20 fewer than the SPD which had taken 21.9 percent of the vote, giving the Independents further reason to hope to gradually become the true 'majority Social Democracy'. Its success was largely a result of the extra-parliamentary and revolutionary mobilisation occurring on the streets. This became increasingly obvious, for instance, during the Kapp Putsch of 13 March 1920.<sup>94</sup>

Here, the real enemies of democracy were on display – opponents not only of the Weimar Constitution, but of any democratic order, whether in the workplaces or in parliament. The putsch, or rather the attempted coup d'état, was led by a Prussian civil servant named Wolfgang Kapp and General Walther von Lüttwitz. Another supporter of the move was General Erich Ludendorff, formerly of the Supreme Army Command. The Kapp Putsch united all social forces whose only regret concerning the World War and the mass killing it entailed was that Germany had not emerged from the slaughter victorious. They felt threatened by the peace treaty and the republic: the Treaty of Versailles permitted the German Reich a standing army of no more than 100,000 soldiers, although twice as many were still under arms in 1920. These soldiers had been much appreciated and needed by both the Reich and the Allied Powers up until then, mostly for the suppression of strikes and the movement of workers' councils, or for fighting the Red Army in the Baltic, to which German troops were deployed until autumn 1919.<sup>95</sup>

Now these soldiers were redundant and had to go, but they fought back and supported Kapp and Lüttwitz's attempt to establish a military dictatorship, although precise plans or intentions remained vague at this point. Some were still supporters of the monarchy, while others had already found new ideologies following the breakdown of the Hohenzollern dynasty: the 'Marinebrigade Ehrhardt', which occupied the government district in Berlin, painted white swastikas on their steel helmets. These stood for a new kind of nationalism, ethnicised and radicalised by the defeat of 1918: from now on, only blood and

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94 For more on the events of the putsch see Erger 1967, Cavallie 1995, Könnemann and Krusch 1972.

95 This was done under Allied orders, but as soon as the 'Balticans' became uncontrollable, the Entente demanded their retreat. See Schulze 1994, p. 212 f.

race were to determine Germanness. Not all military personnel shared these ideas, but most were hardly republicans. Divisions of the army not involved in the coup still refused to fire on their 'comrades'. Units committed to the republic such as the People's Navy Division or the Republican Soldiers' Guard [*Republikanische Soldatenwehr*] had long been dissolved on account of their 'unreliability'. The republic thus had no military force to protect it and its government was forced to flee, first to Dresden and later to Stuttgart. Only through a national general strike called by the trade unions, SPD, USPD and, after brief hesitation the KPD could the coup d'état be repelled. In a display of unity unseen since November 1918, the workers' movement demonstrated its power and made it clear that there was literally no way around them in German society.

Werner observed the events from Halle, where the Independent Social Democrats exerted a critical influence over a proletariat several hundred thousand strong. The resistance to the Kapp Putsch would prove particularly violent here, and Scholem was in the thick of it. The coup began on 13 March 1920, when the government was driven out of the city. Outside of Berlin, the situation was unclear. On 15 March one last edition of the *Volksblatt* edited by Scholem appeared in Halle with a 'fiery protest against the military dictatorship'.<sup>96</sup> Shortly afterwards the newspaper was banned and its offices stormed by the military. The same day, the Halle city council issued a joint statement by USPD, SPD and the liberal parties denouncing the coup, while the workers of Halle began a general strike. On 16 March the Kappists managed to detain the *Volksblatt's* editorial board, Scholem included. The tables were set to turn, however, as the general strike broke the coup and Kapp was forced to flee the country on 17 March.

Owed to their USPD comrades' 'forceful demeanour' towards the local commander in Halle, Scholem and others were soon released.<sup>97</sup> The situation remained far from calm, however, and would in fact escalate even further. The local press continued to be repressed, but the *Volksblatt's* editorial staff were still able to 'inform the public about the truth through a series of leaflets', i.e. by publicising the news of Kapp's escape.<sup>98</sup> Troops complicit in the attempted coup nevertheless remained in their positions, leading to growing conflicts with local civilians. The first battles between armed workers and Kappists

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96 See the article 'Vierzehn Tage ohne Zeitung. Ein Rückblick auf die Märztage in Halle', Könnemann and Schulze 2002, pp. 718–24. The polemical style and use of literary flourishes such as 'Noskites' suggest that the report was written by Scholem himself.

97 Könnemann and Schulze 2002, p. 720.

98 Ibid.

flared up on 18 and 19 March, and would expand over the following days.<sup>99</sup> The workers dug themselves in at Hettstedt train station in the city's southeast and defended their positions successfully, despite fighting with inferior weapons and material, and sought to drive the military out of Halle. In a tremendous display of human effort, they fought their way to the market square and established themselves behind barricades.<sup>100</sup> The putschists subsequently staged a renewed offensive, going so far as to deploy heavy artillery inside the city itself, but their adversaries stood their ground.<sup>101</sup> All the while the general strike continued, the city found itself in a state of emergency, and electricity and water supplies were shut down by the raging battles: 'Young and old ran with buckets to the Saale to fetch water', as the *Volksblatt* later reported.<sup>102</sup> Werner Scholem witnessed these dramatic events first hand and was personally involved in the battles. We learn more from a polemic published in the press in 1924: a former militant from Halle who had returned to the SPD accused Scholem of cowardice and shirking his duty. Werner would not let this accusation stand and demanded the SPD's *Vorwärts* print his reply: 'It is untrue that I "was standing with some small defensive unit led by a militarily informed comrade, and dodged and disappeared when a roughly 10-soldier strong Reichswehr patrol stuck their heads up from behind the railway embankment". Rather, what happened was that I, with the consent of the strike committee coordinating the defensive struggle in Halle against the White Guard, assembled proletarian volunteer troops in northern parts of Halle and led a 24-hour-long battle against police and Reichswehr who had dug themselves in at the infantry barracks in Halle. There were about 5–6000 men fighting on the proletarian side, more than 1000 on the opposing side.'<sup>103</sup>

The accuracy of Werner Scholem's depiction of himself as a street fighter on the barricades cannot be verified. What is certain, however, is that he possessed the necessary experience to lead 'proletarian volunteer troops' after three years of war. Whatever his precise role may have been, we can safely assume that he was involved in the battles in one way or another. In November 1918, Scholem had merely observed the revolution from a distance and regretted it bitterly. The impression left on him by the uprising in Halle, then, must have been all the more overwhelming. He had seen the workers' united front in practice

99 See the military historical studies found in Schunke 1956, particularly pp. 57–76. On the history of the region see Könnemann and Krusch 1972, pp. 108–18; as well as Raase 1960.

100 Könnemann and Schulze 2002, p. 722 f.

101 Schunke 1956, p. 72.

102 Könnemann and Schulze 2002, p. 722.

103 'Herr Scholem berichtet – und eine Antwort darauf', *Vorwärts*, 21 August 1924.

on the barricades of Hettstedt station, where Independents, Communists, SPD supporters, and even Christian trade unionists had risen up in arms against the class enemy.<sup>104</sup> The conflict went beyond a mere defensive struggle for the republic, reinforcing Scholem's belief that the revolution was not yet over. The workers seemed ready for an uprising – all they needed was unity.

Nevertheless, the 'Battle for Halle' did not become a launching pad for a renewed revolutionary wave. The workers' united front in Halle was unable to defeat the putschists entirely. After four days of fierce confrontations, hostilities concluded with a truce on 22 March, and on 23 March the proletarian forces left their positions. Subsequent trade union assemblies called off the general strike on 26 March, after eleven days of struggle.<sup>105</sup> Events had calmed down much sooner in other regions, as the military coup was largely defeated not through the use of weapons but through strikes. Apart from Halle, only the Ruhr region witnessed the formation of workers' defence brigades.

Scholem was more than disappointed by this development. In a speech at a party gathering in October 1920, he portrayed the actions in Halle as an example of revolutionary action: 'I would merely like to establish that wherever the workers were united, as well as in those places where the workers stood behind a united leadership, it was plausible, even during the Kapp Putsch, to stage an action in the interests of the revolutionary proletariat. We contend that the actions throughout the district of Halle should have occurred in the entire Reich. And if we ultimately had to end our campaign and sign a kind of truce, we did so in recognition of the fact that in other parts of the Reich as well as in the USPD's leadership there was an absence of sufficient clarity and leadership required for such action, and we were unable to move forward by ourselves. But comrades, you could have held the same power as we did in a number of other districts'.<sup>106</sup>

In Scholem's eyes, a lack of leadership and unity was all that prevented the revolution from being completed. Indeed, the USPD leadership in Berlin reached a compromise with the SPD and the trade unions within a matter of days, and promptly called for an end to the general strike. The call was heeded, strikes were suspended, and revolutionary enclaves such as Halle and the Ruhr region grew even more isolated. Scholem was not the only critic

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104 An eyewitness account of cross-party participation in street battles can be found in Könnemann and Krusch 1972, p. 116.

105 Könnemann and Schulze 2002, p. 724; Schunke 1956, p. 76.

106 *USPD – Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages in Halle vom 12. bis 17. Oktober 1920*, Krause 1975, Vol. 3, p. 44.

of these tactics.<sup>107</sup> The conflicts surrounding the Kapp Putsch threatened the USPD's tediously consolidated programmatic consensus. It became clear that the party's different currents had entered the general strike with fundamentally different aims: some sought to protect the republic from a military coup, while others aimed to complete the November Revolution. The offer put forward by union leader Carl Legien immediately after the strike to form a socialist unity government encompassing the trade unions, SPD and USPD further deepened tensions. Although such a coalition would have meant the political hegemony of the labour movement in the young republic, the party's left wing opposed the offer. Ernst Däumig, main protagonist of the council movement within the USPD, categorically rejected 'merging with the compromised right-wing socialist party'.<sup>108</sup> The USPD renounced the offer of a unity government, as even the party's more moderate forces remained oriented towards maintaining a distance from the SPD. Subsequent developments would, on the one hand, confirm the revolutionary current's assessment: even though compromised Social Democrats such as Minister of Defence Noske and the Prussian Minister of the Interior Heine resigned, the 'politics of order' continued. Government troops now intervened in the Ruhr region, where a 'Red Ruhr Army' of workers, originally formed to fight the military coup, had seized power. To put down this revolutionary upsurge, the same army units that had supported Kapp's coup d'état only days before were now sent to crush revolutionary miners on behalf of the Ebert government.<sup>109</sup> General von Seeckt, who had denied protection to the republic with the words 'the army does not shoot at the army', was appointed head of Army Command soon afterwards.<sup>110</sup>

The alliance between SPD and military, continued against the former's own better judgement, only confirmed the suspicions of left Independents like Werner Scholem, and was also the reason for the USPD's landslide victory in the June 1920 elections, in which it doubled its share of votes at the SPD's expense. Yet this was not enough to take over the government, for the workers' parties had lost votes overall. As a result, the Weimar Republic saw a conservative government take office in the summer of 1920. The Catholic Centre Party, the liberal German Democratic Party, and the conservative German People's

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107 Richard Müller, leader of the Works Council Central Committee in Berlin, attacked the party leadership viciously at the Halle party conference. His speech would provide the foundation for Scholem's later critique. See Krause 1975, pp. 33–5.

108 Krause 1975, p. 171; see also Engelmann and Naumann 1993, p. 148.

109 On the events in the Ruhr region see Lucas 1973–8. Also involved in the counter-insurgency were counter-revolutionary *Freikorps*, see Schulze 1969, p. 304 ff.

110 Engelmann and Naumann 1993, p. 148.



Party of which Werner's 'right-wing liberal' brother Reinhold was so fond now determined the country's fate. In retrospect, this turn was a decisive defeat for the political left. Never again in the Weimar Republic would a political force to the left of the SPD receive the opportunity to participate in government. At the time, however, Werner Scholem and his comrades could not foresee this – their electoral results were magnificent, and as far as they were concerned, real politics took place in the streets anyway. Only 'sufficient clarity' and 'sufficient leadership' were needed to complete the revolution. The call for strong leadership in Werner's party conference speech reflected the multiple failures of the German Revolution, which was bogged down in local actions and uprisings time and again while the counter-revolution acted with centralised determination and brutal force.

This desire for clarity also dictated Scholem's position on the Communist International, an association founded by Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks in March 1919, proclaiming the realisation of the socialist world revolution under the banner of the 'Third International' as its aim. Marx and Engels founded the First International in 1864, but it eventually buckled under the weight of conflicts with its anarchist wing. The Second International emerged in 1889 as an association of socialist parties, and was founded pointedly on the 100th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, before tragically collapsing under the cannon fire of August 1914. The Bolsheviks blamed its collapse on the loose nature of the undertaking, arguing the Second International consisted mostly of numerous congresses and little action. Instead of a coalition of autonomous parties, they proposed something new: a Communist world party in which the individual parties would serve as mere national sections. This international vanguard was to carry socialism from the East into the metropolises, for at this point the Bolsheviks viewed a revolution in Western Europe as the only viable way to end their country's miserable state of civil war, economic collapse and foreign intervention, and thereby preserve Soviet power. The new International thus served a dual function from the outset: it was to represent the vanguard of the world revolution, while simultaneously conducting Soviet Russia's foreign policy. The founding conference therefore only permitted carefully selected delegates, not least owing to the chaos of civil war, but also to Lenin's intention of building the new organisation with only the most reliable of forces.<sup>111</sup>

The project was an extremely controversial matter within the USPD. Following fierce debate, the Leipzig party conference of December 1919 adopted

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111 See Vatlin 2009, p. 26; as well as Hedeler 2008.

a compromise resolution: the USPD called for a broad conference of social-revolutionary parties including those already in the Third International.<sup>112</sup> Werner opposed this compromise from the beginning, and was one of 54 delegates to vote for immediate affiliation to Moscow's International.<sup>113</sup> The following year saw a marked rise in the numbers of those who, lacking alternative perspectives, placed their hopes in the Russian Revolution: various member assemblies passed resolutions in support of the call from Moscow.<sup>114</sup> The conference proposed in Leipzig would ultimately never materialise – too great was the gulf that emerged in the labour movement in 1914. Adding to these complications were interventions from Moscow impeding an agreement in the party. The Communist International's founding congress had already issued a thoroughgoing criticism of the USPD as a 'centrist current' that preached 'unity between Communist workers and the murderers of the Communist leaders, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg'. It demanded that 'the revolutionary elements' split from the party, a task to be achieved through 'relentless criticism and exposure of the "centre's" leaders'.<sup>115</sup> Although this verdict was based on a rather distorted report given by the KPD delegation, it was not reversed in retrospect, but instead intensified even further. Lenin and his Bolsheviks were convinced that the USPD was dominated by a 'right-wing' leadership that needed to be driven out at all costs. Unlike Werner Scholem, who sought to pull the USPD as a whole to the left, the Bolsheviks had little interest in preserving the party, merely seeking to take over its 'best elements'. A split – this was the Bolshevik version of revolutionary 'clarity'. When a four-person USPD delegation arrived at the Comintern's Second World Congress in July 1920, Comintern functionaries worked tirelessly to drive a wedge between them. They were unsuccessful, however, as USPD leftists and moderates alike were interested in party unity.<sup>116</sup> In a common effort, they attempted to soften the admission requirements to an extent that the USPD could preserve its autonomy within the Third International.

But they failed, and returned to Berlin with a list of '21 Conditions' from Moscow demanding far-reaching political and organisational subordination.

<sup>112</sup> Krause 1975, p. 161 ff.

<sup>113</sup> *USPD – Protokoll der Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitagés in Leipzig vom 30. November bis 6. Dezember 1919*, Krause 1975, p. 389 and p. 395.

<sup>114</sup> Such as the Niederrhein district in November 1919, or Essen and Mecklenburg in February 1920 and Gotha in May 1920; see Engelmann and Naumann 1993, p. 127 and 153 f.

<sup>115</sup> Engelmann and Naumann 1993, p. 124 f.

<sup>116</sup> Krause 1975, p. 191 f. The Italian delegation was likewise taken aside for separate talks, see Leonhard 1981, pp. 161–3.

One point on the list stipulated not only that all 'centrists' were to be expelled prior to Comintern affiliation, but that 'periodic purges' would also be conducted 'to systematically cleanse the party of petty bourgeois elements that inevitably clamour onto it'.<sup>117</sup> Historian Hartfrid Krause concludes: 'The acceptance of the 21 Conditions left no doubt about the future configuration of the new Third International: a centralist structure, absolute subordination to the will of the ECCI [Executive Committee of the Communist International] between World Congresses, disciplining of national parties, surrender of all national independence. The Bolsheviks saw this as the only way to learn the lessons of the mistakes of the Second International and its failure to prevent the outbreak of World War I and avoid a repetition of the old sins'.<sup>118</sup> This fed the scepticism among the USPD's moderate forces. The conditions were unacceptable in their eyes, precisely as Moscow had intended.

The USPD's left wing played along. After all, the alternative of forcing the Bolsheviks into a compromise through collective negotiations with other European parties was no longer an option, as no partners remained with whom the USPD could negotiate.<sup>119</sup> As it were, an 'all or nothing' situation was emerging that would ultimately become a decision of principle whether the various socialist parties were for or against the Russian Revolution. Given this backdrop, many members found themselves increasingly willing to accept the 21 Conditions over the course of a nevertheless stormy internal debate. Werner Scholem was one of the first to push the movement towards this new International, excited that the conditions brought precisely the type of clarity he found so lacking during the Kapp Putsch.<sup>120</sup>

Debates raged in the USPD's local party structures throughout August and September of 1920, and Werner Scholem participated in the discussion as an orator in favour of the 21 Conditions. From a report on a party gathering in Jena on 18 September 1920, we learn of Werner Scholem presenting a resolution in support of the Third International to 400 USPD members.<sup>121</sup> His draft reads as follows: 'The USP[D]'s membership assembly in Jena adopts the standpoint that the party must be restructured to become a tightly centralised fighting

117 Quoted in Engelmann and Naumann 1993, p. 161f.; see also Krause 1975, p. 193f.

118 Krause 1975, p. 195. On Bolshevik influence in the formation of the KPD see also Fowkes 1984.

119 Krause 1975, p. 190f.

120 Hartfrid Krause also attributes this growing acceptance of the conditions to the 'definitiveness and conciseness' of the Third International's supporters, Krause 1975, p. 148f.

121 'Für die Dritte Internationale', *Neue Zeitung für Mittelthüringen*, 2, No. 209, 19 September 1920, quoted in Buckmiller 1980, pp. 580–5.

organisation capable of assuming leadership of the German proletariat at decisive moments of struggle. Yet whoever wants this, cannot perceive the Third International's admission conditions as an obstacle, but must rather consider them a form of assistance in the necessary unification of the party. The Jena comrades oblige their delegates to take this position at the party convention'. Scholem justified his position by referring to the brutal nature of the class struggle: 'From the perspective of the right-wing socialists we need no tightly centralised fighting organisation. But we are at war, and therefore we require armies, international armies. We must fight on the basis of a war plan, and that is the statute of the Third International'.

Werner Scholem, anti-militarist, opponent of war and soldier only against his will translated the metaphors of war into the realm of politics. A final war to end all wars – this was the lesson he drew from the summer of 1914: 'The Second International had no fighting spirit, the World War proves it. Had it issued a battle cry against the war on 4 August 1914, it would have foundered in its beginnings'. Sensitive to their revolutionary hopes and expectations, Scholem urged his comrades to cultivate patience and staying power: 'We don't want to say it will start this winter, the process can take decades'. This was precisely why Scholem demanded the strictest unity and defended the 'cleansing' of any alleged opportunists. At the end of the meeting's minutes, it reads: 'Comrade Scholem once again vigorously promotes his resolution draft and ends with the final verse of the Internationale proletarian song'. Scholem was convincing: out of 400 members present, only 23 voted against his resolution, although critical voices were heard as well. A comrade named Klostermann warned: 'According to Scholem, controversy within the party will soon be a thing of the past. Should that be true, the party in the future is nothing but a dead body'. Klostermann considered the 21 Conditions to be disastrous: 'I reject the party's castration, its transformation into a sect'. Scholem was supported by Karl Korsch, a socialist philosopher and lawyer with whom he would maintain a close friendship over the years to come. Scholem and Korsch were certain that their approach would prevail: 'Finally, Comrade Scholem says that he hopes the radical direction will prevail at the party conference. In such a scenario only some leading comrades would leave the party, but in his view there could be no talk of a party split, and the unification of the proletariat could then be pursued with fresh energy. You cannot remain on both sides in revolutionary times'.<sup>122</sup> Scholem's agitation for the Third International marked another shift in positions. While active in the youth movement and council system, he had argued for autonomy

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122 Bückmiller 1980, p. 581.



FIGURE 19 *USPD party conference in Halle, October 1920. Werner Scholem sits in the centre, in front of the middle tree*

and radical democracy within the left, whereas he now operated according to a logic of friend or foe.

A party conference in Halle scheduled for 12–17 October 1920 was to settle the argument around the International once and for all. No one was pushing moves towards compromise at this point, and delegates were selected in crucial votes between lists of supporters and opponents from the outset – certainly the desired outcome of Scholem’s Jena resolution.<sup>123</sup> Hartfrid Krause describes the mood in the run-up to the conference: ‘The various mutually antagonistic party currents opposed one another like class enemies. They pulled out all the stops, including political denunciation and personal vilification. No quarter was given. A lot of dust from quarrels long forgotten was kicked up once again. Old personal feuds reignited, while new ones emerged.’<sup>124</sup>

The party conference in Halle, a stronghold of the USPD’s left wing, took place on Scholem’s home turf. Prior to the gathering, controversies concerning the location of the event had arisen, as Scholem revealed in one of his speeches: ‘As it turns out, some members of the Central Committee were uneasy about holding the party conference in Halle. No doubt, this must have been discom-

123 Krause 1975, p. 202.

124 Krause 1975, p. 204.

forting to parts of the right wing (cheers, amusement), because they were well aware of the attitude of the workers of Halle.<sup>125</sup> Scholem was particularly harsh towards Wilhelm Dittmann, who had supposedly inquired as to ‘whether the party conference could even take place in Halle peacefully. He had heard that the Mansfeld workers were planning to violently disrupt the conference with clubs’. Scholem indignantly rejected the notion that anyone could even conceive of his comrades behaving in such a disorderly fashion. His true criticism of the party leadership, however, pertained to their conduct during the Kapp Putsch, which he viewed as half-hearted and weak. While Scholem did not directly address the question of the International, he did discuss the tense atmosphere inside the party: ‘The two currents within the central leadership have fought each other [...]. We therefore demand that in such times the party not be torn by the fact that there are essentially two parties active in the central bodies. (Very correct!). This must change in the future. Comrades, we, who come from a district that has always led the USPD from the fore, and which stands almost unanimously behind us in this matter, [...] we believe that if the party’s organisation succeeds in assuming the leadership of the proletariat in the rest of the Reich, it will be possible to maintain the organisation in a form as unified as it is here.’<sup>126</sup>

At first this seemed like an appeal against the looming split, but the subtext was clear: Scholem demanded an agreement in line with the conditions of the Halle left wing – ‘as it is here’ would serve as his standard of measure. He placed all blame for discord in the USPD on the representatives of the ‘right’. The confidence with which he made his point was owed not only to the left wing’s stronghold in Halle: the delegate elections had already indicated that the 21 Conditions were set to receive a majority. Therefore, the things being said and told in Halle were oriented more towards external justification than internal rapprochement or mutual understanding. Nevertheless, grand appearances and persuasive speeches were also featured: Grigory Zinoviev, chairman of the Comintern, attended as personal representative of the Third International and delivered an impassioned sermon, while Julius Martov, leader of the Russian Mensheviks, denounced the International and accused the Bolsheviks of terrorising his party.<sup>127</sup> Scholem was deeply impressed by Zinoviev, and the Russian revolutionary would later play an important role in Werner’s career.

125 *USPD – Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des außerordentlichen Parteitages in Halle vom 12. bis 17. Oktober 1920*, Krause 1975, p. 44.

126 *Ibid.*

127 See Leonhard 1981, pp. 171–81.

Ultimately, the conference in Halle ended as could be expected given the tensions inside the party. After a majority of 236 delegates voted in favour of the Moscow International, the remaining minority contested the former's right to speak on behalf of the party and left the hall. An alternative building in which the minority could continue its own conference had been booked in advance. The USPD was split.

Werner had voted in favour of the Third International and remained seated. He was convinced that he spoke for the true majority. The other side, however, claimed to do so as well. Ultimately, both would prove mistaken. Roughly 300,000 USPD members joined the KPD after the split, elevating the latter to the size of a mass party for the first time – according to its own figures, the original KPD had 78,715 members in November 1920.<sup>128</sup> As the two parties were equally represented in all bodies and committees of the Unified Communist Party of Germany [*Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, VKPD], newly founded in December 1920, the much smaller KPD exerted disproportionate influence in the young party's structure. However, the USPD had published a membership figure of 893,923 at the Halle conference. Even the optimistic estimate of 428,000 members switching to the VKPD in December 1920 was significantly lower than what could have been expected considering the proportion of delegates elected in October. The hope of Scholem and others on the left wing to simply take over the party more or less undivided was clearly an illusion, but the 'right' was equally unable to engage remaining party militants. As a result, several hundred thousand workers abstained from joining *either* current. According to some estimates, around one third of the original membership, i.e. roughly 300,000 (frustrated) members, withdrew from active politics.<sup>129</sup>

A sober look at the numbers inevitably leads one to conclude that this second founding of a Communist Party in Germany was a false start. Nevertheless, radical leftists like Werner Scholem experienced these developments as a liberating break with the old: at last, clear fronts had been drawn between revolutionary Communism and reformist Social Democracy. For Werner Scholem, this step came not a moment too soon. Mere days after the split he agitated for a 'thorough cleaning up' in the trade unions as well, convincing the metal workers of Halle to call for the removal of their local representatives and their replacement with Communists. The German Metal Workers'

128 Wolfgang Leonhard describes the KPD's official membership statistics as 'heavily exaggerated'; see Leonhard 181, p. 182. Concerning USPD members switching to the VKPD, estimates range from 280,000 to 428,000; see Krause 1975, p. 218.

129 All figures from Krause 1975, p. 219.

Union's executive board was furious at the 'very young man, still lacking both life experience and work experience in the workers' movement' and denounced Scholem's agitation as 'wild sedition' in a specially published pamphlet. Only with recourse to trade union bylaws was the local leadership's replacement delayed.<sup>130</sup>

The final split of the workers' movement into two wings had repercussions not only within the German trade unions, but worldwide. In the summer of 1920, the USPD enjoyed the support of almost 4.9 million voters and represented the largest socialist force at the Second World Congress of the Third International.<sup>131</sup> Incidentally, its split saved the Third International from irrelevance and confirmed Lenin's course: the French socialists split in December 1920, the Italian workers' movement broke into Communist and Social Democratic wings in January 1921.<sup>132</sup> Communist parties were being founded across the globe, as the red glow of the Russian Revolution radiated all the way to Latin America and China, advancing into regions in which hardly any followers of the old International had existed. The workers' movement was experiencing a renewed boost of globalisation. At the same time, the split into Communism and Social Democracy born out of World War and revolution would stabilise and become a line of demarcation shaping the rest of the twentieth century.

To Werner Scholem, international solidarity represented the core of the socialist idea. While internationalism's failure in 1914 had caused Werner to doubt the movement, the former's resurgence in 1917 won him over from Zionism to socialism once and for all. In 1920 Scholem undertook, in the name of internationalism, his turn towards revolutionary centralism. He had already expressed a sporadic interest in vanguardist ideas in his wartime letters, but these were usually tied to an individualistic rebellion, as formulated most coherently in his manifesto, 'On the Unconditionality of Youth'. Under the banner of the revolution and guided by Lenin, discipline and obedience were no longer part of the problem, but part of the solution.

Werner's move to Leninism was the result of events that formed the collective memory of an entire generation. As early as 1914 he had observed, with some discomfort, a certain ossification in the workers' movement, which he

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130 Scholem spoke at a party gathering of the USPD Left on 22 October 1920 to discuss the trade union question, and on 26 October a meeting of the DMV called for the replacement of the local representatives, which the union leadership in turn attributed largely to Scholem; see *Deutscher Metallarbeiter-Verband* 1921. I would like to thank my colleague Reiner Tosstorff for making me aware of this pamphlet.

131 Leonhard 1981, p. 171.

132 Abendroth 1965, p. 99.



described as a 'murky sea'.<sup>133</sup> From 1918 onwards he would blame the revolution's failure on the murky inertia of the old organisation. The street battles on the Halle barricades confirmed this view in a both tragic and grandiose way: a revolutionary outburst, suffocated and squandered by his own party. That outside the red city of Halle there may have existed a degree of exhaustion, even among the party's base, never occurred to Werner. The man who had always keenly sympathised with Luxemburg and Liebknecht abandoned his work of patient persuasion inside the USPD in a fit of disappointment. He longed for a clean break, a new revolutionary beginning.

Accordingly, Werner as well as Emmy decided in favour of the KPD. Both served as delegates for the USPD's left wing at the party unification conference in December 1920.<sup>134</sup> A 'Manifesto to the German and International Proletariat' was unanimously adopted, demanding revolutionary action: 'Only thanks to the separation from the right Independents has the United Communist Party emerged, which strives not to be a debating club, but the party of revolutionary action for which the times call out'.<sup>135</sup> Another item adopted without discussion was an organisational statute breaking with the USPD's federalist structure.<sup>136</sup> Beyond the desired clarity of party thought, unity of party leadership appeared to now have been addressed as well. The German labour movement thus entered a new phase. The revolution was over, regardless of whether radicals like Scholem accepted it or not. The workers' councils disappeared and the KPD and SPD, caught in an ongoing dichotomous interaction, took charge of events. Although the right-wing USPD managed to soldier on for a while, it re-affiliated to the majority Social Democrats in 1922. The coordinates determining the fate of the workers' movement over the course of the Weimar Republic would now be the internal developments in both parties, their respective strength and influence inside the trade union movement, and their relationship to one another. The workers' movement, in turn, would prove decisive to the fate of the Weimar Republic as a whole. Werner, who would soon ascend to the highest echelons of the KPD, was about to receive his opportunity to make history.

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133 Scholem 2002, p. 23.

134 *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des Vereinigungsparteitages der USPD (Linke) und der KPD (Spartakusbund), abgehalten in Berlin vom 4. bis 7. Dezember 1920*, Krause 1975, Vol. 3, p. 274.

135 Krause 1975, p. 227.

136 See Krause 1975, p. 222 as well as Leonhard 1981, p. 181.

### Journalism and Judiciary: Werner Scholem as Editor of the *Rote Fahne*

‘In December of 1920 we moved to Berlin, where my husband worked as an editor and journalist and I myself as a secretary and stenographer.’<sup>137</sup> With these sober words, Emmy Scholem described the beginning of a new chapter in the young couple’s lives. The unification of KPD and USPD brought with it a restructuring of the party press, a process which made the split in the party all the more tangible. Following a series of fierce disputes both in- and outside of the courtroom, the left wing was able to take only 19 of 55 daily newspapers with them into the KPD.<sup>138</sup> The newspaper crisis weakened both sides and led to some absurd situations: in order to retain membership outside of the major cities, the USPD Left founded entire local newspapers overnight, only to abandon many of them within a few months. For Werner Scholem, on the other hand, the crisis represented an opportunity: he left the Halle *Volksblatt* shortly after the unification conference and transferred to the *Rote Fahne* in Berlin. As of 1 January 1921, Werner was now employed as an editor for the central organ of the unified KPD.<sup>139</sup>

In Halle, Scholem was nearly sent off with public honours. A draft article reporting on his departure reads: ‘The departure of this enterprising comrade will be strongly regretted by all honest class fighters who came into contact with him, as it cannot be denied that Comrade Scholem, through his extraordinary intellectual abilities and tireless efforts on behalf of the party, has provided the district with tremendously valuable services. By contrast, all sworn enemies of our colleague, the opportunists of all stripes, will surely congratulate each other on being rid of this tenacious adversary.’<sup>140</sup> These words of praise would never see the light of day, and instead only survive in a secret personnel file in Moscow. An annotation in said file explains why: ‘The lines above were written by Comrade Scholem himself, who tried to have them placed in the Halle *Klassenkampf* before his departure. The publication of this note, however, which would have caused great embarrassment, was prevented by the respons-

137 Emmy Scholem, ‘Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs vom 7. April 1954’, *Entschädigungssakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Niedersachsen, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

138 Krause 1975, p. 216 f.

139 Concerning the date see Bureau des dt. Reichstags 1924, p. 516.

140 *Lichnoe delo Sholem, Emma* [Emmy Scholem, personnel file], RGASPI Moscow, Comintern, F. 495, op. 205, d. 9797. The report is archived in Emmy’s personnel file; she briefly worked for the Comintern as a congress stenographer in March 1921. No personnel file for Werner Scholem exists in Moscow.

ible comrades in Halle at the last minute'.<sup>141</sup> Werner by no means lacked self-confidence, which was generally to his advantage, especially since his embarrassing self-praise never came to light. The new position in Berlin meant a major career move for the young journalist. In only two years he had made his way from the Hanover local section to an editor in the capital. He stood directly in the tradition of his role models, Liebknecht and Luxemburg, who were honoured as the founders of the *Rote Fahne* in the masthead of every issue.

Moreover, the new position also came with certain financial perks. Werner earned 1,500 Reichsmarks per month, adding to Emmy's salary.<sup>142</sup> Neither of them were wealthy as such, the salaries of party workers were pegged to the income of skilled workers, but most families of skilled workers usually had more than one child to care for and rarely enjoyed two incomes. Despite breaking with his father, Werner had managed to build a comfortable existence for himself after all, up to and including his own apartment. He and Emmy moved to Waldenserstraße 15 in Berlin's Moabit district. The house had been built in 1905 in the *Gründerzeit* style. Still standing today, the home with its plaster façade is a typical example of Berlin's *Altbau* apartment complexes, although it was barely 20 years old when the Scholems moved in. Werner and Emmy did not have the money to live behind the elegant stucco facade overlooking the street, but by taking up quarters in the somewhat simpler courtyard transept<sup>143</sup> could still afford one crucial privilege: a housemaid.<sup>144</sup>

For Werner, this sort of amenity was an expected standard to which he likely gave little thought. For Emmy, on the other hand, employing a housemaid represented the epitome of upward social mobility. Born the illegitimate daughter of a domestic servant, she was now herself the 'lady of the house', albeit in a rented flat. This arrangement was not the result of Emmy's attention to her social status, but rather her pragmatism: hiring a domestic worker was the only way that she, as a mother, could continue to work and remain engaged in active politics. After all, Werner the full-time revolutionary could hardly be persuaded to partake in housework or other such trivialities, and state-financed

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141 Ibid.

142 Figure taken from a letter by the Berlin president of police on 15 October 1921 in *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem*, Werner, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Vol. 1.

143 The address can be found in *Drucksachen des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, Band 1, 'Verzeichnis der Abgeordneten'.

144 Mentioned in: 'Werner Scholem an den Untersuchungsrichter des Reichsgerichts Leipzig am 30. November 1921', *Strafsache gegen Scholem*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21, Vol. 3.

day-care centres were only found in the utopian passages of August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism*.

Thus, with the support of his wife and a housemaid, Werner intervened into KPD party life both journalistically as well as politically. His rise was practically meteoric: Scholem received a mandate through his position on the party list in the elections to the Prussian Landtag on 19 February 1921, and promptly became a Member of the Landtag, or 'MdL'.<sup>145</sup> He retained his position at the *Rote Fahne*. The combination of journalism and parliamentarism entailed certain advantages for the party, as will be explicated in more detail further on.

While Scholem's speeches in the Landtag are well documented, his work at the *Rote Fahne* is more difficult to reconstruct. The minutes of a KPD politburo meeting indicate that Scholem was responsible for the *Rote Fahne's* evening edition at the end of 1922. After this evening paper was cancelled, he began reporting from the Prussian parliament itself. We can thus assume that the corresponding articles from 1923 onwards were authored by Scholem.<sup>146</sup> We cannot state this definitively, however, for as was common in other workers' newspapers at the time, articles in the *Rote Fahne* were generally published anonymously, only occasionally were certain commentaries and interventions personally signed – mostly, however, by prominent party figures or during factional debates,<sup>147</sup> neither of which applied to Scholem in 1921. He would only rise to prominence at a later stage; the real conflicts still lay ahead of him. Instead, his name appeared elsewhere: in a small notice next to the classified section, Scholem was indicated as the person legally responsible in terms of the German press law. This officially made him chief editor of the *Rote Fahne*, and his formal profession is listed as 'editor' in the register of the Prussian Landtag.<sup>148</sup> Nonetheless, the KPD cultivated a rather instrumental relationship to the press law. That the fresh-faced, 25-year-old editor Scholem did not really lead the editorial board would not become obvious until the spring of 1921, when the KPD entered into one of its greatest crises since its founding.

145 German: 'Mitglied des Landtages'. *Drucksachen des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, Band 1, 'Verzeichnis der Abgeordneten'; as well as Büro des Preußischen Landtages (ed.), *Handbuch für den Preußischen Landtag 1921*.

146 The motion vaguely states that Scholem is to take over this task 'initially'; see *Sitzung des Polbüros 22. Dezember 1922*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/2.

147 Articles in the Comintern's *Internationale-Presse-Korrespondenz*, to which Scholem made a few contributions in 1922, were also authored under real names.

148 In German: 'Schriftleiter'. *Drucksachen des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, Band 1, 'Verzeichnis der Abgeordneten'; as well as: Büro des Preußischen Landtages (ed.), *Handbuch für den Preußischen Landtag 1921*.

The coming crisis could hardly have been predicted. Fusion with the USPD brought with it a degree of stability to a party that had previously been consigned to fighting for its existence on the fringes of legality. A brief glimpse into the KPD's history reveals how significant this consolidation actually was: the organisation's failure to achieve its goal of becoming a mass party was clear from the outset of its founding conference in early 1919. Only a few weeks later, the assassination of its leading figures Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches would plunge the KPD into a grave existential crisis, and for almost all of 1919 the party was forced to operate clandestinely.<sup>149</sup> Were this not enough, a split emerged as well: tensions with syndicalist forces, already apparent at the founding conference, erupted anew, compelling party chairman Paul Levi to resort to a drastic remedy. The syndicalist left wing was expelled from the party at the Heidelberg party conference in October 1919, only to regroup as the Communist Workers' Party of Germany, or KAPD. Although Paul Levi proceeded in a rather authoritarian style, the split gave the party an incipient boost, as it facilitated a re-orientation towards winning over the majority of the working class to Communist politics. With this aim in mind, Levi organised an 'open letter' to the leadership of SPD, USPD and the trade unions. Its demands for an adjustment of wages to inflation levels, the commencement of diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia, and works councils' control over production attracted significant attention and secured the initiative for the KPD. These 'united front politics' remained controversial, however. Many party members considered it an offer of compromise, a move backwards towards Social Democracy.<sup>150</sup> The debate around united front or revolution represented a fundamental dilemma for the KPD during the Weimar Republic, and would also come to leave a mark on Werner Scholem's political career.<sup>151</sup>

Yet when the united front entered a crisis in early 1921, Scholem did not hold a clear position. The KPD itself, however, was once again severely shaken up. Following differences with the Comintern, Levi and his co-chairman Ernst Däumig stepped down in February 1921.<sup>152</sup> A new leadership under Heinrich Brandler, who had opposed Levi's course and derided it as 'opportunistic', now assumed office. The new leadership demanded a revolutionary course of action and enjoyed the support of Moscow. A month later, they saw a favourable

149 Flechtheim 1948, p. 58. On the KPD's early period see Angress 1963.

150 Concerning the united front debate of 1920–1 see Kinner 1999, pp. 42–52 as well as Fowkes 1984.

151 Fleichtheim calls this dilemma the 'revolutionary squaring of the reformist circle', Flechtheim 1948, p. 85.

152 On Levi's resignation see Koch-Baumgarten 1986, pp. 104–13.

opportunity to demonstrate their strength in the Central German industrial region of Halle-Merseburg, Werner Scholem's old stomping grounds.

The newly-united KPD had assumed leadership in this area, in which the USPD had previously been the dominant force in the proletarian camp. In the 1921 elections to the Prussian Landtag it received 197,113 votes, or almost 30 per cent, and emerged the strongest party, while the SPD attracted a meagre 70,340 voters.<sup>153</sup> Yet the elections were merely a reflection of the region's overall radicalisation. The far left KAPD, which categorically rejected parliamentarianism, was also very active here. Even more important was day-to-day radicalism in the workplace, which found expression in wildcat strikes and work refusals. In a declaration by Otto Hörsing, Social Democrat and governor of the Prussian province of Saxony,<sup>154</sup> the scene is described as follows: 'Wildcat strikes, robbery and looting have lately been replaced by individual and group robberies, terror and damage to property, extortions and assaults [...] minor occasions are used as an excuse for thousands of workers to lay down work, neglecting orders from the trade unions. Demonstrations without any aim or sense are held, and at one point armed gangs led by irresponsible individuals blackmail the boss into compensating the workers for the time they did not work'.<sup>155</sup> Workers' resistance that did not conform to conventional trade union channels but instead challenged the daily operations of capitalist production was synonymous with terror and crime in Hörsing's eyes, who went so far as to complain of 'acts verging on insanity'. Hörsing's defence of private property and his call on the unions to restore order are a prime example of the incomprehension with which Social Democracy received the sections of the working class radicalised by war and revolution.<sup>156</sup> Having itself been a revolutionary force prior to the war, Social Democracy now stood on the opposite side as a component of the state. Hörsing's superior, Prussian Minister of the Interior Carl Severing, was also a Social Democrat. The party regarded itself as a force of social order, as the

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153 Weber 1991, p. 27.

154 The Prussian province of Saxony consisted roughly of today's Saxony-Anhalt, northern Thuringia and parts of western Brandenburg and northwest Saxony. Its capital city was Magdeburg.

155 Quoted in Koch-Baumgarten 1986, p. 141.

156 The example of the Halle region, and of the Leuna plant in particular, is used by Karl Heinz Roth as evidence for his thesis of an 'other labour movement', whose militant forms of struggle stood in contrast to the skilled worker-dominated 'professionalist' labour movement. In fact, in the Central German uprising of 1921, just as in the mass strikes of 1916 and the November Revolution of 1918, an enormous discrepancy can be observed between the workers' organisations and their base. See Roth 1974, particularly p. 51 ff.

democratic and social reforms the party pursued could allegedly only be realised within stable institutions. Accordingly, Hörsing announced an occupation of the region under heavy police presence on 16 March.<sup>157</sup> This move was interpreted by many workers as a deliberate provocation. Hopes now ran high at KPD headquarters that deliberate, targeted escalation could trigger a renewed revolutionary dynamic.<sup>158</sup> The *Rote Fahne* immediately launched a press campaign.

The explosive melange of a radicalised local workforce, an impatient KPD leadership and police provocation caused what would become known as the 'March Action': a regional workers' uprising of unexpected intensity, led by the KPD and KAPD, which started as a general strike and from 23 March onwards resembled a kind of local civil war for several days.<sup>159</sup> Yet the revolutionary boost hoped for by the KPD failed to materialise. The uprising remained isolated in one region, while few non-organised workers and virtually no SPD supporters joined the action. The KPD's call for a nationwide solidarity strike went unheeded, and Communists in Berlin and elsewhere left their workplaces as a minority.<sup>160</sup> Eventually, the rebellion was crushed by the military, and the entire affair proved to be a disaster for the KPD. The 'March Action' had cost numerous deaths and isolated the Communists politically. All of the momentum garnered from the unification process had evaporated, and the party's existence was once again called into question.

The military defeat would prove to be just the beginning of a comprehensive wave of repression. As the regular judiciary was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of court cases, President Friedrich Ebert installed 25 special political courts by emergency decree according to §48 of the Weimar Constitution in order to try the insurgents quickly.<sup>161</sup> The §48, originally intended to save the republican order in the face of imminent crisis, became notorious after 1930 for being used to justify a series of un-elected governments; in 1933 it was abused by Hitler to abolish civil rights as a first step towards his dictatorship. Its use against the insurgents in 1921 never went that far, but showed the potential for abuse inherent in its lack of any definition of 'emergency' and the lack of any

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157 Concerning the role of the police and the state apparatus see Knatz 2000.

158 The KPD, Comintern and later GDR historians all denied the existence of plans for an uprising, but these are now considered proven. See Koch-Baumgarten 1986, pp. 104–27 and p. 127 ff.; as well as Weber 1991, pp. 63–82. See also Reisberg 1971.

159 Concerning the beginning and course of the uprising see Weber 1991, pp. 97–183 and Koch-Baumgarten 1986, p. 171 ff.

160 Weber 1991, p. 120.

161 Christoph 1988, p. 101.

minimum protection of civil rights during said emergencies. In Berlin alone three such 'special courts' were in operation.<sup>162</sup> Appealing these courts' rulings was inadmissible, and sentences were imposed in a series of rushed trials, a process legal historian Jürgen Christoph calls a 'suspension of elementary legal guarantees of due process, based on emergency laws'.<sup>163</sup> Numerous scandals surrounded the affair, such as the conviction of a Communist on charges of 'extortion under threat of force' because she had taken an apron while caring for the wounded. By June, a total of 842 alleged uprising participants had been sentenced to 1,253 years of gaol and 654 years of prison.<sup>164</sup>

Scholem, as the legally responsible editor of the *Rote Fahne*, became the target of a judiciary interested in the KPD's central organ's publication of calls for a general strike and resistance. In line with the party's offensive strategy, events during the uprising were allowed to boil over, although the *Rote Fahne* always remained careful not to openly call for violence or the overthrow of the government. Instead, it spoke of 'defensive actions' and 'self-protection'.

The Prussian police, however, were not particularly concerned about such nuances and stormed the *Rote Fahne* print shop just after midnight on 24 March 1921, confiscating the morning edition. Moreover, they took with them 16 printing plates, eight stencils, 35 pounds of typeset and half a bolt of paper 'for special purposes'.<sup>165</sup> Only afterwards would the police president and public prosecutor request the district court's permission for the confiscation. The court order letterhead points to the spirit that guided these proceedings: outdated pre-1918 court forms were used in order to save money, on which the header '1. Royal District Court of Berlin' had simply been crossed out and 'democratised' into '1. District Court of Berlin'.<sup>166</sup> The confiscation was thereby legalised.

On 28 March 1921, all issues of the *Rote Fahne* were seized once more. Three days later, 14 police officers occupied the print shop 'following prior observation

162 The courts, numbered I, II, and III, were represented by a common 'Leader of the Prosecuting Authority' named Hagemann (most likely Max Hagemann, 1883–1968). See *Strafverfahren gegen den Redakteur der 'Roten Fahne' Werner Scholem aus Halle und Genossen wegen Hochverrat 1921*, GStA PK, Justizministerium, I. HA Rep. 84a Nr. 58552.

163 Christoph 1988, p. 104.

164 Christoph 1988, p. 102 f. It was not until May 1927 that KPD Landtag deputy Gustav Menzel could write to Wilhelm Pieck that 'finally, the last victim of our struggles in Central Germany has been set free'; letter from MdL Menzel to Wilhelm Pieck, 31 May 1927, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/26.

165 *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne, wegen Hochverrat*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Vol. 2.

166 Ibid.



by plain-clothes officers' and seized 4,000 copies of the morning edition. A second police visit would follow later that day, this time seizing the evening edition and disabling the printing press by removing a flywheel.<sup>167</sup> All of this occurred despite the newspaper not being officially banned by authorities.

Following a letter of protest by the editorial board on 1 April 1921, the responsible prosecutor cited the KPD's public calls for strikes and resistance as grounds for the measures: 'Although these invocations may simply call for combatting the counter-revolution and for a general strike, this ought to be interpreted as a pretext, while the actual fight is directed towards the existing form of state. The corresponding calls by the Communist press must therefore be conceived as breaches of § 85 of the criminal code'.<sup>168</sup> The corresponding paragraph notes the paper's 'incitement to high treason' as warranting punishment.

Alongside the KPD itself, the printing works in Stallmacherstraße 34 also protested the police measures, for the company in question was the long-established Moeser Book Printers [*Moesersche Buchdruckerei*]. Moeser, unable to fulfil other orders due to the shutdown of his machinery, turned furiously to the editorial board of the *Rote Fahne*. The board responded by pointing laconically to the illegality of the police's behaviour, over which they had no influence.<sup>169</sup> The manager of Moeser's firm then retrieved the print shop's old stationery, which still bore the impressive 'Printers of the Imperial Court' imprint, and addressed the prosecutor directly: 'Before the revolution, W. Moeser Book Printers was the personal printer of His Majesty the Emperor and King and dealt largely with purely administrative orders. Following the revolution, it was of course very difficult to maintain operations in the print shop and to acquire new contracts in order to secure employment. [...] Lengthy negotiations were undertaken as to whether the company's long-standing name was even compatible with such an order [from the KPD]. The intentions expressed by the Communist Party to proceed above all theoretically and strive for a parliamentary majority then opened up the possibility of an agreement'.<sup>170</sup> The missing machine parts were not returned until 15 April. In the meantime, the authorised signatory responsible had quit his job at Moeser in spite of his 26 years

167 All of this occurred on 31 May 1921, see *ibid*.

168 'Generalstaatsanwalt beim Landgericht I., Brief vom 1. April 1921', *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Vol. 2.

169 On the following see correspondence between Verlagsgenossenschaft Rote Fahne and W. Moeser Buchdruckerei, *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Vol. 1.

170 'W. Moeser Buchdruckerei an Staatsanwaltschaft Berlin, 8. April 1921', *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Vol. 2.

of service to the company – continuing business contacts with the KPD was simply beyond reproach.<sup>171</sup> In reality, there could be no talk of any ‘theoretical’ or parliamentary approach for the KPD given its offensive strategy. Even after the utter failure of the March Action became evident, the KPD’s central organ continued steadily down the path of escalation. The 14 April 1921 issue of the *Rote Fahne* declared ‘that the broad proletarian masses are already beginning to realise that the revolutionary action headed by the united Communist Party was not a coup d’état or an adventure, but a political necessity, one of those battles which trigger new and bigger struggles.’<sup>172</sup> Neither the collapse of the March Action uprising, increasingly bitter criticism inside the party itself, nor state repression could knock the party off the offensive course. Following an outbreak of unrest in Upper Silesia in May 1921, the *Rote Fahne* launched a new campaign very much resembling the pattern leading up to the March Action.

In 1918, the German Reich had lost territories in Polish-speaking parts of the country, but the final line of demarcation remained contested. Conflicts between ethnic Germans and Poles now combined with strikes organised by Polish workers, while rumours of a German military intervention spread like wildfire. The KPD sensed revolutionary potential in the developments and issued a special edition on 6 May with the headline ‘Mobilisation of the Reichswehr – Threat of War with Poland’, calling upon workers to act. This appeal contained the phrase, ‘should there be war, secure the weapons for the workers’. The police, who were doubtlessly also reading every issue, understood the meaning of this sentence perfectly and marked it in their files.<sup>173</sup> The *Rote Fahne* made its opinion clear when it came to the national conflict: ‘The Polish proletariat of Upper Silesia will naturally join the Polish Council Republic. The German working population of Upper Silesia will opt for the German Council Republic, and the strongest alliance between the two council republics both in political and economic terms will help resolve the problems which are insurmountable under the rule of the bourgeoisie here as well as there.’<sup>174</sup> At KPD headquarters and in the editorial board of the *Rote Fahne*, the crisis in Upper Silesia was seen as a prelude to the next wave of the world revolution, and the

171 Correspondence between Verlagsgenossenschaft Rote Fahne and W. Moeser Buchdruckerei, *ibid.*, Vol. 1.

172 *Rote Fahne* 165, 14 April 1921, morning edition.

173 *Rote Fahne*, special evening edition 6 May 1921, article with police note in *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Vol. 1.

174 ‘Wem soll Oberschlesien gehören?’, *Rote Fahne* 206, 9 May 1921, evening edition.

tone of party publications grew in urgency over the following days. The state reacted, storming the print shop once more. The editors described the scene vividly in the 9 May 1921 evening edition: ‘After the morning edition of the *Rote Fahne* was confiscated Saturday morning, and the special edition was taken Friday evening, both at our print shop, and the evening edition of Saturday was confiscated from the newsagents, a security police [SiPo] lieutenant with SiPo squads appeared in the night from Saturday to Sunday at about half past one, accompanied by police detectives and civilians (Orgesch) on behalf of police department section 1A and declared the supplement of the Sunday paper to be confiscated. The lieutenant presented the following excerpt from an article as the reason for the measure: “Workers, put an end to the hangman’s justice of bourgeois society! Confront the arbitrariness of the bourgeoisie with your revolutionary will, your determination to fight”. It reads further: ‘A policeman was placed next to every machine. The staircases were blocked by civilians [...] Around 4 o’clock the SiPo finally left our print shop, after the lieutenant told us not to bother with the Monday evening edition, as that would be confiscated as well.’<sup>175</sup>

According to the editors, civilians and members of the ‘Orgesch’ were also present in addition to the security police. Orgesch was the abbreviation of Organisation Escherich, a paramilitary corps in the tradition of the *Freikorps*. The editors of the *Rote Fahne*, however, suspected a different mastermind behind the operation: ‘What have the Social Democratic workers to say about the fact that all this occurs at the order of their party comrade, police president Richter?’<sup>176</sup> Just like Governor Hörsing, Berlin’s police president was also a member of the SPD. The KPD hoped to drive a wedge between the SPD’s base and Social Democratic officeholders, and believed that any and all repressive measures would accelerate this process and deepen the allegedly revolutionary situation.

Consequently, the campaign around the unrest in Upper Silesia continued, appearing almost as an attempt to write a second March Action into being – with Moscow’s backing. The *Rote Fahne* for 13 May 1921 featured ‘Guiding Principles on the Tactics of the Communist International during the Revolution’. It explained: ‘The general uprising is only the final link in a chain of mass actions leading to the seizure of power. Partial uprisings or armed partial actions may become necessary at certain exposed spots or in critical situations.’<sup>177</sup> Corres-

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175 *Rote Fahne* 206, 9 May 1921, evening edition.

176 *Ibid.*

177 *Rote Fahne* 213, 13 May 1921.

pondingly, the paper began spreading rumours of intervention and war. The *Rote Fahne* reported of a 'Coup d'état by the Reichswehr against Upper Silesia' and published documents allegedly proving a looming German intervention against Poland.<sup>178</sup>

The documents were forgeries, as the 'State Commissioner for the Maintenance of Public Order' was quick to determine in a letter to the responsible prosecutor. He nevertheless demanded further measures be taken against the *Rote Fahne*, underpinning the demand with an interesting argument: 'given the current state of relations, a state of war between Germany and Poland is already in effect, it should be considered if and to what extent the publication of such documents as such, albeit forged, amounts to the act of high treason'.<sup>179</sup> State commissioner Robert Weismann, whose profession resembled that of a modern domestic intelligence service, not only considered a war between Germany and Poland inevitable, but in fact already underway.<sup>180</sup> The warnings of war delivered by the *Rote Fahne* were thus more than a figment of the revolutionary imagination. They seemed quite realistic considering the anti-Polish revanchism that penetrated well into the republican circles of Weimar Germany.<sup>181</sup> The KPD was mistaken in its belief that the workers would risk another uprising just weeks after the March Action fiasco. The campaign in the Communist press, however, would continue regardless.<sup>182</sup>

The person liable for all this in terms of German press laws was Werner Scholem. His name was printed in small but clearly legible letters in the imprint of every issue of the *Rote Fahne*. Werner Scholem also appeared as the 'responsible editor for politics' in the *Schlesische Arbeiterzeitung*, although that was

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178 Ibid.

179 'Staatskommissar für öffentliche Ordnung an den Staatsanwalt beim außerordentlichen Gericht des Landgerichts 1', 13 May 1921, *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Vol. 1.

180 Robert Weismann (Centre Party) had already investigated Karl Radek as a state prosecutor in February 1919 and covered up *Freikorps* activities. He served as state commissioner from 1920–3, and became a state secretary in the Prussian government afterwards. Weismann, who was of Jewish ancestry, emigrated in early 1933 and had his German citizenship revoked the same year. He died in New York in 1942. See Gietinger 1995, p. 27.

181 Rüdiger Bergien explicitly describes this consensus as 'bellicist'. According to Bergien, the German army's secret arms build-up in violation of the Treaty of Versailles was supported by state functionaries up to and including Social Democrats, Bergien 2012.

182 Alongside the *Rote Fahne*, the *Schlesische Arbeiterzeitung* also reported on 'Upper Silesian war preparations' and targeted workers with headlines like 'War on the Upper Silesian Wars', see *Schlesische Arbeiterzeitung* 110, 22 May 1921.

actually published in Breslau.<sup>183</sup> This is another indicator that Scholem carried no real responsibility for the KPD press's editorial line. Rather, he accepted the honourable task of attaching his name to the strategy of the offensive and assuming legal responsibility for it, which itself entailed a significant amount of risk. The responsible editor of the Communist newspaper *Ruhr-Echo* was sentenced to two years of gaol in April 1921 for publishing the KPD leadership's appeals.<sup>184</sup> Werner must have been aware of this case, as his own *Rote Fahne* reported on it. Why did he take such a great risk?

The explanation can be found in his status as a member of the Prussian Landtag. As deputy, Scholem enjoyed immunity: the Landtag had to approve every criminal prosecution of a fellow member of parliament. Social Democracy had pioneered the tradition of deploying 'sitting editors' under the Kaiserreich whose sole task was to go to prison for the party if necessary. The KPD pursued a similar tactic by appointing members of parliament as responsible editors. The extent to which this was planned and carried out strategically is revealed by a police interrogation record on Bernhard Karge, a KPD district secretary in Kassel, who was present during Scholem's appointment: 'On 17 March there was a meeting of the *Zentralausschuss* [leading KPD body] in which the leading editors from the party leadership a[nd] the secretaries of the district leaderships also participated. The general political situation was discussed and deemed favourable. [...] After Easter, upon the signal issued by headquarters, immediately following the events [...] general strike should commence a[nd] everything done for the seizure of power. [...] During the session, news of the decree by Hörising broke a[nd] it was discussed whether events should now perhaps be launched even sooner. [...] Agreement was meanwhile reached that the press should confine itself to aggressive propaganda. Furthermore, it was decided that the party's members of parliament should become those liable according to the press law'.<sup>185</sup> During a further round of interrogations, Karge commented on Scholem's role: 'In the *Zentralausschuss* meeting on 17 March 1921 Scholem did not stand out in any way. He is generally of the opinion that such activity of individual terror must be rejected. At the time, Scholem said not a single word during the meeting. And as far as I know, Scholem did

183 See issue 103, 13 May 1921. Scholem's name appears on this paper at least until issue 120, 4 June 1921.

184 The state prosecutor had originally asked for seven years, see 'Der Weiße Terror wütet', *Rote Fahne – Bezirk Nordwest*, 22 April 1921.

185 Testimony of Bernhard Karge, 19 January 1922, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem*, Werner, *Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BAArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Bd 1.

not attend the conference of party editors. Owing to the decision made by headquarters, which negotiated about this with the editors of the *Rote Fahne*, Scholem was then appointed chief editor of the *Rote Fahne* in terms of the press law. His editorial work, however, was only very minor, and he is certainly not the author of any of the articles in question, as I know for certain. In the *Zentralausschuss* sessions in April and May Scholem then declared that he rejected taking responsibility for the articles published in the *Rote Fahne*. This referred especially to the article he had mentioned, which contained a call to take up arms. Of course, Scholem could voice this opposition only internally. The party committee therefore withdrew its confidence in the leadership, as the call for arming workers, in the form it had been alluded to in the article, contradicted the party's actual tactical approach.<sup>186</sup>

If we are to believe Bernhard Karge, Scholem rejected the KPD's offensive course and distanced himself from the press campaign run in his name. He shared this position with many other Communists who regarded the March Action as adventurous and disastrous, such as former KPD chairman Paul Levi, who condemned it as 'putschism' and was expelled from the party for his statements.<sup>187</sup> Unlike Levi, Werner would remain loyal to his party when the situation escalated in late March 1921. Karge's testimony is the only indication of a critical stance towards the March Action on Werner's part. His statements about the 'Battle for Halle' in the previous year, however, suggest that he eagerly anticipated an armed uprising. Was it merely insufficient organisation that bothered him in March 1921? Any doubts Scholem may have privately expressed to some of his comrades aside, publicly his name stood for the March Action. And when his party repeated these failed policies in exactly the same manner during the Upper Silesian campaign weeks later, Scholem was liable again. But he remained loyal, and criticism was only voiced internally; outwardly, unity was of utmost priority.

Scholem risked quite a bit for this loyalty. The authorities considered him to be the originator of the KPD's press campaign, perhaps even the architect of the March Action itself, and were determined to take him into custody. The decision was made at the highest level: on 28 March 1921 at 11:00, a joint meeting of the national government and the Prussian Ministry of State recommended Scholem's arrest, preferably after being caught 'in the act'.<sup>188</sup> The Reich's Min-

186 'Zeugenvorführung Karge im Amtsgericht Brandenburg an der Havel vom 7. Juli 1922', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16/1921 Bd 1.

187 Levi 2009.

188 'Gemeinsame Sitzung des Reichskabinetts mit dem Preußischen Staatsministerium am

istry of the Interior subsequently issued the following proclamation: 'A trial on charges of high treason shall be initiated against the *Rote Fahne* due to its provocative articles which appear to be highly treacherous acts. The trial shall occur before an extraordinary court to be specifically installed in Berlin based on article 48, paragraph 2 of the Reich constitution'.<sup>189</sup>

As outlined above, these extraordinary courts were operational shortly after the March Action concluded. On 7 April 1921, Max Hagemann, a lawyer and 'Head of the Prosecuting Authorities at Special Courts I, II, and III' in Berlin put forward a motion to suspend deputy Scholem's immunity.<sup>190</sup> A 'criminal investigation against Scholem and comrades on charges of high treason, committed in the form of a number of appeals and articles in the *Rote Fahne*', was underway. Hagemann acknowledged that the paper had supported council-republican tendencies even earlier, but argued that 'this tendency inside the *Rote Fahne* remained within legal boundaries' until the end of March 1921.<sup>191</sup> Where exactly these boundaries lay remained unclear: 'There can be no doubt that the ultimate objective of these appeals is the dictatorship of the proletariat and the establishment of a council republic. Yet this objective is not stated explicitly. Therefore, the only offence that can be assumed is that of §§ 110 and 111 of the criminal code, not high treason. In the interest of the state, however, the appeals are provocative to a degree that demands that their publication and dissemination not go unpunished'.<sup>192</sup> The prosecutor thus openly admitted that the high treason charge was untenable. Nevertheless, Werner Scholem's case would be used as a show trial against the threat of Communism as a whole. He was charged with 'obstructing the state authorities in the performance of its duty' (§ 110 of the criminal code) and 'public incitement to commit criminal offences' (§ 111 of the criminal code). After the charges were approved by parliament, the additional charge of high treason was tacitly added to the list.

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28. November 1921', *Akten der Reichskanzlei*, available at [www.bundesarchiv.de](http://www.bundesarchiv.de) (last accessed 16 August 2012).

189 'Anweisung Reichsminister des Innern', *Akten betreffend Kommunismus*, BAArch R 1501/20322.

190 Sources only provide a last name, but the lawyer was most likely Max Hagemann (1883–1968), who would later move to the Prussian Higher Administrative Court before joining the 'Reich Commission for Handling Assets of the Enemy' in 1942 and later becoming president of the (West German) Federal Criminal Police Office [*Bundeskriminalamt*] in 1948.

191 *Strafverfahren gegen den Redakteur der 'Roten Fahne' Werner Scholem aus Halle und Genossen wegen Hochverrat 1921*. GStA PK, Justizministerium, I. HA Rep. 84a Nr. 58552.

192 Ibid.

At the same time, Werner Scholem was also being monitored by the Prussian State Commissioner for the Maintenance of Public Order. The latter urged the prosecutor to ‘neutralise the *Rote Fahne* through provisional arrest of the responsible editor’ on 5 May 1921. It reads further: ‘Although the current responsible editor of the *Rote Fahne*, Werner Scholem, is a member of the Prussian Landtag and thus enjoys the immunity of a deputy, an order of provisional arrest would not be inhibited by the Constitution as long as this arrest occurs no later than the day following the offence.’<sup>193</sup> The state prosecutor was instructed to catch Scholem ‘in the act’ because such cases were not protected by parliamentary immunity. Yet despite daily police raids on the offices of the *Rote Fahne*, authorities decided against arresting Scholem on the spot. An official order to apprehend someone in the act would have been perceived as an obvious attempt to circumvent immunity, and the police sought to avoid provoking the Prussian parliament.

Almost immediately after the Landtag convened, Werner Scholem shifted roles from parliamentarian to topic of parliamentary debate itself. The Landtag’s Procedure Committee discussed his detention on 16 April and 9 May 1921.<sup>194</sup> Chaired by Otto Nuschke, deputy for the liberal DDP and editor of the *Berliner Volkszeitung*, the committee discussed the status of immunity and the role of press freedom at length.<sup>195</sup> Although Nuschke considered the charges put forth by the judiciary as ‘grave offences’, he nevertheless defended Scholem. In his view, Scholem’s statements were political statements in a political newspaper, and accordingly ought to be treated as political, not criminal, offences. He argued that the purpose of parliamentary immunity was to protect deputies from political trials. Nuschke thus concurred with a quite common interpretation, distinguishing between ‘criminal’ and ‘political’ offences. In this regard, a speaker from the USPD pointed to the distinction between regular imprisonment and political detention, known as *Festungshaft* in German because detainees would be held in a military fortress rather than a prison with common criminals. At the time, this special form of punishment was generally

193 ‘Staatskommissar für die Überwachung der Öffentlichen Ordnung an Staatsanwaltschaft Berlin, 5. Mai 1921’, *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne, wegen Hochverrat*, BAArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Vol. 2.

194 *Ausschußverhandlungen über die strafrechtliche Verfolgung der Abgeordneten*, GStA PK, I, HA Rep. 169 D, I J, Nr. 9a, Beiheft 1, Vol. 1.

195 On the following see *Preußischer Landtag*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, Drucksache 409: ‘Bericht des Geschäftsordnungsausschusses über den Antrag des Justizministers auf Genehmigung zur strafgerichtlichen Verfolgung und zur Inhaftnahme des Abgeordneten Scholem wegen Hochverrats’.



applied to cases lacking ‘dishonourable sentiment’ – high treason, as a political offence, could not be treated as a villainous crime, despite the penalties associated with it. Political offences were considered ‘honourable’ deeds in the Weimar Republic, or were at the very least treated as distinct from ‘petty crime’. That said, not all members of parliament were inclined to grant Scholem this honour. The Centre Party and German National People’s Party [*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*, DNVP] considered Scholem to be the ‘intellectual architect of the action in Central Germany’ and ‘chiefly’ responsible for the crimes committed during the March Action. The motion was handed back to the Minister of Justice for the time being due to disagreements on the issue. During the second session on 9 May, the vote turned to Scholem’s disadvantage. With a vote of ten to eight, approval for a criminal investigation was recommended.<sup>196</sup> Regardless of the contradictions found in Hagemann’s motion, the charge of high treason now seemed to be settled, entailing a potential penalty of life imprisonment. Given the heated anti-Polish sentiment in Germany at the time, no one expected any mitigating circumstances to be taken into consideration. Werner Scholem reacted correspondingly: on the day of the committee session, he disappeared without a trace, not to be seen again until autumn.

Scholem’s career as member of parliament was thus interrupted before it had properly begun, but his career as a journalist continued without him, albeit in a ghostly manner: he would continue to appear as the legally responsible editor of the *Rote Fahne* and the *Schlesische Arbeiterzeitung* for several weeks. Due to delays within the parliamentary bureaucracy, it took until 2 June for Scholem’s immunity to actually be suspended by a decree of the Ministry of Justice.<sup>197</sup> Two days later, an arrest warrant followed and wanted notices were distributed throughout the German Reich. The draft of the warrant reads as follows: ‘Scholem, Werner, editor and writer, born 28 Dec 1895 in Berlin [...]; height 167 cm; slim, black long hair combed back; eyebrows black; eyes dark; clean-shaven; eagle nose; mouth normal; teeth good; pale face colour; protruding ears, markedly Jewish type; language German, sometimes wears horn-rimmed glasses. According to reports received his appearance has already been altered by a haircut.’<sup>198</sup>

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196 Ibid.

197 The parliament still had to formally approve the recommendation of the Procedure Committee, ‘Brief des Reichsminister der Justiz an den Leiter der Anklagebehörde bei den außerordentlichen Gerichten I, II, III in Berlin vom 10. Juni 1921’, *Strafsache gegen Scholem*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Band 2, Bl. 87 ff.

198 In *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Band 2.

**Stedbrief.**

Gegen den unten beschriebenen früheren verant-  
wortlichen Redakteur der „Roten Fahne“ u. Schriftsteller

**Werner Scholem**

geboren am 28. Dezember 1895 zu Berlin, zuletzt  
wohnhaft in Berlin, Waldenserstraße 15, welcher  
flüchtig ist und sich verborgen hält, ist die Unter-  
suchungshaft wegen Hochverrats verhängt.

Person-  
Beschreibung:

Größe: 1.67 m; Ge-  
stalt: schlank; Haare:  
schwarz, lang nach  
hint. gekämmt; Bart:  
glattrasiert; Gesicht-  
farbe: blaß; Augen:  
dunkel; Nase: Adler-  
nase; Ohren: ab-  
stehend; Sprache:  
deutsch; Besondere  
Kennzeichen: trägt  
zeitweilige Hornbrille.  
Sein Aussehen ist  
durch Abschneiden  
des Haars bereits  
verändert.  
Es wird ersucht,  
denselben zu ver-  
haften und in das  
nächste Gerichtsgefängnis abzuliefern, sowie zu den  
hierfürigen Akten St. I. 2. 21 sofort Mitteilung zu machen.  
Berlin, den 18. Juni 1921.  
Staatsanwaltschaft beim außerordentlichen Gericht bei  
dem Landgericht I. [68]



FIGURE 20 Wanted notice for Werner  
Scholem, 1921

The characterisation as being of ‘markedly Jewish type’ was tacitly removed before publication. The incorrect date of birth was retained, but did little to limit the fervour surrounding the manhunt. Scholem’s warrant of arrest appeared in the magazine *Die Preußische Schutzpolizei*, read by 50,000 constables all over Prussia.<sup>199</sup> Not every common criminal received such attention, and reactions were correspondingly widespread.

According to police reports, he had been seen in Cologne, but also in Hanover three weeks later. A newspaper editor from Reichenberg in Bohemia claimed that Scholem was working there as a journalist.<sup>200</sup> The press for its part suspected he was even further east, namely in Moscow.<sup>201</sup> The Bavarian

199 *Die Preußische Schutzpolizei*, No. 9, 15 July 1921, p. 119. On circulation see ‘Schreiben der Verlagsgesellschaft Kameradschaft an den Oberstaatsanwalt Berlin vom 17. Juni 1921’, *Strafsache gegen Scholem, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BAArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21 Band 2, Bl. 90.

200 ‘Meldung der Polizeiwache Zittau vom 19. August 1921’, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BAArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1.

201 *Die Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, for example; see press clippings and police reports in *Reichskommissar für die Überwachung der öffentlichen Ordnung – Akten betreff Scholem, Werner. 1921–1924*, BAArch, R 1507/739.

border police outpost in Lindau, on the other hand, reported that an apprehended KPD courier had revealed Scholem's current location to be the Czech city of Aussig.<sup>202</sup> The manhunt continued, but Scholem was nowhere to be found, and reports grew increasingly fanciful. One report, written by the German Vice Consulate in the Dutch municipality of Zevenaar, proves particularly entertaining – supposedly, authorities had arrested an alleged KPD courier named August Bock who was able to provide precise details of Scholem's whereabouts:

‘They allegedly had both lived in the Reichstag building, the Reichstag supposedly had issued a detention warrant in the context of a criminal investigation against them. Both had Russian passports, being Russian subjects as they were. [...] During the escape they were recognised in Hanover, Scholem then disappeared in a car without a trace, taking both passports. Bock, however, was allegedly taken to Holland through forbidden channels by a certain Max Kluge. Upon displaying the Soviet star, the latter had been obliged to assist him. [...] All Communists are allegedly in possession of passports and necessary papers, the passports are all certified by the use of stamps, signatures are forged by young girls who are very well practised in doing so after a while. [...] The final destination in Russia was indicated as Tashkent in Turan, where a santonin plant was to be taken over. [...] Scholem and Bock were supposedly on their way to Russia to bring the factory back into operation.’<sup>203</sup> Santonin was a commonly used deworming medicine against intestinal parasites at the time, particularly for tapeworms and roundworms. The notion that Werner Scholem really spent this period worm hunting in Tashkent seems questionable, but his true hideout remained unknown to the authorities. Meanwhile, preparations for the second trial continued apace: on 13 September the chief prosecutor of the Reich put forward a second motion to the Landtag requesting a criminal investigation on charges of high treason, related to the forged documents allegedly proving a military intervention in Upper Silesia published by the *Rote Fahne* in mid-May.<sup>204</sup>

202 ‘Grenzpolizeistelle Lindau an Polizeidirektion München am 18. Juni 1921’, *Reichskommissar für Überwachung der öffentlichen Ordnung – Akten betreff Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 1507/739.

203 ‘Deutsches Vizekonsulat Zevenaar an das Auswärtige Amt Berlin’, 23 July 1921, *Reichskommissar für die Überwachung der öffentlichen Ordnung – Akten betreff Scholem, Werner. 1921–1924*, BArch, R 1507/739.

204 *Ausschußverhandlungen über die strafrechtliche Verfolgung der Abgeordneten*, GStA PK, Preußischer Landtag, I. HA Rep. 169 D, I J, Nr. 9a, Beiheft 1, Vol. 1.

Ten days later, authorities were finally able to announce their success. Following three months of speculation, Werner Scholem had finally been apprehended, seized in the second-class waiting room of Berlin's Anhalter Bahnhof train station at 2:30 pm on 23 September 1921, arrested by 'Section 1A' of the Berlin police department.<sup>205</sup> The abbreviation stood for Berlin's political police, with whom Scholem would have repeated, albeit involuntary, contact in the years to come.

Scholem was taken to police headquarters at Alexanderplatz and detained. A day later he was brought before a coroner, but refused to make a statement concerning his arrest. He was then taken to pre-trial detention in Berlin's Moabit district, where he was stripped of 404 Reichsmarks and his silver watch chain and locked in a cell to wait for his arraignment.<sup>206</sup> The judicial process began to take its course and his detention was extended, first for a week, then another. Finally, on 6 October, the preliminary investigation was initiated, and Scholem again refused to comment on the matter.

On the back of every KPD membership book was a note advising that when dealing with police, silence was absolutely imperative. Werner Scholem complied. For weeks he remained stoically silent and said nothing concerning his whereabouts prior to being arrested, despite numerous interrogations. He only commented on his biographical details. Apart from that, as late as November he continued to state: 'I definitively refuse any further comment on the matter'.<sup>207</sup> Detention in Moabit seemingly did not intimidate Werner Scholem. In a letter to a comrade named Wilhelm (his name is not further specified), he describes his situation almost with a touch of humour: 'I'm doing fine here, at least as well as in that godforsaken place which I would otherwise have to spend my time in. I still have a powerful talent for sitting since Halle and Spandau. I am thinking of studying a lot, and that actually makes it worthwhile, you sit here peacefully without some bighead belching about'.<sup>208</sup> Only the loss of his mandate in the Landtag seems to really concern him: 'However, I almost got here after laying down the mandate. In that case I would have been however quite mad. I had the letter to the president [of the Landtag] in my pocket when I was, in fact quite

205 *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 September 1921.

206 *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16/1921 Band 1.

207 'Vorführprotokoll vom 14. November 1921', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1.

208 'Werner Scholem an Wilhelm (Nachname nicht überliefert)', 27 September 1921, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1.

politely, invited by two gentlemen displaying that well-known dainty label for a car ride to Alexanderplatz.<sup>209</sup> In fact, the *Rote Fahne* had already reported Scholem's resignation, which was probably the reason for his return.<sup>210</sup> In this sense, the affair had a positive side effect: due to his arrest, the letter never made it to the president of the Landtag, but instead landed in the hands of the police and was later given to his lawyer. Scholem would remain a member of the Prussian parliament, whereas had he remained in hiding and delivered the letter successfully, he would have lost his mandate only hours later, constituting an involuntary career setback.

Werner also included all sorts of practical information for his wife in his prison letter, as well as requests for clothes and extra meals. Although Werner pressured her repeatedly, Emmy would not allow herself to be reduced to the household, and there was little Werner could do about it behind bars. His last remarks on the matter strike a somewhat resigned tone: 'I let her know, however, that my earlier wishes regarding her occupation were obsolete. She ought to do as she pleases'. Evidently, further differences concerning Emmy's work life had emerged prior to Werner's escape, to which he finally gave in. In a concluding remark, he writes about his future with a sense of calculated optimism: 'Perhaps I'll now be given the opportunity to study for several years, something I've always longed for. You never know what something is good for.'<sup>211</sup>

Werner Scholem was now a political prisoner. Immediately, his party launched a solidarity campaign in his defence. The *Rote Fahne* announced: 'Comrade Scholem has now fallen into police hands after all. Scholem was active outside of Berlin on behalf of the party ever since the suspension of his immunity. The police authorities, who allow Kappists<sup>212</sup> to walk freely and are at a complete loss when it comes to finding the assassins of workers' leaders, mobilised a tremendous apparatus to track down Comrade Scholem. Using their despicable spy methods, they even harassed the close family members of our Comrade Scholem, so as to set up a trap for him or obtain information on his whereabouts.'<sup>213</sup> Indeed, the prosecution had sifted through Scholem's

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209 Ibid.

210 See *Rote Fahne*, 24 September 1921. Herta Geffke (1893–1974) was to succeed him.

211 'Werner Scholem an Wilhelm (Nachname nicht überliefert)', 27 September 1921, in *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J16 /1921 Band 1.

212 Protagonists of the right-wing Kapp Putsch in 1920.

213 'Genosse Scholem verhaftet', *Rote Fahne*, 25 September 1921.

private life and even retrieved information about his parents, including a list of Arthur Scholem's prior convictions. Ironically enough, this list contained three times as many entries as his lost son's: in 1905, Arthur had committed a 'business offence', in 1897 he had attracted attention for 'offending against the Law of Sunday Rest', and in 1888, at the age of only 18, he paid a fine of five Reichsmarks for 'illegal gambling'.<sup>214</sup> Werner's criminal record, on the other hand, contained only one entry, namely that of slander – but attached to a significantly higher fine.<sup>215</sup> Betty was the only family member not already known to police.

Others, too, wondered about the increase in criminal activity in the Scholem family – Walter Benjamin wrote an 'Aramaic fragment' to his friend Gershom on the occasion, commenting on Werner's arrest: 'Truly, no grass grows where the new green is. For the man's traces have remained there, together with his brothers. Yet the pilasters snatched one of his brothers. And Gershom spoke: am I the keeper of my brother Werner? But they were aghast at his words. And his kin perished and his entire house as well as the prints of this house became unbearable in all of Israel'.<sup>216</sup> Things would not turn out quite so bad, but Werner had greatly added to his status as black sheep of the family nonetheless.

The KPD, on the other hand, felt its honour had been tarnished, and was intent on providing evidence that not only Scholem's arrest, but indeed the entire March Action had been a police provocation. The *Rote Fahne* had a few words to spare for the Prussian Landtag as well: 'The trial will simultaneously reveal the Prussian Landtag's frivolity, which at the beckoning of a prosecutor did not hesitate to strip Comrade Scholem of his parliamentary immunity'.<sup>217</sup> The KPD undertook great pains to secure Scholem's release through the Landtag's Procedure Committee, but would ultimately fail to do so.<sup>218</sup> The defendant remained in his cell in Moabit, only a few blocks away from

214 'Auszug aus dem Strafregister Berlin für Arthur Scholem', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1.

215 Interestingly, his military imprisonment was not listed. The offence mentioned was from his time as a journalist in Halle in 1919. See 'Auszug aus dem Strafregister Berlin für Werner Scholem', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1.

216 'New Green' was an allusion to the 'Neue Grünstraße', Arthur's home address. Walter Benjamin to Gershom Scholem, 27 Dezember 1921, Benjamin 1995–2000, Vol. II, p. 230.

217 *Rote Fahne*, 25 September 1921.

218 'Scholems Haftentlassung abgelehnt', *Vorwärts*, 18 October 1921. The USPD newspaper *Die Freiheit* published a report on the same day; see Drucksache Nr. 1737 des Preußischen Landtages, Wahlperiode 1921–1924.

his home in Waldenserstraße 15. Geographical proximity aside, the prison and his living room could not have been further apart.

Scholem was represented by the lawyer Kurt Rosenfeld, a member of the USPD. He had defended prominent revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg and Kurt Eisner in numerous trials, and had briefly served as the Prussian Minister of Justice during the November Revolution.<sup>219</sup> But those times were now over, and revolutionaries were now back in the dock. Rosenfeld could initially do little for his client, and Scholem's situation worsened even further. The KPD had been defeated twice in the Landtag: Werner's criminal prosecution had now been expanded to include an investigation of his involvement in the forged reports about alleged German military intervention in Upper Silesia.<sup>220</sup>

These reports had stirred up a proverbial hornet's nest, feeding into a wave of national indignation in which Germans across party lines lamented territorial losses and attacks on ethnic Germans in former Reich territory ceded to Poland. Werner Scholem became the scapegoat for the nation's aggrieved sense of honour, prompting the Prussian Landtag to approve his criminal prosecution. But could the parliamentary deputies participating in the vote really have known what was at stake for him? After all, the forged military reports had made the charges far more serious than a mere infraction of the press law: Scholem could now be charged with treason. As was also the case in 1918, Werner faced a sentence of up to ten years in prison. It now became clear why Scholem's immunity had been lifted on two separate accounts: should the first charges of high treason fall apart due to the rather meagre evidence at hand, there would still be a second chance to make a political example of him.<sup>221</sup> Indeed, the prosecutor and the government were determined to see Werner in prison at any cost.

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219 Kießling 1987, p. 93 ff.

220 Deputy Nuschke regarded the overlapping motions put forward by the Reich prosecuting attorney as 'not entirely comprehensible', as Scholem was already imprisoned in Moabit. See Drucksache Nr. 1737 des Preußischen Landtages, Wahlperiode 1921–1924. The *Vorwärts* proclaimed: 'The committee expressed its vigorous disconcertment that the motion was only put forward by the Reich prosecuting attorney on 13 September, that is, four whole months after the publication of the *Rote Fahne*', *Vorwärts*, 18 October 1921. The motion was nevertheless sustained.

221 This strategy was already being prepared at the end of August 1921, as a note by the prosecuting attorney proves. 'Verfügung des Oberreichsanwalts vom 26. August 1921', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache Scholem, Werner*, BAArch, R 3003, 6J 34/22 Bd 2.

The charges of treason were formulated at the Supreme Court [*Reichsgericht*],<sup>222</sup> Weimar Germany's highest court, in August 1922.<sup>223</sup> Here it would again become clear that the disclosed documents were forgeries. The court, however, argued that Scholem had believed the documents to be real. In the court's view, these circumstances did not prove his innocence, but instead added to the seriousness of his offence: in their view, Scholem should have kept the documents secret for the sake of the nation! The indictment reads: 'Concealing them from other governments would be essential for the sake of the German Reich, as they may – assuming their authenticity – evidence breaches of the Treaty of Versailles by the German government, thus providing the Allied Forces with a pretext for further measures against Germany'.<sup>224</sup>

Thus, Scholem was not charged with publicising a hoax, but in fact stood before the court for not assisting in the cover-up of what had looked like a breach of international law by the German government. This indictment was formulated at the Supreme Court in Leipzig, tasked with protecting the republic's constitution. The notion of justice entertained by chief prosecutor Ludwig Ebermayer prioritised Germany's national interest over international law, while subordinating freedom of the press to the needs of German foreign policy.<sup>225</sup> Scholem was not the only victim of such perversions of justice, as numerous critics of German militarism and representatives of the pacifist

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222 Translator's note: Throughout the book, the term *Reichsgericht*, designating the highest court in the German Justice system, is translated as Imperial Court only for the period up to 1918, when Germany, the *Deutsches Reich*, was still an empire and a monarchy. During the time of the Weimar Republic, however – although the formal name of *Deutsches Reich* (literally translated: 'German Empire') was retained – the term Imperial Court is inaccurate, for a republic can have no 'imperial' courts. The term Supreme Court is used for the Weimar period beginning 1918, reflecting its official function of guarding the Weimar Constitution of 1919, despite the fact that the court in many ways continued its conservative legal practice from previous eras.

223 'Anklageschrift des Oberreichsanwalts gegen Werner Scholem, Leipzig 1. August 1922', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache Scholem*, Werner, BArch, R 3003, 6J 34/22 Band 2.

224 Ibid.

225 Numerous treason trials were pending at the Supreme Court, most of which related to publishing information on cooperation between the German army and the *Freikorps*. Lead prosecutor Ebermayer would deny accusations of political justice in his memoirs in 1930, claiming that he always worked in collusion with the Ministry of Justice and only allowed trials against individuals seeking to 'attract the attention of enemy powers to such events'. See Ebermayer 1930, p. 143.



movement faced similar false accusations.<sup>226</sup> Letterhead was not all the Weimar judiciary had retained from the times of the Kaiser – its prosecutors and judges had carried over as well, leading to the quite paradoxical situation that those supposedly tasked with protecting the democratic constitution would translate the subservient spirit of the monarchy into a legal norm. These cases were about more than the mere attitudes of individual judges. Rather, such jurisdiction was intended to systematically prevent the press from investigating illegal armaments projects. The formation of paramilitary units such as the *Freikorps* or the Black Reichswehr, an illegal secret division organised directly by the German army, as well as their use of weapons taken from army stockpiles, remained similarly taboo for journalists. This gag order facilitated the emergence of a right-terrorist milieu that would haunt the Weimar Republic for the rest of its existence.<sup>227</sup>

Another episode from Werner's penal proceedings illustrates these conditions well. Scholem requested an easing of his detention and applied to see his wife and daughter in their apartment for a few hours twice a week. He invoked the case of a fellow inmate to whom such exceptions were also granted, and agreed to have a police guard accompany him on his visits. He even offered to cover any possible costs.<sup>228</sup> After two months of imprisonment, the prospect of studying behind bars no longer seemed as appealing to Scholem. The judge in charge of Scholem's case was quite perplexed. Excursions lasting several hours were by no means common for prisoners awaiting trial, bringing the director of the Moabit penal institution under increasing pressure to offer an explanation: which prisoner was given such perks?

An inquiry concluded that the person in question was Lieutenant Ernst Krull, who was released from his cell almost daily, only returning in the evenings. Asked about this by the judge, the director of the Moabit's prison answered: 'Krull was let out on: 23, 24, 27, 28, 30 Nov; 1, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 16 December [19]21'. The reasons for this were as follows: 'The releases were ordered by the court because the interrogations took place at the Reich Commissioner for Public Order'.<sup>229</sup> The interrogations, some of which took place in the Ministry

226 See Hannover and Hannover-Drück 1987, pp. 176–92.

227 Paul Levi would issue a stern warning in 1927 that 'state secrets' surrounding the arms build-up ultimately served to protect right-wing terrorist organisations. See Hannover and Hannover-Drück 1987, p. 192.

228 'Werner Scholem an den Untersuchungsrichter des Reichsgerichts Leipzig am 30. November 1921', *Strafsache gegen Scholem Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BAArch, R 3003, 6J 283/21, Band 3.

229 'Oberstrafdirektor der Strafanstalt Moabit an Oberreichsanwalt vom 19. Dezember 1921',

of the Interior, concerned the assassination of the Centre Party politician Matthias Erzberger.<sup>230</sup> Even the coroner found this explanation rather bizarre. Both 2 November 1921 and 11 December 1921 are underlined by hand in the date list. Next to the underlining is written: 'Sunday!'<sup>231</sup>

The remark was as simple as it was revealing: obviously the Ministry of the Interior and other authorities preferred not to work on Sundays. Krull enjoyed poorly hidden privileges, allowed to leave his cell as he wished, yet no further investigations into the matter were conducted – Krull obviously had protection from above. Werner's request, on the other hand, was rejected, leaving him to fume in his cell. He vented in a letter to Emmy:

My request for a day release has been rejected, among other things with the remark that my statement concerning the use of this practice in another case is based on 'an error or misunderstanding'. Well, then we must be dealing with sorcery here! Every morning, and I mean every single morning, including on Sundays, my neighbouring cellmate, Lieutenant Krull, who is in investigative custody for the murder of Rosa Luxemburg, is taken out. And I am not hallucinating either, because I can hear the inspector calling out in the central hall every morning: '406 (that's Krull's cell number) – take out!' Then the warder lets him out and he disappears for the rest of the day. There is a sign on his door that says 'taken out', which I admire each time I am fetched to see my lawyer. Mr Krull doesn't return to his cell until 8 or half past 8 in the evening, sometimes even later.<sup>232</sup>

Scholem's letter revealed what the authorities sought to hide: political prisoners of the extreme right had little to fear from the justice system, even if they were suspected of murder. Lieutenant Ernst Krull was detained as a suspect in

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*Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 34/22 Band 1.

230 Undated handwritten note, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 34/22 Band 3.

231 'Notiz Oberstrafdirektor der Strafanstalt Moabit an Oberreichsanwalt vom 19. Dezember 1921', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 34/22 Band 1.

232 Copy of a letter from Werner to Emmy Scholem on 13 December 1921, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1, Blatt 93.

the murder of Rosa Luxemburg.<sup>233</sup> Mathematician Emil Julius Gumbel reported on the case in his acclaimed work *Four Years of Political Murder* in 1922, quoting the testimony of one of those complicit in the murder.<sup>234</sup> Gumbel was sure of Krull's involvement: 'After him, Lieutenant Krull also shot a bullet through Mrs Luxemburg's head, who was sitting in the car. Krull was being tried for murder. First, he admitted having taken part in the murder, then he revoked his statement. Subsequently, the trial was terminated due to lack of evidence, but then resumed at a later point'. Krull was also in possession of a watch that had belonged to Rosa Luxemburg. Gumbel remarks: 'Krull claimed the watch had been abandoned property passing from hand to hand at the Hotel Eden. Krull gave a speech: "there is nothing one could bring against us. Every German felt relief when these two lumpen were sent to kingdom come. We deserve the fatherland's gratitude for this. Such figures as Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht must be tried by judge lynch". Krull was sentenced for theft in two cases to three months of prison [...]'.<sup>235</sup>

Krull was in possession of some of the late Rosa Luxemburg's belongings and had been heard justifying her murder in public, which made him a suspect in the case. That said, whether or not he had been the fatal shooter could hardly be ascertained around the turn of the year of 1921–2.<sup>236</sup> The initial military trial proceedings in 1919 had been a farce: one of the prime suspects processed ordinances and search bulletins, files were forged, and one defendant was even aided in his escape abroad.<sup>237</sup> While Scholem sat in prison together with Krull, a civilian court finally investigated Luxemburg's murder – what Krull's strange Sunday interrogations revealed, however, was that the suspected assassins continued to receive protection from state bodies after the case transferred from

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233 On the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht and subsequent investigations see Gietinger 1995. On the brief public debate surrounding the alleged discovery of Luxemburg's corpse in the morgue of Berlin's Charité hospital see Laschitza and Gietinger 2010.

234 Gumbel's text attracted significant attention, and his depictions were confirmed by authorities to a large extent; see Gumbel 1922. The passage quoted is from a soldier named Runge, who hit Rosa Luxemburg with the butt of his rifle twice, knocking her unconscious. However, the actual cause of death was a gunshot wound; see Gietinger 1995, p. 36.

235 Gumbel 1922, p. 13.

236 SPD Minister of Defence Gustav Noske endorsed the military court's judgement against the defendants in the case of Luxemburg's murder with his signature on 8 March 1920, despite the fact that its weaknesses and limitations were obvious and even public knowledge at that point. See Gietinger 1995, p. 78 and 108 as well as the attached source documents. See also Gietinger 2009, particularly p. 120 ff.

237 Another was let off with a minor punishment for 'hiding a corpse', see Gietinger 1995, p. 46, p. 48, p. 58 f. and p. 60 ff.

military to civilian jurisdiction. Werner Scholem lacked such protection. Having already faced unpleasant experiences with the Kaiserreich's military justice, he delivered a similarly bitter judgement of the republican legal system: 'There are double standards at play here. A man detained for suspicion of murder receives privileges and relief, which renders the investigative custody – seemingly only enacted for the public eye – a farce; after all, all he did was slay a workers' leader, and he is after all a nationalist officer! A member of parliament locked up because a purely political press offence, with an unpopular attitude, is not even allowed to see his family once a week, even though this would be possible without any special requirements. *Justitia fundamentum regnorum!*'<sup>238</sup>

'Justice is the foundation of the state' – in Scholem's view, this phrase carried little meaning in the new republic, and his anger was understandable. Although it would later come to light that Krull was not actually Rosa Luxemburg's murderer and that her watch had been stolen prior to her death,<sup>239</sup> he was nevertheless the suspect in a murder case, while Scholem sat in police custody merely for writing a newspaper article. The fact that Krull was permitted to leave his cell on a daily basis in spite of these circumstances showed how little interest the judiciary had in solving the case – in stark contrast to the efforts made by all levels of government to neutralise Werner Scholem as editor of the *Rote Fahne*. In spite of his outrage, Werner saw no sense in seeking to further scandalise his case. He wrote to Emmy:

I consider it a futile effort to make a fuss about this. What good is it when Krull's excursions are prohibited, which is surely the utmost outcome I could expect from such efforts! I now hope our application for release from prison will be successful, and believe it is best to just remain silent

238 Copy of a letter from Werner to Emmy Scholem on 13 December 1921, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1, Blatt 93.

239 Gietinger 1995, p. 81f. Records of the proceedings against Krull can be found in the Landesarchiv Berlin, Rep. 58, Nr. 75. Krull was also not a member of the GKSD, but rather the *Freikorps* Roßbach. According to the testimony of Waldemar Pabst, the actual murderer was Lieutenant Hermann W. Souchon, who in a previously agreed upon operation jumped onto the footboard of the car transporting Luxemburg and fired the fatal shot. Souchon was never convicted; on the contrary, in 1969 he successfully sued and prevented TV journalist Dieter Ertel from identifying him as the killer. Thus, 50 years later the murderer would become the accuser, and the investigating journalist the convict. See Gietinger 1995, p. 94 and pp. 95–106 as well as Gietinger 2009, p. 375 ff.

and wait. Once I am released from prison I'll ultimately be better off than Krull anyway. Also, I will inform the *Reichsgericht* through Rosenfeld that with the exception of my mandate, to which I am of course obliged, I will cease all other political activities until the decision concerning my trial has been made. The bail bond and an assurance that I will never elude a real court of law, in contrast to the special courts – that's all one can do. If they decide to keep me locked up regardless, then at least it is no longer a matter that has anything to do with justice.<sup>240</sup>

The bail bond was intended to secure a temporary release. Scholem lacked the necessary funds, however, and could expect little assistance from his family. He therefore appealed to his party's solidarity.<sup>241</sup> Considering the circumstances, Scholem expected that he would require a sum of 'considerable size'.<sup>242</sup> The KPD did indeed step in to shoulder the burden, although the bail was set at a staggering 150,000 Reichsmarks – hundredfold the amount of Scholem's monthly salary. Scholem was important to the party, and it organised the necessary funds. His lawyer Kurt Rosenfeld deposited the entire sum on 29 December 1921, Werner Scholem's 26th birthday.<sup>243</sup> This unique present notwithstanding, he still spent his birthday alone in his Moabit cell, for it was not until half past seven in the evening of 31 December 1921 that Werner was released, following almost three-and-a-half months of imprisonment.<sup>244</sup> Although he missed his birthday, Werner and Emmy were able to celebrate the fourth anniversary of their marriage together.

The court proceedings for Werner's charges of treason and high treason continued, however, and Scholem appeared at interrogations and hearings regularly.<sup>245</sup> He continued to refuse to testify, while the judiciary remained patient.

240 Copy of a letter from Werner to Emmy Scholem on 13 December 1921, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1, Blatt 93.

241 Werner Scholem to the KPD *Zentrale* in October 1921 (precise date illegible), SAPMOBArch, RY 1/I 2/3/76a.

242 *Ibid.*

243 'Antrag auf Annahme von Geld zur Hinterlegung vor dem Amtsgerichte vom 29. Dezember 1921', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1; as well as 'Beschluss des 1. Strafsenats des Reichsgerichts vom 19. Dezember 1921', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 3.

244 'Entlassungsbescheid vom 31. Dezember 1921', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 3.

245 On the order of arrest see a hand-written draft of the prosecutor's letter from 4 January 1922, *ibid.*

In a letter to the Ministry of Justice, the chief prosecutor explained his tactics: 'Accordingly, we will first wait to see whether the criminal proceedings brought forward due to the unrest in Central Germany reveal any more incriminating material on the defendant'.<sup>246</sup> But nothing was found. On the contrary: in January and July 1922, authorities documented the cited testimony of Bernhard Karge. The witness stated that Scholem had not been involved in drafting the calls for the March Action, and that he in fact had criticised their content.<sup>247</sup> This raised further doubts about the trial for high treason, particularly as the charges were already based on extremely thin evidence. Scholem could then only be charged with a breach of the press law, but the court in Leipzig was not authorised to deal with such offences. Ultimately, the Supreme Court was spared an embarrassment by the alleged traitor Scholem in the summer of 1922 by a crisis that would shake the whole republic.

After the Centre Party politician Matthias Erzberger had been assassinated by nationalist assassins in 1921, the terror returned in spring of the following year. On 24 June 1922, foreign minister Walter Rathenau was killed by a hand grenade and several shots fired from a machine gun. An offshoot of the secret paramilitaries, about which no newspaper was allowed to report, had struck. Both murders had been committed by members of the radical right-wing paramilitary group Organisation Consul, a successor of the Erhardt Naval Brigade [*Marinebrigade Erhardt*], a *Freikorps* division also involved in the Kapp Putsch.<sup>248</sup> The second murder was considered punishment for Rathenau's 'fulfilment policies', meaning his cooperation with the Allied Forces of World War I in meeting reparations agreements.<sup>249</sup> The assassins rejected reparations on principle and strove for a 'national revolution' to restore German greatness.

However, the idea that Rathenau, a man of impeccable nationalist credentials, stood in their way seems rather paradoxical. As director of raw materials in the Prussian Ministry of War, he had been the principal organiser of the German wartime economy, opposing peace negotiations as late as October 1918. His later 'fulfilment policies' did not represent an admission of German guilt,

246 'Oberreichsanwalt an den Reichsminister der Justiz (Briefabschrift) vom 27. Januar 1922', *Akten betreffend Kommunismus*, BAArch, R 1501/20322.

247 'Aussage Bernhard Karge vom 19. Januar 1922', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem, Werner; Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BAArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Bd 1; as well as 'Zeugenvorführung Karge im Amtsgericht Brandenburg an der Havel vom 7. Juli 1922', *ibid.*

248 For more background information, see Sabrow 1999, as well as Gietinger 2009, p. 244 and Krüger 1971, pp. 72–100.

249 On the politics of compliance see Schulze 1994, p. 222 ff.

but rather aimed to prove the infeasibility of the Allies' reparations demands by complying with them to the letter. While the nationalist Right sought to restore Germany's greatness through revolutionary means, Rathenau pursued the same objective by means of *Realpolitik*.<sup>250</sup>

Nevertheless, in the eyes of both the assassins and millions of other German nationalists, Rathenau represented the physical incarnation of the 'Jew republic' that, to them, was Weimar Germany. A popular song deriding Rathenau had been circulating through the bars and beer halls of the country for some time already, containing the chorus, 'Shoot down Walter Rathenau, the God-damned dirty Jew!' [*Knallt ab den Walther Rathenau, die gottverdammte Judensau*].<sup>251</sup> This call had now been heeded. Anti-Semitism, already on the rise prior to 1918, was given renewed impetus by the humiliation of the war defeat.<sup>252</sup> The same Supreme Court that sought to convict Scholem for high treason neglected to prosecute the use of the term 'Jew republic'. According to the court, this was merely expressing an opinion 'held by broad segments of the population' concerning the actually existing 'inordinate power' of Jews in public life.<sup>253</sup> Only after Rathenau's murder did state authorities react, no longer able to deny the existence of right-wing terrorism.<sup>254</sup> The day following the assassination, Reich chancellor Joseph Wirth gave a speech in the Reichstag, from which one phrase in particular would linger on in public memory. Concerning the right-wing parties, the Centre Party politician proclaimed, 'There is the enemy, and there can be no doubt: this enemy is on the right!'<sup>255</sup>

His pronouncement marked a paradigm shift on the part of Weimar democrats, who until then primarily understood their adversaries as being to their left. Even Social Democrats had not, at least since 1919, made any attempt to close ranks with their former comrades in the KPD and USPD, opting instead for a 'coalition of order' together with conservative forces. This coalition relied on the support of an army whose mindset was essentially identical to that

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250 See Volkov 2011.

251 See Toller 1934, p. 274.

252 On the trajectories of anti-Semitism in Germany and Western Europe see Steiman 1998.

253 Hannover and Hannover-Drück 1997, p. 264.

254 The right also attempted politically motivated assassinations against SPD politician Philipp Scheidemann and Jewish journalist Maximilian Harden, but both survived. This came in addition to countless so-called *Fememorde*, executions of suspected traitors by their own comrades. See Hannover and Hannover-Drück 1987, pp. 105–45 as well as Sabrow 1999.

255 *Verhandlungen des Reichstags – Stenographische Berichte*, I. Wahlperiode 1920, Vol. 356, 236. Sitzung, Berlin 1922, Sp. 8054–8058.

of the Organisation Consul, both of which had their origins in the counter-revolutionary *Freikorps*.<sup>256</sup> Some of them worked for the government, others as freelance murderers. A muzzled press and the state protection of murder suspects like Ernst Krull had led to a situation in which the paramilitaries, protected by the state and its courts for so long, were now out of control.

The shock of Rathenau's assassination finally prompted an attempt to alter this situation. Launched at first in the form of a decree, the Reichstag subsequently passed a 'Law for the Protection of the Republic' authorising the prohibition of any organisations hostile to the republic and making calls for the murder of elected representatives of the republic a punishable offence. A newly installed state constitutional court was established to serve as a counterweight to the Supreme Court (and former Imperial Court) in Leipzig, entangled as it was with the military and paramilitary groups. Nonetheless, the new criminal court was by no means left-leaning. It was founded upon a sort of early variant of the so-called 'horseshoe' theory of political extremism, prosecuting right-wing terrorism just as decisively as any leftist plans for revolution. Thus, the court was not an attempt to dispense with the political judiciary, but simply to confine its scope to a more narrow republican corridor.<sup>257</sup>

Although Scholem, a Communist, stood outside of this corridor, he would benefit from the reform nonetheless: together with the Law for the Protection of the Republic, the Reichstag had also passed a 'Law on the Exemption from Punishment for Political Offences', which became known as the 'Rathenau amnesty'.<sup>258</sup> The law was a reaction to the questionable practices of the extraordinary courts following the March Action, which had been the subject of ongoing controversy. The trial against Werner Scholem on charges of high treason was within the jurisdiction of the new constitutional court,

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256 The Organisation Consul's programme was published in 1921 with the title *Germany's Future: Tasks and Aims*; according to Gabriele Krüger, its monarchist spirit could be summarised in its demand to 'make Black-White-Red!' Over time, however, ethnic nationalist and anti-Semitic thinking grew increasingly accepted. In the organisation's magazine *Wiking*, for example, the organisation claimed to fight 'against democracy, Social Democracy and Jewry'. See Krüger 1971, p. 85f. and Hannover and Hannover-Drück 1987, pp. 135–45. On the relationship between World War, counter-revolution and the National Socialist movement see also Krumeich, Hoffstadt and Weinrich 2010.

257 Made punishable were 'acts of violence against the republican form of state', although Reich Minister of Justice Gustav Radbruch (SPD) assured critics from his own party that only far-right activities were meant by this. This limitation was not written into the law, however, and it would be soon used to persecute the left as well. See Hannover and Hannover-Drück 1987, p. 115f.

258 Christoph 1988, pp. 127–63.



and the latter made short work of it: the proceedings were called off.<sup>259</sup> Werner Scholem would not be sentenced for high treason.

This was certainly a relief for Scholem, but only a temporary one. His trial for treason at the Supreme Court relating to the forged military documents continued. 'Treason' was not considered an offence directed against the republican system of government, but rather a betrayal of the German Reich's national interests – in this case, revealing military secrets to the public, even if those alleged secrets were later revealed to be a forgery. Considering his letters during World War I and his hopes for Germany's 'annihilation', Scholem was undeniably 'guilty' from a moral standpoint. Scholem's categorical anti-nationalism was rare at the time, probably even among his own comrades. Yet the Reich's Supreme Court of Justice could not punish a mere attitude, it required proof of an actual offence. Therefore, the main trial was commenced in September 1922. Scholem had remained silent to the very last day, leaving the trial open to surprises. And surprise them Scholem did.

On 27 October, his lawyer Rosenfeld unexpectedly introduced three new witnesses: 26-year-old editor Leopold Kreutz, 21-year-old 'writer' Heinz Neumann, and 29-year-old Fritz Runge. The bombshell was dropped during the main trial in Leipzig on 22 January 1923. The court incipiently followed the prosecution's construction of charges, according to which the forged documents 'should have been kept secret for the sake of the German Reich'.<sup>260</sup> The line of argument proving Scholem's 'offence', however, would turn into an absolute fiasco for the prosecution. The text of the court's decision documents the course of the proceedings:

The defendant, who refused to give any statement on the matter whatsoever up until the day of the main trial, denied having ordered or been in charge of said publications during the main trial. On 7 May 1921<sup>261</sup> the

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259 In an exchange with the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Justice stated succinctly: 'The proceedings against editor Werner Scholem on charges of high treason in Berlin have been called off by a decision of the State Constitutional Court for the Protection of the Republic of 19 August v. J. [1922, RH], as the accused is guaranteed immunity by the law of 21 July 1922'. See letter from the Minister of Justice to the Minister of the Interior, 6 January 1923, *Akten betreffend Kommunismus*, BArch, R 1501 / 20322.

260 'Urteil im Fall Werner Scholem vom 22. Januar 1923', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 34/22 Band 2.

261 According to Landtag records, the committee did not meet until 9 May 1921. The 'different criminal investigation' was the aforementioned charge of high treason. See Drucksache Nr. 409 des preußischen Landtages, Wahlperiode 1921–1924 as well as *Ausschussverhand-*

Prussian Landtag, of which he was a member, approved his prosecution concerning a different criminal investigation. In order to elude this investigation, he left the country and went into hiding at his party leadership's discretion on 9 May, first to Reichenberg in Bohemia, where he arrived on 10 May. His departure from Berlin, as ordered by his party, made it absolutely impossible for him to continue to be the responsible editor for the *Rote Fahne* [...] rather, he had assumed that his party would soon appoint another responsible editor without much further ado. When he discovered, upon his arrival in Reichenberg, in an issue of the *Rote Fahne* that he was still being listed as the responsible editor, he immediately wrote to the party leadership in Berlin demanding that this 'sloppiness' end. After a stay of 3 weeks, he moved from Reichenberg to Aussig. Supposedly, he did not return to Germany before the autumn of 1921. The defendant's absence from Berlin at the time of publication, his request to the party that the listing of his name as editor-in-chief be ceased and the infeasibility of conducting editorial work from abroad were all confirmed by the mutually complementary testimonies of the witnesses Neumann, Runge and Kreutz, which all correspond to the defendant's statements. Consequently, it is not proven that the defendant is responsible, according to the general criminal code (as perpetrator or participant) for the publications in question [...] Should the defendant have still been the responsible editor-in-chief of the *Rote Fahne* at the time of the imputed publications, then the assumption of his perpetration can be ruled out by the proven circumstances.<sup>262</sup>

The verdict represented a seminal defeat for the prosecution, and Scholem was acquitted unequivocally.

Of all the contradicting tips and clues concerning Werner's whereabouts during the nationwide manhunt, only two proved to be true: he had been in Czechia, and he had worked as a journalist, first at the *Vorwärts* in Reichenberg, the traditional publication of Austro-Hungarian Social Democracy that had refused to take a pro-war stance and became the German-language publication of Czechoslovakian Communists.<sup>263</sup> Scholem later moved to the nearby town of Aussig, but by then had already been identified and denounced in

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*lungen über die strafrechtliche Verfolgung der Abgeordneten*, GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 169 D, I J, Nr. 9a, Beiheft 1, Vol. 1.

262 'Urteil im Fall Werner Scholem vom 22. Januar 1923', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache Scholem, Werner, Redakteur der Roten Fahne*, BArch, R 3003, 6J 34/22 Band 2.

263 Keßler 2013a, p. 39.

Reichenberg.<sup>264</sup> Section 1A of the Berlin police had been able to filter out crucial information from the heap of false reports and arrest Scholem following his secret return to Berlin after all. They were unaware, however, of the exact time of his return or the length of his stay abroad. This would prove to be crucial in the proceedings. Scholem was acquitted and the treasury had to bear the full cost of the trial.

One is inclined to ask why Scholem declined to clarify matters immediately following his arrest – why did he accept three-and-a-half months of imprisonment if he could have proven his innocence from the beginning? The reference to the ‘party assignment’ in Scholem’s testimony contains a hint: his escape was coordinated with the KPD leadership, who also provided him with a new assignment while in hiding. Scholem had hardly pushed for his removal as chief editor of the *Rote Fahne*. The ‘sloppiness’ of the affair was actually quite systematic, for an editor in hiding was even better than parliamentary immunity. Scholem had agreed to take full legal responsibility for all content published in the *Rote Fahne*. He may have felt somewhat uneasy about the arrangement during his hiding, but remained absolutely loyal even after his arrest. Before undertaking any steps towards his defence, he wrote a letter to the KPD’s leadership requesting ‘rules of conduct’. The highest party body debated the matter on 15 September 1922, and only after his defensive strategy had been explicitly approved did he announce his witnesses three days later.<sup>265</sup> Scholem acted fully as a soldier of the party. His refusal to testify had caused the judiciary to keep its focus on him instead of opening further proceedings against the

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264 The denunciation was delivered by the editor of a different newspaper with the explicit request to handle the matter discreetly. See ‘Meldung der Polizeiwache Zittau vom 19. August 1921’, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Scholem*, BArch, R 3003, 11 J 16 /1921 Band 1. The tip concerning Aussig was given by arrested KPD courier Wilhelm Ingruber; see ‘Grenzpolizeistelle Lindau an Polizeidirektion München am 18. Juni 1921’, *Reichskommissar für Überwachung der öffentlichen Ordnung – Akten betreff Scholem, Werner*, BArch, R 1507 / 739.

265 In the minutes of the meeting we find the following: ‘We have received a letter from Comrade Scholem, in which he requests rules of conduct for his trial. Scholem has been charged with treason, which is not covered by his amnesty, for having published allegedly forged documents about arms depots in Silesia. At the time of the publication of these documents, Scholem was already in Czechoslovakia and is able to prove so through witnesses. Should this scenario materialise, an acquittal will have to be passed. And due to the statute of limitations, no one else can be charged. Decision: Comrade Scholem is to prove through witnesses that owed to his absence it can be ruled out that he actually was the responsible editor’. See meeting of the KPD *Zentrale* on 15 September 1922, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/2.

*Rote Fahne*. The party was grateful, providing bail money and a lawyer, and the gamble worked: after the case collapsed, no one could be held liable. The KPD had pushed its luck and triumphed in its standoff with the state.

What, then, can we learn from Scholem's case? It certainly sheds light on the relation between restoration and revolution in the early Weimar Republic. The democratic constitution approved in Weimar in 1919 was first and foremost a piece of paper, its implementation left unspecified. The KPD had an ambivalent relationship to this struggle over the constitutional reality, or rather realisation of the constitution, as it wavered between strategies of united front and revolutionary overthrow. The SPD, by contrast, pursued an exclusively parliamentary politics, in which both social reform or reformist socialism were assumed to take place exclusively within the boundaries of lawful institutions. However, with the exception of the parliaments elected in 1919, no actual republican institutions existed in the Weimar Republic. The entire staff of the judiciary, administration, police and army had been inherited from the Kaiserreich.<sup>266</sup> The laws behind the new constitution were also from a different era: Werner Scholem was charged using a press law authored in 1874. The new constitution had not created new legal norms, but was at best a first step in that direction. The elected parliaments represented, as it were, a thin layer of democracy superimposed on the firm base of the old monarchist state. Although the National Assembly of 1919 had expected the elected parliaments to gradually transform the state, by now a restoration seemed equally plausible. In fact, the status quo even facilitated it, for rather than a conservative majority, only a stalemate between reformist forces and conservatives was sufficient: without new laws on many aspects of public life, the old laws from the Kaiserreich and their reactionary interpretation would continue to subvert the republican constitution. The constitution itself was essentially the result of a similar stalemate: the workers' parties, the protagonists of the November Revolution, did not hold a majority in the National Assembly. Thus, a state was created which, although elections were indeed held, was not even a republic in name: changing the title 'German Reich' [*Deutsches Reich*] had been rejected.

All this came together in the trial against Scholem before the Supreme Court in Leipzig. The criminal code of 1871 and a judge exhibiting a corresponding mindset turned the forging of documents into 'treason'. Scholem's conviction faltered, but only due to a lack of evidence. The legal norm of treason

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<sup>266</sup> On judiciary practices in the Kaiserreich see Wilhelm 2010. The creation of new institutions was consciously avoided, and the integration of the workers' councils into the Weimar Constitution, which even portions of the SPD had demanded in 1918–19, never occurred. See von Oertzen 1963.

remained in place and silenced the press: ten years after Scholem's acquittal, renowned pacifist Carl von Ossietzky would be convicted with the exact same argument after revealing secret German rearmament projects.<sup>267</sup> Given this state of affairs, the KPD cultivated a rather instrumental stance towards the state. To them, the Weimar Republic was not governed by the rule of law but was rather a poorly disguised authoritarian state that did not even use republican letterhead and could not be respected. Personal experiences with the imperial (and later republican) judiciary, which many socialists had acquired in the postwar years and before, often reinforced this cynical attitude. Consequently, Scholem had no qualms breaking the press law and protecting himself with his parliamentary immunity before eluding authorities by fleeing the country.

The ethical balance of accounts on the state's part, however, appears far more questionable: a Reich commissioner, as protector of the constitution, suggests circumventing a member of parliament's immunity without parliamentary approval, explicitly backed by the government that, in turn, as executive body of the state, directly interferes with the judiciary, ignoring the constitutional separation of powers. Another body associated with the executive, the Berlin police, headed by a Social Democrat, subsequently prevents the publication of a newspaper published by that very member of parliament. The paper is the main publication of a party that competes with the SPD but which can now no longer participate in public debate, although the party is not prohibited from doing so by court order. The prosecutor of a special court, established by invoking the emergency decree paragraph § 48, then brings forward charges of high treason against said member of parliament. All of this in full awareness of the fact that the evidence at hand is insufficient. A freely elected parliament approves the criminal prosecution nonetheless. In an attempt to ensure that the disagreeable deputy is convicted, a second treason charge is added. The parliament once again authorises prosecution. The charge ultimately put forward is formulated in accordance with the notion that all journalists of the republic are essentially obligated to keep government acts that may violate international law secret and even help cover them up.

It is difficult to say who gets away better from this comparison, the state or the enemy of the state, but counter-tendencies can also be observed: the Law

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267 Ossietzky publicised illegal armaments projects conducted in allegedly civilian-led aeronautics research in 1929. The decision, reached in 1931, allowed the Nazis to arrest Ossietzky in 1933 without recourse to preventative custody or other measures. Ossietzky refused to emigrate, although authorities probably wanted him to (the state arranged for his passport to be delivered to him in a rather poignant fashion). See Hannover and Hannover-Drück 1987, p. 186 f.

for the Protection of the Republic, an attempt to reform the judicial system, ended the trial for high treason against Scholem in the summer of 1922, and even the reactionary Supreme Court was forced, despite its bias, to acquit Scholem following exculpatory statements by multiple witnesses.

The Weimar judiciary therefore comprised both class justice and the state of law simultaneously. The judiciary was bound to the rule of law, but these laws were undermined wherever the organs of state were unwilling to implement them, such as in the case of Rosa Luxemburg's murder, the tail end of which Scholem experienced during his imprisonment. The Law for the Protection of the Republic represented a serious attempt to end such impunity. Although it was in fact beneficial to political prisoners such as Scholem, he had no appreciation to spare. In the Prussian Landtag, Scholem actually made fun of the law: 'That gives one a horse's laugh: the class justice of the criminal Court for the Protection of the Republic, the same court that pets the reactionaries.'<sup>268</sup> Chief prosecutor Ludwig Ebermayer, who had presided over Scholem's case, openly admitted as much in his memoirs: 'The "Law for the Protection of the Republic" suffered a strange fate. Prompted initially by the assassination of Rathenau, it was primarily conceived as a weapon against the right.'<sup>269</sup> 'The enemy is on the right' was the slogan at the time. Over time, however, it evolved more and more to become a weapon against the left.'<sup>270</sup>

In light of these circumstances, the Weimar Republic appears on closer inspection not as an established entity to be rejected or defended politically, but rather a dynamic social and political field marked by relations of power and struggles between competing interests. The democratic rule of law was both a promise and an ideal to be claimed and expanded or, alternatively, dismantled or eroded. Scholem first experienced this struggle as an object of the judiciary, yet this changed beginning with his release in late 1921. As a member of the Prussian Landtag he was now a lawmaker and saw from the inside how the

<sup>268</sup> *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, 189. Sitzung am 30. November. As a Reichstag deputy, Scholem called for the abolition of the State Constitutional Court in 1924, see 'Antrag von Katz, Scholem und Stöcker vom 9. August 1924' as well as 'Interpellation von Scholem und Katz vom 13. August 1924', *Preußischer Landtag*, Drucksache Nr. 430 and Drucksache Nr. 433, 2. Wahlperiode 1924.

<sup>269</sup> This was due primarily to the selection of judges. Originally, the inclusion of lay judges was intended to reinforce democratic tendencies. This faltered, however, as three conservative professional judges and six lay judges appointed by political majorities ensured a consistent conservative majority. See Christoph 1988 as well as Hannover and Hannover-Drück 1987, p. 116.

<sup>270</sup> Ebermayer 1930, p. 180.

Weimar Republic was being constructed. Scholem actively participated in this process, usually as a revolutionary orator, but sometimes as a practical reformer as well, confronted at all times with the overwhelming desire of his opponents for political restoration in the country.

### Reform or Revolution? A Parliamentarian in the Prussian Landtag

The Prussian Landtag, in which Werner officially represented the 'United Communist Party of Germany', was not just any state parliament. Many responsibilities lay with the individual states in Weimar Germany's federalist system, and the 'Free State of Prussia' established after the abolition of the monarchy was the largest in terms of both population as well as territory, covering almost all of eastern and northern Germany as well as Silesia and East Prussia. A reorganisation of this construct, the boundaries of which were the result of forgotten conquests and dynastic coincidences of bygone centuries, had, like so many other reforms, ground to a halt at the end of the revolution.<sup>271</sup> Consequently, Greater Prussia remained intact as a legal entity. Laws passed by the Prussian Landtag applied to the majority of the German population, and often served as examples for other German states to follow. Although the Prussian State Assembly, elected shortly after the revolution and precursor to the Landtag, had drafted a new state constitution in 1919, its break with the old Kingdom of Prussia remained far from complete. A host of state laws were still in need of reformulation, while how and by whom these laws would be implemented remained equally critical to effective reform. The first Prussian Landtag elected in February 1921, in which Werner Scholem served, would thus play a crucial role in the history of Prussia and the Weimar Republic as a whole.

The parliament convened in the building of the former Royal Prussian Landtag in Prinz-Albrecht-Straße in Berlin on 10 March 1921.<sup>272</sup> This body, with its aristocratic 'House of Lords' and three-class franchise system, once represented a stronghold of political and social reaction, regularly denounced and condemned by the SPD under the Kaiserreich.<sup>273</sup> Only with the coming

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271 Two exceptional cases of successful federal reform were the establishment of the state of Thuringia out of multiple smaller states in 1920, and the approval of Greater Berlin as a municipality in the same year.

272 The street was renamed Niederkirchnerstraße in 1951, after the Communist resistance fighter Käthe Niederkirchner (born 1909, murdered in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, 1944). See Heimann 2011.

273 Such as in the voting rights struggles of 1908–10 that secured freedom of assembly in

of the revolution had the reviled three-class voting system finally been abolished. The Landtag itself had at one point served as the meeting place of the 'Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils', a revolutionary body that assumed state power in November 1918, and also hosted the KPD's founding conference several months later. The convening of the State Assembly, however, marked the end of this period of political *Sturm und Drang*.<sup>274</sup> Social Democracy, almost completely marginalised in the Landtag under the old regime, was now the strongest force in parliament and asserted its mandate to govern. Although the party would lose a significant amount of support in the snap elections of February 1921, it would nevertheless remain the largest parliamentary group, accounting for 114 of 428 total deputies.<sup>275</sup> Right behind it came the followers of God and Fatherland, now regrouped into three major parties: the Catholic Centre Party (84 seats), the German National People's Party (DNVP, 75 seats) and the conservative German People's Party (DVP, 58 seats). The socialist left found itself in a minority, with 28 seats for the USPD and 31 for the KPD. After the majority of the USPD fraction returned to their former comrades of the old Social Democracy, the KPD was the only remaining left party in the opposition.<sup>276</sup>

The KPD was represented in the Landtag for the first time, as it had chosen to boycott the 1919 State Assembly election out of revolutionary impatience. By now, however, a certain degree of pragmatism had set in inside the party. The Communists had chosen a parliamentary leader, Ernst Meyer, who oriented his politics around a dialectic of reform and revolution learned from the late Rosa Luxemburg.<sup>277</sup> Instead of boycotting elections and spouting abstract radicalism, Meyer stood for a politics that took the daily grievances of working people as its point of departure, and though he did not object to advocating for reforms within the existing political system, he also pointed out the

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Germany. See Warneken 1986. On the election campaigns themselves see Mann 1990, pp. 37–48.

274 For more on the Prussian Landtag during the Weimar Republic see Möller 1985; on the transitional phase see particularly pp. 32–132, as well as Heimann 2011.

275 A table of all election results from 1919 to 1933 including numbers of parliamentary mandates is located in Möller 1985, p. 601.

276 The liberals were present as a minority in the Prussian parliament, represented by 26 deputies from the German Democratic Party (DDP). Also seated in the parliament were eight representatives of the 'German-Hanoverian Party' [*Deutsch-Hannoversche Partei*] and four from the 'Economic Party of the German Middle Classes' [*Wirtschaftspartei des deutschen Mittelstandes*].

277 Rosa Luxemburg opposed the demand for an electoral boycott at the KPD's founding in 1919, but was unable to win over the majority. On Ernst Meyer see Wilde 2011.



limitations of the parliamentary road as such.<sup>278</sup> A brief glimpse at the list of speakers in the Landtag minutes is enough to identify Meyer as the KPD's unequivocal spokesperson in this period.<sup>279</sup> Werner Scholem had already met Meyer in 1916 and received a few issues of the forbidden *Spartacus Letters* from him – the same letters that had drawn him to Rosa Luxemburg in the first place.<sup>280</sup> Werner learned quite a bit from the tactical skill of this parliamentary veteran, even though they would later find themselves in different wings of the party. Other prominent speakers from the KPD included Karl Schulz from Berlin-Neukölln, Otto Kilian from Halle and Iwan Katz from Hanover, the latter of whom Scholem would often work with in the years to come. After this leading group followed Werner Scholem himself, one of the party's seven leading orators.<sup>281</sup> Despite his lack of parliamentary experience, Scholem quickly became a defining voice in the KPD delegation. This statement can be also understood literally: at the time, parliamentary speeches were delivered without microphones, and speakers required a very loud voice to make themselves heard, often competing against heckling and other assorted commotion.<sup>282</sup> Scholem evidently did his job well. He not only spoke loudly and often, but even represented the KPD in confrontations with the ministers of the Prussian government as well.

From November 1921 onwards, this government comprised a coalition between Social Democrats, the Catholic Centre Party, the liberal DDP, and the conservative DVP, headed by Minister-President Otto Braun. The inclusion of the DVP proved highly controversial, given that the parliamentary balance of power also made a coalition of Social Democracy, Centre Party and Liberals possible. Historians later came to assign this constellation the name 'Weimar Coalition', as it united all of the parties supporting the liberal-democratic spirit of the Weimar Constitution.<sup>283</sup> Yet factually, the Weimar Coalition would only be in power at a national level in 1919–20 and 1921, whereas the monarchist DVP served in government cabinets far more often. Having said that, Prussian Social

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278 Wilde 2013, p. 208.

279 The 'VKPD' title was abandoned shortly after the unification with the USPD Left; the parliamentary fraction will be referred to as the KPD parliamentary group in the following.

280 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 7 July 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

281 Beside the five top orators already named, Gustav Sobottka and Gustav Menzel spoke roughly as often as Scholem. Only the number of speeches is recorded, not total speaking time.

282 This was to the disadvantage of women speakers who were often mocked for their allegedly shrill voices, as was the case for Ruth Fischer. See Keßler 2013a, p. 184.

283 Schulze 1994, p. 71f.

Democracy under Minister-President Otto Braun held power almost without interruption, usually in coalitions with the Centre Party and the DDP. Prussia was therefore widely considered a 'democratic bulwark' in the crisis-ridden republic by later historians.<sup>284</sup>

That said, Werner Scholem's experiences as a deputy from 1921 to 1924 put this appellation into a bit of perspective. Following the election of February 1921, the Centre Party and DDP both flatly refused to join any government without the participation of the DVP and expressed their clear preference to govern with the monarchists over Social Democracy. Republican unity therefore existed only on paper, in reality a minority government headed by Centre Party politician Adam Stegerwald ran the administration. Only after the DVP took a stance against right-wing extremism in the wake of Erzberger's murder were DVP and SPD able to agree upon political collaboration.<sup>285</sup> Negotiations began, resulting in the formation of a 'grand coalition' of SPD, Centre Party, DDP and DVP.<sup>286</sup> The KPD fraction in 1921 thus found itself confronted with a political marriage of convenience between Social Democrats, Catholics, liberals and conservatives. The SPD was the target of particularly harsh criticism for this 'politics of coalition' which the Communists, not least Werner Scholem, viewed as a betrayal of working-class interests.

Owed to his witty polemics, his unorthodox biography and his self-confident demeanour, Werner Scholem was soon famous (or, as it were, infamous) throughout the parliament. Scholem became the topic of debate during his very first session, when the Landtag was tasked with deciding whether to quash a criminal proceeding from Scholem's time at the Halle *Volksblatt* – certainly a less than optimal debut in a parliament the majority of whose members attached great importance to decorum.<sup>287</sup> During the fourth session, Scholem

284 See Orlow 1986, as well as Schulze 1977, p. 499 ff. and p. 562 ff. On domestic and security policies under Minister of the Interior Severing see Alexander 1992, p. 125 ff., as well as Alexander 1996. On the late phase of the Weimar Republic see Orlow 1991 and Ehni 1975. The modern SPD also refers positively to the notion of a democratic Prussia, see Platzeck 2008.

285 The DVP supported President Ebert's 29 August 1921 Decree on the Restoration of Public Security and Order, a forerunner of the 1922 Law for the Protection of the Republic. Schulze 1977, p. 342 f.

286 The bourgeois minority cabinet governed from the end of April until November 1921, meaning that the SPD both served in the government and provided its Ministry of the Interior. Only after the elections of December 1924 did a typical 'Weimar Coalition' form in Prussia; see Alexander 1992, p. 134. On the controversies surrounding the coalition in the SPD see Alexander 1996, p. 348 ff.

287 The proceeding, a libel suit, was ultimately quashed. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Land-*

took the floor for the first time and delivered a diatribe on the deployment of emergency courts following the March Action. The meeting's minutes describe 'loud disturbances and tumultuous heckling', after which Scholem was interrupted by the bell and the president's call to order. Scholem was unimpressed and continued his speech, calling Prussian Minister of the Interior Severing (SPD) a 'polished Noske from Bielefeld'.<sup>288</sup> The next session was scheduled to elect the Minister-President – and to the assembled deputies' great amusement, Werner Scholem also received a vote.<sup>289</sup>

Aged 25, Scholem was the youngest member of the Landtag, whose president by seniority, Herold, had been born in the revolutionary year of 1848, a bygone era that had seen the first and ultimately failed attempt at a bourgeois revolution in Germany.<sup>290</sup> Werner was therefore often denied the right to even speak: 'I have no intention of conversing with Mr Scholem. He is too young for me', as, for example, deputy Eugen Leidig (DVP) is recorded saying.<sup>291</sup> Scholem retaliated promptly in these situations: 'I could hardly care less about the personal esteem I receive from delegate Dr Leidig. But I would like to express that we, the youth, were old enough to defend the so-called Fatherland of Herr Dr Leidig in the trenches during the war, (booing on the right), that we were old enough to risk our necks for this Fatherland and the sack of money delegate Leidig represents. Hence, we are surely old enough to partake in consultations here.'<sup>292</sup>

The president's bell was Scholem's constant companion while delivering these vicious polemics; in fact, hardly a speech is recorded in which this did not occur. As a youthful rebel with respect for neither nation nor Fatherland, Werner Scholem represented a walking provocation to most of his parliamentary colleagues.<sup>293</sup> That he was the subject of a police manhunt shortly after the parliament convened and then disappeared into hiding for several months certainly contributed to this reputation, but his role as an *enfant terrible* was

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*tages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '1. Sitzung am 10. März 1921', as well as '3. Sitzung am 12. März' und '4. Sitzung am 7. April 1921'. On the tabular records of the speeches in the following see the speech register of the Landtag's sessions' minutes (for each case).

288 See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '4. Sitzung am 7. April 1921'.

289 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '5. Sitzung am 9. April 1921'.

290 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '1. Sitzung am 10. März 1921'.

291 *Ibid.*

292 *Ibid.*

293 This fit with the image of the KPD fraction as a whole, whose members tended to be younger than the rest of the parliament; see Möller 1985, p. 276.

already established before the arrest. The *Rote Fahne* lamented that the majority of the Landtag had allowed ‘their vengefulness and animosity towards our comrade Scholem’ to drive them to lift his immunity.<sup>294</sup> Indeed, the fault lines between the parliament’s fractions ran deep: on 7 May 1923 a plenary session escalated to the point of President of the Landtag Robert Leinert (SPD) calling the police into the building and ordering several Communists detained. Werner Scholem was also arrested in the middle of the assembly room, although he neither spoke nor heckled during the debate, but merely stood in the officers’ way coincidentally. He was later charged with ‘insulting police officers’ and ‘obstructing an officer in the performance of his duty’ for allegedly deriding the police as ‘bum-bailiffs.’<sup>295</sup> Nevertheless, Scholem refused to bow before the police and the ringing of the president’s bell. He maintained a consistently contrarian attitude, understanding his disobedience as an old Social Democratic tradition. Following his arrest, Werner appreciatively pointed out the fact that Landtag president Leinert had once been forcefully removed from parliament by police 11 years prior himself, branded a socialist troublemaker. Scholem arranged for a reprint of a corresponding *Vorwärts* article from 1912 in the *Rote Fahne* in 1921.<sup>296</sup> Scholem celebrated his biography time and again – for instance, when he underscored the reactionary spirit of bourgeois schools by arguing ‘that I have been thrown out of three of them.’<sup>297</sup> He deployed a similar style of argument while discussing reforms to Berlin’s penal system: ‘I have had the pleasure of doing time in Moabit myself and thanks to the Justice Minister’s careful attention I am familiar with the conditions.’<sup>298</sup>

294 *Rote Fahne* 119, 11 March 1922.

295 This was provoked by the refusal of a KPD deputy to accept his expulsion from the session. Scholem reports: ‘When the police invaded the session chambers to drag out comrade Paul Hoffmann, I found myself standing in an aisle [...]. In order to cut a devious route short, several police jumped me and pulled me from the aisle in a brutal manner. I expected this glorious action to be over at that point, but I was mistaken. For the police then immediately proceeded to forcibly drag me out the hall as well [...]. Scholem was sentenced to a 60 mark fine a year later. See Scholem’s ‘Die widerrechtliche Verhaftung der Genossen Scholem, Sobottka und Rosi Wolfstein’, *Rote Fahne* 102, 8 May 1923. See also ‘Die Polizeiaktion im Landtag’ in the same issue, as well as the report on proceedings ‘Die Spitzel-Weiß-Aktion gegen unsere Landtagsabgeordneten vor Gericht’ *Rote Fahne* 53, second insert, 16 May 1924.

296 See *ibid* as well as *Vorwärts*, 10 May 1912.

297 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘105. Sitzung am 23. Februar 1922’.

298 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘210. Sitzung am 23. Februar 1923’.

What to do with such an uncouth, improper deputy? For the dignitaries of the Landtag and the many estate owners, professors, doctors, clergymen and high-ranking civil servants among them, Werner Scholem was likely a rare and rather odd specimen. Unfortunately for them, his deliberate provocations were far too well-argued and accurate to simply ignore. Known for trenchant critiques of war and militarism and thunderous polemics against the aggrieved nationalism of a defeated society, many regarded Werner Scholem as the physical embodiment of the rootless, unpatriotic Jewish intellectual. He was regularly subjected to anti-Semitic heckling and insults. A comparative study by Birgit Rolke shows that of all 31 Jewish deputies who served in the Prussian Landtag between 1919 and 1933, Scholem belonged to the eight who were attacked the most.<sup>299</sup> This may be owed to the fact that he refused to take the insults lying down, and always snapped back at his opponents.<sup>300</sup> Scholem often responded with irony, other times with polemic, but always with decisive counter-attacks against a bourgeois elite that had long abandoned its commitment to religious freedom and other Enlightenment ideals. This led to more than one rather paradoxical occasion upon which Werner Scholem, avowed Communist and council-republican, found himself arguing for minimum legal standards and defending bourgeois ideals of tolerance.

Although Scholem would speak on a range of subjects including freedom of the press, asylum law, judicial reform, food prices and the relationship between church and state, the controversies surrounding education and school reform, right-wing terrorism and anti-Semitism were clearly the main focus of his parliamentary work. Scholem's handling of these three topics will be further elaborated in the following. His comments reveal much more than mere personal opinions, but in fact reflect fundamental contradictions of the revolutionary left in the early Weimar Republic, while also providing further context regarding the political climate at the time.

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299 Rolke lists Ernst Heilmann, Hermann Badt, Paul Hirsch and Erich Kuttner (all SPD), Oscar Cohn (USPD), Werner Scholem and Iwan Katz (KPD); Max Lichtenstein (USPD) is also listed elsewhere. See Rolke 1998, pp. 82–4, p. 90; concerning the attacks on Scholem see p. 79.

300 During these attacks, Scholem was often ordered to explain his relationship to his Jewishness, while his colleague Iwan Katz was provoked less often. Generally speaking, Jewish deputies from the ranks of SPD, USPD and KPD were attacked more often, while Jewish members of parliament who had converted to Christianity were spared such attacks entirely. See Rolke 1998, p. 83 ff.

### Scholem as School Reformer

School and educational reform was Scholem's subject of expertise. He spoke at length in several plenary sessions and served on a committee responsible for school curricula.<sup>301</sup> The basic obstacle was largely the same in all institutions of the Weimar state: the school system, as an aggregate of individuals, procedures and legal arrangements, was a relic of the Kaiserreich functioning along the latter's ideological lines and stubbornly resistant to attempts at democratic reform.<sup>302</sup> The KPD initiated a debate on the matter in February 1922, during which Scholem introduced examples of authoritarianism and anti-democratic tendencies found in German schools.<sup>303</sup> According to him, history was widely taught with pre-war textbooks throughout the country, despite the decree prohibiting their usage in 1919. Scholem cited a textbook from 1913 in which the socialist movement and its 'delusional thoughts' were described as a 'grave danger for the German Reich'. The book was supposedly still in use, despite the existence of a Social Democratic government. Other books contained hymns of praise to Kaiser Wilhelm as well as a sing-along version of the 'Song for Marshall Hindenburg'.<sup>304</sup> Scholem quoted a particularly extreme example: 'The story is about how various people go out on patrol during the war, when several enemies come into sight. It then reads: "Then the men stop – that is, the enemies – just 4 steps away from us. They are chatting casually. We get an itch in our fingers to just shoot the two in front of us; they would be a safe prey. But we are tasked otherwise, and therefore have to let them go. What a shame!"' Scholem remarked: 'As Communists, we are by no means absolute pacifists, as it were, but we do consider it a testament of barbarity when the

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301 Scholem served as parliamentary rapporteur for the curriculum subcommittee in December 1922, see *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '261. Sitzung am 1. Dezember 1922'. He also mentioned his service during a speech in 1923, see *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '261. Sitzung am 22. Juni 1923'.

302 Numerous attempts at educational reform and separation of church and state emerged during the revolutionary phase of 1918–19, but were largely abandoned during negotiations in the National Assembly. See Becker and Kluchert 1993, p. 159 ff.

303 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '105. Sitzung am 23. Februar 1922'.

304 Scholem described the usage of such materials in Weimar schools as systematic, and claimed that in some cases pupils were even being pushed by their teachers to join the Association for Germanness Abroad [*Verein für Deutschtum im Auslande*], a national-chauvinist organisation chaired by Hindenburg himself. Contemporary criticisms of the Hindenburg personality cult in Weimar schools can be found in Wothge 1961, particularly pp. 74–84.

younger *Gymnasium* pupils are taught to shoot down citizens of other nations, who themselves were also sent to the trenches by order of their respective propertied classes; [...] If this is still possible today, then we require no more proof of the spirit that continues to pervade the Ministry of Education, which affirms the old system in the worst possible way; this spirit signifies not an affirmation of the current system, but a relapse into the barbarity of war'.<sup>305</sup>

The responsible 'Minister of Science, Arts and Public Education' was Dr Otto Boelitz, a *Gymnasium* headmaster from Soest in Westphalia and a member of the conservative DVP. He and Werner would engage in a spirited rhetorical duel in November 1922,<sup>306</sup> after Scholem submitted an interpellation on behalf of the KPD proving that the minister had failed to issue his formal approval, necessary to inaugurate newly elected school headmasters, on several occasions. The ministry had gone so far as to deny a Communist physics teacher a headmaster position and demand he explain his political views. Scholem described this act as illegal, for the Weimar Constitution stated that the appointment of civil servants was to be determined exclusively in terms of the individual applicant's qualifications and capability. Moreover, 'freedom of political conviction' applied to civil servants as much as any other citizen of the Reich. Scholem put forward evidence that similar practices were being used against Social Democrats, relating the case of a history teacher named Witte, an SPD member: 'That is the man who dared to teach history in a republican sense, and who therefore could of course not be confirmed as headmaster'.<sup>307</sup> After finally appointing a Communist elected by the Berlin magistrate to a headmaster position, Scholem continued, Boelitz was greeted with a storm of protest from conservative teachers' associations: 'Submissively and wistfully he had to eat humble pie and issue the promise that he would no longer confirm any Communists'.<sup>308</sup> The SPD parliamentary group had also submitted an inquiry, but despite participating in the government was nevertheless forced to wait full two months before

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305 Ibid.

306 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '183. Sitzung am 23. November 1922'.

307 Ibid.

308 Scholem introduced testimony from various witnesses and named an additional case as further evidence of the political blockade in the civil service affecting Social Democrats and Communists alike. Specifically, he brought up the case of a French teacher named Hisserich, whose director had confiscated his pupils' workbooks in order to 'inspect' them for mistakes and then expelled him from the school on grounds of 'deficient qualifications'. It would later emerge that the director had inserted the mistakes himself. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '183. Sitzung am 23. November 1922'.

receiving a rather evasive answer. Alluding to this, Scholem attested to minister Boelitz's 'eel-like properties which allow him to dodge any question you ask him and squirm and elude giving an answer'.<sup>309</sup> He concluded his speech with an appeal to his parliamentary colleagues in the SPD: 'If these policies are continued, if the Social Democratic Party continues to tolerate such a man as the minister in charge of the education of the youth, then the next generation leaving school will become far more reactionary than the current one already is'.<sup>310</sup> Scholem's colleagues from the KPD greeted his closing remark with loud bravos.

It was now the minister's turn to provide some answers. Boelitz denied the accusations, pointing to the aforementioned headmaster's 'unsuitable personality' and citing jurisdictional problems between the magistrate and district authorities as a pretext for the incident. Further complicating the matter, he explained, was the fact that some of those elected had supposedly left the Protestant state church. According to the minister, this would have breached the education act of 1906, still applicable in the absence of new regulations, which prohibited the employment of atheists or members of independent churches as headmasters of confessional schools.<sup>311</sup> Almost all schools were 'confessional schools' at that time, as the establishment of secular education was just beginning in 1922.<sup>312</sup> A ban on atheist headmasters in Protestant schools effectively amounted to a blacklist, preventing further career advance for non-religious teachers. The minister's response showed that Otto Boelitz was not in the least bit interested in secularising Weimar Germany's schools. His goal was not simply to prevent a handful of Communist headmasters, however, but to preserve the national-clerical school system as a whole.<sup>313</sup>

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309 Ibid.

310 Ibid.

311 The Prussian education law prescribed confessional schools as the standard school form. Education historian Gerhard Kluchert explains the underlying motivation as follows: 'In their view, schooling conducted in a religious spirit was the best means to instil certain patterns of behaviour and thought in the youth from the "lower estates", which would then make them immune to revolutionary "false doctrine"; see Becker and Kluchert 1993, p. 16.

312 Allowing parents to choose their children's school type, rather than imposing a strictly secular educational model, was part of the so-called 'Weimar school compromise' negotiated between the SPD and the Centre Party in the National Assembly. Formally, both secular and confessional schools stood on equal footing, but in practice confessional schools became the norm. Parents who refused to send their children to religious schools were often left with provisional secular schools or even classes. See Becker and Kluchert 1993, pp. 159–83.

313 These educational policies also served to mobilise the conservative parties: 'The slogan "save the Christian school" was excellently suited to securing the support of all social forces



Scholem excoriated the minister for his elusive answers: 'The Landtag is of course a redundant entity, that much is clear. (Shout from the right: Look who's talking!) It would be good if the Landtag went to hell sooner rather than later. However, Ladies and Gentlemen, if you don't want the Landtag to resemble a complete farce to the outside world (shouting on the right), then you must at least ensure that your ministers provide an answer when asked by members of parliament'.<sup>314</sup> These sharp words mirrored Scholem's own dilemma – as a Communist advocating the rule of workers' councils, he regarded parliament as superfluous, while remaining committed to improving the condition of the country's schools at the same time. This stance is underscored by his tenacious interventions in subsequent debates, which when viewed as a whole outline a blueprint for educational reform in the Weimar Republic. When elaborating his educational reform concepts, Scholem drew not only on the debates within the KPD itself, but also on demands by the unions or the League of Radical School Reformers [*Bund entschiedener Schulreformer*], an association of progressive teachers, as well as ideas emerging from the USPD.<sup>315</sup> He debated the merits of his proposals not only inside the Landtag, but also at public meetings,<sup>316</sup> and was thus part of an active community of discussion and exchange between German educational reformers.

In his war of words with Boelitz, Scholem referred to the USPD's draft for the educational law of the state of Thuringia<sup>317</sup> and called for the abolishment of the tripartite school system of *Gymnasium*, *Realschule* and *Volksschule*. Within this system, pupils were formally classified according to their ability and performance, but in fact largely on a class basis. The sons and daughters of upper and middle class families finished primary school and then attended

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interested in retaining, or rather restoring, the old arrangement, as well as attracting other social layers attached to church and tradition, particularly in the rural areas', Becker and Kluckert 1993, p. 167 f.

314 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '183. Sitzung am 23. November 1922'.

315 Scholem referred to the League of Radical School Reforms as well as the trade unions in the 263rd session of the Landtag on 4 July 1923, and to school reforms drafted by the USPD in the 183rd session on 23 November 1922; see corresponding session minutes in *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924. On KPD education policies see Flach 1974 and Wothge 1961. On the League of Radical School Reformers see Bernhard and Eierdanz 1991.

316 Such as on 19 May 1923 in 'Dörings Festsäle' in Berlin-Kreuzberg, see announcement in 'Der Kultusetat und das Berliner Proletariat', *Rote Fahne* 106, 12 May 1923.

317 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '105. Sitzung am 23. Februar 1922'.

*Gymnasium* where they learned Latin and Greek, required to enter German universities. Another possibility was the *Realschule*, with its modern languages and vocational training preparing students for a career in business. The eight years of *Volksschule*, lacking all foreign language instruction, was the norm for most. Once set on this track, it was almost impossible to switch to *Gymnasium* later: even if a student from a working-class background found the financial means to sustain themselves for three additional years of schooling, they lacked the four years of language training in both Greek and Latin necessary to qualify for *Gymnasium* and later university.

Scholem sought to replace this system with a four-year primary school, followed by an intermediate level consisting of two strands, one of which would include foreign language instruction (French however replacing Latin), while the other would not. In the upper-intermediate forms eight to ten, then, this arrangement would continue and allow for an advanced level of schooling, including a higher education entrance qualification – again in two strands, either as a continuation of the upper-intermediate level with additional English classes, or Greek or Latin, alternatively.<sup>318</sup> Scholem went further, demanding that classes for national minorities such as the Polish population in East Prussia be taught in their respective native languages.<sup>319</sup> His proposals amounted to the integration of the public schools and the *Gymnasium* into a comprehensive school system, in addition to a reform of instructional content to include a stronger orientation towards practical and vocational education. Scholem thereby pursued two goals at once: firstly, the dissolution of the *Volksschule* as a ‘class school’ for the lower strata,<sup>320</sup> and, secondly, an overcoming of the ‘humanist’ education ideal with its mandatory Latin and Greek classes. The latter in particular was a thorn in Werner’s side: ‘I consider it pedagogical fiddle-faddle when Latin is imposed as a main subject for 9- and 10-year-old children.’<sup>321</sup>

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318 Ibid.

319 This was a controversial subject in the wake of the 1918 territorial concessions to Poland. The KPD demanded constitutionally just treatment for the Polish minority in Germany, as this was the only way to prevent discrimination against ethnic Germans living in the new Polish state. He accused the right of nationalist hypocrisy: ‘How do you intend to write about the rape of their minorities if you yourself rape the splinters living within the German borders?’ See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘261 Sitzung am 22. Juni 1923’.

320 On the strict division between the *Volksschule* and upper level schools in Weimar Germany see Kluchert, who speaks of ‘two empires of education’; Kluchert 1993, pp. 1–28.

321 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘105. Sitzung am 23. Februar 1922’.

His proposals, however, found little support, nor were they deemed worthy of rebuttal by other deputies. When he spoke of ‘class schools’, jokes were often made from the right: ‘nine classes, from sexta to prima’, deliberately mixing the traditional Latin names for school ‘classes’ with social class. Scholem was not at a loss for words: ‘Those old chestnuts you are calling out demonstrate to me that you did not use your *Gymnasium* education to learn how to make witty interjections, if nothing else!’ – according to the session’s minutes, his remark was met with ‘great amusement’ in parliament.<sup>322</sup> Even more vicious attacks failed to ruffle Werner Scholem’s feathers. When he called for making Latin an elective subject, a deputy on the right asked: ‘How about Hebrew?’ Scholem answered: ‘How about old Gothic? After all, Hebrew is taught at the secondary schools. I don’t know why owls should still be brought to Athens. [...] Every step is being taken so that you, esteemed colleague, can pursue your dream of learning Hebrew.’<sup>323</sup>

Anti-Semitic heckling would continue to dog Scholem, even when he took on the role of a pragmatic reformer, and was never interrupted or curbed by calls to order. Scholem nevertheless pushed on with his reform agenda, formulating proposals for a second educational track including cost-free vocational schools and democratic self-organisation of the student body.<sup>324</sup> As far as adult education was concerned, Scholem suggested expanding the system of public libraries and adult education centres already existent throughout Germany.<sup>325</sup> In his view, however, the libraries had to first be cleared of ‘religious, nationalist and militaristic rubbish’. The disentanglement of church and school and the separation of religion and state were central issues to Werner Scholem. On a later occasion, he would demand that the Prussian state cease paying the salaries of vicars and parsons.<sup>326</sup> The reaction he received was to be expected: an unnamed deputy shouted ‘synagogues are also among them!’, to which Scholem tersely replied, ‘Quite right, demagogues are also among them.’<sup>327</sup>

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322 Ibid.

323 Ibid.

324 Scholem called for introducing mandatory vocational education for young people under 20 years of age, funded by the employers themselves with instruction taking place during working hours. At that time, vocational schools had been left to municipalities as an optional measure, which often led to an overall reduction in schooling opportunities. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘263. Sitzung am 4. Juli 1923’.

325 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘111. Sitzung am 9. März 1922’.

326 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘261. Sitzung am 22. Juni 1923’.

327 Ibid.

Scholem's ultimate goal was the democratisation the school system, ridding it of monarchist and reactionary ideological residue. The 'hallowed school grounds', as a speaker from the DVP put it, were a 'putrid marsh' in Scholem's eyes, urgently in need of 'political drainage'.<sup>328</sup> To this end, he called for the introduction of instructional materials on democratic citizenship.<sup>329</sup> Once again, he had to defend himself against hecklers, and did so with characteristic wit: 'Someone is already shouting "Aha!" over there. The German Nationals feel nauseous just from hearing about civics instruction'.<sup>330</sup> With regard to the implementation of this new subject, Scholem demanded: 'that those teachers who are older than 50 years and too old to teach their classes in a modern spirit, instead maintaining a spirit of sedition and militarism, be removed at last and replaced by young republican teaching assessors'.<sup>331</sup> New teachers, however, first had to complete their training at one of the country's universities, most of which were themselves animated by a spirit similar to that in the schools, if not worse.

Scholem was characteristically unsparing in his criticism, labelling Weimar's institutions of higher education 'bulwarks of the old system' and substantiating his allegations with concrete examples. Many universities continued to host celebrations marking such festivities as the anniversary of the founding of the Reich or Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III's birthday, which frequently devolved into spectacles of anti-republican invective, often delivered by professors whose hefty salaries were financed by the very republic they claimed to despise. Their audience was similarly minded. Scholem named in particular reactionary student corps and fraternities whose by-laws stipulated that 'marriage with a coloured or Jewish woman annuls membership in these corporations'. He continued: 'Such rules are just more proof of the barbaric mindset of the corps students and should suffice to illustrate even to democratic and right-socialist circles that arguing benevolently with these people will achieve nothing'.<sup>332</sup> Scholem's diagnosis of the right-wing and anti-Semitic tendencies among student fraternities was confirmed by the interjections of other depu-

328 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '181. Sitzung am 25. Oktober 1922'.

329 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '263. Sitzung am 4. Juli 1923'.

330 *Ibid.*

331 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '199. Sitzung am 20. Januar 1923'.

332 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '104. Sitzung am 22. Februar 1922'.

ties while he spoke: 'very prudent!' echoed through the chamber as Scholem quoted from one such so-called 'Aryan paragraph'.<sup>333</sup>

Scholem recommended democratising the universities by hiring younger teaching staff: 'We must oppose the currently existing aristocracy of tenured professorships. For this reason, we also advocate improved conditions for the broad mass of unsalaried lecturers. The unsalaried lecturers are consoled with empty promises, although it is they who bear a substantive and important share of teaching work at the universities. If one sees that an unsalaried lecturer today may be earning 100 marks a month – and there are such cases – then action must be taken. We demand a harmonisation of salaries for university teaching staff, abolishing differences in rank, and the reorganisation of hiring procedures, in which the participation of the student body, and perhaps even the laymen, would have to be considered. This last demand, however, will only be realisable in the context of a comprehensive remodelling of the entire higher education system in the workers' state'.<sup>334</sup> Additionally, he called for the remittal of tuition fees for students of less well-off backgrounds, 'so that the working-class element will finally be seen at the universities'.<sup>335</sup> Scholem was committed to making the universities accessible to all of society, rejected the precarisation of non-professorial teaching staff and fought to revoke the professorial privileges of tenured professors. His reference to the 'workers' state', however, indicates that he perhaps doubted the feasibility of his proposals himself, as such far-reaching democratisation seemed impossible under the bourgeois state and would have to wait until the establishment of a socialist system.

The demeanour of some of his fellow Landtag members was as if on cue, confirming and reinforcing his pessimism. From the outset of his speech on university reform, Werner was 'greeted with clamour' from the right, to the

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333 See *ibid.* Moshe Zimmermann attributes a key role of the campuses in establishing the legitimacy of anti-Semitism among the 'respectable population': 'Anti-Semitism was particularly prevalent among the students. The *völkisch* German student associations emerged out of the *Kyffhäuserverband* [nickname for the original league of nationalist student corps], known for advocating for a *numerus clausus* and organising demonstrations against Jewish professors. The National Socialist student association dominated the broader student organisations by July 1931, after which anti-Semitic tendencies were accordingly prevalent and central', Zimmermann 1997, p. 41. The *numerus clausus* policy was intended to limit the number of Jewish students.

334 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '104. Sitzung, 22. Februar 1922'.

335 *Ibid.*

point that his deliberations ceased to be audible for most of the deputies in attendance. When at one point he demanded opening the universities to international students, the result was another hail of shouts from the right's benches. German universities were allegedly already heavily burdened by 'Galician' students. Scholem responded: 'If, indeed, you turn exclusively against the so-called "Galicians", then you must be completely honest about it; then you must say: in reality, we are really quite indifferent as to who enters the universities, as long as no Jews come in'. Indeed, the term 'Galician' denoted Eastern European immigrants, many of whom were Jewish. Shortly afterwards followed the vice-president's bell: 'Herr Deputy Scholem, you may not accuse those governing this state of being narrow-minded (amusement). It violates the order of this house, I therefore call you to order'.<sup>336</sup>

Scholem demanded social equality, democracy and internationalism, and the political right responded with anti-Semitism. But it was Scholem who was called to order, not the right-wing hecklers, and the democratic majority eventually voted against his reform proposals. Scholem tried again and again to challenge Social Democracy, to appeal to its republican conscience and win over its deputies. Their response, however, was usually rather muted, as the SPD relied on the votes of Centre Party and DVP for its governing majority. This came at the cost of relinquishing the education ministry to clerical conservatives like Otto Boelitz and forgoing reforms to the education system. Not all of the SPD's Landtag deputies approved of this compromise, however. SPD speaker Hildegard Wegscheider also criticised the minister during one of her speeches, prompting Scholem to call upon her to back up her words with actions: 'All of your deliberations were hypothetical: if things continue that way, then the politics of coalition is surely inadequate. It is rather obvious that no one will remove the reaction from schools that way, the reaction which has found its splendid representative in Herr Boelitz – who is now trying to escape the room so he needn't listen to my remarks (amusement). The reaction can only be eliminated from the education system if the influence Herr Boelitz and those circles backing him have on schools is broken, if we take that influence away from them. For one must certainly be clear about this: Herr Boelitz represents the spirit of Potsdam'. Asked by the right 'and what do you represent?', Scholem answered plainly: 'We represent the spirit of proletarian revolution, a very clear juxtaposition'.<sup>337</sup>

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336 Ibid.

337 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '181. Sitzung am 25. Oktober 1922'.

Yet Scholem and the KPD's parliamentary group failed to topple Boelitz. The minister served a full term and was only replaced in 1925, when electoral success allowed the SPD to free itself from its dependence on the DVP as a governing partner. Boelitz subsequently dabbled in writing, composing a school textbook on 'Germanness at the Borders and Abroad' that was denied approval for use in schools by the Prussian Ministry of Education on account of its deeply nationalist outlook. Only after Hitler's rise to power, warmly greeted by Boelitz in a letter to his publisher, did the book receive the required certification as instructional material.<sup>338</sup>

Thus, when Scholem observed that Boelitz often spoke warmly of 'national consciousness' while at the same time always remaining careful 'like an egg dancer' to avoid the word 'republic', this was more than just his usual polemic.<sup>339</sup> Boelitz stood for the spirit of right-wing nationalism that deliberately prevented democratic reforms in Germany and thus helped pave the way for fascism. Although he repeatedly ran into a proverbial brick wall, Scholem would continue to demand the democratisation of the education system throughout his four-year term. The parliament's disinterest in what he had to say is illustrated in a debate on the establishment of parents' councils in schools.

The KPD had proposed a motion demanding parents' councils with the right to participate in school-related decision-making.<sup>340</sup> Scholem reported on the curriculum committee's debate and was again interrupted by provocative laughter. According to Scholem, the parents' councils represented a prime example of how necessary reforms were frequently blocked by the 'grousing majority in the curriculum committee'.<sup>341</sup> Scholem continued: 'Not only were remarks made indicating that they associated these institutions with a rather unpleasant revolutionary stench, [...] on these grounds alone were our motions declaredly rejected by them'. At this point, the session's minutes indicate 'inter-

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338 Blänsdorf 2004, p. 304, p. 349.

339 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '181. Sitzung am 25. Oktober 1922'.

340 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '190 Sitzung am 1. Dezember 1922'. KPD politician Edwin Hoernle had already introduced the concept of parents' councils as an alternative to reform from above in January 1922. See Hoernle, 'Schulreaktion und proletarische Elternräte', Flach 1974. See also Wothge 1961, pp. 143–57.

341 Scholem was particularly critical of arguments justified by a lack of necessary funds: 'Here, however, and this is similar with many other motions submitted to the education budget, we are talking about things the implementation of which is absolutely feasible and would not cost an extra penny', see *ibid.*

jections from the right'. The nature of these interjections can be deduced from Scholem's response: 'Dear Herr colleague, I am in fact fully aware that you are an idiot; your anti-Semitic interjections and gestures only show that you are an idiot of remarkable magnitude.'<sup>342</sup> The president's bell would follow shortly and Scholem was called to order. The heckler went unrebuked. Scholem was furious: 'Herr President! I would like to establish that one of the deputies seems to be confusing the Landtag with the German Nationalist Protection and Defiance Federation [*Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund*]'.

Scholem was referring to the main umbrella organisation of the anti-Semitic right, founded in 1919 and banned in 1922 for suspected involvement in political assassinations. Scholem's angry comparison of the Landtag to the anti-Semitic *Trutzbund* provoked another remark from the right: 'Then you wouldn't be here!', followed by 'tumultuous amusement'. Scholem continued: 'I understand – (continuing amusement on the right) that when one has no arguments based on facts he of course must take recourse to anti-Semitic remarks. Idiots – and I am saying this again at the risk of being called to order once again – anti-Semitic idiots are too dumb to partake in a sober, fact-based conversation. That is precisely the root of anti-Semitism!'<sup>343</sup>

The parents' council debate represents a tragic embarrassment for the Prussian parliament. Reform proposals were ridiculed before they could even be presented, and the only counter-arguments heard were anti-Semitic slurs which went unrebuked by the chair of the session. In this specific case, the meeting was chaired by vice-president Wolfgang von Kries. As a member of the nationalist DNVP, he saw no reason to call his fellow party members to order. Other members of the presidium may not have been as openly biased, but there is nevertheless not a single recorded case in which the chair intervened to stop anti-Semitic attacks directed at Scholem. Eleven years later, the DNVP would serve in the government that facilitated Adolf Hitler's election to chancellor.

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342 Ibid.

343 Scholem also attacked those who interrupted him directly. In the minutes of the same session we read: 'Dear Herr Koch, it is fairly well-known that you generally are a very cheerful person [...] You have such a pleasant talent of easily drinking yourself into a happy mood. (continuing interjections and laughter from the right) – Dear Herr Koch, we can't all smell as nice as you do when you've been boozing (great amusement)'. The addressee was DNVP deputy Julius Koch. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '190. Sitzung am 1. Dezember 1922'.



### Anti-Semitism and the *Ostjuden* Debate

In spite of continual anti-Semitic derision, Werner Scholem never allowed himself to be pushed onto the defensive. He dealt out generously and refused to repudiate his Jewishness, although he remained an unwavering atheist. This became apparent not only from his reactions to hecklers, but also and particularly when the Landtag handled Jewish issues, such as a debate on whether the state should provide synagogues with tax revenues,<sup>344</sup> in which Scholem repeated his demand for the separation of religion and state at the cost of Jewish religious communities. He had already called for the abolition of all church taxes in 1923, arguing that religious congregations should ‘stop bothering the state with their concerns’.<sup>345</sup> Even more telling in this regard is a parliamentary debate on the ‘immigration of the *Ostjuden* to Germany’ initiated by a parliamentary interpellation from DNVP deputy Martin Kaehler, a professor of economics in Greifswald.<sup>346</sup> This debate will be briefly reconstructed in the following, for it not only sheds light on Scholem’s relationship to Judaism and the Jewish community in general, but also highlights the evolution of anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic.<sup>347</sup>

Kaehler’s interpellation concerned the so-called *Ostjuden* (‘Eastern Jews’) living in Germany. At the time, this term referred to Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who, in contrast to the assimilated *Westjuden* (‘Western Jews’), were characterised by their usage of the Yiddish language and adherence to religious orthodoxy. Moreover, they differed from the long-established Jews in their lower social position. Struggling to survive as destitute immigrants with a limited command of the German language, most were forced to eke out a sub-proletarian existence.<sup>348</sup> Official statistics estimated the number of East-

344 In Weimar Germany, the state collected taxes from religious citizens to fund the activities of churches and other religious institutions. A similar system continues to function in Germany today.

345 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘211. Sitzung am 24. Februar 1923’.

346 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922’. Along with these debates, the parliament also held a discussion on the topic of Zionism, in which Werner Scholem however did not speak. See Rolke 1998, p. 46.

347 See Rolke 1998, pp. 50–65. Rolke compares this exchange with a similar debate in the Prussian National Assembly in 1919 and a budget debate in 1920, in which the ‘*Ostjuden* question’ was raised in relation to the Berlin housing crisis.

348 *Ostjuden* were not, however, a socially, culturally or politically homogenous group. A middle class of educated and non-religious Jews also existed in Eastern Europe, some

ern Jewish labourers in Germany at 55,000 people, a figure Kaehler considered too low, 'because the larger share of the *Ostjuden* hardly seeks a living as workers in Germany'. Here Kaehler alluded to widespread belief that Jews avoided manual labour. His interpellation submitted on behalf of the DNVP declared the immigration of *Ostjuden* to be 'unwanted to the highest degree' and called for deportations.<sup>349</sup> Kaehler's explanation reads as if quoted from a handbook on modern anti-Semitism: according to him, there was 'no question that even today Bolshevism in Russia but also here in Germany is infiltrated by Eastern Jewish elements very strongly, in both leadership and membership'. In order to prove this, Kaehler cited a report by the liberal *Kölnische Zeitung* characterising the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe as 'dangerous' and insinuating that both the *Vorwärts* and the USPD paper *Freiheit* had been infiltrated by migrant *Ostjuden*. Kaehler was also able to cite an article from the SPD publication *Neue Zeit* in which member of the Landtag Theodor Müller attacked Eastern European 'traffickers' in a tone that made his reference to *Ostjuden* stereotypes obvious to contemporary listeners.<sup>350</sup> Aided by these and other statements from his political opponents, Kaehler went on to claim that 'as we know from experience, this kind of Jewry, when they turn to intellectual occupations, act as enemy of any and all authority and as subversive elements in general'.<sup>351</sup> He distanced himself from pogroms and 'anti-Semitic agitation', however, consciously limiting his attacks to the *Ostjuden* while sparing assimilated and established Jews – although his remarks contained veiled threats against them as well.<sup>352</sup>

Social Democratic Minister of the Interior Carl Severing was obliged to reply on behalf of the Prussian government, opening his speech with the fact that 'speakers who consider the radical right-wing organisations their political

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of whom would later join the German socialist movement, such as Rosa Luxemburg and Arkadi Maslow. In turn, there was also a layer of assimilated Jews, albeit relatively small, located within the industrial proletariat and the wider working class in Germany. See Zimmermann 1997, p. 22 f., p. 92 f., p. 97. On *Ostjuden* in Germany see Heid 1995 and 2011, as well as Maurer 1986.

349 Drucksache Nr. 2932 des Preußischen Landtages, Wahlperiode 1921–1924.

350 *Die Neue Zeit* 13, 24 June 1921; see also Heid, 'Proletarier zu sein und Jude dazu, das bedeutet unsägliches Leid', Heid and Paucker 1992.

351 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922'.

352 According to Kaehler, should German Jews choose to defend their eastern 'brothers of tribe and faith' unconditionally, then 'Western Jewry would saw off the strong branch upon which it yet sits among us', *ibid.*

and *völkisch* interest representation go to great lengths to blame the Jews for the economic and political misery under which we are currently suffering'.<sup>353</sup> Severing made reference to Lessing's drama *Nathan the Wise* and reminded deputies 'that we are not first born into this world as Christians, not as Jews, and not as Mohammedans, but first and foremost as human beings'. He sought to uphold this while 'still also serving German interests'.

His appeal to progressive values aside, these 'interests' constituted the dominant line of argument throughout Severing's speech, lending it a rather dubious character. He began by acknowledging the 'foreigner problem' as a serious issue, and subsequently addressed his speech to the League of Nations, claiming that Germany could not afford to take in any more Jewish families currently being expelled from Hungary in large numbers: 'In any case, the current food situation, the state of the German housing market as well as the future outlook of the economy and the labour market are not suited to allowing more foreigners to enter our country. (Very correct! from the DNVP) You see, Gentlemen, if we only debate things objectively we can at least find many points of commonality'.<sup>354</sup>

Applause from the DNVP did not trouble the Social Democrat Severing, who sought to portray himself as a tough law and order politician. He justified political concessions on immigration policy exclusively in terms of the rights of German minorities abroad: 'Should we draw the barbarians' odium upon us by toughening policing of foreigners during these times, [...] you may rest assured that our fellow countrymen will be treated in a similar way'. Additionally, Severing boasted of not only putting forward, but even tightening the sanctions in a decree on *Ostjuden* immigration.<sup>355</sup> He explicitly praised the fact that 'the

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353 Ibid.

354 Ibid. The abbreviation 'D.-nat.V.-P.' used in the original minutes has been shortened to 'DNVP' in the following.

355 On 1 November 1919, Prussian Justice Minister Wolfgang Heine (SPD) decreed that Eastern Jews brought to Prussia as labourers during the World War would be granted residency if they could prove they had both employment and lodgings, while deportation awaited those who could not. These sorts of deportations could often be averted with help from the local community or the self-organised Jewish Workers' Welfare Office founded for this purpose (see Maurer 1986, p. 270 ff. as well as Elsner 1993). However, mandatory registration with local police authorities and regular passport inspections under threat of deportation made it impossible for *Ostjuden* to consolidate even a modicum of social status. The journalist Joseph Roth summed it up well when he wrote, 'Freed from the struggle for papers [...] is an *Ostjude* only when he conducts the struggle against society with illegal means', quoted in Reinecke 2010, p. 307; see also p. 317 f. and p. 327 f. on the criminalisation of the *Ostjuden* by police and civil administration.

previous speaker has taken great pains to address the problem with the due objectivity', as well as the work of Jewish charity organisations in facilitating a swift onward journey for many Eastern Jewish immigrants. Severing concluded: 'First and foremost, of course, it must be the German who is entitled to decent housing, food provisions and work opportunities'. For that he received 'lively agreement from both left and right'.<sup>356</sup>

Severing's speech was followed by a contribution from Hans von Eynern, a representative of the SPD's conservative coalition partner DVP. He similarly praised the German National Kaehler for his 'objectivity' and 'stately general tone'. Von Eynern noted that a general 'foreigner problem' had indeed emerged at the end of the war. Correspondingly, anti-Semitism was not 'a consequence of the emergence of this new national-social party', but rather 'that anti-Semitism had reached full bloom precisely as a result of the influx of these unwanted elements, which finds expression in this movement that we all, including the delegates of the DNVP, lament very much'. Hans von Eynern referred to the Nazi Party, founded in Bavaria in 1920 but now spreading north. The emergence of this National Socialist German Workers' Party [*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP] was met with disapproval by the DVP, probably because it represented additional, unwelcome political competition. Thus the speaker from the DVP, as Kaehler before him, placed the blame for anti-Semitism on Jews themselves. But he exempted long-established German Jews, even inviting them to 'tackle the problem of the *Ostjuden*' together with the DVP. After all, von Eynern reasoned, *Ostjuden* immigration was particularly 'unpopular' among German Jews.<sup>357</sup>

Werner Scholem was next on the list of speakers. After the previous orators had all congratulated each other on their objectivity, it was now Scholem's turn to take the debate in a new direction. Scholem conceded that the previous speakers had been correct in one aspect, namely the fact that German Jews were in many cases quite hostile towards the immigrating *Ostjuden*: 'The long-established Germany Jewry, as far as it is capitalist, has the strongest interest [...] that no more competition for this German capitalist Jewry comes to Germany. [...] But why are the *Ostjuden* so unpopular in Germany in the first place?

356 Severing had called for an end to all immigration as early as 1920 in a debate on the housing crisis. He rejected right-wing deputies' demand to intern all Eastern Jews, because 'housing and feeding' the *Ostjuden* 'at public expense' would surely provoke even further protest. See Rolke 1998, p. 54f. as well as *Protokolle der Preußischen Landesversammlung*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '149. Sitzung am 7. Juli 1920'.

357 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922'.

[...] The truth is that the *Ostjuden* are a tribe of sharp intelligence – a fact that is undisputed, and such competition is of course feared.<sup>358</sup> Scholem was interrupted at this point. The heckler's interjection is not documented, but it seems that Scholem was accused of being an *Ostjude* himself. Scholem took this as an opportunity to clarify his position: 'Very well, if you think that I speak here as a representative of these circles, I am very flattered indeed. You would have to pay a lot more attention to what such a representative would have to say. But I for my part may say [...] that I am not a representative of German Jewry, nor of the *Ostjuden*. Whenever I take the floor here, I do so as a representative of the proletarian circles, both German and Eastern European proletarians.'<sup>359</sup> Scholem did not see himself as speaking on behalf of Jewry as such, but nonetheless refused to deny his Jewish heritage. He would confirm this only a few sentences later with the words 'a German Jew like me'. Far from denial, he went so far as to express pride in his Jewishness, repeatedly praising the 'intelligence and sharpness of mind' of the *Ostjuden*.<sup>360</sup> However, Scholem was not satisfied with simply counterposing anti-Semitism with a positive Jewish self-image. He insisted on addressing the question from a proletarian perspective, which to him was more than propaganda. By highlighting the role of *Ostjuden* as workers, Scholem was able to marginalise both Severing's 'foreigner problem' as well as Kaehler's anti-Semitism and address the underlying social problem: labour migration in post-war Europe.<sup>361</sup>

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358 Essentially, assimilated German Jews feared a rise in anti-Semitism and thus a threat to their own social status. Many distanced themselves from the *Ostjuden*, while the Jewish community simultaneously shouldered social responsibility by establishing various Jewish welfare organisations. See Maurer 1986, p. 482 f. as well as pp. 508–759.

359 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922'.

360 Here we can find traces of Scholem's Zionist past, for *Ostjuden* were considered 'undisguised' representatives of Jewry in the Zionist milieus of his youth, where a veritable 'cult' had formed around them; see Scholem 2012, p. 44.

361 Rolke criticises Scholem's speech for, as a Communist, having 'only the Eastern Jewish proletarians' in mind and defending them for 'purely ideological reasons'. In her view, he distinguishes between capitalist *Westjuden* and proletarian *Ostjuden* and only defends the latter, who were 'among other things, rather coincidentally Jewish as well', see Rolke 1998, p. 53, p. 63. Beyond the fact that Scholem praised the *Ostjuden* as 'intelligent' due to their Jewishness, this view also ignores that Scholem was the only deputy who moved beyond the inherently anti-Semitic discourse of an '*Ostjuden* problem' and counterposed it with a debate on labour migration. His speech can only be considered problematic if one chooses to interpret him as equating all German Jews with 'the capitalists' – Scholem, however, speaks of 'long-established German Jewry, *insofar* as it is capitalist' and stresses

Scholem maintained that ‘we are not only talking about *Ostjuden*, but about all the Eastern Europeans coming to Germany’. He criticised the practice of the ‘organs of the Ministry of the Interior, who are unfortunately very receptive to anti-Semitic influence’ and demanded an end to all bans on labour migration, irrespective of nationality or religion. Speculators, traffickers and criminals, on the other hand, ought to be dealt with harshly and equally as irrespective of their national origin.<sup>362</sup> Scholem would not allow himself to be drawn into discussions of any sort of ‘Jewish problem’ or ‘race question’, instead returning again and again to the social question. By shouting ‘*Ostjude!*’, the right sought to lure him back onto their ground, but Scholem refused. The heights of the anti-Semites’ delusion became evident when he again spoke of ‘Eastern Jewish proletarians’ and a heckler from the right interjected with ‘There is no such thing!’.

Scholem took this opportunity to recount a brief history of Eastern Jewish immigration in Germany.<sup>363</sup> He pointed to the World War, in which the German military command had issued a decree to the Jewish-Polish population in Yiddish, and read out a German translation of some of the central passages: ‘We come to you as friends. The barbaric foreign government has been toppled. Equal rights for Jews in Poland shall rest on a solid foundation [...] Do not let yourself be fooled by Tsarism’s promises. It is now everyone’s holy duty to stand together with the Germans and fight for liberation.’<sup>364</sup> Scholem’s quotations prompted angry outbursts from the floor, yet he went further, reminding his colleagues how forced labourers had been recruited from the occupied territories during the final stages of the war, among them many Jews from Eastern Europe.<sup>365</sup> Scholem went into great detail, which in turn provoked further heckling: ‘This population was thus ordered onto the market square. Upon their

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the existence of non-capitalist Jews; see Rolke 1998. On Jewish migration see Reinecke 2010.

362 Scholem even demanded: ‘We think every trafficker and every usurer belongs in gaol and that as long as the death penalty is applied, it should be given to traffickers and usurers’. The qualification ‘as long as’, however, suggests that this was not actually the position of the KPD. In fact, Scholem would call for abolishing the death penalty a few weeks later, describing it as ‘judicial murder’ and the executioners of the Prussian prison system as ‘statutory murderers’. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922’ and ‘210. Sitzung am 23. Februar 1923’.

363 For more historical background, see Heid 1995 and Maurer 1986, pp. 34–81.

364 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922’.

365 See Maurer 1986, p. 36 ff. Recruitment was abandoned in April 1918, however – see Reinecke 2010, p. 309.

arrival, soldiers of the municipal authority rounded them up and made sure that these Jews were unable to return to their homes. They were taken to the train station with nothing but the clothes they were wearing (Hear ye, hear ye!) without being allowed to say goodbye to anyone, and were taken to Germany. (Hear ye, hear ye, interjection from the right). Do you want to deny this, Herr Kaehler? (Dep. Dr Kaehler: I didn't say anything) – Oh, I see, Herr Kaehler is now backing down (interjection on the right). Well, they are undeniable facts after all'.<sup>366</sup>

That Scholem's statements were based on facts was proven over the course of the debate by the almost surreal appearance of a particular witness. Dr Victor Bredt of the 'Economic Party of the German Middle Classes' [*Wirtschaftspartei des deutschen Mittelstandes*] is recorded as stating: 'Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, I am quite familiar with [the] *Ostjuden* in Poland, for I was stationed in a Polish position during the war, where I was charged with the administration of the district of Czenostochau [Polish: Czestochawa] [...]. But let me say up front: It was the most unpleasant task of my entire life to conscript all the Jews from Czenostochau and send them to Germany as workers. I do not seek to make myself look better than I am: the reason was not some overwhelming compassion or altruism, but simply the fact that I thought it was a great stupidity. We surely became very unpopular and even hated among Poles because of this. [...] That didn't help though, all those people still failed to work (great amusement). Herr Scholem, I was in charge of the matter myself and know every detail about it. Of course, at first it was a great calamity, as those people were shipped across the border amidst terrible hue and cry. After eight days, everything was back to normal'.<sup>367</sup> Here, KPD deputy Schulz from Berlin-Neukölln interrupted him by exclaiming: 'You ought to be placed on the war criminals list!' Bredt reacted calmly, stating: 'Dear deputy Schulz, put me on that list if you must!' The deportation of civilians for purposes of forced labour did in fact constitute a breach of the Hague Convention with respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land of 1899,<sup>368</sup> but international law had already been suspended by the German

366 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922'.

367 The productivity of Jewish forced labourers, at least during deployment in the eastern territories, was evaluated as low, which the historian Trude Maurer attributes to poor nourishment and maltreatment, see Maurer 1986, p. 36.

368 This document stated in article 52 that with regard to the treatment of occupied populations: 'Neither requisitions in kind nor services can be demanded from communes or inhabitants except for the necessities of the army of occupation. They must be in proportion to the resources of the country, and of such a nature as not to involve the population

invasion of Belgium in 1914. The rule of law was replaced by the power of violence, an experience that left a deep impression on the political culture of the Weimar Republic. Bredt's absolute lack of guilt was symptomatic of the mindset of the interwar society in which the German population, and veterans and former members of the military in particular, portrayed itself as an innocent victim of the victorious powers.<sup>369</sup>

Scholem also brought up the culture of impunity and blatant public glorification surrounding German war crimes: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, if such deeds were committed, then a parliamentary group still seeking to cover up for the actions of the old German system is the last to have the right to demand that those who were forcibly brought here should now be forcibly thrown out of the country once again'.<sup>370</sup> It was this national hypocrisy, Germany's staged role as victim and savage ignorance towards supposedly inferior others, which Scholem denounced and condemned time and again in the Landtag. In concluding his speech, he returned to the realities of modern life for Jewish workers: the Ruhr region alone was home to between 13,000 and 15,000 Jewish proletarians, among them 4,000 miners working below ground.<sup>371</sup> According to Scholem, statements by the local employment office and trade unions indicated that German workers were 'working together with these *Ostjuden* workers in the best conceivable manner'. The situation was largely the same in agriculture, he added: 'For example, I know for a fact that the lords of Pomeranian manors have requested Jewish farm workers four times this year'. The massive farms in East Prussia and Pomerania were operated by the traditional aristocracy, the so-called Junkers, and by some well-off middle class businessmen who bought themselves manors. They had suffered from labour shortages after

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in the obligation of taking part in military operations against their country'. Only prisoners of war could be forced to participate in war operations against their native country, although strict rules such as mandatory payment and humane treatment applied here as well. See *Laws and Customs of War on Land* (Hague 11) 1899.

369 Victord Bredt also distanced himself from anti-Semitism, only to downplay the severity of pogroms in his next breath by comparing them to looting. He ended with the demand: 'Something must be done so that these elements, who have no business here, get out of Germany'. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922'.

370 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922'.

371 Moshe Zimmermann points out that a German Jewish industrial proletariat existed alongside *Ostjuden* immigration, which, for example, encompassed roughly 10–12 percent of Berlin Jews. This group tended to expand due to processes of pauperisation and proletarianisation among Jewish clerks and skilled labourers, see Zimmermann 1997, p. 97.



the revolution, when new laws significantly improved legal conditions for agricultural labourers. Ironically enough, a brother of DNVP deputy Reinhold Wulle was among these large landowners. Scholem concluded: ‘These Aryan people with the skulls of Pomeranian Junkers would not request *Ostjuden* if they didn’t think that the *Ostjuden* farm workers were a modest, diligent proletarian element willing to work.’<sup>372</sup> His closing remark for the German Nationals was: ‘All you do is try to prey on the people’s desperation, for when they are confronted with nothing but misery, anti-Semitism represents the prime tool for deflecting their attention away from the true culprits of the people’s misery’. He then concluded in the name of the KPD: ‘Thus, we clearly reject the notion of an *Ostjuden* problem as such’. Likewise, Scholem rejected the restrictive immigration policy put forward by Severing, calling instead for a ‘migration policy favourable to workers and hostile to capitalists’.<sup>373</sup>

Scholem was the first speaker up to that point who had neither propagated nor downplayed anti-Semitism, but in fact expressed adamant opposition to it. He was the only one to point out the interconnected nature of economic crisis and xenophobia. Only one speaker would subsequently take a similarly definitive stance: Scholem’s former USPD comrade Oskar Cohn, who had returned to the SPD with the rest of the remaining USPD in 1922. Cohn referred to his own German-Jewish family history and spoke positively of the contributions made by the *Ostjuden* in particular as ‘bearers of the German idea and municipal self-administration’ in Prussia’s eastern provinces. Jews had even acted as mediators between East and West during the war and served the Germans as interpreters, he continued. Unfortunately, their efforts were met with little appreciation: ‘They were treated by Germany with all due ungratefulness, and repaid for their services during the war with pogroms in Ukraine and Poland in 1919’.<sup>374</sup> Although Cohn referred somewhat positively to the ‘German idea’, he nevertheless criticised the previous speakers’ utilitarianism. In his view, they had considered freedom of movement ‘only from the most narrow perspective of utility; migration is good if it serves German national interests, [...] but what

372 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922’. Reinhold Wulle (1882–1950) served in the Reichstag for the DNVP and later founded the anti-Semitic German Völkisch Freedom Party [*Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei*], which participated in a common electoral list with the NSDAP in 1924. See Schumacher 1994.

373 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922’.

374 *Ibid.*

is bad is a population element, namely coming from the east, that may harm or be uncomfortable in the eyes of business circles represented here by deputy Fischbeck and Herr Dr Kaehler'.<sup>375</sup>

It was thus left to two socialist Jews to articulate a public condemnation of anti-Semitism and demand a migration policy untainted by national chauvinism in the chambers of parliament.<sup>376</sup> Such a move, however, was clearly already out of the question for Minister of the Interior Severing. Although he opposed anti-Semitism, he continued to defend a restrictive immigration policy, fully in line with the Prussian administration's elaborate system of migration controls dating back to the 1880s. Neither the November Revolution nor the Social Democratic turn in Prussia could stop this process, which would only reach its final conclusion in the 1920s.<sup>377</sup>

This national isolationism was founded upon an increasingly ethnic-nationalist discourse revolving around German nationality and German interests. Although ethnic nationalism had existed since the Kaiserreich, it became a dominant motif on the right in response to the military defeat and revolution of 1918. Within this framework, the *Ostjuden* represented the opposite, the 'Other' against which Germanness was defined.

The new nationalism was also prevalent beyond the right, particularly when 'national interests' were concerned. Severing's speech and his attempts to find common ground with the DNVP demonstrate this well. Nevertheless, it came into conflict with universalist concepts supported not only by Social Democrats, but even the Christian parties. For instance, Centre Party politician Friedrich Leonartz declared: 'My party vehemently rejects any rowdy anti-Semitism as well as any other kind of public sedition that goes against the principle of Christian love. We are appalled and unwilling to accept that part of the German people are treated in such a despicable way as some parts of

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375 Ibid.

376 Social Democrat Ernst Heilmann also involved himself in other debates against anti-Semitic remarks, such as his vigorous defence of the *Ostjuden* during the housing crisis debate in July 1920. Iwan Katz spoke on the topic for the KPD in May 1921, using statistics to disprove the common assertion that Eastern Jewish immigrants were the cause of the housing crisis. Like Scholem and Cohn, Katz and Heilmann were both left politicians of Jewish descent. See Rolke 1998, p. 56 ff. as well as *Protokolle der Preußischen Landesversammlung*, '149. Sitzung am 7. Juli 1920'; *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '16. Sitzung am 4. Mai 1921'.

377 See Elsner 1993 and Reinecke 2010, p. 380 f. The newly-drawn eastern borders after the first World War required Prussia's customs and immigration systems to be completely rebuilt, see Reinecke 2010, p. 309 ff.

the press are currently doing'. Yet at the same time, Leonartz explained that 'in the foreigner question, for us it will always be the German interest that is paramount'. Altruism and national interests were not a contradiction in his eyes: 'I just spoke of Christian love, that kind of Christian love which according to our faith we owe to all human beings, we indeed owe first and foremost to our German people. (Exactly! from the right)'.<sup>378</sup> Encouraged by the support he received from the right, Leonartz continued: 'Indeed, I believe that the interests of the German people, of our German brothers, have priority over the interests of any elements of foreign origin', and invoked the housing shortage in Berlin as a specific example.<sup>379</sup> Given this state of affairs, Leonartz continued, the delegates would 'surely agree with me that it is inappropriate when Jews, or foreigners in general, stake claims to flats to the extent that they do here in Berlin'. He ended his speech with an appeal to the audience's patriotism: 'And one thing is certain: the German people will only once again return to former greatness and the irredentists<sup>380</sup> will only return to us and our culture if we help ourselves, if we rely on ourselves and determinedly resist all that is unhealthy and foreign'. We can ascertain from the session's minutes that this was not an individual opinion within political Catholicism, as loud cheers of 'Bravo!' are recorded issuing from the Centre Party parliamentary group.<sup>381</sup>

The fourth and smallest party in the governing coalition with SPD, Centre Party and DVP was the left-liberal DDP. It was considered an opponent of anti-Semitism, certainly one of the reasons why Scholem's mother Betty was a sympathiser.<sup>382</sup> In the debate on the *Ostjuden*, however, it became clear that

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378 Ibid.

379 'The stereotypical image of Eastern European Jews as profiteers and extortionists taking food and jobs away from Germans developed into a recurring figure in the contemporary discourse,' Reinicke 2010, p. 309.

380 'Irredentism', from the Italian expression *terre irredente* ('unredeemed'), originally referred to the Italian national movement's demand for unification of all Italians under one state. Here, the term refers to German populations in areas separated from the German Reich after 1918.

381 Open anti-Semitism remained a taboo in the party due to the lasting impression left by Ludwig Windhorst (1812–91), but religious anti-Semitism had always been present, albeit in a latent form. Thus, during a National Assembly debate in 1920 concerning the appointment of socialist Kurt Löwenstein to the Greater Berlin School Council, a speaker from the Centre Party rejected him explicitly for his Jewish heritage. See Rolke 1998, p. 44. On the Centre Party and anti-Semitism see also Herzig 2006, p. 187 and p. 231.

382 See Herzig 2006, p. 221. Herzig stresses that the DDP, along with the SPD, was the only party in the Weimar Republic prepared to nominate Jewish candidates for parliamentary elec-

some senior DDP deputies were unable to resist the anti-Semitic zeitgeist. The speaker for the liberals in the Landtag was Otto Fischbeck, one of the DDP's founding fathers and former Prussian Minister of State for Trade and Commerce. Fischbeck responded to Severing: 'I agree with the Minister. The misery we suffer from is exacerbated and augmented by the influx not only of foreign Jews, but of foreigners in general'. As far as anti-Semitism was concerned, he first mentioned his membership in the 'Society to Combat Anti-Semitism' [*Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus*]. He then proceeded: 'I consider it an unfortunate attempt to fend off anti-Semitism by denying things which everyone can see. My party, perhaps more than any other party, has suffered accusations of being a "Jewish party" both outside and inside this house. We notice this during electoral campaigns, and quite some abuse has been poured over us for that reason alone. (Very true! From the DDP). We will continue to stand by our liberal principles in the future, and demand the equality of all German citizens belonging to the German cultural community, who live and want to stay here in Germany and who are prepared to bear the burden of serving the Fatherland together with us, without consideration of their religion.'<sup>383</sup> Beyond citizenship, the liberal Fischbeck named a number of other conditions for recognising Jews as citizens worthy of equal rights. In conclusion, Fischbeck invoked the 'community of these German Jews with their fellow Germans' and sought to win over assimilated Jews for the fight against the *Ostjuden*: 'They wish to stand together with us against these strangers, who are crossing the borders into our country by the masses and often lead to such appalling conditions as I described before. Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, just as we do not want the German Jews to be affected by the behaviour of these elements clearly of a lower cultural level, we likewise do not want the latter to be spared simply because they adhere to the Jewish religion.'<sup>384</sup> Fischbeck also viewed the *Ostjuden* as inferior and bothersome 'elements'. He complained at length about their speculative activities in gold and currency trading, and loudly greeted new stock exchange regulations 'which impede access to the stock market for such dubious persons'. Even the war hero Victor Bredt realised that something

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tions, but unfortunately does not mention the KPD, USPD or Lenin League [*Leninbund*] which also did so. The DDP openly abandoned its fight against anti-Semitism after 1930 and fused with the anti-Semitic 'Young German Order' [*Jungdeutscher Orden*] to form the 'German State Party' [*Deutsche Staatspartei*]. See Herzig 2006, p. 221f.

383 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '188. Sitzung am 29. November 1922'.

384 *Ibid.*

was not quite right with Fischbeck's speech. He remarked laconically: 'Formally this speech was supposedly about opposing anti-Semitism, yet substantively it was simply an anti-Semitic speech. (Absolutely! From the left). [...] I was a bit puzzled as to why the gentlemen on the right did not loudly applaud it (shouts from the right: We certainly did!) – alright, then all is well'.<sup>385</sup>

'Then all is well' – in November 1922, a hate-filled tirade against Eastern Jewish immigrants in the Prussian Landtag received cross-party support from Catholics, German Nationals, left-liberals, and National Liberals. Social Democracy stayed out of the anti-Semitic fray, but made great efforts to accommodate the political right through a restrictive migration policy. Only a single representative of the party's left wing, namely Oskar Cohn, distanced himself from the immigration policy and defended the immigrants. The second opposing speech was delivered by Werner Scholem, who, as both Communist and Jew, was an outsider among the Weimar democrats in a double sense. To conclude, let us look at one last observation Scholem made halfway through the debate: 'Once again we must note that no one has openly defended anti-Semitism in this house, as one must have feared being less than successful with it'.<sup>386</sup> Indeed, not a single speaker openly adhered to an anti-Semitic race theory – with the possible exception of Dr Kaehler from the DNVP, who insinuated as much when demanding Germany establish racial immigration criteria along the lines of the New York immigration authorities. Remarkable is that Kaehler, in this instance as well as others, remained careful to base himself on arguments originating from outside the right-wing spectrum. This discursive strategy demonstrates that the verbally or physically abusive style of 'rowdy anti-Semitism' [*Radauantisemitismus*] later considered characteristic of Weimar Germany was not accepted in mainstream political debate in the early 1920s. Even the nationalist DNVP would wait until 1929 to introduce an 'Aryan paragraph' and exclude Jews from membership.<sup>387</sup> By 1922, however, the 'rowdy anti-Semitic' current had lost a significant amount of support following the Rathenau assassination, and the 'German Nationalist Protection and Defiance Federation' [*Deutschvölkischer Schutz und Trutzbund*] so often cited by Scholem was even banned. Radically anti-Semitic parties such as the Nazis already existed, but had yet to develop a mass base. Anti-Semitism further receded as the economy stabilised post-1924, as historian Arno Herzig confirms: 'As much as anti-Semitism marked the political (non-)culture of the post-war years, as

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385 Ibid.

386 Ibid.

387 Herzig 2006, p. 213.

abrupt was its decline in political significance after 1923, suggesting that anti-Semitism could be politically activated and deployed in times of crisis.<sup>388</sup>

This drop in anti-Semitism would remain a relatively brief episode, however. Statements addressing *Ostjuden* immigration by deputies across party lines show that although open support for anti-Semitism may have been taboo, anti-Semitic stereotypes deeply informed deputies' thinking well into democratic circles. Behind a wave of denials and distancing lay a host of anti-Jewish clichés, from which assimilated German Jews were always considered exempt. Even a speaker like Severing, who did not personally make anti-Semitic remarks, felt obliged to praise the supposedly 'objective argumentation' of the extreme right. This political bridge-building operated through the common ideological denominator of 'German interests' faced with the existential threat of the Treaty of Versailles, which also led to widespread fears of Germany being culturally overrun by foreigners, even among the ranks of the SPD. Isolated anti-Semitic incidents occurred within the Social Democratic parliamentary group as well: Scholem complained of anti-Semitic heckling from SPD deputy Theodor Ulmer, and Iwan Katz was also attacked with anti-Semitic slurs by SPD representatives on one occasion.<sup>389</sup> Yet Social Democracy as a whole distanced itself from such abuse, and anti-Semitism was definitively not an accepted part of the party's political culture. The same was true for the KPD, which also witnessed isolated anti-Semitic incidents, but was not an anti-Semitic party as such – otherwise Werner Scholem never could have the impact on the party detailed here. Given the intense and wildly fluctuating levels of anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic, neither of the two workers' parties nor their hundreds of thousands of members could have remained entirely free of anti-

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388 Ibid.

389 Scholem stated the following: 'I must note that it is a specialty of delegate Ulmer to insult members of this parliament as "Jew louts" [*Judenbengel*], which certainly adds to the DNVP fraction's appeal'. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1928, '248. Sitzung am 7. Juni 1923'. Ulmer was also originally from the USPD. The interjection in Katz's case is likewise recorded, Katz was derided with a shout of 'Jew!' from the ranks of the newly reunited SPD in 1923, see *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1928, '288. Sitzung am 15. Dezember 1923'; see also Rolke 1998, p. 14. Hints of similar anti-Semitic interjections from the SPD are available for the Reichstag in the final days of the Kaiserreich. Klaus Gietinger establishes how the Social Democratic anti-war figure Hugo Haase was attacked by pro-war Social Democrats in March 1916. He names the shouts of 'The Jew-youth must go!' from Gustav Bauer and 'The Jew gang must be brought to an end!' from Carl Legien. Neither interjection appears in the session minutes, however, but were first brought up at a meeting of an association of office workers, see Gietinger 2009, p. 52 and p. 411; Gietinger in turn cites Rintelin 1993, p. 116.

Semitic attitudes and behaviours. Nevertheless, on the whole they served as protected spaces in which Jewish and non-Jewish politicians and activists could work together and join forces against the ethnic nationalism propagated by the right.<sup>390</sup>

Rapprochement failed to occur between the KPD and SPD during the *Ostjuden* debate due to the parties' highly divergent relationships to and understandings of the nation, which had divided them since the war. While the SPD committed itself to defending the 'national' interest in 1914, the KPD remained tied to a principled internationalist worldview. Social Democratic acceptance of a German *raison d'état* was the political glue that held the Prussian 'grand coalition' together. For the SPD, this meant supporting an isolationist policy when it came to the question of immigration – albeit not one based on anti-Semitism, but rather on the alleged protection of the national interest.

### A Reluctant Republican? Fighting Right-Wing Terror and Fascism

Due to both the continuous hostility directed against his person as well as his intense engagement with the stagnation of educational reform, Werner Scholem was very much aware of the fragile nature of the republican order. Although he regarded the republic as a form of bourgeois class rule doomed to perish, he was still very sensitive to the fact that Communists could not remain indifferent to the possibility of democracy being overthrown by the right. Such an overthrow would not advance the goal of a council republic, but instead meant the repression of any and all political activity on the left. The Communists, firmly rooted in the revolutionary tradition, were historical enemies of the right, united by their hatred for the 'Criminals of November'.

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390 A register of anti-Semitic incidents in the Weimar KPD can be found in Keßler 2005. Olaf Kistenmacher takes these and similar examples to hypothesise the existence of an anti-Semitic tradition within the KPD, see Kistenmacher 2007. Compared to all other parties, however, the workers' parties of SPD, USPD and KPD, founded upon internationalist ideals, had the most effective arguments against ethnic-nationalist anti-Semitism. Construing a tradition out of this series of incidents appears questionable, particularly given a host of prominent counter-examples such as the role of Werner Scholem as KPD speaker in the *Ostjuden* debate described here. It should also be noted that the KPD was always the main target of anti-Semitic attacks and polemics affecting not only Jewish politicians like Scholem, but which, through the right's construction of a 'Jewish Bolshevism', came to include the entire KPD and even parts of the SPD. The Nazis would repress both parties indiscriminately after taking power in 1933.

Therefore, the notion that there was such a thing as a coalition of 'left-wing and right-wing extremists' against the republic in the Prussian Landtag, as some historians claim, can easily be ruled out. In fact, the KPD often called on state authorities to crack down on the right-wing enemies of the republic, although they knew from experience that police and judiciary were usually unwilling to do so.

The KPD made great efforts to denounce appearances of monarchist or right-wing groups during its parliamentary work, a task to which Werner Scholem was particularly dedicated. In a debate on 30 November 1922, he spoke on behalf of two motions the KPD had submitted the previous June. One of them condemned the toleration of monarchist events held by municipal and state authorities in East Prussia, Silesia and other parts of the country,<sup>391</sup> while another motion personally submitted by Scholem addressed an appearance of Field Marshal General Hindenburg in Königsberg in June 1922.<sup>392</sup> Scholem emphatically declared his opposition to such a gathering: 'Hindenburg, the monarchy's business traveller (tumultuous commotion on the right), the man upon whose name being uttered the entire working class remembers those "glory days" that lie behind it (interjection on the right), this man will continue to go on his business trips across East Prussia on behalf of the reaction and the counter-revolution (That's right! From the Communists), while the republican authorities, who are not called to order by the Prussian government, these so-called republican authorities which are a mockery of the republic (That's right! From the Communists) will continue to support him in his counter-revolutionary endeavours. Should the Landtag continue to tolerate this, then it will unambiguously demonstrate that it is a Landtag not of the republic, but of the monarchy and the counter-revolution.'<sup>393</sup> Scholem had experienced the aforementioned 'glory days' first hand as a frontline soldier in the Eastern Army Group commanded by Hindenburg himself, and considered it unacceptable for such a figure to glorify the war and the Kaiserreich with the state's support.

It seems that many agreed with him in Königsberg as well: a workers' demonstration 'for the republic and against the monarchy' was organised in response, ending in confrontation when several army divisions broke out of the parade and attacked the counter-demonstration. One civilian was killed by bayonet

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391 This toleration, or rather acquiescence, occurred through measures such as the organising of school delegations; Drucksache Nr. 2996 des Preußischen Landtages, Wahlperiode 1921–1924.

392 Drucksache Nr. 3001 des Preußischen Landtages, Wahlperiode 1921–1924.

393 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '146. Sitzung am 13. Juni 1922'.



thrusts and several other demonstrators were wounded by gunfire. Königsberg was not an isolated case: indeed, a similar police attack on republican demonstrators occurred in the Brandenburg town of Zossen in June 1922, albeit without fatalities. Scholem commented: 'These bloody events were only possible because the army and other bodies of the Prussian government actively participated in these monarchist and anti-republican rallies everywhere'.<sup>394</sup> The KPD therefore demanded a purge of all reactionary civil servants from the state bureaucracy, a prohibition on members of police and army participating in monarchist rallies, the disbanding of all armed monarchist organisations, and the formation of republican workers' brigades from the ranks of SPD, USPD and KPD. Scholem's interpellation inquired: 'Is the Ministry of State aware of the significance of this movement, whose protagonists shy away not even from assassinations?'<sup>395</sup> This phrase was actually intended as a reference to the Erzberger assassination in August 1921, but would take on an unpleasant urgency only twelve days later following the murder of Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau.

Scholem complained that the KPD's warnings had gone unheeded, seeing as his motion from June 1922 was postponed until November. Although a slight political thaw set in after the Rathenau assassination and a significant number of KPD proposals were incorporated into a 'Berlin agreement' between all three workers' parties (also binding for the Prussian SPD), this had all come to an end by November 1922. The KPD's demands were not met in the slightest, while those responsible for the violence in Königsberg went unpunished.<sup>396</sup> Scholem's balance sheet was devastating: 'As was the case prior to the Rathenau murder, the Ministry of the Interior continues to snore and will not be disturbed in its blessed political slumber'. He suspected a method behind the proceedings: 'One uses a few pointed words for the right, only to then turn to the left and say: What are you complaining about? All you do is disturb the work the Ministry does to protect the republic from the right'.<sup>397</sup>

394 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '189. Sitzung am 30. November 1922'.

395 Drucksache Nr. 2996 des Preußischen Landtages, Wahlperiode 1921–1924.

396 Scholem was perhaps also so critical because 'unnecessary concessions' had been made in the agreement with the three workers' parties, and the entire event had been 'terribly overestimated', see Werner Scholem, 'Skizze über die Entwicklung der Opposition in der KPD', *Die Internationale*, 7, 2/3, March 1924, p. 126.

397 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '189. Sitzung am 30. November 1922'.

Instead, Scholem lamented, the Prussian police fiercely persecuted the ‘control committees’ [*Kontrollausschüsse*] established in many working-class areas to combat rising food prices and enforce price limits on local businesses. The price hikes were a result of post-war inflation, which began in late 1922 and reached its peak the following year. Werner Scholem objected to the government ordering the police to dissolve these committees. The ban on right-wing terrorist organisations, on the other hand, only existed on paper, as proven by a number of recently discovered weapons depots. A ban on the ‘Young German Order’ was even revoked by state governor Gustav Noske in Hanover. Minister Severing had banned the National Socialist Party, yet refrained from extending this ban to the party’s re-founding as the ‘Greater German Workers Party’ [*Großdeutsche Arbeiterpartei*].<sup>398</sup> In Hanover, Nazi rallies had even been given police protection, and the paper of the Nazi movement continued to circulate legally, while the Communists’ *Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung* was banned for ‘insulting the government’.<sup>399</sup>

Bearing this experience in mind, Scholem warned of a ‘fascist danger’ in Germany for the first time. This was a new tone – prior to that, he and his comrades had always spoken of ‘reaction’, ‘counter-revolution’, ‘monarchists’ or ‘representatives of the old system’, but by the early 1920s the radical right was regrouping. The monarchy had fallen into disrepute after 1918, making the aristocratic principle unsuitable as a basis for a mass movement. *Völkisch*, ethnic-nationalist ideas increasingly formed a coherent ideology in their own right, as the ‘counter-revolution’ could not simply turn the wheel of history back to the *ancien régime*, but was instead forced to reinvent itself in a political arena characterised by mass mobilisations and social struggles. In Italy, such a regrouping of the right had already been successful. The term ‘fascism’ in fact originates from *fasci di combattimento*, Benito Mussolini’s street fighting squads formed in 1919. These organisations combined a popular rhetoric appropriated from the socialist programme with a set of policies in radical opposition to socialist egalitarianism. Mussolini had seized power after his ‘March on Rome’ just a month prior to Scholem’s speech in the Landtag, an event whose ramifications were still unclear to many observers. Elements of the radical right, especially the NSDAP which had been organising in Bavaria

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398 The NSDAP, still in its founding phase at the time, was banned in Prussia on 15 November 1922, but remained legal in Bavaria and other states. The ‘Greater German Workers’ Party’ was a placeholder organisation limited to Berlin, but never managed to grow and was banned by Severing on 10 January 1923. See Schuster 2005, p. 22.

399 Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, ‘189. Sitzung am 30. November 1922’.

since 1920, were nevertheless inspired by the Italian model. By 1922, the Nazis had launched several attempts to expand their activities into northern Germany. Werner Scholem had noticed this and issued determined warnings not to underestimate the threat of a fascist dictatorship in Germany. Speaking in November 1922, he protested Severing's remarks on the 'German national character' in particular, 'which supposedly rules out the possibility of something like in Italy happening here'. In response to an interruption from the right, Scholem became more explicit: 'Surely you must be familiar with the German national character and know very well that it is precisely the German national character that is inclined to uncritically follow such people as yourself, that is to say, that the German national character – much more so than the character of any other people – is very much willing to bow to the rule of the reaction. The German people in particular, which has inherited a certain predilection for servitude from its own history – surely, you will concede this point, as it is a very well-known fact – is inclined to be held in serfdom. However, gentlemen on the right, you know that the German people have always been oppressed more fiercely by their own tyrants than by any foreign tyrants, (Very true! From the Communists) that the German people, which has not yet shed this characteristic feature, is very much inclined to having itself enslaved, even more severe than before, again someday'.<sup>400</sup>

Werner Scholem did not hold the Germans' supposed love of freedom in particularly high esteem, and watched as the right's actions grew increasingly aggressive and violent. He had warned of a 'systematic escalation' of the right's activities as early as June 1922, while fellow Communist Iwan Katz spoke openly of a 'repeat of the Kapp Putsch'. The KPD's parliamentary interpellation in the wake of the Rathenau murder charged: 'The organisers of putsch and murder, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Helfferich and others still walk free'.<sup>401</sup> On 20 April 1923, then, Werner Scholem warned: 'Investigations by the government of Thuringia have revealed that these people are working towards a civil war in the near future. The government of Thuringia has also detained several messengers of the Bavarian Hitler Guard and confiscated orders these messengers were carrying clearly indicating that the fascists' next attack was intended to take place in proletarian Thuringia'.<sup>402</sup> Scholem's concerns were very real,

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400 Ibid.

401 Drucksache Nr. 3208 des Preußischen Landtages, Wahlperiode 1921–1924. 'Helfferich' referred to the financier and DNVP politician Karl Helfferich (1872–1924), known for anti-republican propaganda and public incitements to violence.

402 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, 232. '232. Sitzung am

for Adolf Hitler's coup d'état modelled on the March on Rome would fail only a few months later in November 1923, albeit not in Thuringia, but Munich. Hitler was supported in this endeavour by Erich Ludendorff, a former member of the Supreme Army Command also involved in the Kapp Putsch and the very Ludendorff whose arrest the KPD had called for in June 1922. Ludendorff, a general from the 'Great War', and Hitler, who had served as a private, represented two generations of the political right.<sup>403</sup> They signified two distinct political conceptions, although both remained rather vague in their specifics. Their cooperation confirmed the existence of a continuity between the Kaiserreich, the experience of the war, and the emerging Nazi movement. To contemporaries, it demonstrated the determination and will to power of the republic's right-wing enemies.

Scholem observed these tendencies closely. In contrast to what later became standard practice in the KPD, he did not proceed to indiscriminately deride the SPD and other social forces as 'fascist'. In fact, in numerous public speeches he would call for resolute, united action against *Freikorps*, street fighting gangs and other right-wing groups.<sup>404</sup> According to Scholem, invoking the 'German

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20. April 1923'. On 'proletarian Thuringia', where SPD and KPD worked together much more closely than in Prussia, see Kachel 2011, esp. p. 154 f.

403 The military as well as military experience played a significant role in the pre-history of National Socialism. Nevertheless, this continuity is controversial among historians, particularly with view to the *Freikorps*. While R.G.L. Waites describes the *Freikorps* as the 'vanguard of Nazism', Hagen Schulze describes them as a force that for a time also stood 'in the service of the republic'; Hannsjoachim Koch's study on the 'German Civil War' draws similar conclusions. Gabriele Krüger's detailed study on the Brigade Ehrhard and the Organisation Consul describes the transition from conservative-monarchist to *völkisch* tendencies. Klaus Gietinger's biographical study of Waldemar Pabst also stresses the continuity of personnel between the counter-revolution of 1919 and the Nazi assumption of power in 1933. See Waites 1952; Schulze 1969; Koch 1978; Krüger 1971, particularly p. 84 ff.; Gietinger 2009, particularly pp. 117–76.

404 Scholem warned against the 'German fascists' who had attacked groups of unemployed in Mühlheim, killing several. He repeated his demand for workers' self-defence units and was greeted with laughter and jeers. On 7 June 1923 Scholem warned against dissolving the Thuringian workers' self-defence units, describing the move as a measure 'to support murderous anti-republican, fascist and anti-worker organisations'. On 4 July 1923 he cited the growing youth involvement in 'fascist organisations' as an example of the coarsening and degeneration of the youth, which could only be countered by educational reform, rather than empty appeals to morality and conscience. On 20 May 1924 he lodged a protest against the ban on the *Rote Fahne*, which had issued a public appeal to prevent a right-wing mass mobilisation in Halle: 'If the *Rote Fahne* called for smashing the fascists who were preparing an armed demonstration, then it is not only their right to do so, but indeed

national character' was a 'very weak foundation of the republic in the face of reaction'. In November 1922 he objected vehemently to Severing's criticism of the KPD's interpellations and motions, quoting the minister: 'Such interpellations are supposedly bad for the simple reason that they hurt German industry'.<sup>405</sup> Scholem viewed this as symptomatic of a larger problem, and challenged Minister of the Interior Severing: 'Herr Severing will receive another opportunity to prove here to the members of the Landtag that the Prussian government is unwilling to take measures against the reaction, that it by its inactivity, its drowsiness, and through snoring noises it sporadically utters, is the primary pacemaker of the reaction'.<sup>406</sup>

The minister felt obligated to respond to this polemic, but seems to have been more concerned with deflecting the right's accusations first. The right claimed that state government measures against right-wing organisations were designed to 'suppress national sentiment among large segments of the population'. Severing protested: 'I must vehemently protest against such insinuations. These statements represented a lamentable return to – if you excuse my wording – the bad habit of the old conservative party, namely to claim national sentiment and patriotism solely for itself (Very true! From the centre and left). I believe that the left parties in this parliament, the parties committed to this constitution, the parties who have sent their representatives into the state government, can by all means claim a patriotic sentiment as well as the pursuit of this patriotic sentiment'.<sup>407</sup> While Werner Scholem regarded German 'patriotic sentiment' as the root of right-wing terrorism, Severing sought to reclaim it for Social Democracy and its coalition partners: 'In those territories of our state that are particularly vulnerable it is precisely the parties loyal to the constitution who over the past weeks and months have proven that they will not allow the DNVP to out-do them when it comes to patriotic acts'. Severing vigorously defended himself against accusations of pursuing ideological policies against the right: 'You won't be able to prove a single case in which an association that may be politically close to you (right) was harassed in this pedantic, timid man-

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their duty as an organ of the workers' party [...]. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '232. Sitzung am 20. April 1923', '248. Sitzung am 7. Juni 1923', '263. Sitzung am 4. Juli 1923', and '310. Sitzung am 20. Mai 1924'. See also the article 'Das Verbot der Roten Fahne vor dem Landtag', *Rote Fahne* 88, 21 April 1923, in which Scholem's speech from 20 April 1924 is paraphrased.

405 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '189. Sitzung am 30. November 1922'.

406 Ibid.

407 Ibid.

ner'. Bans on organisations were not issued with view to their programmes, but to the specific actions they took, he explained. If these included illegal or armed activities, then the Law for the Protection of the Republic applied. According to Severing, even the German Nationals must have understood that 'by uprooting even the seeds of resistance, by curbing even the slightest steps towards public sedition and civil war, we are doing the best possible service to our country's social harmony, and thus ultimately also to the DNVP and German National supporters'.<sup>408</sup> Severing seems to have been more offended by the right's questioning of his nationalist credentials than by Scholem's anti-fascist polemic.<sup>409</sup>

Nonetheless, he found time to respond to Scholem as well. At first, Severing justified the measures taken against the control committees: 'When I tell the Communist workers: do not assume any administrative functions in your control committees so that you don't come into conflict with the authorities and avoid clashes, that is far more beneficial for the workers' interests than when your *Rote Fahne* writes: emulate the lawless actions of the control committees in Ahlfeld, Pinneberg and Hornhausen'.<sup>410</sup> Severing believed himself to be protecting not only the interests of DNVP voters, but those of KPD supporters as well: 'I am firmly convinced that, according to any measure, I represent the workers' interests far better than you do with your speeches'.<sup>411</sup>

Only at the end of his speech did Severing briefly address his alleged failure to take action against right-wing terror: according to him, the NSDAP had not received police protection in Hanover, and moreover, he had long been aware of the arms depots Scholem cited from newspaper reports: 'I do not snore so loudly, colleague Scholem, that I would not notice such reports'. Scholem's remarks seem to have left an impression on him nonetheless, for two months later the Greater German Workers' Party was banned along with the NSDAP.<sup>412</sup> Severing by no means stood idly by in the face of right-wing

408 Ibid. On the civil war as a trope of Weimar politics see Wirsching 1999.

409 Rüdiger Bergien assigns Carl Severing a key role in the linking of republican and anti-republican forces in a common mission to re-arm the country in his study of the 'defensive consensus' in the Weimar Republic. This rearmament was conducted under the ideological veneer of 'patriotic acts' for the 'endangered territories', i.e. the East Prussian provinces territorially cut off from the rest of the Reich. See Bergien 2012, p. 37 f. and p. 128.

410 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '189. Sitzung am 30. November 1922'.

411 Ibid.

412 See Schuster 2005, p. 22.

terror, and tried, through a series of bans on parties and other organisations, to curb its most extreme excesses.<sup>413</sup> His fundamental understanding of how to counter the political threat of the right, however, was vastly different from the Communists'. While Scholem mistrusted the state and called for workers' self-defence units formed from the various parties of the left, Severing made it clear that no armed groups, irrespective of political persuasion, would be tolerated in Prussia, 'whether they are called workers' defence and have a Communist bent' or 'self-defence organisations for the supposed protection of agriculture'.<sup>414</sup> Scholem repeatedly accused Severing of indirectly protecting the 'fascist gangs' through his attacks on the left's self-defence organisations.<sup>415</sup> Severing, however, placed his complete trust in the state's authority, and tolerated no counter-institutions of any kind, be they workers' self-defence units or civilian food price control committees.<sup>416</sup> It is noteworthy that Severing chose not to address Scholem's accusations of army and police sympathy with the right and its paramilitary organisations.

His silence highlights a central problem of Social Democracy's 'reforms from above', for it was almost impossible to democratise the state given the administrative staff left over from the Kaiserreich, as democratically-inclined judges, military officials and police would have in fact been the precondition for any serious or effective deployment of state force against the extreme right. In the Weimar Republic, many officials, and military officials in particular, remained closely connected to the armed far right. Despite this fact, the SPD continued to rely on the state in its given form and opposed all forms of self-organisation – even if such organisations operated non-violently such as, for instance, the control committees. Instead, Severing ensured that the police in all major Prussian cities were headed up by Social Democratic police presidents.<sup>417</sup> This move failed to break the anti-republican hegemony deeply entrenched within the

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413 In 1923 he also banned the 'German Völkisch Freedom Party', see Alexander 1996, p. 681.

414 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '189. Sitzung am 30. November 1922'.

415 See 'Das Verbot der Roten Fahne vor dem Landtag', *Rote Fahne* 88, 21 April 1923, which refers to Scholem's speech on 20 April 1923.

416 Severing's biographer Thomas Alexander also mentions the 'consolidation of the state's internal monopoly on power' as one of the goals of the 'Severing System'. This also included an attempt to re-establish the primacy of politics vis-à-vis the military, through measures such as strengthening provincial governors beginning in 1920. See Alexander 1996, p. 507 f. and p. 681.

417 Alexander 1996, p. 534 ff. and p. 561 ff. As a Prussian minister, Severing had no influence over the army.

state apparatus, and constituted a first step at best. Even this seems doubtful, however, as the officers of the security police (SiPo) were still recruited directly out of the army for the most part, and in turn stood firmly in the tradition of the World War and the *Freikorps*.<sup>418</sup> Another aspect of Severing's approach seems similarly paradoxical: while purporting to combat the armed forces of the right on the streets, he simultaneously treated their like-minded allies in the nationalist DNVP as professional and knowledgeable partners in parliamentary dialogue, while the KPD, on the other hand, was never offered the chance to engage in such dialogue. That said, the Communists were not particularly keen on cooperating with Social Democracy either, focused as they were on 'exposing' the bankrupt nature of its policies in government.<sup>419</sup> The enormous gap between the two regarding questions of nation and state provided more than enough opportunities to do so.

### The Philosophy of History in the Landtag

Werner Scholem was a committed and passionate school reformer, defended the republican state against right-wing terror and coup attempts, and fought for an expansion of asylum law, vehemently protesting the deportation of Spanish and Italian syndicalists to their home countries in 1922.<sup>420</sup> He nevertheless

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418 The SiPo was eventually unified with another police division, the *Ordnungspolizei*, to create the *Schutzpolizei* (Schupo), while personnel remained largely the same. See Ehni 1975, p. 36.

419 Here, however, there were differences not only between the distinct wings of the party, but also between KPD districts. In Prussia, where the SPD was in government, Social Democracy became an immediate enemy, as it was in charge of the police and therefore the target of the latter's exposure tactics in the parliament. In Bavaria, however, where SPD and KPD jointly opposed a right-wing government, common actions inside as well as outside the parliament were quite common. Sebastian Zehetmair of the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich is currently working on a local study of the Bavarian KPD. On Thuringia see Kachel 2011.

420 Spanish syndicalists Nicola Fort and Lucia Concepcion and Italian syndicalist Boldrini were deported to their home countries for alleged involvement in a political assassination. Scholem insisted, legally consistent, that existing extradition treaties were applicable only to petty offences, not political crimes. He defended the detainees as revolutionaries: 'A revolutionary is not even granted asylum these days. The times in which there was the right to seek asylum in Switzerland, England and other countries are over, simply because the times are over in which the bourgeoisie had an interest in such sanctuaries, times in which the bourgeoisie still had at least some remainders of its own struggle to complete.'



rejected the existing Constitution of the Weimar Republic, and made no secret of it: 'Esteemed Herr Colleague, of course we defend the republican form of state. That we do not defend this specific republic, you know very well', he exclaimed to his fellow deputies.<sup>421</sup> Here, Scholem spoke for the entire KPD. As elaborated above, the USPD and the Communists did not view the Weimar Constitution as the conclusion of the revolution, but in fact continued to aspire towards a council republic throughout Germany. Although the acceptance of the '21 Conditions' had meant abandoning the left's ideals of direct democracy with respect to internal organisation, most Communists deemed centralism a mere means to an end. In their view, the actual political form of a Communist society remained council-based democracy. This notion would come to play a role in daily politics, as well: whether parents' councils, students' councils, control committees for food prices, or workers' self-defence units, the idea of self-organisation clearly distinguished Werner Scholem's parliamentary interventions from the concepts of the state proffered by a Carl Severing or an Otto Boelitz. After what was left of the USPD re-joined the SPD in 1922, however, the Communists found themselves alone in their calls for a council republic.<sup>422</sup> This isolation, together with the absence of the revolution and the party's growing dependence on the Soviet Union, would later lead to the gradual erosion of the KPD's fight for a council republic, giving way to a significantly more authoritarian style of politics.

What remained a central reference point (albeit a negative one) for the Weimar Communists, then, was Social Democracy. Scholem was well aware of Social Democracy's legacy. Time and again he explicitly invoked its traditions, as, for example, with regard to internationalism: 'We, by contrast, declare that we are the heirs of these anti-national currents of German Social Democracy, and we are proud to say we are the heirs of this anti-national, that is, international spirit'.<sup>423</sup> Werner Scholem often confronted Social Democrats with the awkward fact that they had been oppositional socialists until only a few years

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See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '136. Sitzung am 16. Mai 1922' and Werner Scholem, 'Die deutsche Auslieferungsschmach', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 66, 13 May 1922.

421 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '181. Sitzung am 25. Oktober 1922'.

422 The KAPD and smaller organisations such as the anarchist FAUD and syndicalist left trade unions stood for similar ideals, but these groups would remain marginal and were viewed more as competition than potential coalition partners by the KPD. See Bock 1969.

423 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '104. Sitzung am 22. Februar 1922'.

prior.<sup>424</sup> To him, the SPD embodied the betrayal of the left's traditions, while the KPD represented political continuity. To this end, Scholem often referred enthusiastically to a Reichstag address given by August Bebel in 1903 during his own parliamentary speeches against anti-Semitism, in which the latter had condemned hatred against Jews in line with the SPD's Erfurt Programme.<sup>425</sup>

The most effective of the old Social Democracy's traditions was, however, the party's philosophy of history, from which Scholem drew heavily. It stated that both the Kaiserreich and the Weimar state shared a common historical destiny, namely, to one day perish: 'This democratic state, whose weaknesses we all know, whose weaknesses result from historical development, and this historical development is already ahead of the democratic state.'<sup>426</sup> Scholem's optimism concerning the laws of history stood in contrast to his remarkably perceptive unease about the growth of a fascist movement in Germany. He simply could not imagine that fascist ideology would also resonate among young workers. In Scholem's eyes, authoritarian tendencies were limited exclusively to the bourgeois youth whose political ideals were rooted in absolutism, a 'typical symptom of bourgeois society's decay'. Working class youth, on the other hand, thought differently: 'The youth of a class that is historically on the ascent longs for something other than tyrannical oppression. Only the youth of a class which can remain in power exclusively by oppressing the mass of the people will latch onto oppression as the symbol of its political worldview from the outset.'<sup>427</sup>

While Scholem warned of the fascist danger, he was simultaneously convinced that any future radicalisation would benefit the left. Not only the youth, but also the 'downwardly mobile layers of the former bourgeoisie, those intellectuals, doctors and independent scholars' would inevitably become proletarianised and join the ranks of the 'fighting proletarian front'.<sup>428</sup> Echoes of the SPD's Erfurt Programme can be heard here, as it had already predicted the demise of the middle classes in 1891 and described a social rift separating soci-

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424 Such as in April 1923, when he brought up Severing's past career as a socialist journalist. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '232. Sitzung am 20. April 1923'.

425 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '104. Sitzung am 22. Februar 1922'.

426 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '189. Sitzung am 30. November 1922'.

427 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '181. Sitzung am 25. Oktober 1922'.

428 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '202. Sitzung am 23. Januar 1923'.

ety into two 'hostile groups'.<sup>429</sup> This philosophy of history, heavily reinforced by Carl Severing's appeals to 'national feeling', prevented Scholem and other KPD politicians from pursuing coalitions for the defence of democratic reforms more seriously. Moreover, the precise nature of 'fascism' remained murky. Did its agenda mean a return to Wilhelmine absolutism, or was an even more brutal form of political servitude in the making? Werner had hinted at the latter with his remarks about the German 'national character', but in 1923 the German fascists themselves remained unsure of their actual political objectives. Although they tactically referred to Mussolini's successes in Italy, the various groups and splinter groups of the extreme right oscillated between a vision of restoring former German greatness and an as yet ill-defined *völkisch* utopia of an ethnically purified Germany.

In this context, Scholem's faith in the laws of history would become an obstacle in much more than just the defensive struggle against the right. His faith served to impede the fight to raise the standard of living as well, such as when Scholem declared that his educational reforms were only truly practical within the context of a socialist workers' state. The notion that history was on his side was part and parcel of Werner Scholem's identity, and he responded to interjections referring to his bourgeois background by protesting: 'Certainly, I am proud to be on the side of the workers because, as I have mentioned before, I'd much rather be a renegade of the bourgeoisie than of the working class, rather a class that is rotten and doomed to perish than a class that is on the ascent'.<sup>430</sup> The tense political situation in Weimar Germany at the outset of the 1920s confirmed Scholem's view of history. A series of economic and political crises as well as bourgeois governments utterly unable to cope with them appeared to alternate in rapid succession. Often these governments could only assert their authority by casting aside the democratic principles upon which they supposedly rested, while the economic crisis in particular seemed to prove Scholem's belief that bourgeois society was 'rotting' from within. In order to provide necessary historical context, this period will be briefly illuminated in the following before returning to Scholem's parliamentary career.

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429 Kautsky 1910, p. 81.

430 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, 181. Sitzung am 25. Oktober 1922.

### Inflation, Crisis and Radicalisation

The first post-war years in Germany essentially amounted to one continuous economic crisis, brought on by the end of the wartime boom paid for with war bonds and surreptitious currency devaluations.<sup>431</sup> With the war's end in 1918 came a rude awakening, as well as the need to transform wartime into peacetime production. However, the domestic market had almost ceased to exist; most workers suffered heavy wage cuts and could barely afford basic goods.<sup>432</sup> Lost colonies and overseas markets brought external trade to a halt, while the Allies' enormous reparations demands further exacerbated the situation.<sup>433</sup> The civilisational rupture engendered by the war thus not only discredited the moral foundations of bourgeois society, but also undermined the economic principles upon which it rested. The population knew 'the market' only as the black markets of speculators and traffickers, a synonym for crime and corruption. The left offered an anti-capitalist explanation for these conditions, while the right did so in anti-Semitic terms. The planned economy, long regarded as little more than a utopia, was now an everyday experience, having kept the war machine running for four years through state rationing of food and consumer goods. While the market stood for social breakdown in the eyes of the masses, the state and its plan represented a last toehold of stability and reliability. The Berlin housing market was already under heavy state control, and the same was now being demanded for large-scale industry by both Communists and Social Democrats alike.<sup>434</sup> This mood continued when the crisis reached a new peak in 1923, a year that began with a German-French conflict over

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431 Total wartime borrowing amounted to 99 billion gold marks, while the circulation of bank notes rose twelvefold. Price stability was secured through government controls, which helped to conceal the true extent of inflation until after the war. See Wentzel 1981, esp. p. 7.

432 Jürgen Kuczynski states that overall purchasing power of wages in 1917 had declined 70 percent compared to 1900. See Kuczynski 1962–6, p. 179.

433 Based on Woodrow Wilson's '14 Points', the German government had prepared to pay roughly 30 billion gold marks, as most of the demands appeared fulfilled through the confiscation of German financial and material assets. However, after the reparations committee decided to include annuity payments for the Allied powers, the level of funds demanded of the German government exceeded all previous estimates. See Schulze 1994, p. 227.

434 A socialisation commission was established to address these demands. It was dissolved in April 1919, reinstated in March 1920 after the Kapp Putsch, and deliberated until 1923. Well-known Social Democrats such as Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding and Rudolf Wissell were members. Its suggestions, however, were never acted upon. See Behrend 1998.

reparations culminating in a French occupation of the Ruhr region.<sup>435</sup> The government used this as a pretext for a large-scale national resistance campaign, in which the KPD also temporarily participated for questionable political reasons.<sup>436</sup> The 'Battle of the Ruhr', however, was brief, and only served as a precursor to the real crisis beginning in the fall of 1923: hyperinflation.

Currency devaluation had already reached worrying levels in 1922, but was further intensified nonetheless in order to meet reparation obligations. The government was willing to accept the self-destructive tendencies inherent in such an economic policy, seeking to demonstrate the impracticality of the Allies' reparations demands while avoiding national bankruptcy at the same time.<sup>437</sup> No resistance was encountered from business circles, as the working and middle classes, and perhaps some sections of the petty bourgeoisie, bore the brunt of these policies. Wages and savings were devalued, while means of production and real estate increased in value due to the cancellation of debts and mortgages. Wage struggles became increasingly arduous under such conditions, as union strike funds soon grew worthless and any wage increase was almost immediately eaten up by new inflationary hikes.<sup>438</sup>

Inflation initially proceeded rather slowly. The US dollar, traded at 4.20 gold marks in 1914, was valued at 52.30 Marks by 1921. In August 1922 its value had reached 1,134.56 marks.<sup>439</sup> In 1923, prices moved into the tens of thousands before stabilising around twenty thousand marks for a while,<sup>440</sup> but would soon rise again. Moderately at first, but then frantically – a pound of potatoes could cost 50,000 one day, and double the next.<sup>441</sup> By August 1923 the dollar had reached an exchange rate of one million marks. Betty Scholem painted an atmospheric picture for Gerhard, who emigrated at the height of the crisis: 'When you left, the brand of sausage I gave you cost 12 million marks; today it's up to 240 million. All prices have risen at this pace, often even faster. The col-

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435 On the Ruhr occupation and the labour movement's response see Winkler 1985, pp. 553–604, as well as Rosenberg 1965, pp. 178–221.

436 The contradictions inherent in the campaign and Scholem's position towards it are discussed in the following chapter. For an overview of the campaign see Angress 1963, pp. 314–77.

437 Many feared a political collapse of the young republic should the state be forced to declare bankruptcy. See Schulze 1994, p. 35 f.

438 See Wentzel 1981.

439 Wentzel 1981, p. 280.

440 The temporary plateau was the result of a curbing of the printing presses by the Cuno government, see Rosenberg 1965, p. 182.

441 Haffner 2003, p. 55.

lapse of the economy is complete. No one can buy a thing, and the unemployment rate has thus been on the rise.<sup>442</sup> Arthur Scholem's business, however, seemed to be weathering the crisis better than expected: 'You'll be glad and interested to know that we've been printing money – for the government printing house, of course. A general rapture prevails on the shop floor, since the threat of unemployment hangs over everyone. [...] We are working in two shifts and every night Reinhold inspects the end of work together with Lump. Our first copy editor Herr Schmidt sleeps in the print shop and there is a policeman guarding the door and courtyard. We are very fortunate in this regard and can be very pleased!'<sup>443</sup> The Scholems were not the only business to use the crisis as a license to print money – albeit not always in a literal sense. A combination of low wages and the dollar's absurdly strong purchasing power facilitated a massive increase in German exports, which Arthur Rosenberg described as foreign markets having German goods 'dumped upon' them,<sup>444</sup> allowing export companies to retain the value of their capital stock.

In this way, the state's harsh economic policies actually made sense from the perspective of the republic's wealthiest, although inflation ultimately proved to be a political disaster that would play a major role in the collapse of Weimar democracy. Inflation eroded any remaining faith in Germany's economic and political elites and ate away at the foundations of the social order as such, affecting even the most intimate spheres of people's lives.<sup>445</sup> Popular values of German thrift, diligence and success through hard work that had been preached for generations vanished overnight. Sebastian Haffner describes the atmosphere in his memoirs: 'It was a situation in which mental inertia and reliance on past experience were punished by starvation and death, but rapid appraisal of new situations and speed of reaction were rewarded with sudden, vast riches. The twenty-one-year-old bank director appeared on the scene, and also the high school senior who earned his living from the stock-market tips of his slightly older friends. He wore Oscar Wilde ties, organized champagne parties, and supported his embarrassed father.'<sup>446</sup> The carnival of the nouveaux riches combined with the misery of those missing out on the spoils

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442 Scholem 2012, p. 124.

443 Ibid; Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 83.

444 Rosenberg 1965, p. 183. On the trajectory of inflation in the Weimar Republic see also Schulze 1994, p. 37.

445 In his 1927 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Gustav Stresemann decried the proletarianisation of wide segments of the middle class as the greatest loss of the inflationary crisis, for the middle classes were 'traditionally the bearers of notions of state', see Schulze 1994, p. 37.

446 Haffner 2012, p. 56.

was an explosive mixture, and it is no coincidence that Scholem warned of an increase in right-wing radicalism during this same period. The date Hitler and Ludendorff had selected for their attempted coup d'état, the night of 8 November 1923, was of course no coincidence either. Nevertheless, it was less the anniversary of the 'November Crimes' of 1918 that inspired them to choose this date, as it was the dire extent of hyperinflation.

The Communists had already attempted their revolution in October 1923. Encouraged by the raging ferment and radicalisation spreading through all layers of society, they believed the day of reckoning to be fast approaching. The KPD leadership already began drawing up elaborate plans for an uprising in close cooperation with the Communist International in Moscow in August 1923. The SPD's prestige had suffered greatly as a result of the trade unions' helplessness during the inflationary crisis, bringing the KPD remarkably close to its claim of being the leading workers' party. Yet given the breakdown of authority already underway, the KPD did not hope for improved electoral results so much as for revolution. It placed its hopes in the control committees and works councils as a kind of relaunch of the 1918 council movement, while the self-defence squads of the 'Proletarian Hundreds' were to constitute the sword of the revolution. In order to protect this emerging counter-power, the KPD even joined parliamentary coalitions with the SPD in Thuringia and Saxony.<sup>447</sup> Writing off Bavaria as a bastion of reaction, the KPD instead hoped for its revolution to begin in the 'red heart of Germany'.<sup>448</sup>

The plan failed. A works councils congress on 21 June 1923 flatly refused to join a general strike with the Communists, let alone participate in an armed uprising. Party leader Heinrich Brandler would ultimately call off the plans for an uprising, very much to the irritation of some of the party's more impatient members. One of his fiercest critics was Werner Scholem. Probably as the result of a courier being intercepted, or perhaps the local KPD leadership's unwilling-

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447 The KPD's cooperation with the SPD in Thuringia went beyond the merely instrumental, and many members argued for a long-term alliance. This in turn was well received by many in the SPD, and would leave a lasting impression all the way to the founding period of the East German SED, see Kachel 2011. Scholem was highly critical of these proposals, describing the SPD government in Thuringia as a 'purely bourgeois government' fighting 'in lockstep with the bourgeoisie' against the KPD, see Scholem, 'Die Wahlen in Thüringen', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 181, 16 September 1922. Pro-cooperation currents existed in both KPD and SPD, see LaPorte 2003; on the relationship between currents and regions in the KPD see also Eumann 2007.

448 Translator's note: this phrase is a play on Thuringia's traditional nickname, 'the green heart of Germany'.

ness to follow orders, the port city of Hamburg would be the only locality to witness armed action in October of 1923. Several hundred Hamburg Communists attacked local police stations, erected barricades and fought the police in the streets over a period of three days. They remained isolated, however, as even several thousand striking dock workers neglected to come to the uprising's aid.<sup>449</sup> The entire operation proved to be a disaster for the KPD. While cancelling the plan would have allowed for a return to the united front course and a consolidation of the widespread support the party had accrued during the crisis, the Hamburg fiasco reinforced the image of the KPD as an irresponsible putschist organisation, and the Communists watched as their mass base evaporated in a matter of days. The state chose to intervene as well, launching a wave of arrests all across the Reich from which only elected parliamentarians were exempt.

### Reform or Revolution: Scholem's Answer

Let us now return to the Prussian Landtag, where the status of the KPD was the subject of heated debates in the autumn of 1923. Minister Severing read aloud from several intercepted letters written by leading KPD cadre Ruth Fischer to Comintern leader Zinoviev. Based on this explosive material, Severing was able to prove that the KPD had in fact developed long-term plans for an uprising. In addition to this written evidence, Severing had another ace up his sleeve: 'Under loud and increasing commotion among members of parliament and buoyant exclamations by the Communists, assistants are placing machine guns, rifles, anti-tank rifles, Mauser pistols, Luger pistols, army revolvers, flare guns, blasting caps, ammunition, etc. on a table in the assembly room'.<sup>450</sup>

According to Severing, the arms caches had been discovered in secret KPD depots, and their public display had the desired effect: most Landtag deputies seethed with indignation, while the Minister of the Interior emerged from the affair triumphant as a proven law and order politician. A statement from the KPD's parliamentary group was neither expected nor desired at the session, which was scheduled to end after Severing's speech. Only a handful of Communist delegates were present, as many of them were needed in their constituencies to deal with the arrest wave, for only elected representatives could act

449 See the comprehensive study in Jentsch 2005.

450 Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '278. Sitzung am 28. November 1923'.



as protected mediators between Communists and police.<sup>451</sup> Werner Scholem, however, was present that day and demanded the right to speak. He shouted 'This is intolerable! After he attacks us we are to be denied a response!' at Severing and immediately received a call to order. The KPD subsequently managed to scrape together the 15 votes necessary to assert their right to speak.

KPD parliamentary group leader Ernst Meyer responded to the accusations first, denying the letters' authenticity. Meyer claimed that Severing had been fooled by informants and 'eight-penny boys'. Denunciation without evidence was an old police trick, he continued.<sup>452</sup> Unfortunately for Meyer, the letters were in fact authentic. Their content reflected disagreements between the Comintern in Moscow and the Berlin district leadership, the latter of which belonged to the KPD's left wing.<sup>453</sup> The arguments pertained not only to the Hamburg uprising, but also to one particular street demonstration in Berlin the day before at which the KPD had tried to provoke riots. After Meyer, it was Scholem's turn to speak. In their last battle of words, Werner had been the one to challenge Severing, this time the roles were reversed. The Communists were beaten and stood with their backs against the wall, but this bothered Scholem little. Werner, unlike Ernst Meyer, had little interest in issuing denials:

But if this letter is real, it isn't even that much of a sensation. To deny that we, as Communists, were intending to stage a demonstration in Berlin would be ridiculous. [...] We are proud that the workers of Berlin heeded the call by the banned Communist Party by the masses yesterday (Bravo! From the Communists), that the workers of Berlin stand by the banned Communist Party and that these bans represent no obstacle to us taking the streets nonetheless and show our opponents that our party is alive and that such a movement as ours can never be crushed by violence. [...] Moreover: piling up weapons about the origins of which not a thing has been proven is then declared to be a 'discovery'. But I will tell you

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451 Ernst Meyer delivered this justification during the Landtag plenary, see *ibid.*

452 *Ibid.*

453 See Jentsch 2005, p. 287f. Fischer's response to Zinoviev read aloud in the Landtag was from 22 November 1923, a copy can be found in SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/128, Bl. 87 ff. The authenticity of the letters had been known to the KPD moderate current around Ernst Meyer a few days prior. In an internal report to Clara Zektin, another leading moderate figure in the party, written by a trusted source under the codename 'Josef', it is mentioned that the letter to Fischer was confiscated during a police search of party headquarters in Rosenthaler Straße 38. See Iozef. P'ismo K. Tsetkin [Letter from 'Josef' to Clara Zetkin], 1 December 1923, RGASPI, Komintern, F. 528, op. 1, d. 2359.

more – and I am saying this not as the representative of an organisation which certain people are trying to bring into opposition to other KPD groups, as Herr Heilmann so miserably attempted, but in the name of the Communist Party as a whole: indeed, as the reaction is moving closer to seizing power, we are preparing a proletarian revolution.<sup>454</sup>

Scholem received thundering applause and approval from the Communist fraction for this unmistakable statement. He then threw all concern for common courtesy aside, and literally talked himself into a rage:

Yes, we are preparing the revolutionary struggle against the rule of the bourgeoisie, against the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, with the aim of erecting the dictatorship of the proletariat. (Bravo! From the Communists) We don't deny that and are taking all steps we deem necessary and which all revolutionaries have had to take when preparing for revolution in order to end the rule of a politically and morally bankrupt class. (Exactly! From the Communists) Herr Severing, you police master of a Stinnes coalition, agent of the bourgeoisie, which will give you the boot once your service is no longer required (Exactly! From the Communists), Herr Severing, should you really have confiscated a few weapons here and there which the Communists had actually organised from themselves – you will not disparage the Communist Party in the eyes of the workers with that! (Exactly! From the Communists) Herr Severing, you may arrest individual functionaries of ours, you may detain us because we violate certain paragraphs, but we don't give a damn about your paragraphs and we don't give a damn about your laws which the reaction hasn't abided by either. You can arrest hundreds, or even thousands of revolutionary workers and functionaries – the Communist Party will continue its preparations and continue to make sure that the proletariat is shown a goal and a way to reach it, so that the proletariat sees: there is a leadership, a movement, a party, systematically preparing the revolution.<sup>455</sup>

Although this particular address was considered outrageous even by Scholem's standards, he was not interrupted. The president's bell, usually a regular companion of his speeches, for once remained silent. Scholem continued:

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454 Ibid.

455 Ibid.

When a Herr Heilmann declares that the Social Democratic Party as a whole is against any armed uprising, [...] then we say: we can surely do without a united front with Heilmann, [...] we will relinquish a united front with Ebert and Severing (Exactly! From the Communists); but what we surely do not reject is the unified front of workers, the unified front with Social Democratic colleagues in the workplaces, the unified front with the members of the Social Democratic Party who are infuriated by their party's leadership's counter-revolutionary stance. We needn't reject it because it already exists. If those political corpses who sit in this parliament as representatives of Social Democracy reject a united front with us, they may do so. History does not care about what these people have to say, but moves according to the potential power of a class that is destined to assume power in Germany (Very good! From the Communists), and that is destined to hammer together that bankrupt and shattered Germany into a proletarian state.<sup>456</sup>

The speech ended in frantic applause and cheers of 'Bravo!' from the Communists. Their political opponents chose not to respond. The parliament returned to its scheduled agenda, and 'consultations on the decree of the State Ministry of 15 September 1923 concerning the presence of spinal polio in the governorate of Breslau' commenced.

This performance was to be Scholem's last major speech in the Landtag, and his most important one as well. Scholem provided an answer to the crucial question haunting all Weimar radicals, whether to pursue 'reform or revolution', in the most straightforward way possible. Yet his speech passed over the other deputies as if he had said nothing at all. Could the Landtag have been at a loss for words? The way in which the Landtag majority returned to regular business is consistent with their attitude that the KPD was an unworthy discussion partner, an evil to be fought with all legal means. Communists were considered criminals at best, traitors to the German race at worst. Scholem's speech thus was not truly directed at either the bourgeois parties or the SPD. He was not speaking to the parliament at all, but rather denouncing it. His speech was directed exclusively towards the proletarian masses and his own party, signalling to both: the KPD lives, the struggle continues.

However, Scholem's speech was more than a mere agglomeration of revolutionary morale-boosting slogans. It formulated a programme for the future of the KPD that would have a decisive impact on the party's political develop-

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

ment over the coming years. Perhaps most striking is how openly Scholem disassociated himself from Meyer's tactics. Instead of demanding proof from the SPD, Scholem pleaded guilty to all charges: Yes, the KPD was acting in consultation with the Communist International! Yes, the KPD was organising illegal demonstrations! Yes, the KPD was preparing for an armed revolution! Although Scholem denied any differences of opinion within the party, his speech reveals clear disagreements with former mentor Ernst Meyer. Mistrust pervaded the KPD: as a confidant of Ruth Fischer, Scholem was informed about her correspondence with Zinoviev and knew of the letters' authenticity.<sup>457</sup> Meyer, by contrast, had no clue what was going on. The intercepted letters were directed explicitly against him and the KPD's pragmatic wing, whom Fischer and Scholem blamed for the defeat in October 1923.<sup>458</sup>

Under Meyer's tutelage, Werner had made a genuine effort to practice pragmatism during the endless hours of school reform debates in the curriculum committee, but had been rewarded with anti-Semitic slurs. He now stated more clearly than ever before: I don't give a damn about parliament! His contempt for representative democracy, cultivated since his early days as a member of the city council in Hanover-Linden, had cemented itself for good. The parliament no longer appeared useful, not even in the medium term or for tactical purposes; it was simply bankrupt. In spite of the disastrous defeat of the previous October, Scholem continued to believe that the atmosphere of August 1923, the latest phase of mass radicalisation, would persist. In reality, however, the Hamburg uprising had decimated the KPD's mass base. Restoring the party to its erstwhile fighting capacity would be a months-, if not years-long task. Intense debates raged as to how this consolidation should look. Scholem's impassioned speech formulated a programme to deal with the party's situation. It was simple and can be summarised in three words: keep it up!

Although Scholem asked himself why the uprising in October 1923 had failed, he never questioned the notion that the masses had been ready and waiting for the revolution. In his view, the party's defeat was exclusively the leadership's fault, little more than a detour on the path to working-class rule through which he hoped to 'hammer together' the proletarian state. Scholem, as representative of that class, saw himself as this hammer and acted according to the proverb: 'when you only have a hammer, every problem looks like a nail'. Self-criticism was clearly not one of Scholem's strengths. He knew only abysmal

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457 Werner had written Zinoviev himself on 30 October 1923. He referred to his 'close friendship' with Ruth Fischer and assured him that their conversation had been agreed upon beforehand. See SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/128, Bl. 87f.

458 On internal difference in the KPD see the following chapter in this volume.

pessimism, such as that experienced in the trenches during the war, and the soaring, giddy optimism he felt in 1923. This optimism would be the secret to his success over the next two years. Scholem's confrontational approach and his readiness to 'grasp the bull by its horns' was precisely what the defeated and disoriented party wanted to hear. The members were hardly interested in self-doubt and self-criticism, let alone the tactical retreat suggested by Ernst Meyer. They wanted the revolution, and they wanted it as soon as possible. Werner Scholem's promise to give them that revolution would be the launching pad for his meteoric rise.

## Communism: Utopia and Apparatus (1921–6)

Werner Scholem would make only two brief appearances on the floor of the Landtag after his major speech in November 1923, for weightier responsibilities occupied his time by the following year. In April 1924 he ascended to the KPD's executive leadership, or *Zentrale*; a month later he was elected to the Reichstag.<sup>1</sup> Ernst Meyer, until now the parliamentary speaker of the Landtag group and Scholem's superior, was abruptly sidelined.

What led to this development, and what exactly distinguished Meyer's variant of Communism from Scholem's? Their differences were more than mere aftershocks of the failed 'German October' in 1923. As Scholem himself argued in a position paper, 'the differences in question do not stem from yesterday or the day before'.<sup>2</sup> In order to properly contextualise the various fault lines running through the party, we shall briefly return to early 1921, when Scholem arrived back in Berlin following his stint in the provinces and rose to the local KPD district leadership body.

Here he met an emerging oppositional current within the party, which will be further detailed in the section 'The Berlin Opposition'. This current, also referred to as the 'Left Opposition' or, in the words of its opponents, 'ultra-left' current, became Scholem's new political home. Over the years, this opposition and its political positions would grow increasingly dogmatic. The Left Opposition, also present in Hamburg and elsewhere, rallied around a complete rejection of any sort of agreement or alliance – let alone united front – with Social Democracy or the trade unions, advocating an immediate, 'revolutionary' approach instead. This conflict emerged, for example, during the 'Battle of the Ruhr' of 1923, when the KPD leadership attempted to exploit nationalist and anti-French sentiment in the Ruhr region. Criticisms of the Left and Werner Scholem in particular, as well as their political demand for workplace occupations instead, will be elaborated in the following. While the party's left wing had functioned as a kind of solidary corrective under Heinrich Brandler's term as

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1 This election obligated Werner to resign his Landtag mandate shortly before the end of the legislative session, see 'Sitzung der Zentrale der KPD vom 9. Mai 1924', SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/2/16.

2 Statement of opinion of the *Zentralvorstand* and district leadership of Berlin-Brandenburg to G.Y. Zinoviev, Berlin, 2 March 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/128, Bl. 5.

leader, alienation increasingly characterised the diverging wings of the KPD's relationship to one another. By spring 1923, open hostilities had broken out between the Berlin-Brandenburg district leadership, the opposition's primary stronghold, and the central leadership. The Berlin leadership, in which Scholem by this time held a leading position as *Organisationsleiter* ('organisational leader') with authority over all full-time party functionaries in Berlin, used the crisis triggered by the failed uprising of October 1923 to go on the offensive. Conveniently omitting their own involvement in events, Scholem and his comrades-in-arms set about toppling the party leadership around Heinrich Brandler. They achieved their goal not least thanks to assistance from Moscow organised by Scholem personally – a matter further elaborated in the section 'Reaching for Power'. The political interplay between Berlin and Moscow, the latter of which would become a site of fierce internal power struggles following Lenin's death in 1924, represents the overarching theme of this chapter.

At the Frankfurt party conference in April 1924, Scholem rose to the position of nationwide *Organisationsleiter*, leading the KPD behind Arkadi Maslow and Ruth Fischer. Although he retained a degree of informal influence in Berlin-Brandenburg, he now directed all KPD officials in the country. Their attempt to mould the party into a vanguard organisation in the Bolshevik sense is reconstructed in the section 'The Power of the Apparatus'. This project, however, would prove short-lived. Revolutionary fervour subsided along with the inflation crisis, and with them the popular appeal of the Left Opposition's arguments. Catastrophic election results in 1925 finally provoked a split within the left leadership, and while Scholem remained faithful to his convictions, Ruth Fischer reversed course to become a passionate advocate of the same 'united front' with the SPD and unions she had vehemently opposed for years. The party's new course aimed to defend the republic against monarchism in the wake of Field Marshal Paul Hindenburg's election to President. Hindenburg had been a leading military figure during the 'Great War' and remained a devoted monarchist. A figure like him as head of state was a catastrophe for both the revolutionary KPD as well as the republican left. Hindenburg would ultimately appoint Adolf Hitler as Chancellor in 1933. Although the KPD could not foresee this, a majority of its members knew the inflexibility of the left-wing leadership had allowed them to be outmanoeuvred by the right. The 1925 split, the result of considerable pressure from Moscow, eventually led to the removal of the left KPD leadership entirely. Not even Ruth Fischer was spared.

In the opposition once again, the left was no longer able to act in a unified manner as they had prior to 1923. The new leadership under Ernst Thälmann, himself a renegade 'left', managed, through a gruelling process, to pit the different oppositional groups against one another and expel them from the KPD

one by one. The sections ‘The Apparatus Strikes Back’ and ‘Scholem Versus Stalin’ trace this phase, characterised by seemingly incomprehensible and ever-shifting alliances, shattered friendships and uncompromising *Machtpolitik*. It was during this period that Scholem, erstwhile champion of an authoritarian campaign to ‘Bolsheivise’ the party, increasingly became a defender of internal democracy against the rising Stalinists.

Nevertheless, neither Scholem nor others on the left like Karl Korsch or Arthur Rosenberg framed their criticisms of Stalin’s policies primarily in terms of democracy or authoritarianism, but rather in those of reform or revolution, evaluating the situation in light of their experiences with the SPD prior to 1914. As a result of this misjudgement, and even more so of their abstract-revolutionary course’s lack of broad appeal, the Left Opposition lost its seat in the Central Committee in the fall of 1925 and was expelled from the party entirely in November 1926.

They confronted the difficult choice of either abandoning their fundamental principles or building a new organisation. This dilemma, which eventually led to the founding of the Lenin League [*Leninbund*], will not be addressed until the fifth chapter, ‘A Reluctant Renegade’, while the following sections deal with Scholem’s rise and fall in the ranks of the KPD – a party career representative of both the contradictions inherent in the Weimar KPD as a whole, as well as its ultimately tragic attempt to pursue an independent path beyond Moscow’s interference.

### The Berlin Opposition (1921–3)

Apart from the Ruhr region and Halle-Merseburg from where Scholem had been recalled in 1920, Berlin was the Weimar Republic’s third major industrial centre and a stronghold of the labour movement, imbued with its own unique tradition of political radicalism.<sup>3</sup>

Berlin, after all, was not only home to masses of workers, but was also a university city and the political centre of the nation. Here, proletarian radicalism born out of existential poverty and economic insecurity encountered the most diverse varieties of political dissidence. Parliamentary duties had already drawn the most famous Marxist intellectuals to Berlin a generation before,

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3 This tradition had emerged in the Kaiserreich, as Dirk H. Müller demonstrates for the metal and construction industries, see Müller 1985. On social structure and worker radicalism see also Eumann 2007 and Weipert 2013.



where Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Otto Rühle conducted their fierce debates with Kautsky and the party centre.<sup>4</sup> Their ideas captured the imagination of the workers, but Luxemburg and Liebknecht with their doctoral degrees in economics and law learned quite a bit from the rank and file as well. They adopted the ideas of the workers' councils and incorporated them into the KPD's programme, a party that itself had its roots in Berlin.<sup>5</sup> Of similar import were the writings of Karl Korsch (who held a doctorate in law) condensing the council-democratic popular impulses into a theoretical system in its own right.<sup>6</sup> Korsch had served on the socialisation commission in Berlin in 1919, a body established during the revolution to draft a plan for socialising key industries but whose proposals were ignored, and was elected to the Reichstag along with Werner Scholem in 1924. Both originally came from the USPD and would later become major figures of the KPD's left wing.<sup>7</sup> Intellectual and proletarian radicalism in the KPD entered into a tense relationship of mutual, collective learning processes, often marked by outbursts of intense conflict, as foreshadowed by the fierce arguments between Luxemburg, Liebknecht and the majority of worker delegates at the party's founding congress. This conflict would repeat itself under the leadership of Paul Levi, who also held a doctorate in law, when he expelled the radical left current from the party at the 1919 party conference in Heidelberg. This split, however, came at a heavy cost: the base of the KPD in Berlin collapsed almost entirely, forcing the district party to rebuild from scratch. The expelled majority formed a new party, the syndicalist-leaning Communist Workers' Party of Germany [*Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, KAPD], which was stronger and larger than the Berlin KPD for some time.<sup>8</sup> The KPD's erratic radicalism in its early years was by no means a mere import of an intellectual vanguard; on the contrary: the party leadership, composed largely of intellectuals, attempted to hold back

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4 A similar left opposition had emerged in the SPD 20 years earlier, when the so-called 'youth' challenged the leadership of the founding generation in 1890. See Müller 1975.

5 The majority of Berlin members left the pro-war SPD at the USPD's founding in 1917. By early 1918, the 'Majority-SPD' with its 7,000 members was, compared to the 25,000 Independents, in fact a minority. Although the revolution brought countless new members into the ranks of the SPD, it also strengthened the council movement to the extent that, following the outbreak of a general strike in early March 1919, the SPD's council delegates sided against the interim government as well. The world war therefore strengthened and intensified the radicalism of Berlin's worker milieus. See Lange 2012, p. 37 and p. 96.

6 Korsch 1975.

7 'Für die Dritte Internationale', *Neue Zeitung für Mittelthüringen*, 2, No. 209, 19 September 1920, quoted here in Buckmiller 1980, pp. 580–5.

8 See Weber 1969b, p. 39. On the KAPD in Berlin see Bock 1969, pp. 236–51.

its radicalised working-class base from unilateral action on several occasions.<sup>9</sup> Although the KAPD's influence would subside as early as 1921 due to persistent internal conflicts, the spread of worker radicalism in Berlin was far from over. Instead, the disintegration of the KAPD led to renewed pressure on the KPD, which again stood alone as the only force to the left of the SPD.

This, in turn, provoked a new wave of radicalisation within the organisation. The Berlin KPD was firmly in the hands of its left wing, which soon began referring to itself as the 'Left Opposition'. When Werner Scholem returned to his home city in 1921, the district was led by the charismatic duo of Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow. Both came from affluent Jewish households, and like Scholem had broken with their families and dedicated themselves to socialism. Ruth Fischer, the daughter of a Viennese philosophy professor, had been one of the founding members of the Communist Party of Austria in 1918 and came to Berlin the following year, where she first worked for the KPD's theoretical journal, *Die Internationale*, before entering the Berlin district leadership.<sup>10</sup>

Maslow, born Isaak Yefimowich Chemerinsky, came from a southern Russian merchant family and emigrated to Dresden with his mother in 1899. A highly intelligent and musically gifted young man, he was not only an impressive pianist who performed on several concert tours, but displayed a promising propensity for physics as well, temporarily studying under Albert Einstein and Max Planck at the University of Berlin. In Berlin, Maslow came to know and love Ruth Fischer, the woman who converted to Communism this gifted soul thrown to the winds by the experiences of war.<sup>11</sup> Alongside Fischer and Maslow, leading figures of the Berlin left also included historian of antiquity and private lecturer Arthur Rosenberg, who in 1914 at the age of only 25 completed his doctoral studies at the University of Berlin with a thesis entitled *The State of the Ancient Italic Peoples*.<sup>12</sup> Scholem and Rosenberg not only grew into close political allies, but would develop a lifelong friendship.

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9 The notion that the KPD's radicalism was a product of its leadership is the guiding theme of Klaus-Michael Mallmann's *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik. Sozialgeschichte einer revolutionären Bewegung* (1992) as well as Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten's *Aufstand der Avantgarde. Die Märzaktion der KPD 1921* (1986). This consensus is challenged by Stefan Heinz, who uses the Berlin example to demonstrate widespread radicalism among the working classes. See Heinz 2010.

10 See Keßler 2013a.

11 Maslow, however, had already maintained contact with Russian Social Democracy. See Keßler 2013b, as well as Weber and Herbst 2008, pp. 579–81.

12 A *Habilitation* in the German and Austrian university system is a dissertation comparable to a second PhD thesis, qualifying researchers for a full professorship. However, only

The intellectual profile of the Berlin district leadership is quite striking – during political disagreements they were often referred to as a ‘clique of academic scatterbrains’. Clara Zetkin formulated this most trenchantly: ‘The opposition does not recruit its followers from the party’s mass constituency, but rather from some circle of sophisticated functionaries possessing mere smatterings of knowledge. It therefore finds it relatively easy to attract attention, as it remains at the surface of things, but also to establish factional links and to act in a coherent and unified manner. It is supported by broader sections of the party only where these are near clueless politically and exhibit a mere “emotional” revolutionary sentiment. Such comrades are strongly impressed by Maslow’s cynical brashness, Ruth Fisher’s booming rhetoric and Scholem’s muddleheaded impudence.’<sup>13</sup> This notion of the intellectuals as alien elements and demagogues was also passed on in historical literature – by Werner T. Angress, for instance, who wrote of the members of the Berlin left: ‘They were considerably younger (ten years at an average) than the leaders of the *Zentrale*, nearly all of them came from a middle-class background against which they had rebelled, and Fischer and Maslow were foreign born. They also lacked the political experience, the pride, and the maturity of their older comrades, who had grown up in the school of militant labor struggles with strikes, lock-outs, and often imprisonment’.<sup>14</sup> While this image may fit Maslow, Fischer or even Rosenberg to some degree, Werner Scholem’s life complicates the narrative. He was acquainted with both militant struggle as well as the prisons of the Kaiserreich.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, in contrast to the commonly held image of the Berlin district leadership, a number of Communists from typical working-class backgrounds were involved in this circle as well. They included, for example, mechanic Anton

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tenured professors are allowed to use the title ‘Professor’. Between *Habilitation* and full professorship, the title *Privatdozent* (private lecturer) is used. Private lecturers are unsalaried and were originally created for professionals such as medical doctors or lawyers from outside the university system. Both then and now, however, many private lecturers who are not appointed to a full professorship suffer a precarious existence. On Rosenberg, see Keßler 2003.

- 13 K. Tsetkin P’ismo ИККИ [letter from Clara Zetkin to ECCI], 23 February 1923, RGASPI, F. 528, op. 2, d. 84.
- 14 Angress 1963, p. 254. Angress describes the KPD left as an intellectual circle that would have remained a clique without ‘support from such genuine proletarians’ as Thälmann. For a critical perspective see Langels 1984, pp. 20–2.
- 15 Otto Langels also names Scholem as a counter-example to Angress’s characterisation. See Langels 1984, p. 21.

Grylewicz, who became the Berlin KPD's *Organisationsleiter* in 1920, or tool-maker Hans Pfeiffer and locksmith Ottomar Geschke, who both came from the Spartacus League. Another worker-functionary was Paul Schlecht, who earned his living as a toolmaker in a cable-manufacturing plant in the Berlin district of Oberspree and joined the district leadership as an honorary member in 1921.<sup>16</sup> Finally, another name worth mentioning is mechanic Max Hesse, whose father had been a founding member of the metal workers' union DMV [*Deutscher Metallarbeiter-Verband*]. Hesse was the same age as Scholem and, like him, joined the Workers' Youth in 1912. After the war he became a member of the soldiers' council in Berlin-Spandau, before chairing the KPD sub-district of Berlin-Charlottenburg from 1920 onward. Most striking is that all five were members of the Revolutionary Stewards during World War I.<sup>17</sup> At the time, this movement of anti-war socialists only allowed skilled workers and long-standing trade unionists into their conspiratorial circle.<sup>18</sup> This concentration of so many Stewards suggests that the Berlin district was run by a well attuned network of labour movement veterans.<sup>19</sup> The 'Berlin Opposition' was thus a symbiosis: it was made up of not only intellectuals, but also included many radical workers and trade unionists whose contributions have gone unacknowledged by history.<sup>20</sup>

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- 16 On their biographical details see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 292 f., p. 329 f., p. 579, p. 671 f., p. 791 f. and the list of Berlin *Orgleiter* and *Polleiter* on p. 1080. A folder of Hans Pfeiffer's recollections can be found in LArch Berlin, c Rep 902-02-04 Nr. 007.
- 17 Weber and Herbst 2008, on Max Hesse see p. 369 f. Another member of the Stewards in the Berlin leadership was the locksmith Paul Weyer, who joined the body in 1922 but opposed participating in the ADGB unions, against the leadership's line, and was expelled in 1924, see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 1019.
- 18 On the rise of the Stewards movement see Müller 1985, pp. 285–329, as well as Hoffrogge 2014, pp. 35–60.
- 19 In addition to the connection with the KPD Left Opposition, another faction from the Revolutionary Stewards' political periphery moved towards Paul Levi's KAG. This milieu attempted to re-found a cross-party network of stewards. Arkadi Maslow personally called for the Stewards to submit to the 21 Conditions on 15 November 1921, precipitating their departure from the party. Maslow operated under the command of the Berlin KPD's central leadership, which justified the decision as follows: 'the idea that leadership in a revolution could consist of a thrown together commission must be resolutely opposed, as only a firm party is qualified for this task,' see 'Sitzungen des Zentralvorstandes', SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/14; as well as Hoffrogge 2014, p. 172 f.
- 20 In terms of further intellectuals in this milieu, Ernst Schwarz is also worth mentioning. Schwarz was a studied assessor who joined the KPD together with the USPD in 1920, and also operated under the alias 'Tiede'. He joined the Berlin-Brandenburg district leadership in 1922, see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 855 f.

Additionally, although the intellectuals served as the group's public face and were usually the ones to deliver speeches at conferences and other meetings more so than the worker-functionaries, there are hardly any indications of tensions within the group.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Oskar Wischeropp, lathe operator and member of the district leadership, made his opposition to anti-intellectual attitudes quite clear: 'With regard to proceedings against the intellectuals, I must say I am no friend of any kind of guarantees, to me a man matters only to the extent – no matter if worker or intellectual – that he represents the interests of the party.'<sup>22</sup> Newcomers, however, had to prove themselves before they were considered trustworthy by the wider group. Werner Scholem failed to impress his new comrades at first, as a complaint by Hans Pfeiffer from March 1921 shows: 'There has been bitter complaint from comrades in Moabit that Comrade Scholem from the *Rote Fahne* editorial board gave a talk at the Sunday meeting on 6 March in the Moabiter Gesellschaftshaus that was so poor, our comrades moved to revoke his right to concluding remarks.'<sup>23</sup> Despite these and other initial hurdles, the opposition soon consolidated a degree of unity and Werner Scholem became one of its most prominent speakers. By 1923 he was one of the milieu's most well-known personalities, right after Fischer and Maslow.

The Jewish background of the Fischer/Maslow/Scholem trio did not impede their rise to the pinnacle of the Berlin KPD, although they were subjected to verbal abuse on several occasions. In a personal conversation with his friend Hugo Urbahns, Scholem reported of being the target of anti-Semitic slurs; his comrade Theodor Kögler even mentions that the Berlin leadership had been derided as 'Jew louts' [*Judenbengel*].<sup>24</sup> This would not stop the left in Ber-

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21 It was only after the left took over the KPD central leadership in 1924 that an open conflict of this type occurred, when Scholem tried to replace treasurer Artur König due to his general inability to perform his duties. Thälmann accused Scholem of trying to push workers out of the leadership, see Weber 1969b, p. 105 and the section entitled 'The Power of the Apparatus: Werner Scholem Organises the KPD'.

22 The expression surfaced when fellow member of the district leadership Paul Weyer attacked Maslow as an academic and a spy in February 1923: 'I still have a certain distrust of academics. Such as this Comrade Maslow – who knows where he has lived the last ten years and from where he got his money!' Wischeropp responded with the passage quoted above, see 'Sitzung der Bezirksleitung des KPD-Bezirks Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz', 2 February 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16.

23 Correspondence of the Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz KPD district leadership, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/25.

24 Hermann Weber told the following to the author: 'I learned from several friends of Scholem's (e.g. Wolfgang Bartels, Wilhelm Riechen and Theodor Koebler) that Scholem in

lin. Despite scattered animosities towards them, they were elected and supported by a broad majority of Berlin workers for years, even when opposing the national leadership of their own party. Neither do the minutes of party conferences and meetings, transcribed quite literally for the most part, indicate any anti-Semitic abuse towards Scholem – even in cases where the minutes remained unpublished and restricted to internal use, and therefore uncensored. It is not until after his expulsion from the party that a report details how Scholem and Fischer, when departing the Left Communist Lenin League in May 1928, were derided as ‘a gang of Jews’ by disappointed followers. The faction from which this remark came later re-joined the SPD.<sup>25</sup> The two documented cases relate to the party’s rank and file; we find no evidence of similar incidents only one level above this, namely that of conference delegates. Relevant here is a comparison with parliament: the kind of anti-Semitic abuse that was more or less written into the daily order of business in the Prussian Landtag simply cannot be found in the context of the district leadership, the central leadership or the party conferences of the KPD. Certainly, the rise of the Nazi movement prompted some rather ungainly attempts in the party press propaganda to redirect anti-Semitic stereotypes in an ‘anti-capitalist’ direc-

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fact spoke of a hidden anti-Semitism within the KPD in private conversations with Hugo Urbahns, and that Scholem linked this to the indirect attacks against his opposition. When Urbahns responded that he had never experienced suchlike as a Left Oppositionist, Scholem replied he should take a look at himself (he was tall, blonde and blue-eyed) and then at Scholem who approximated the stereotype of a “Jew”. Though I have no other documents, Koegler did say in my film *50 Jahre KPD*: “the Berlin Opposition was also insulted with the words, ‘Jew louts, get out of the Münzstraße’”. Written correspondence between Hermann Weber and the author, 23 July 2012.

- 25 On this, Franz Dahlem reports: ‘The exit of Maslow, Ruth Fischer and Scholem from the Lenin League and the corresponding publication of the news by our party press have led to a catastrophic collapse of the Lenin League here in Suhl. At first the oppositional workers could not believe it, but when our leaflet with excerpts from Maslow’s and Scholem’s declarations to works councils and before a works council assembly circulated here in Suhl, disbelief and outrage at this “treason” flashed to mad hatred against the new renegades Maslow, Ruth Fischer, Scholem. The rumour immediately circulated that Maslow had been bought by the Central Committee for 100,000. “Bribed dogs”, “Gang of Jews that sticks together” were just some of the expressions that the people around Heym hurled at them’, Franz Dahlem, ‘Die Lage im Leninbund. Von Suhl aus gesehen’, *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der Tass über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD* and *Berichte über Ultralinke und Leninbund*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/705/22. Guido Heym, who Dahlem indicates was the leader of the Suhl Left Communists, left with his group and joined the SPD following the conflict.

tion.<sup>26</sup> Active discrimination against Jewish members within the structures of the KPD, however, cannot be identified. On the contrary, a continuation of the Social Democratic tradition in which assimilated Jews often occupied high positions in the party hierarchy and left a prominent impression on party debates is clearly identifiable. The Left Opposition included a particularly high number of Jews in prominent positions, including, apart from the Berlin comrades, Iwan Katz, who came from a merchant family in Hanover.<sup>27</sup> Although the Left Opposition had its centre of activities in Berlin, it was active throughout the country. Another stronghold was Wasserkante, a district in northern Germany led by primary school teacher Hugo Urbahns and Ernst Thälmann, who began his working life as a drayman in Hamburg.<sup>28</sup>

But what did the Left Opposition actually stand for? According to Ruth Fischer, the group shared a measure of scepticism towards Soviet policies from the outset. As proof of this she named the visit of three Russian oppositionist functionaries sent to Berlin in March 1921 to keep them away from Moscow. Fischer wrote that at the time, these three men ‘asked the Berlin organization to continue with all its energy to fight against state regimentation, the State Party, and the degeneration of Communism’.<sup>29</sup> She wrote this in 1948 as a reckoning with Stalinism, the origins of which she traced back to the Comintern’s earlier Leninist phase. Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute that the Left Opposition as it emerged in 1921 stood firmly on the foundation of Leninism. Fischer and Scholem voiced no criticism of Soviet Russia, defended Lenin’s 21 Conditions, and drew sharp distinctions between themselves and the syndicalists of the KAPD. Scholem was prone to rail against ‘KAP[D]ist, anti-Bolshevist, anti-centralist tendencies’ in the movement.<sup>30</sup> His choice of words suggests that his opposition had nothing in common with that of the syndicalist currents from the KPD’s early period.

To this day, one of the most important source texts on the emergence of the Left Opposition is an article written by Werner Scholem in 1924, the first draft of which was written by Maslow and Fischer.<sup>31</sup> Scholem commences his

26 Some of these attempts are detailed in Keßler 2005.

27 Scholem met him at the very latest as a parliamentary colleague in 1921, although they had already encountered each other at the Halle conference at which the USPD split in December 1920.

28 Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 925 ff. A biography of Thälmann is currently being authored by Norman LaPorte at the University of Glamorgan (Wales).

29 Fischer 1948, p. 182.

30 Werner Scholem, ‘Feinde Ringsum’, *Der Funke* 16, 15 September 1924.

31 The first draft of this article came from Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow, and is located in

narrative in 1920 with the words, ‘following the unification of the Spartacus League and the left USP[D]’. According to Scholem, critics at the time had opposed the Levi leadership in ‘tactical questions’, their policies had already been ‘vigorously rejected’ during a conference of Berlin party functionaries in the spring of 1921. This refers to the united front strategy of the ‘open letter’, with which Levi hoped to attract Social Democratic workers in early 1921.<sup>32</sup> The opposition, on the other hand, was critical of any attempt to persuade the masses to join the KPD through appeals to whatever the popular demand of the day might be. This scepticism was motivated by an ever-present fear of ‘opportunism’, that is, a lapse into Social Democratic reformism.<sup>33</sup> Whenever a debate on engaging in joint actions with the SPD broke out, the opposition warned of a ‘right-wing danger’ that would result in the ‘liquidation’, i.e. dissolution, of the KPD. The consensus around which the opposition rallied was thus of a decidedly negative character. Paul Levi became their crown witness for the danger that ‘liquidationism’ truly posed, as he did in fact return to the SPD after his expulsion. The Berlin left criticised the party’s careless treatment and readmission of Levi’s sympathisers, yet felt the leadership did not take them seriously. Scholem wrote that they had been misrepresented ‘systematically as a lot of “brawlers”, “intellectual fools”, and the like.’<sup>34</sup> While Maslow, Fischer, Scholem and the Berlin left saw themselves as the true keepers of the Communist flame against a reformist deluge, the party leadership viewed them as little more than a group of troublemakers. Clara Zetkin, for instance, denounced the opposition’s purely negative consensus. According to Zetkin,

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SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/128, Bl. 42 under the title ‘Skizze zu Richtlinien für die Berliner Delegation nach Moskau’, dated 17 April 1923. A second version has survived with the title ‘Skizze der Berliner Delegation nach Moskau, den 21. April 1923’, with the sub-heading ‘Die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD’, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/14, Bl. 164ff. This version was passed as a resolution by the Berlin KPD central leadership on 18 April, its authors are indicated as Fischer and Maslow. Relying on this resolution, Scholem drafted his ‘Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD’, *Die Internationale*, 7, Issue 2/3, 28 March 1924.

32 Weber 1969b, p. 41.

33 The March Action fiasco was not discussed in Scholem’s ‘Skizze’, as this would have raised the question of whether or not the opposition’s favoured ‘offensive’ line had already failed. The Berlin leadership, however, distanced itself from the March Action in 1921 – in a report from October 1921 one even reads that Fischer, Maslow and Geschke had warned a Comintern representative against premature actions on 17 March 1921, before the incident occurred. Report from the Berlin district leadership to the ECCI, 13 October 1921, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/25.

34 Ibid.



the Opposition 'not only criticises the party's current policies, but ultimately renders all and any policy impossible due to its concern for the purity and independence of the party, leaving nothing but the propaganda of a tiny, pure sect'.<sup>35</sup>

This tendency of the left towards self-isolation as observed so acutely by Zetkin did, however, emerge against the backdrop of a dramatically altered political situation. The pre-1918 SPD never seriously faced the prospect of entering a governing coalition; as the only workers' party, it remained largely estranged from other parties. Moreover, it operated within an autocratic system in which elections meant very little. In Weimar Democracy, however, two very distinct workers' parties co-existed, and the government was constituted through an electoral system. This new constellation increased the pressure on the workers' movement to participate in official politics, which in turn favoured the SPD, which had proven its ability to govern through its coalitions with Christian and liberal parties from 1919 onward. Even if the KPD managed to push the SPD to the left by means of clever united front tactics, this would only make the party more dependent on Social Democracy. By and large, the logic of elections and coalitions facilitated compromises within the existing order rather than a revolutionary rupture.

It is therefore quite understandable why a strong current inside the KPD would have warned repeatedly against this danger. Fundamental opposition probably seemed like a reasonable course to many Communists, not least from their own personal experience. Werner Scholem, for instance, had been politically socialised in Berlin and Halle. He experienced two strongholds of worker radicalism and generalised what he learned there. It should hardly come as a surprise that he considered a revolutionary course appropriate as a general policy, even and especially during electoral campaigns.<sup>36</sup> The danger he saw was not radical isolationism, but rather being bogged down in the opportunist 'swamp', as he had witnessed in Social Democracy prior to World War I. Many had undergone similar experiences; to these militants, radicalism seemed realistic not despite but because of their many years in the labour movement.<sup>37</sup>

35 K. Tsetkin P'ismo IKKI [letter from Clara Zetkin to ECCI], 23 February 1923, RGASPI, F. 528, op. 2, d. 84.

36 Scholem based his arguments on the notion that disappointment with the SPD's compromises would bring future electoral success for the KPD. See Werner Scholem, 'Die Wahlen in Thüringen', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 181, 16 September 1922.

37 Hermann Weber also notes that many supporters of the KPD left came from the USPD, confirming the notion that they were rooted in the movement. Many Berlin district functionaries were, similar to Scholem himself, active in the movement for over a decade

This was the backdrop against which Ruth Fischer would condemn, as early as the 1921 Jena party conference, the implementation of united front tactics by the party leadership, demanding instead, as Werner Angress puts it, a ‘more dynamic course’.<sup>38</sup> At this early stage, however, the left limited itself to amendments and corrections of official policy. The leadership drafted a radical transitional programme which contained a demand for the ‘forced syndication’ of companies, so as to introduce state co-ownership of large corporations.<sup>39</sup> The left criticised this programme as unrealistic: the ‘bourgeois class government’, as Scholem wrote in an article, was neither willing nor able to implement such a demand. In his view, it was thus absolutely necessary that the demand for a ‘workers’ government’ be included as well.<sup>40</sup> At this point, criticism remained sympathetic, as the left ultimately supported the united front policy. In an article from 1922, for example, Scholem praises the joint actions of KPD and SPD in mass demonstrations as the ‘starting point for building the international united front of the world proletariat’.<sup>41</sup>

Scholem could engage in this kind of united front, for the KPD commonly dominated the dynamics at demonstrations and was able to interact well with the Social Democratic base – effectively constituting a united front from below. Top-level negotiations between the parties, however, could potentially impose political restraints on the KPD and were thus vehemently rejected. Scholem was highly critical of the campaign following the Rathenau murder in June 1922: ‘The KPD let itself be bound by an agreement with the SPD and the trade union bureaucracy and thus concealed its “Communist face” from the masses’.<sup>42</sup> According to Scholem, this led to an initial escalation of the party conflict: ‘The fierce criticism of the leadership coming from the left organisations in the wake of the Rathenau action [...] instilled that fatal anti-opposition

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before becoming prominent oppositionists. See Weber 1969, p. 18; on length of political careers see citations from Weber and Herbst 2008.

38 Angress 1963, p. 255.

39 An ‘Assessment of Material Assets’ was simultaneously intended to incur a large partial expropriation to pay for remaining war reparations, instead of financing them on the backs of workers via taxation. Tactically, the demand was designed to pressure the SPD and the unions from the left. On this programme see Wilde 2013, p. 243 ff.; Angress 1963, p. 255.

40 Werner Scholem, ‘Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD’, *Die Internationale*, 7, Issue 2/3, 28 March 1924, p. 125.

41 See Werner Scholem, ‘Der 20. April in Deutschland’, *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 52, 22 April 1922.

42 Werner Scholem, ‘Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD’, *Die Internationale*, 7, Issue 2/3, 28 March 1924, p. 125.

mood among the leadership that has poisoned inner-party relations ever since. At the time, plans emerged to forcefully remove the district leadership in Berlin-Brandenburg in order to get rid of the “grouzers and brawlers”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the KPD leadership passed a resolution as early as 11 April 1922 mandating that all resolutions passed by the Berlin organisation first be approved by the leadership.<sup>44</sup> At the end of June, controversy broke out around the Communist Youth – Werner Scholem had allegedly addressed a letter to a youth organisation close to the KAPD, seeking to win them over to his opposition against the party leadership – the Politburo debated the matter under the agenda item ‘the Scholem case’ and issued a formal rebuke against him.<sup>45</sup> On 1 August 1922, the KPD leadership would eventually declare: ‘There is a clear agreement that the current leadership in Greater Berlin is using its organisational influence to mobilise against the line of the party in general and against the *Zentrale* in particular’.<sup>46</sup> During the same session, the leadership also appointed Heinrich Brandler ‘Chief District Secretary’ for the Berlin-Brandenburg district. It would be his ‘task to systematically draw together all of the *Zentrale*’s forces so as to exert political influence on the organisation in Greater Berlin’. The leadership’s plans to sideline the opposition could not have been more obvious, but nevertheless failed. Attempts to discipline the opposition suggest that internal party conflicts intensified around April 1922, and would escalate into an open rupture by the summer. While the opposition had initially engaged in constructive criticism, by now their trust had eroded. The Berlin group and their sympathisers saw themselves as victims of persecution, and viewed their leadership as an irreconcilable adversary.

Decisive in this struggle over hegemony within the KPD, however, was not only the party rank and file, but the Comintern in Moscow as well. Shortly before the commencement of the 4th World Congress of the Communist International in November 1922, the Berlin Communists held a mass meeting with 3,000 attendees at which KPD chairman Ernst Meyer’s ‘transitional programme’ was denounced and Ruth Fischer was elected as a delegate to Moscow.<sup>47</sup> The KPD thus no longer spoke with a unified voice on the international stage. As had already been the case during the crisis of the Levi leadership, the Comintern, and thereby the Bolsheviks in particular, were appointed as judges and medi-

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43 Ibid, p. 127.

44 ‘Sitzung des KPD-Politbüro vom 11. April 1922’, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/2.

45 ‘Sitzung des KPD-Politbüro vom 29. Juni 1922’, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/2.

46 *Zentrale* was the official name of the central leadership at the time; ‘Sitzung des KPD-Politbüro vom 1. August 1922’, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/2.

47 Angress 1963, p. 256.

ators in German questions – a basic pattern that would resurface in numerous conflicts over the following years. Yet by the end of 1922, the Comintern faced its own crisis. Hopes for the world revolution had not materialised, and the Soviet government's 'New Economic Policy' made substantial concessions to its own domestic petty bourgeoisie. The pessimistic mood was embodied by the figure of Lenin, who, weakened by a recent stroke, was only able to deliver a brief opening address.<sup>48</sup> Although the revolutionary thrust of the Berlin KPD was met with little enthusiasm during this period of retreat, the opposition still managed to hold its own in Moscow. Dissidents Ruth Fischer and Hugo Urbahns, together with Ernst Meyer, were invited to a clandestine meeting in a side room of the Kremlin. Prominent Bolsheviks Leon Trotsky, Karl Radek and Grigory Zinoviev attempted to arbitrate the German dispute, while the sickly Lenin at first sat quietly and listened, before rejecting Meyer's concept of a 'German NEP' for the transitional programme.<sup>49</sup> Although a public resolution on the united front question would later re-affirm Ernst Meyer's position in the party, the prominent attendees of the meeting signified the elevation of the opposition from a local Berlin and Hamburg phenomenon to the status of an internationally recognised current.

The incident reinvigorated the opposition and the KPD's disunity continued, re-emerging at the KPD's Leipzig party conference from 28 January to 1 February 1923.<sup>50</sup> Scholem's description in retrospect recalls a meeting in which there were 'two sharply distinct political factions, although [the conference] had not been prepared in a factional manner'.<sup>51</sup> It was the first time that – in the face of increased worker militancy in the context of the crisis in the Ruhr region – programmatic statements of party leadership and opposition publicly contradicted one another.<sup>52</sup> What followed was a crucial vote, culminating in a majority siding with the leadership and its united front policy.

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48 Angress 1963, p. 257.

49 Multiple reports of this meeting exist, see Fischer 1948, pp. 183–6, Zetkin 1934, p. 38; for an evaluation of the meeting see Angress 1963, p. 262.

50 On the conference see *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des III. (8.) Parteitag der KPD in Leipzig vom 28. Januar bis 1. Februar 1923*, Berlin 1923 and Angress 1963, pp. 267–78.

51 Werner Scholem, 'Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD', p. 129.

52 Werner Angress summarises the two programmes as follows: 'Whereas the Left placed the emphasis on action, organization, initiative, and armament of the workers, the majority theses stressed defense against "Fascist" aggression, and a policy of attrition vis-à-vis the Social Democrats. They proposed that the seizure of power be accomplished by gradual stages, through constant struggles for improved positions of the workers in the political arena', see Angress 1963, p. 275.

Scholem commented on this defeat for the opposition with sharp words: ‘The majority-approved theses in Leipzig clearly illustrate the new Communist revisionism which removes the dictatorship of the proletariat as the immediate goal of struggle and which considers bourgeois democracy as the “framework” in which the Communist Party wages its struggle through the workers’ government that is established through parliamentary channels.’<sup>53</sup> Although both wings of the KPD employed similar rhetoric, using terms like ‘united front’ and ‘workers’ government’, they associated very different concepts with them. One side contemplated parliamentary alliances with the SPD and even tried out these tactics: in the spring of 1923, the KPD’s toleration allowed an SPD government to come to power in Saxony. SPD Minister President Erich Zeigner, the head of the new government, thus signified the KPD’s attempt to improvise a revolutionary *realpolitik*. A similar path was explored in Thuringia.<sup>54</sup> In the eyes of the opposition, however, these were not workers’ governments but simply a disgrace.<sup>55</sup> The opposition focused exclusively on control committees and works councils. A workers’ government, as Werner Scholem defined it, was not a coalition in parliament, but rather the ‘blasting apart of bourgeois democracy and the commencement of the civil war’.<sup>56</sup> The opposition could support united fronts ‘from below’, but never an alliance with the SPD leadership. The ultimate split between the two wings became apparent towards the end of the Leipzig party conference, when not a single opposition candidate appeared on the list of candidates for the central leadership. The opposition subsequently boycotted the vote – an unprecedented response.

Prior to the party conference, the Berlin organisation had assumed that they would receive at least one or more seats in the new *Zentrale*. But even symbolic collaboration was controversial: in a meeting of the district leadership in late January 1923, Werner Scholem had spoken out against such a move: ‘Participating in the *Zentrale* at this point is more dangerous than if we wouldn’t join [...] I nevertheless strongly hope that we don’t actually end up in the position to have to decide this [...] If comrade Ruth does move to the *Zentrale*, then she needs to leave Münzstraße, for she will be the intellectual leader in the *Zentrale*. Münzstraße was the seat of the Berlin district leadership, and Scholem wanted to keep his comrade Ruth Fischer there: ‘The time when Ruth was absent from

53 Werner Scholem, ‘Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD’, p. 129.

54 On Zeigner see Rudloff 1999. On the KPD in Saxony see LaPorte 2003. On Thuringia see Kachel 2011.

55 As Ruth Fischer put it at a meeting of the KPD leadership on 4 September 1923, see Jentsch 2005, p. 147.

56 Jentsch 2005, p. 130.

Berlin should serve as a cautionary tale. The *Zentrale* immediately attempted to send people away from Berlin [...] Nominate Maslow, even if he is not elected, then Ruth can work here'. His comrade Henning also supported this idea: 'It would be best to send comrade Maslow to headquarters, Maslow and Brandler are hard-headed enough to scuffle amongst themselves'.<sup>57</sup> Hans Pfeiffer, who apparently never got on well with Scholem, argued against such moderation more decisively: 'Scholem's remarks prove that he is unaware of the actual situation [...] Once our comrades are part of the leadership we'll have conquered the whole party within half a year'.<sup>58</sup> This glimpse behind the scenes shows how dominant Fischer and Maslow were in the Berlin district leadership.<sup>59</sup> Werner Scholem looked to Ruth Fischer's possible departure with outright fear – only over the course of 1923 would he emancipate himself from her influence.

One outcome of the opposition's Leipzig boycott was the election of four representatives of the current to the new leadership under Heinrich Brandler. That said, these were not prominent spokespersons of the opposition, but rather carefully hand-picked comrades. This move by the leadership was enabled by the emergence of internal differences. Six members of the opposition had dissociated themselves from Fischer's boycott, thereby sabotaging her planned showdown with the leadership. In an emergency meeting of the Berlin district leadership, Werner Scholem sharply criticised the delegation for their conduct: the dissenters had literally stabbed the opposition in the back, just 'when it wanted to prove to the International that it will hold together politically'.<sup>60</sup> Scholem remarked to Heinrich Brandler, who was also present: 'As much as I consider our entrance to be wrong – first appearing as the strong man, only to then retreat – I tell you right now, you can count on the Berlin organisation down to the last man if you lead an unequivocal fight against the bourgeoisie and the SPD; we will support you, but we will not be denied the right to clearly state our opinion including before the party membership'.<sup>61</sup> Ruth Fischer likewise demonstrated a willingness to come to an agreement: 'It

57 'Sitzung der KPD-Bezirksleitung Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz am 22. Januar 1923', SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16.

58 Ibid.

59 Mario Keßler notes that not only her charisma, but also her status as a young radical brought her into this leading position: 'In the Berlin party organisation, which had a very low average age, a politician of Ruth Fischer's type was required, not a party patriarch like Clara Zetkin', see Keßler 2013a, p. 93, see also p. 73.

60 'Sitzung der Bezirksleitung des KPD-Bezirks Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz', 2 February 1923, SAPMOBArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16.

61 Ibid.

was my impression that when comrades see that there's not only *meshuga* students and profit lecturers, but honest workers, that the *Zentrale* would come to its senses and not reject our extended hand'.<sup>62</sup> By 'profit lecturers', Fischer was referring to private lecturer Arthur Rosenberg, whom Heinrich Brandler had allegedly taunted as such during a speech.<sup>63</sup> In reality, Rosenberg earned no 'profit' from his teaching position at all, as private lecturers were unsalaried. The Berlin Opposition was maligned in this way time and again. Brandler had already behaved abusively towards the intellectuals in Leipzig, arguing they only brought confusion to the movement.<sup>64</sup> Though he would subsequently refrain from these sorts of attacks, he nevertheless continued to harbour reservations: 'We need intellectuals, but we should tell our young intellectuals, come and learn about facts, but stop ruminating and growing hysterical'.<sup>65</sup>

Owed to this ultimately inconclusive trial of strength, the KPD's two main currents were left with no option but to work together, which functioned far more smoothly in the newly elected leadership than expected: all four opposition members in the leadership, including Hans Pfeiffer, adopted Brandler's line in April 1923.<sup>66</sup> Pfeiffer's plans for a surprise takeover of the party were thus prematurely brought to an end, but neither would this co-optation mark a resolution of the underlying conflict, as Werner Scholem explains: 'The party conference had not fused the party together, but torn it into two halves, of which one dominated the central apparatus and the other the party's largest district organisations. It was therefore only a question of time before the most severe conflicts would erupt'.<sup>67</sup>

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62 Ibid.

63 Rosenberg would later accept Brandler's apology, see Keßler 2003, p. 87.

64 *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des 3. Parteitages der KPD*, p. 325f., see also Angress 1963, p. 278.

65 'Sitzung des Berliner Zentralvorstandes der KPD am 3. Februar 1923', SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1-2/14.

66 Werner Scholem, 'Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD', p. 131. The other three were Heinz Neumann, Arthur Ewert and Gerhart Eisler – Ruth Fischer's brother, see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 671. Fischer was given an explicit justification for Pfeiffer's selection by the leadership: 'I was told in the leadership meeting that Pfeiffer was taken because he will be active in the movement long after Ruth and Maslow no longer are,' see 'Sitzung der Bezirksleitung des KPD-Bezirks Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz, 2 February 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1-2/16.

67 Werner Scholem, 'Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD', p. 130, as well as 'Bericht der Bezirksleitung der KPD Berlin-Brandenburg über die Arbeit der Organisation vom Januar bis September 1923'.

### National Revolution on the Ruhr? Scholem and Schlageter in the Summer of 1923

The 'Battle of the Ruhr', in which, paradoxically, government and employers encouraged the workers to go on strike against a French occupation of German coalfields, would soon become a major impetus for renewed conflict within the KPD.<sup>68</sup> The French demanded reparations in the form of coal, while the German government sought to test their adversary's resolve. In retrospect, Werner Scholem criticised the KPD's course of action in this situation: 'While all eyes were on Saxony, the party leadership wantonly neglected the Ruhr question. [...] The party was mistaken when it entered the Battle of the Ruhr without taking up a clear position against the German bourgeoisie.'<sup>69</sup> The KPD did in fact try to benefit from the government's Ruhr campaign by exploiting it with an 'anti-imperialist' intervention beginning in June 1923. Werner Scholem and Ruth Fischer had travelled to the Ruhr region on several occasions in March 1923 with the intention of preventing this, attending the party conference of the KPD's Rhineland-Westphalia North district in Essen and submitting a resolution calling for workers' control over production.<sup>70</sup> This provoked significant discontent inside the party. Scholem was accused of calling for workplace occupations,<sup>71</sup> which the leadership viewed as a breach of discipline and an attempt to 'overturn' the party's tactical line.<sup>72</sup> Scholem rejected the accusations, depicting them as an attack on the party's left as a whole: 'I have no intention whatsoever of making it in any way easy for those who are trying to throw us out. We will try not to show any weakness, we will proceed just like the opposition in the construction workers' union (lively interjection). All this outrage expressed here can only be understood by those who know what is going on here, namely that some comrades want to separate from

68 On the role of the Left Opposition in 1923 see also Hoffrogge in LaPorte and Hoffrogge 2017.

69 Werner Scholem, 'Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD', *Die Internationale*, 7, Issue 2/3, 28 March 1924.

70 Scholem reported on this at a meeting of the Berlin leadership on 27 March 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16. The opposition's resolution called for an 'active Ruhr policy' alongside 'simultaneous intensification of the movement in the Reich', as well as 'the question of the working class taking over the workplaces' as a main slogan. See Scholem, 'Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD'.

71 The assembly was held on 12 March in Dortmund, see 'Sitzung des Berliner Zentralvorstandes vom 4. April 1923', SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/14.

72 Edwin Hoernle to the ECCI, 23 April 1923, RY 1/I 2/ 3/62a, Bl. 132, quoted in Kessler 2003, p. 90.



us'.<sup>73</sup> Scholem compared his actions to the tactics of the Communist minority inside the Social Democratic construction workers' union. This marked a rupture: for the first time, Scholem openly articulated that his own party's leadership was the main political adversary. Heinrich Brandler intervened, demanding that the opposition bring Scholem and Fischer 'back into line', as this was the only chance for the hoped-for reconciliation to be successful. Otherwise, Brandler continued, 'We will be left with no other salvation than to apply organisational means, including even potential expulsion from the party'.<sup>74</sup> This was the first time, but by no means the last, that Scholem was threatened with expulsion from the KPD.

Scholem and Fischer's Ruhr policies were a response to what was referred to as the 'Schlageter course' – an episode from the summer of 1923 when the KPD sought to benefit from the Ruhr conflict by deploying nationalist and patriotic slogans. The policy was named after Leo Schlageter, a *Freikorps* volunteer and member of the fascist Greater German Workers' Party [*Großdeutsche Arbeiterpartei*] executed for sabotage by the French occupying forces on 26 May 1926. Radek honoured Schlageter in his speech as a 'fighter', but also described him as a 'wanderer into nothing', a criticism of his extreme nationalist worldview.<sup>75</sup> Inspired by Radek, the KPD sought to re-channel the *völkisch*-inspired radicalisation towards its own camp, and did not shy away from pandering to right-wing and fascist rhetoric in the course of doing so – a risky move that threatened to blur the lines between Communism and the emerging fascist movement. Previous literature had assumed that the KPD's Left Opposition approved this course without reservations.<sup>76</sup> British historian Edward H. Carr based this notion on Bolshevik Karl Radek, who claimed that these new tactics had been implemented 'hand in hand' with member of the opposition Ruth Fischer.<sup>77</sup> Another supposed piece of evidence is a speech given by Fischer to

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73 Scholem's comparison with the KPD's policy in the trade unions garnered intense criticism, and he was confronted with this statement for days afterwards in various meetings. See 'Sitzung der Bezirksleitung des KPD-Bezirks Berlin-Brandenburg', 3 April 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16.

74 'Sitzung des Berliner Zentralvorstandes vom 4. April 1923', SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/14.

75 See Jentsch 2005.

76 Angress, for instance, writes: 'only because the Schlageter line was a matter of tactics rather than of doctrine was it supported throughout the party, even including the Left Opposition', Angress 1963, p. 349.

77 Karl Radek, *Die Lehren der Deutschen Ereignisse*, p. 18, quoted in Carr 1954, p. 185. Carr also regards the Schlageter course as a purely tactical move, which, as a first step of a planned Communist insurrection, was more suited to the party left than the pragmatists.

university students in Berlin, in which she responded to anti-Semitic sedition against 'Jew capitalists' with the words: 'Whoever is agitating against Jewish capital, gentlemen, is really already a class warrior, even though he may not know it yet'.<sup>78</sup> Ruth Fischer, who grew up in a Jewish family, wanted attacks on 'Jewish capital' to be seen as also directed against Stinnes and Klöckner, i.e. German capitalists, and thereby appeared fully supportive of the Schlageter course. Her appearance proved highly controversial at the time and remains so among historians today, as Fischer chose to initiate a dialogue with an openly anti-Semitic audience, rather than distance herself and the KPD from such forces altogether. Her speech is sometimes used as evidence of widespread anti-Semitism in the KPD as a whole<sup>79</sup> – the reality, however, is more complicated. Fischer was herself Jewish and entered the stage attempting to win listeners over to the left, seeking to dissuade them from anti-Semitism by offering anti-capitalism as an alternative. The attempt, however, would fail. By taking the students' hate speech as a point of departure for debate, she ended up deploying the image of 'Jewish capital' herself, rather than rejecting such stereotypes on principle. This appearance ought to have been sufficient to demonstrate that the Schlageter course was doomed and would benefit, rather than neutralise, the growing fascist movement.

It is thus all the more interesting that Heinrich Brandler, the spiritual architect of the new line, reported of resistance to the course from Ruth Fischer, Werner Scholem and the Berlin left in particular.<sup>80</sup> In an unpublished letter, he complains of Fischer's insufficient support for the new tactics just days before her infamous speech: 'It has given Ruth and a whole range of other leading comrades from the left and from the right quite some stomach ache'.<sup>81</sup> According to Brandler, Fischer and Maslow were literally sabotaging the Schlageter course by publicly ridiculing it at meetings: they teased that, unfortunately, although the new policy had indeed neutralised a total of 12 fascists, 3,000 workers were driven into the fascist camp at the same time. Further proof of the opposition's critical stance towards the KPD's national-revolutionary adventurism is the fact that the party had planned an 'anti-fascist day', including several large demon-

78 'Hängt die Judenkapitalisten. Ruth Fischer als Antisemitin', *Vorwärts*, 22 August 1923. The article was published a month after Ruth Fischer's speech, thus it is unclear whether the quote is accurate; that said, it was never disputed by the KPD.

79 Kistenmacher 200.

80 See also Hoffrogge 2017.

81 KPD *Polbüro* to Karl Radek, Moscow (ECC1), 12 and 18 July 1923 – the abbreviation 'Bra' refers to Brandler, the author; SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/ 208b, Bl. 436 ff. und Bl. 448 f.

strations, for 29 July 1923.<sup>82</sup> When the Prussian Ministry of the Interior issued a ban on the demonstrations, the party's leadership moved to abandon the plan. The left in Berlin, however, stood by their plans for an anti-fascist day. The matter was referred all the way to Moscow and debated by the Comintern, where Radek went out of his way to prevent the anti-fascist day from taking place.<sup>83</sup>

Another voice critical of the national-revolutionary experiments was that of Werner Scholem. In February 1923, he spoke out against the nationalist rabble in the Landtag, charging that while Germans killed by the French military were publicly mourned, others were blithely ignored: 'There is no difference between the victims [...] in one case, workers from Essen were plastered with lead by French imperialism and its henchmen, while in Mühlheim unemployed Germans were murdered by German fascists and German police'.<sup>84</sup> Scholem refers here to a recent demonstration of unemployed workers that had been violently attacked, thus also expressing his opposition to the right-wing terror that accompanied the resistance to the French occupation. While Karl Radek and later Ruth Fischer would make rhetorical concessions to the right so as to tactically redirect its followers' radicalism to the left, Scholem considered this move too risky. He insisted that, even in the Battle of the Ruhr, sedition and terror from the right were not the kind of resistance the KPD could benefit from: 'Outside the Ruhr region we must now step up the struggle against the fascists and for wage demands. This critique is necessary. The political line of the *Rote Fahne* was mistaken, as it implies that we abandon the Ruhr workers in a united front with the Cuno government'.<sup>85</sup> Cuno was the Chancellor responsible for the nationalist anti-French campaign. Scholem argued that workers in the Ruhr region could only be successful in their fight against imperialism 'if they manage to cancel the capitalists' rule over production in the Ruhr region, no matter what national banner they may champion'.<sup>86</sup> If we compare all the

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82 E.H. Carr concluded in his analysis of the summer of 1923 that the Schlageter course, as a manoeuvre intended to split the fascist organisations, did not preclude the possibility of holding anti-fascist demonstrations, Carr 1954, p. 181. Thus, the Proletarian Hundreds, organised to defend against right-wing terrorism, formed a major component of the party's plans for revolution in the summer of 1923.

83 Carr 1954, p. 187.

84 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, '232. Sitzung am 20. April 1923'.

85 'Sitzung der KPD-Bezirksleitung Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz', 23 May 23, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1-2/16.

86 *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtages*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921-1924, '259. Sitzung am 20. Juni 1923'. A draft resolution prepared by Scholem for the Berlin leadership articulated a criticism of the KPD's hesitation as early as 28 May 1923: 'The *Rote Fahne* saw it as its

statements relating to the Ruhr conflict, we can discern a clear anti-national criticism of the government's anti-French Ruhr campaign emanating from the opposition in early 1923, interrupted by a sudden shift by Ruth Fischer in July 1923, likely due to pressure from Moscow.<sup>87</sup> Once Radek had spoken in favour of the KPD tactically accommodating popular nationalism, Fischer abandoned her criticism and went along with the new line. Ruth Fischer would in fact switch to supporting a party line she had previously criticised for tactical reasons on a number of occasions – a behaviour that irritated Scholem and led to multiple altercations between the two. Scholem refused to give in to Radek in 1923, as did the Berlin KPD as a whole, indicated by the 22 June resolution. Nevertheless, Ruth Fischer's appearance before fascist university students stuck in public memory, while Scholem's critique of nationalism remained buried in the transcripts of internal meetings. Only later would these conflicts between opposition and party leadership be conducted in the open.

### From the Battle of the Ruhr to the 'German October' of 1923: New Conflicts in the KPD

Escalating tensions between the opposition and the leadership over tactics in the Ruhr region prompted a meeting in Moscow to reconcile the two wings from 27 April to 23 May 1923.<sup>88</sup> Although Heinrich Brandler was granted official Comintern support for his united front strategy, he was also compelled to admit Ruth Fischer and three other representatives of the opposition into the party leadership.<sup>89</sup> This outcome failed to satisfy the Berlin Opposition, however, as Fischer reported to the district leadership upon her return from

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responsibility to urge the workers in the Ruhr and the rest of Germany to remain passive. The way in which the *Rote Fahne* warned the Ruhr workers against a fight with the fascists is tantamount to a disassociation from the Ruhr workers' movement', SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16, Bl. 222. A resolution of the Berlin leadership on 22 June 1923 called for a council-republican orientation instead, *Rote Fahne* 145, 27 June 23; available in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16.

87 See the following section.

88 Ruth Fischer, Ernst Thälmann, Arkadi Maslow and Gerhart Eisler, one of Ruth Fischer's brothers, were present at the meeting. Heinrich Brandler and Paul Böttcher attended as representatives of the party leadership; see Jentsch 2005, p. 88f.

89 Ruth Fischer, Ernst Thälmann, Ottomar Geschke and Artur König were elected to the party leadership on 17 May 1923, see *ibid.* On the political content of the compromise see 'Zur Liquidation der Parteidifferenzen', *Rote Fahne* 107, 13 May 1923.

Moscow: 'We see the expansion of the leadership only as a burden and an obstacle for our work as a whole, and secondly the expansion is a solution incomprehensible to the membership, and, thirdly, it is hardly a desirable situation when the opposition is forced into the leadership from above'.<sup>90</sup> Werner Scholem was among those critical of the conference's results. To his mind, Ruth Fisher should have argued against the united front more forcefully: 'One needs to declare that one disagrees with it and therefore cannot advocate it, but that as a disciplined Communist one will defend it. That is the only possible standpoint'.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, because Fischer had failed to object to the strategy in political terms, Scholem even argued 'that the opposition is finished, that we effectively supported the right politically. One could also say, the opposition has ended and the minority has admitted that the majority was right'.<sup>92</sup> To Scholem, these actions were 'shameful', as he went on to explain: 'this way we no longer have the option of really explaining the circumstances to our comrades. At the functionaries' meeting we can no longer talk as we do now'.<sup>93</sup> He had a point: the opposition's representatives in the leadership were now obligated to publicly support Brandler's policies.<sup>94</sup> This rather thankless position between a rock and a hard place, so to speak, was now inhabited by Ruth Fischer. She shuttled back and forth between KPD headquarters in Rosenthaler Straße 38 and the Berlin district committee in Münzstraße 24. When arriving at the latter, her task was to present and explain the current party line to her Berlin comrades; the most vehement objections often came from Werner Scholem.

Scholem had opposed Fischer's turn as early as the Schlageter course debate. A look at the internal state of the party at the time, however, suggests a deeper disagreement lay behind this clash. In truth, Werner sought to settle a more general score: 'This "dodge the fight!", that's the new policy. The SPD press has

90 *Sitzung der KPD-Bezirksleitung Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz*, 12 May 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1-2/16.

91 *Ibid.* Scholem's criticisms were shared by Arthur Rosenberg; the KPD *Polbüro* immediately informed the Comintern of these differences within the opposition; see *Polbüro an Komin-tern vom 19. Mai 1923*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/208b, Bl. 428.

92 *Sitzung der KPD-Bezirksleitung Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz*, 12 May 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1-2/16.

93 *Ibid.*

94 Scholem would later describe the conference as a 'failed attempt to bridge the deeply entrenched differences through an organisational compromise'. See Werner Scholem, 'Skizze über die Entstehung der Opposition in der KPD', *Die Internationale*, 7, 2/3, 28 March 1924, p. 131.

of course already reacted. In tonight's issue, the *Vorwärts* will set itself up as the defender of the Communists, explaining that the Communists' policies are good, which of course means that they have no other policies than the SPD. I must say, the dissatisfaction among the Berlin membership has reached an extent far exceeding any earlier period.<sup>95</sup>

Of central concern here, however, were not policies concerning the Ruhr conflict directly, but rather KPD toleration of an SPD government in the state of Saxony. When Saxon police forces attacked a march of the unemployed in Leipzig in early June and killed nine demonstrators, Arthur Rosenberg and Werner Scholem responded by calling for an end to political cooperation with the SPD.<sup>96</sup> They demanded that the toleration policy be abandoned and the KPD overthrow the Zeigner government responsible for the state police. Fischer rejected such criticism: 'The leadership will not abandon cooperation with the Zeigner government under any circumstances. The SPD is triumphant all over the right wing. Every person with a political mind can clearly see what is happening in Saxony, but it's pointless to continue addressing the issue in the district leadership.'<sup>97</sup> Scholem disagreed: 'I've got to say, I really don't understand Comrade Ruth's logic in the question of Saxony. She once understood it better [...] we will comment and state our position on the issue just as we have done in the past. [...] I am not of the opinion that we ought to keep our mouths shut.'<sup>98</sup> Scholem, who had declared the opposition politically moribund as recently as April that same year, now called for an attack on the leadership and did so successfully. On 22 June 1923, the *Rote Fahne* published a resolution by the Berlin district committee demanding an end to toleration of the Saxon government,<sup>99</sup> thrusting the internal party conflict back into public view. While Ruth Fischer temporarily sided with the leadership and organised the Schlageter course together with Radek, Werner Scholem and Arthur Rosenberg became the spokesmen of the radical opposition calling for a confrontational stance vis-à-vis the SPD.

95 *Sitzung der KPD-Bezirksleitung Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz*, 28 May 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16.

96 With Arthur Rosenberg's support, Scholem had already drafted a resolution opposing the leadership's line in Saxony and the Ruhr region, see *Sitzung der KPD-Bezirksleitung Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz*, 4 June 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16.

97 *Sitzung der KPD-Bezirksleitung Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz*, 11 June 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 3/1–2/16.

98 *Ibid.*

99 'Resolution der Bezirksleitung vom 22. Juni 1923', in *Rote Fahne* 145, 27 June 1923.

The left articulated its own understanding of a ‘workers’ government’ in the resolution: a government ‘that relies on the works councils and armed workers’. It also called for a policy of nationalisation, albeit conceived only as an initial step towards socialism: ‘if the steps taken by the workers’ government are accompanied by the strictest workers’ control from below, through the works councils – which are to be consolidated according to city and district.’<sup>100</sup> The term ‘workers’ government’ [*Arbeiterregierung*], used by both wings of the KPD, implied council democracy to the opposition, perhaps due to the influence of the old Revolutionary Stewards inside the Berlin district leadership. Needless to say, the KPD leadership was less than pleased with these criticisms. Brandler appealed to the Comintern even prior to the resolution’s publication, demanding that the troublesome opposition finally ‘take a drubbing’.<sup>101</sup>

Although Ruth Fischer had backed down, the quarrel inside the party continued thanks to Scholem and Rosenberg. It was not until the inflation crisis of August 1923 depicted above that both wings of the KPD would again find common cause, by which time the party generally found itself in the ascendant.<sup>102</sup> Voters viewed the KPD with growing sympathy, although this was not reflected in increased electoral returns, as the only upcoming elections were scheduled for the tiny state of Mecklenburg-Strelitz.<sup>103</sup> There is, however, evidence of sig-

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100 Ibid.

101 Letter from Heinrich Brandler to the German ECCI delegation, 16 June 1923, SAPMO-BArch RY 5/I 2/3/203, Bl. 109; see also Jentsch 2005, p. 105.

102 Arthur Rosenberg later wrote: ‘The Independent Trade Unions especially, which had always been the chief support of Social Democracy, were in a state of complete disintegration. The inflation destroyed the value of the Union subscriptions. The Trade Unions could no longer pay their employees properly nor give assistance to their members. The wage-agreements [...] became useless when the devaluation of the currency made any wages paid out a week later worthless’, Rosenberg 1965, pp. 193–4. Lothar Wentzel confirms this observation with empirical examples from the metal industry, see Wentzel 1981, pp. 153–61. While Rosenberg speaks of a ‘destruction of the Trade Unions’ and the ‘ruin of the SPD’, Heinrich August Winkler emphasises the KPD’s inability to take over leadership of the uprisings and control their trajectory; see Winkler 1985, p. 594. Wentzel claims that the strikes were often spontaneous political strikes, but that the KPD was only able to exert significant influence during the Cuno strike; see Wentzel 1981, p. 157.

103 This was no coincidence in Rosenberg’s eyes: ‘the middle-class majorities in the Parliaments together with the administrative bureaucracy took care that there should be no elections, for radical electoral successes would have inflamed the masses still further. [...] Very different was the course of German politics after 1930, when it became an affair of

nificant growth in Communist strength in the trade unions. After losing most of their influence in the aftermath of the March Action in 1921, Communist sympathisers collected one third of the seats at a trade union conference of the metal workers' union, DMV, in July 1923. The number of Communist trade union groups rose from 4,000 to 6,000 between July and late October 1923 alone, while the number of KPD-led works councils also grew rapidly.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the KPD appeared set to replace the SPD as the leading party of the German working class.

When the KPD's *Zentralausschuss*, an assembly of district representatives, convened in Berlin on 5 and 6 August, the usual in-fighting between opposition and leadership was absent. Both sides anticipated a revolutionary situation and agreed that the Zeigner government in Saxony had moved to the right.<sup>105</sup> Moscow was also following events closely and reacted quickly. In August 1923, the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party headed by Joseph Stalin called all leading members back from vacation to attend a special meeting on the situation in Germany. At this meeting, Stalin vividly stated the importance of events for the continued existence of the Soviet Union: 'Either the revolution in Germany fails and defeats us, or the revolution there succeeds, everything goes well and our survival is assured. There is no other choice.'<sup>106</sup>

Expectations could not have been higher, yet neither were they a mere Russian projection – they aligned with optimistic reports coming from Berlin, as even Heinrich Brandler believed Germany to be 'in the midst of civil war'.<sup>107</sup> The leaders of the KPD were summoned to Moscow to draft a detailed plan for the coming revolution,<sup>108</sup> but internal party conflicts would re-emerge before the delegation departed. While Brandler anticipated a radicalisation of the SPD's

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rendering the German Republic defenceless before a final assault by a series of National Socialist victories. Then the authorities saw to it that one election after another took place, so that the Republicans did not know whether they were standing on their heads or their heels', Rosenberg 1965, pp. 194–5. In Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the KPD received 11,000 votes and was therefore almost as strong as the local SPD, which received 12,000 votes; see Rosenberg 1965, p. 195, as well as Flechtheim 1948, p. 90.

104 Flechtheim 1948, p. 91.

105 Attendees included representatives of the leadership, the districts, as well as editors of party newspapers and Communist trade unionists; see Jentsch 2005, p. 124 ff.

106 The session convened on 21 and 22 August 1923; see Jentsch 2005, pp. 139–42.

107 Jentsch 2005, p. 127.

108 In this context, Jentsch emphasises that the KPD leaders were by no means mere receivers of orders, but in fact decided all concrete measures themselves; see Jentsch 2005, p. 497, as well as Jentsch 2009, p. 69.



base and considered a workers' government between SPD and KPD a viable intermediate step in the revolution, Ruth Fischer condemned this position as an 'attempt to dodge the civil war and engage in a Zeigner-esque disgrace of imperial proportions'.<sup>109</sup> The leadership in turn accused the Berlin district committee of systematically poisoning the internal atmosphere of the party. During a more turbulent meeting, even Ruth Fischer's brother Gerhart Eisler called for his sister's resignation. In the end, however, the 'only' measure passed – against Fischer and Geschke's votes – was a gag order for the opposition: the ECCI in Moscow was to inspect and evaluate the leadership's political work. Until this was completed, members were forbidden from publicly addressing the conflict.<sup>110</sup> When the KPD's leading lights travelled to Moscow in September of 1923, then, they did so not only to devise a plan for an uprising together with the Comintern, but also to have the seemingly irresolvable party conflict mediated by a higher authority.

Both sides fought stubbornly for their respective positions. Brandler managed, through 'private talks' with Bukharin, Radek, Stalin and Trotsky, to secure assurances that the Russians would detain Arkadi Maslow in Moscow to rob the Berlin Opposition of its intellectual figurehead. In addition, Brandler demanded that the Russian Politburo remove the entire Berlin district leadership, referring to Scholem and Rosenberg by name. He justified this demand as follows: 'We believe we cannot be responsible for entering the civil war with these people'.<sup>111</sup> This attempt failed, however, as would Brandler's plan to have Ruth Fischer detained in Moscow.

Moscow's ruling was announced on 5 October: the Berlin district leadership would remain in power, while Ruth Fischer was ordered to cooperate with the national leadership 'under threat of the most vigorous measures up to expulsion'. A revolutionary directorate was established in Berlin, and Moscow called for an end to the KPD's internal conflicts. Comintern chairman Zinoviev concluded the arbitration by stating: 'This puts an end to all discussions and negotiations, statements and counter-statements will no longer be accepted. The resolution is adopted. The session is closed'.<sup>112</sup> Arthur Rosenberg and

109 Jentsch 2005, p. 147.

110 Jentsch 2005, p. 149.

111 *Beratungen der Zentrale der KPD und der BL Berlin mit den russischen Mitgliedern des ECCI*, SAPMOBArch, RY 5/1 6/10/78, Bl. 27.

112 'Protokoll der 3. Sitzung der russischen Mitglieder der Exekutive mit den Delegationen der Zentrale der KPD und der Delegation der Bezirksleitung Berlin-Brandenburg', 5 October 1923, Bayerlein, Babichenko, Firsow, Vatlin (eds.) 2003, p. 211. See also Jentsch 2005, p. 169f.

Werner Scholem, both known throughout the party as opinionated critics of the leadership, were ordered to submit to the new line in the form of a loyalty oath.<sup>113</sup>

This oath, however, would not even hold until the delegation's return from Moscow. After arriving in Berlin on 15 October, Ruth Fischer claimed 'that her line of argument had been completely victorious in Moscow, which also found expression in the written formulations of the executive resolutions' – although she was unable to produce documents substantiating this assertion.<sup>114</sup> Party headquarters responded by forbidding her from giving further reports before the conference resolutions were received in written form.<sup>115</sup> Rosenberg, Geschke, Scholem, Wischeropp and other members of the Berlin district leadership now spoke out in solidarity with Ruth Fischer and against the 'muzzle' placed on her, thus nullifying the compromise reached in Moscow before it was even announced. Despite the revolutionary situation it continued to propagate, the Berlin left was unwilling to shelve factional in-fighting in the interests of party unity. Furthermore, and perhaps even more interestingly, differences would arise around the plan for revolution itself at an emergency meeting held on 20 October 1923. Werner Scholem was particularly sceptical. Although he had called for a radical approach in the Ruhr region the previous spring, he considered such tactics inappropriate for Berlin at this point: 'The proposal is tantamount to an occupation of the factories. But we must be very clear about whether we really want to initiate the revolutionary foray into civil war. He [Scholem] considers this to be impossible, seeing as the party is conducting a politics of retreat in Saxony. In Saxony, the government has less say than here in Berlin. It has accepted the ban on the Proletarian Hundreds without any kind of reaction. It acquiesces to the removal of the state police and the invasion of

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113 Hugo Eberlein had been sent to Berlin as a messenger, reaching his goal 'after a neck-breaking flight with two emergency landings on open fields'. He reports: 'In a session of the district leadership that occurred yesterday evening, I reported. Scholem and Rosenberg delivered declarations of loyalty that they would stand behind the leadership in this situation. A directorate was established for Berlin until Moscow reaches a decision. [...] All instances in Berlin are ordered to submit'. The directorate consisted of Ottomar Geschke and Hans Pfeiffer, as well as an unnamed 'third comrade'. See 'Eberlein im Auftrag der Zentrale KPD an EKKI', 5 October 1923, Bayerlein et al. (eds.) 2003, p. 205.

114 'Bericht über die Verhandlungen in der Berliner Bezirksleitung und im Berliner Zentralvorstand am 20. Oktober 1923'; RGASPI, Letters to G.I. Zinoviev, F. 324, op. 1, d. 555.

115 Scholem also complained in a letter to Zinoviev on 30 October 1923 that the opposition had 'been unable to report to the responsible bodies of the Berlin party on what had occurred in Moscow, because the national headquarters [*Reichszentrale*] had prohibited all reports upon threat of expulsion for 14 days'. See SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/128, Blatt 87.

the army. Following these 14 days of a politics of retreat, we cannot suddenly call for an occupation of the factories. We are not prepared to pull off another March Action while comrades in Saxony slumber'.<sup>116</sup>

This turn is quite remarkable: at the last minute, Scholem believes the revolution to be less than imminent after all. He blames this development on the leadership and its policies in Saxony, for the KPD's participation in the state governments of Saxony and Thuringia in October 1923 constituted the first step of the party's plan for revolution: the Proletarian Hundreds, also supported by the local SPD, were originally intended to be expanded into the armed vanguard of the revolution. The state apparatus, however, was far from a neutral instance, and could not be harnessed in pursuit of the party's goals at will. When the time came, the local army district command simply revoked the Saxon government's authority over the police, ignoring the constitutional separation of army and police.<sup>117</sup> A second fatal blow, delivered from the highest levels of state, would soon follow: in consultation with the national government, president Friedrich Ebert issued an emergency decree on 20 October 1923 authorising the military to remove the workers' governments in Saxony and Thuringia from office. This move constituted a straightforward coup d'état, albeit cloaked – and quite poorly so – in the language of emergency rule.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, the move was also intended as a blow against his own party: Ebert, a Social Democrat, mobilised the military in order to put a violent end to unwelcome coalition experiments by his comrades from the SPD's left wing.

Werner Scholem voiced his criticism of factory occupations in Berlin on the same day, arguing that the adversary was simply too powerful. The KPD leadership, on the other hand, felt that events vindicated their plans for revolution. Following the attack on the workers' governments, it unanimously voted

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116 'Bericht über die Verhandlungen in der Berliner Bezirksleitung und im Berliner Zentralvorstand am 20. Oktober 1923'; RGASPI, Letters to G.I. Zinoviev, F. 324, op. 1, d. 555.

117 Flechtheim 1948, p. 94.

118 The move was justified by invoking the existence of the Proletarian Hundreds, established via Saxon state decree to fight right-wing terrorism. Despite the KPD's revolutionary plans, Harald Jentsch emphasises that the Hundreds posed no real danger to the republic – due to both their own self-understanding as a defensive organisation, as well as the generally poor condition of their equipment (see Jentsch 2005, p. 99). SPD deputy to the Prussian Landtag Heilmann would defend the legality of establishing armed auxiliary police in late November 1923 as an argument against the KPD's demands for proletarian self-defence, but unintentionally provided an argument in favour of precisely such self-defence: auxiliary forces were legal, as long as they were backed by an elected government. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, '278. Sitzung am 28. November 1923'.

to issue calls for a general strike and an armed uprising. The party intended to win an endorsement of this plan at a works council congress in Chemnitz on 21 October 1923 and begin the revolution from there – but the majority of delegates refused to cooperate.<sup>119</sup> Heinrich Brandler called for the election of political works councils and a general strike. In response, SPD minister Georg Graupe threatened to leave the conference together with his comrades. Graupe's reaction reflected a widespread mood among the delegates: in many parts of the country, wage conflicts during the inflationary period and the struggle for daily survival had led to political exhaustion rather than revolutionary euphoria.<sup>120</sup> Workers were preoccupied with making ends meet and staving off hunger in the face of ongoing wage depreciation. Adding to this, the new Stresemann government had already ended and thereby defused the Ruhr conflict by late September. Brandler's motion for a general strike was delegated to a sub-commission, and thus given a 'pauper's burial'.<sup>121</sup> He immediately abandoned all revolutionary machinations, hoping to extricate the KPD from the affair without its covert plans becoming public knowledge.

Preparations for the Hamburg uprising under local KPD leader Ernst Thälmann, however, continued apace. It remains unclear to this day exactly how or why this happened.<sup>122</sup> Although most of the existing literature places responsibility with an errant KPD messenger, more recent evidence indicates that the Hamburg KPD was well aware of the negative outcome of the conference. Was Thälmann, a member of the KPD opposition, intent on forcing the hand of the revolution regardless?<sup>123</sup> Whatever the actual reason, the results were catastrophic. Several hundred Communists rose up in Hamburg, storming over a dozen police stations, seizing weapons and fighting pitched street battles with police and military. The action quickly degenerated into an absolute fiasco. Communist fighters were overpowered and arrested, and the KPD was outlawed not only in Hamburg but across Germany on 23 November.<sup>124</sup> It was in this situation that Werner Scholem gave his last major speech in the Prussian Landtag, yet his revolutionary exhortations were little more than a defiant swan song for shattered dreams. For the Communists, the entire affair was disturbingly similar to that of March 1921. They had utterly misjudged the mood among

119 See Jentsch 2005, p. 230 ff.

120 Kinner 1999, Vol. I, p. 61.

121 This is how August Thalheimer would describe it eight years later in his brochure *1923: A Missed Opportunity?* (Thalheimer 2004).

122 Jentsch 2005, p. 237 ff.

123 Jentsch 2005, p. 242 f.

124 The ban lasted until 1 March 1924, see Weber 1969b, Vol. I, p. 52 f.

the masses: despite widespread social immiseration, the German working class demonstrated little readiness to start a revolution. The KPD's focus on armed revolt in emulation of the Russian model had blinded it to German political realities.<sup>125</sup> Now that the KPD was widely perceived as a terrorist group, the unconstitutional removal of the workers' governments seemed forgotten in the public's eyes.

In light of such a spectacular failure, all of the KPD's currents had reason to pause and reflect critically on recent events. It would have been worth considering who or what was responsible for the development, and whether the party's revolutionary euphoria may perhaps have been the result of a misreading of the crisis. Alas, such reflections did not take place.

### Reaching for Power: Scholem and His Comrades Take Over the KPD

Internally split for some time now, the KPD was unable to unify in the shock of defeat. Instead, the conflict escalated, taking the form of mutual accusations, polemics and personal defamation. The past served not as a lesson for the future, but as a weapon in the struggle for power inside the party. This battle raged not only in Berlin but in Moscow as well, where the defeat had proven equally disorienting. Stalin, still unknown outside Russia, had clearly articulated what hopes the Comintern placed in the German revolution – it was, ultimately, a question of the Soviet Union's survival as a socialist state. What was to be done now? Lenin, whose charisma had held together conflicting views within the Russian Communist Party, could no longer participate in the discussion. Paralysed by a series of strokes, he found himself confined to a sanatorium in the Moscow suburb of Gorki, while debates on the future of the revolution increasingly grew into a struggle over his succession. Potential heirs to the throne fought over interpretations of the past in both Moscow and Berlin. Explanations were needed, heads were about to roll, and self-criticism was dangerous.

The Berlin Opposition for its part was quick to identify the culprit responsible for the defeat of the 'German October': the policies of 'blatant retreat' put forward by Heinrich Brandler. Scholem stated as much one day before the Chemnitz conference. That said, Werner Scholem had himself argued for

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<sup>125</sup> Klaus Kinner speaks of a decoupling of 'political reality' and 'political volition', arguing: 'An initially promising development, a noticeable increase in the KPD's influence and capacity for action, led those responsible for political decisions to sheer voluntarism', see Kinner 1999, p. 60.

retreat even prior to Brandler's official cancellation, when he warned against factory occupations in Berlin. He was therefore just as implicated in events as his oppositional colleague Ernst Thälmann, who bore responsibility for the disaster in Hamburg. Nevertheless, the opposition behaved as if it had nothing to do with these incidents. Heinrich Brandler, by contrast, accepted personal responsibility for calling off the plan.<sup>126</sup>

The opposition had no qualms about exploiting his honesty. As early as 29 October, Ruth Fischer demanded Brandler's removal from the national leadership,<sup>127</sup> thereby sounding the bell for the last round of the factional struggle that Werner Scholem had openly declared for the first time in the spring of 1923. In order to better prepare themselves for the coming period, the left sought to retrieve their comrade Arkadi Maslow from his forced Moscow exile, and delegated this task to Scholem. On 30 October 1923, Werner Scholem addressed a letter directly to Grigory Zinoviev, chairman of the Comintern, forcefully demanding Maslow's return. Maslow had in the meantime been accused of disclosing secret information following an arrest in 1922, and even of being a police informant. During police questioning and his subsequent trial, Maslow had portrayed himself as a Soviet envoy in hopes of evading criminal prosecution.<sup>128</sup> Party guidelines, however, clearly stated that members were to remain silent in case of arrest; and although Maslow's offence had nothing to do with espionage, the fact that he refused to admit his mistake kept the rumours going.<sup>129</sup>

Werner Scholem now wrote in Maslow's defence, and in doing so appeared on the world stage of the Comintern for the first time. In addition to defending Maslow against the accusations brought against him, Scholem stressed the Russian leadership's role in the October disaster: 'In such a situation the membership may be inclined to give up its faith in the Executive, for it is well-known that comrade R[adek] led the Saxon policies, that he covered up for Brandler – whose dismissal is vehemently demanded across the Reich – and that he prevented a struggle of resistance when the army marched in. You, Comrade Zinoviev, enjoy our special personal trust since the party conference in Halle. We shall likely endure all debates, which will necessarily arise, if only the Maslow case could be taken care of. We therefore expect that you apply all your

126 See Weber 1969b, Vol. I, p. 51; as well as Jentsch 2005, p. 271 f., and Jentsch 2009.

127 Jentsch 2005, p. 274.

128 Fischer 2006, p. 454.

129 Paul Weyer had already accused Maslow of espionage in a district leadership meeting on 2 February 1923. See SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/16. Harald Jentsch reports of espionage rumours as early as 1921, see Jentsch 2005, p. 310 f.

influence and personally ensure that the matter be resolved by early November and Maslow be sent back'.<sup>130</sup> Unmentioned was the fact that Zinoviev, as head of the Comintern, also bore responsibility for Brandler's policies. Scholem was well aware of differences emerging inside the Russian Communist Party, which saw Karl Radek and Leon Trotsky facing off against Grigory Zinoviev and Joseph Stalin. He deftly sided with Zinoviev while invoking the anger of the KPD's rank and file, which may well have been 'inclined' to withdraw its support for the International and its chairman, as a bargaining chip against him.

Now Scholem had only to ensure that the membership would play along and 'vehemently' demand Brandler's removal as he had claimed. To this end, a meeting was held in Berlin on 12 November 1923 to which the district leadership managed to mobilise 2,500 members. Werner Scholem was the keynote speaker, launching a frontal assault against Brandler and demanding the convocation of a party conference 'for achieving the necessary political and organisational restructuring of the party'.<sup>131</sup> Scholem's speech carried the masses. When Fritz Heckert spoke in defence of the leadership, he found himself interrupted for several minutes and hardly able to finish his speech; ultimately, he only gathered ten opposing votes. From this point onwards, the opposition seized every available opportunity to increase the pressure inside the party<sup>132</sup> while receiving political backing from Zinoviev, who expressed harsh criticism of the KPD leadership in a 'closed letter'.<sup>133</sup> Scholem's manoeuvre had worked. Although the Berlin KPD was criticised in the reports of the two Bolsheviks present in Berlin, Radek and Pyatakov, the pendulum nevertheless swung increasingly in the opposition's favour. As the current leadership failed to issue a coherent response to Zinoviev's 'closed letter', Ruth Fischer used this time to direct further appeals to Zinoviev and draw the leadership in Moscow closer to her side. This correspondence led to the already mentioned incident in which Fischer's letters were confiscated during a raid of KPD party offices and read aloud in the Prussian Landtag. The letters revealed that Radek, a member of the Comintern's Executive Committee, had also criticised the Berlin KPD.<sup>134</sup>

130 SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/128, Blatt 87. See Jentsch 2005, as well as Jentsch 2009, p. 83. Scholem's letter initially went unanswered.

131 Jentsch 2005, p. 279.

132 On the campaign against Brandler see Becker 2001, pp. 241–52; as well as Jentsch 2005 and Jentsch 2009.

133 Jentsch 2005, p. 279 and p. 280 ff.

134 Letter from 19 November 1923, see *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, 278. Sitzung am 28. November 1923. On the conflict between Ruth Fischer and the Comintern in 1923 see also Jentsch 2005, p. 287 f. On the letter's authenticity see below.

The comrades from Berlin were rebuked for their inaction: although they had criticised the leadership for ‘dodging the armed struggle’, they had also failed to mobilise any class forces whatsoever. Given Scholem’s reservations in October 1923, this version of events seems more or less accurate. The opposition demanded revolution, but was unsure of itself when the decisive moment arrived. Scholem and his comrades’ response was to simply deny the accusation. Their ascent relied on the legend of a hesitant Brandler that conveniently ignored their own failings.

Werner Scholem would emphatically declare the KPD’s internal unity during his last Landtag speech on 28 November 1923, but he did so against his own better judgement for the parliament’s sake,<sup>135</sup> as factional struggles raged under the surface. In early December, a third current beside the Brandler leadership and the left, the so-called ‘Middle Group’, emerged. They positioned themselves between opposition and leadership, further isolating Brandler and his followers. Meanwhile, the party’s political work stagnated. In another letter to Zinoviev from late 1923, Werner Scholem describes the situation as ‘utterly unbearable’.<sup>136</sup> In his view, the party had ‘absolutely no politics and absolutely no line anymore’, the party apparatus was running ‘completely empty’, and the party had ceased to react to current affairs. Leadership meetings were ‘tremendously unfruitful’, concerned exclusively with the question of ‘how to kick out the opposition’. However, Scholem claimed, the opposition now commanded a clear majority at the district level and among the rank and file, and these ‘most brutally violent measures’ against the opposition could soon provoke a split in the KPD – that is, should the Comintern neglect to intervene. Scholem turned up the pressure: if Zinoviev wanted to save the KPD, he had to support the left.

Scholem managed to organise a majority in other KPD districts over the course of several meetings. For instance, one of Brandler’s supporters reported his presence at an oppositional conference in Hanover, ‘where he engaged in the rottenest and daftest party tactics’. A certain ‘Josef’, who reported this in a letter to Clara Zetkin, took Scholem’s appearance as an opportunity to

135 A largely unsuccessful undertaking – SPD deputy Heilmann stated with obvious self-satisfaction that the speaker preceding Scholem, Ernst Meyer, certainly did ‘not [belong] to the tendency of Ruth Fischer’, bringing up a painful subject for the factionalised party. See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 1. Wahlperiode 1921–1924, 278. Sitzung am 28. November 1923.

136 Scholem and others to the Executive Committee of the Communist International, 10 December 1923, RY 1/12/3/208b, Bl. 528f. Arthur Rosenberg, Oskar Wischeropp, Anton Grylewicz, Max Hesse and other Berlin KPD functionaries are listed as signatories.



strike back: 'We are now moving to organised factional work in Berlin. [...] If Zinoviev fails to publicly break with the opposition and achieves no new compromises, then it will mean a party split'.<sup>137</sup> For the first time, Werner Scholem travelled to Moscow as a representative of the opposition.<sup>138</sup> His emphatic diplomatic correspondence had earned him a reputation, as his political opponents also acknowledged. From now on, Clara Zetkin would only refer to the opposition as the 'Fischer-Maslow-Scholem Clique' in her unflattering letters.<sup>139</sup> The trio would have a decisive impact on the KPD's development, but continued to be held back by the espionage accusations against Maslow. The Moscow 'Maslow Commission', tasked with reviewing the accusations, was thus more than a mere sideshow, and Werner Scholem made great efforts to defend his comrade.<sup>140</sup>

Maslow would later return the favour, albeit in a somewhat less flattering manner. Twelve years after this incident, while exiled in Paris, Maslow wrote his novel *Die Tochter des Generals* ['The General's Daughter'], the main protagonist of which was a certain 'Gerhard Alkan', an unmistakable reference to Werner Scholem.<sup>141</sup> This literary Scholem makes his first appearance in the book at that very Moscow conference in January of 1924.<sup>142</sup> Interestingly, Maslow does not mention his own embarrassing situation, but instead focuses exclusively on episodes between the court proceedings. Gerhard Alkan, alias Werner Scholem, is portrayed as the 'nimble-footed, floppy-eared, between-sessions lover' who is 'treated quite favourably by the blond stenotypists for the most part'. His proletarian roommate Paule, a character strongly resembling Max Hesse, denounces Gerhard as a 'slob', which does little to alter his behaviour. The Scholem found in Maslow's novel is remarkably successful in matters of love, known to carry

137 Iozef. P'ismo K. Tsetkin [Letter from 'Josef' to Clara Zetkin], 1 December 1923, RGASPI, F. 528, op. 1, d. 2359.

138 Joining him in the German delegation were Ruth Fischer, Ernst Thälmann, Artur König, and Max Hesse, as well as Maslow, who was already in Moscow; see Bayerlein et al. 2003, document 98, p. 428. Scholem departed Moscow on 15 January 1924, see Jentsch 2005, p. 309.

139 See Tsetkin P'ismo G.E. Zinov'evu [Letter from Clara Zetkin to G.I. Zinoviev], 26 February 1924, RGASPI, Komintern, F. 528, op. 2, d. 58. Zetkin conducted intense correspondence with Zinoviev and supported Brandler.

140 See Jentsch 2005, p. 307 f. and p. 301 ff.

141 Maslow 2011. The biographies of Scholem and protagonist Gerhard Alkan are nearly identical, including names of children and wife, who is called 'Elly' in the novel. Both plot and the characters found in the novel, however, have been dramatized and partially fictionalised. See also chapter 7, section 'Espionage and Intrigue'.

142 Maslow 2011, pp. 26–32.

a notebook packed with the names of various liaisons. At one point in the book, he captures the imagination of a young comrade and passionately conceives a child with her, while still managing to enforce discipline among the German delegation on the side: 'Of course, even throughout this brief ideal marriage, Alkan did not miss a single session. He only demanded that Thälmann appear on time as well. Yet Thälmann could not be persuaded to do so, and the notebook man therefore loudly berated the Hamburgian time and again. Thälmann was powerless against this "snout", not to mention that he was simply wrong, which is why he knuckled under like a large clumsy mutt to the small, scrawny Alkan every time – who never looked the slightest bit odd in these moments, despite his protruding ears and his eternal notebook'.<sup>143</sup> Unfortunately, Maslow's literary genius is of little help in reconstructing the actual proceedings of the conference, which is why we rely on the rather prosaic stenographic record instead. The sessions witnessed dramatics of their own and were, historically speaking, likely more consequential than Scholem's romantic intrigues.

Appointed to preside as judge over the trial against Arkadi Maslow was a man named Joseph Stalin, an ambitious member of the Russian Central Committee largely unknown outside the country. Stalin possessed a sharp instinct for power and advanced his career step by step, appointing loyal followers to posts within the party bureaucracy while his opponent Trotsky, the tribune of the people, relied primarily on revolutionary charisma.<sup>144</sup> Scholem spoke out in defence of Maslow, seconded by Max Hesse, who was just as capable of being loud and offensive in official meetings as his alter ego Paule from the novel: during a previous Moscow trip, he had demanded his comrade's dismissal with the words 'Scholem is a criminal'.<sup>145</sup> The literary discord between the two, then, seems to have a basis in real life. Yet what could have been a disaster ended in perfect harmony, for not only were Scholem and Hesse willing to cooperate, but even Stalin – who had harshly criticised Maslow and the German opposition just weeks before – discovered a newfound sympathy for the left.<sup>146</sup> With the support of Scholem, he managed to convince the commission of Maslow's

143 Maslow 2011, p. 31.

144 See Deutscher 1962.

145 Discussions between the KPD *Zentrale* and the Berlin district leadership with the Russian members of the ECCI, SAPMOBArch, RY 5/1 6/10/78, Bl. 77.

146 According to Ruth Fischer, Stalin was the mastermind behind the commission. Only after being disappointed by Brandler did he change course and 'posed as a leader who can see no injustice done without himself interfering', Fischer 1948, p. 363.

innocence.<sup>147</sup> The verdict was passed by an extremely close margin of three against four, and was less than honourable: although Maslow was cleared of espionage, his demeanour towards the police was described as ‘cowardly and reckless’.<sup>148</sup> Stalin jovially commented on his change of opinion: ‘There is no shame in changing one’s opinion after having learned more about the matter, the people and the facts. Therefore, we have nothing to be ashamed of as revolutionaries’.<sup>149</sup> The only one ashamed seems to have been Maslow himself, who omitted this episode from his novel entirely.

Maslow’s acquittal was a sign that the left had secured an alliance with Stalin and Zinoviev, who together with Kamenev now formed a ‘triumvirate’ to curb the influence of the charismatic Leon Trotsky. Trotsky in turn was supported by expert on German affairs Karl Radek. At a conference of the Russian Central Committee, Stalin criticised his rival Radek for his ‘underestimation of the left in Germany’. He praised the Opposition effusively and made prominent mention of his new friend Werner Scholem: ‘The left in Germany includes people like comrades Scholem, Hesse, Ruth Fischer and others (I am not referring here to the leader of the left, Comrade Maslow). They may remain theoretically unschooled, but as practitioners and agitators, as people connected to the revolutionary masses, they are great chaps. They very much remind me of our Rosal in Kronstadt, of our Slutsky in Petrograd and Bagdadev in Petrograd’.<sup>150</sup> Werner Scholem was thus mentioned in the same breath as the heroes of Red October. He had secured meaningful support for the opposition and saved Maslow, the erstwhile *spiritus rector* of the left, at the same time.

147 Scholem named Ruth Fischer and Hans Neumann as witnesses that Brandler, Hans Pfeiffer, Arthur Ewert and Heinz Neumann had met privately to discuss taking advantage of Maslow’s case in the factional conflict. See ‘Brief Wilhelm Pieck an die Zentrale der KPD vom 1. Januar 1924’, Bayerlein et al. (eds.) 2003, document 93, p. 416 ff., here p. 420.

148 It ought to be stated in Maslow’s defence that his opponents had planned the accusation in advance. A confidant named ‘Josef’ threatens in a letter to Clara Zetkin from December 1923 to publish Maslow’s testimony: ‘If, as is stated here, Maslow is being sent over, a rumour is going around that he is already on his way, then I will publish the records from 1a and take up the fight across the board, even against Zinoviev’ – ‘1a’ refers to the political section of the Berlin police. See Iozef. P’ismo K. Tsetkin [Letter from ‘Josef’ to Clara Zetkin], 1 December 1923, RGASPI, F. 528, op. 1, d. 2359.

149 Quoted in Jentsch 2005, p. 313. The decision can be found in Bayerlein et al. (eds.) 2003, document 96, p. 426.

150 Josef Stalin, ‘Die deutsche Revolution und die Fehler des Genossen Radek, Aus dem Bericht auf dem Plenum des Zentralkomitees der RKP (B)’, 15 January 1924, Bayerlein et al. (eds.) 2003, p. 449.



FIGURE 21 *Moscow Conference, January 1924 – Arthur [Artur] König, [Karl] Jannack, [Werner Scholem], Ernst Thälmann, Arkadi Maslow, Max Hesse, Ruth Fischer, [?], Pfeiffer-Ruhrgebiet (emigrant from 1923, in a Red Army soldier's uniform)' (caption by Werner Scholem himself)*

Scholem and his comrades now enjoyed a strong political tailwind from Moscow. In fact, Stalin would suggest forming a new KPD leadership with representatives of the Middle Group and the left as early as 2 January.<sup>151</sup> Zinoviev had also moved closer to the left following several personal conversations, and adopted the current's explanation for the failure of the October uprising. Discussions lasted several days, during which Scholem and the left negotiated aggressively, threatening at one point to leave the conference only to emerge triumphant a few days later.<sup>152</sup> In the final resolution, the October defeat was

<sup>151</sup> Jentsch 2005, p. 306.

<sup>152</sup> The German Opposition's delegation initially rejected Zinoviev's theses on 6 January 1924 and requested private talks. It would later require the exertion of their 'greatest willpower' to return to the negotiating table. See Bayerlein et al. (eds.) 2003, 'Deutscher Oktober 1923 – Ein Revolutionsplan und sein Scheitern', document 96, p. 426 and document 98, p. 429.

attributed to opportunistic mistakes committed by the Brandler leadership. A party conference in the second half of March was to decide on a new KPD leadership, although a strong role for the Left was a foregone conclusion.<sup>153</sup> Negotiations concluded on 21 January 1924 with a decisive victory for Scholem's side.

The date would mark a day of mourning in revolutionary memory, however, for it was also the day Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, founder of the Bolsheviks and driving figure of the Russian Revolution, died in the Moscow suburb of Gorki. The negotiations that came to an end on the day of his death marked a new era in the history of the Communist International, an era in which the Russian party would assume uncontested leadership of the Comintern after losing faith in the Western European revolution.<sup>154</sup> Werner Scholem had not lost this faith. Nonetheless, he and his comrades had ensured, through their relentless internal opposition, that the KPD would grow increasingly dependent on Moscow's interventions. Certainly, their desire for personal admiration and the will to power also played a role in these developments, but records from the time indicate that Scholem in particular acted under a strong belief that he was protecting the KPD from drifting into opportunism and the political swamp, as a faithful servant of the world revolution.

Following the delegation's return from Moscow, Scholem and his comrades continued the internal struggle at home. Although the Comintern had withdrawn its support for Brandler, Zinoviev, as chairman of the Comintern, continued to favour a central leadership including, or even led by, the Middle Group. The Comintern, however, was neither theoretically nor practically capable of anointing a new KPD leadership in early 1924. Not only did the KPD's statutes call for a party conference in such situations, but the decision ultimately lay in the hands of the districts and the membership. The history of the Berlin Opposition shows that it remained possible to form an organised opposition even within the confines of the 21 Conditions, for its political influence continued to be determined democratically at district conferences and local assemblies. Although politically motivated expulsions had been conducted during the Levi crisis, the KPD's leadership lacked the authority to smash oppositional forces through disciplinary means between 1921 and 1924. The KPD thus continued to practice internal party democracy, evidenced by the left's success being predicated on precisely such a mobilisation of the rank and file. Likewise, Scholem's

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153 The single disadvantage in the left's eyes was that the united front and KPD work within the ADGB unions had also been written into the party program; Jentsch 2005, pp. 333–44.

154 Jentsch 2005, p. 344.

alliance with Zinoviev and Stalin was only possible through the left's strongholds in Berlin and Hamburg – whereas Moscow had no such centre inside the German party, at least for the time being. Scholem was supposed to build precisely such a centre, but would soon prove to be an independent thinker with his own ideas.

The Left Opposition continued its mobilisation in early 1924, seeking to secure maximum possible influence at the coming party conference. After the old leadership was removed in February 1924, the left increased their attacks on the Middle Group in order to hold them back as well. They did so in such an aggressive manner that their new partner Zinoviev sent a letter complaining about a breach of the Moscow decrees,<sup>155</sup> expressing particular displeasure at Werner Scholem's behaviour. During a session of the Comintern Executive on 14 March, he labelled Scholem a slanderer for claiming the Comintern opposed the united front at a public meeting in Berlin. Moreover, Scholem rejected all forms of partial demands and agitated against work within the ADGB trade unions. In Zinoviev's eyes, such a shift in direction without first consulting the International was not only politically mistaken, but constituted an act of disloyalty questioning the International's very existence. The opposition was promptly summoned to Moscow to explain themselves.<sup>156</sup> The left, however, paid little attention to Zinoviev's complaints. Scholem and his comrades refused to travel to Moscow and confidently pointed to their support among the rank and file. Werner Scholem compiled a statistic according to which the KPD's Middle Group had won majorities in only six of 23 districts,<sup>157</sup> and only because the left had been denied the right to speak. Wherever the left appeared, it won a majority. Scholem sent these figures directly to Zinoviev, intent on assuming leadership of the party with or without Moscow's approval.

Zinoviev was forced to accept this reality, albeit reluctantly. He forwent a second Moscow appearance by the left, but demanded assurances they would settle for a two-thirds majority in the new leadership. In addition, he wanted to expand the body with '10–15 new members from the ranks of the workers' – significantly diluting the left's influence.<sup>158</sup> Scholem considered the proposal unacceptable, demanding from Zinoviev: 'As it has turned out that the KPD fully supports us, we now demand that the will of the party be recognised and

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155 G.I. Zinoviev to Thälmann, Maslow and Fischer, 7 March 1924, quoted in Jentsch 2005, p. 378.

156 Jentsch 2005, p. 382.

157 Jentsch 2005, p. 380.

158 Jentsch 2005, p. 385f.

that no kind of manoeuvres be pursued to conceal this unmistakable will'.<sup>159</sup> In his letter, Werner Scholem cites a local KPD resolution from the Berlin neighbourhood of Neukölln vehemently denouncing the 'dark machinations' of the Middle Group and appealing to the Comintern for assistance. This formulation is an example of the opposition's tendency to present itself as a victim of conspiracies and backroom politics, and also shows how skilfully the rank and file was won over through resolutions originally drafted by the opposition itself. Werner Scholem played a vital part in staging such manoeuvres. He did not, however, use his growing political influence to support Fischer and Maslow unconditionally. As in the previous year, Scholem criticised Fischer's political tactics as 'opportunistic' and denounced her for making too many concessions in Moscow.<sup>160</sup> Scholem and Rosenberg occupied a particular role within the Berlin Opposition, serving as a 'maximalist' counterpole to Fischer and Maslow.

This became obvious, for instance, at a nationwide conference of the left convened by Werner Scholem on behalf of the opposition on 25 March 1924. Although the left was still far from consolidating its newly acquired gains at this point, Arthur Rosenberg nevertheless gave a speech that contradicted Maslow substantially.<sup>161</sup> Noteworthy is that Rosenberg also criticised 'opportunism' among the Russian Communists and called for independence from the Comintern. Although he viewed Trotsky's tendency as the actual 'right' within the Russian party, he also accused Zinoviev and Stalin of opportunism, and argued that an alliance with this faction could only be legitimate in order to counter the right.<sup>162</sup> Given that Arthur Rosenberg had not joined the Moscow delegation, his knowledge of proceedings there must have come from Werner Scholem. Rosenberg and Scholem in fact grew sceptical of the Russian leadership earlier than most. Although reliant on Comintern support to implement their own policies, they were by no means entranced by the glow of Red Moscow.

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159 Werner Scholem to Grigory Zinoviev, 18 March 1924, quoted in Jentsch 2005, p. 387, p. 469, fn. 54.

160 Scholem departed on 15 January, before the conclusion of negotiations on 21 January. Heinrich Brandler wrote to Clara Zetkin on 14 February 1924: 'In Berlin Scholem and Rosenberg are decrying Maslow and Ruth as opportunists because the latter have reached a compromise with the "peculiar leftists" Koenen and Stoecker. Koenen and Stoecker are now "proving" that they were always "left", and it was only me who led them astray. If it weren't so sad, it would be hilarious', quoted in Jentsch 2005, p. 387.

161 Jentsch 2005, pp. 387–8.

162 Jentsch 2005, p. 389.

Walter Stoecker described the duo as the ‘group of the ultra-left (Luxemburgians)’;<sup>163</sup> although only the first half of this label would stick with them over the coming years. For, all criticism aside, Scholem and Rosenberg neglected to break with their hitherto allies Maslow and Fischer in March 1924, knowing all too well that only a united appearance by the KPD could secure the left’s hold over the leadership.<sup>164</sup>

The decision was reached in April 1924, going down in KPD history as the ‘Frankfurt Party Conference’. Due to the party’s ongoing illegality, various secret sessions were held at different locations, and not even the conference minutes list speakers’ names.<sup>165</sup> The party conference, lasting from 7 to 10 April, marked a temporary conclusion of the long conflict between leadership and opposition between 1921–4. It ended, quite simply, in that the opposition became the majority and succeeded in pushing through its demands. At first, it achieved this in collusion with the Moscow-led International, but later in opposition to it, as the latter stubbornly clung to its demand for a stronger role for the Middle Group. Accordingly, a Comintern delegation appeared at the party conference to persuade delegates to accept the Comintern’s request.<sup>166</sup> Scholem’s claims concerning the mood of the rank and file were not figments of his imagination: the district party conferences had elected left delegates to the national conference in Frankfurt, and the former opposition was able to use this majority to fend off the apparatus’s last attempts to marginalise them.<sup>167</sup> The new leadership thus consisted of a 15-person body, without any additions, in which the left commanded decisive influence, led by Ruth Fischer, Arkadi Maslow and

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163 Jentsch 2005, p. 387.

164 Zinoviev criticised Scholem and Rosenberg’s views in a letter to Thälmann and Paul Schlecht on 31 March. He assured them, however, that he would accept the left as the new leadership. Given that he sent similar letters to Maslow and Fischer, Weber suspects a manoeuvre to exploit political differences on Zinoviev’s part. This attempt failed, however. See Jentsch 2005, p. 389 and p. 470 (fn. 60); Weber 1969b, p. 64.

165 *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des 9. Parteitages der KPD, Abgehalten in Frankfurt am Main vom 7. Bis 10. April 1924*. The conference was partially held in Offenbach, see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 1077. Jentsch attempts a reconstruction of the speakers list, and concludes that Scholem participated as a delegate for Berlin; see Jentsch 2005, p. 474, an. 80. See also Weber 1969, pp. 65–73.

166 See Weber 1969b, p. 62 f.

167 Hermann Weber argues that the loss of members after October 1923 primarily benefitted the left: as pragmatic and reform-oriented members turned their backs on the party, those who remained radicalised further. See Weber, ‘Einleitung’, in Bayerlein et al. (eds.) 2003, p. 29.



Werner Scholem. The left's sole concession was to incorporate four members of the Middle Group into the new leadership.<sup>168</sup>

The KPD candidate lists for the May 1924 Reichstag elections were also to be drafted at the conference. Ignoring fierce protests from the floor, existing district nominations were modified in the left's favour,<sup>169</sup> giving the future parliamentary delegation a distinct left tilt and nominating Scholem as a candidate. The opposition concluded its march through the party, begun in 1921, with a resounding victory. But this shift in mood only became possible as a result of the 1923 fiasco. The bungled 'German October' had fundamentally eroded the membership's faith in the party's old guard. Stalin recognised this as early as January 1924, predicting the left's triumph to his rival, Karl Radek: 'A situation is emerging in which the workers look for new leaders, they are willing to accept people like Scholem, Hesse, Ruth Fischer and no longer believe the people with a long-standing party record, as these comrades' mistakes, despite their high qualifications, have driven the workers away from them. Comrade Radek does not understand this. [...] He considers them to be rascals, unserious people incapable of anything sincere'. Stalin went on to predict 'that these "unserious" people are the future, that they hold entire districts in their hands and kick out the "serious" people'.<sup>170</sup> Stalin's prognosis would become reality only three months later. The 'unserious' opposition, with its maximalists Werner Scholem and Arthur Rosenberg, was now in power – but could it actually lead the KPD?

### The Power of the Apparatus: Werner Scholem Organises the KPD

Within the newly elected KPD leadership body, formally titled the *Zentrale*, Ruth Fischer, Arkadi Maslow and Werner Scholem formed the secretariat of the Politburo and thus represented the party's core leadership.<sup>171</sup> Werner Scholem

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168 The new leadership consisted of: Hugo Eberlein, Ruth Fischer, Wilhelm Florin, Ottomar Geschke, Iwan Katz, Artur König, Arkadi Maslow, Wilhelm Pieck, Hermann Remmele, Arthur Rosenberg, Ernst Schneller, Paul Schlecht, Werner Scholem, Max Schütz, and Ernst Thälmann; see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 1077. These names were kept secret for conspiratorial reasons; KPD members only knew the names of the leading trio, which in turn bolstered their influence even further; see Jentsch 2005, p. 477, an. 97.

169 Jentsch 2005, p. 419 f.

170 Josef Stalin, 'Die deutsche Revolution und die Fehler des Genossen Radek, Aus dem Bericht auf dem Plenum des Zentralkomitees der RKP (B)', 15 January 1924, Bayerlein et al. (eds.) 2003, document 100, p. 449.

171 Fischer was chair of the political secretariat, also known as *Polleiterin*, and thus de facto

initially ranked third behind the famous Fischer-Maslow duo, but was thrust to the fore by a dramatic incident on 20 May 1924, when Maslow was arrested. He had stumbled into a police inspection while strolling through Berlin's largest amusement park, the 'Lunapark' in Halensee. The police were actually targeting a local pickpocket and had little to do with persecuting Communists, but nonetheless dragged the matter on endlessly as soon as they realised whom they had apprehended. Police detained and investigated Maslow, ultimately forcing him to languish behind prison bars for a full two years. He was still able to exert a great deal of influence over party policy by smuggling letters out of his cell in a variety of adventurous and creative ways, but day-to-day work had to be delegated to others.<sup>172</sup>

Werner Scholem would suddenly, at the age of 28, become the second leading figure of the KPD. While Ruth Fischer functioned as the party's public face, Scholem ran the leadership's organisational office and was, as Hermann Weber puts it, 'an almost absolute ruler over the party apparatus'.<sup>173</sup> He assumed his new responsibilities as organisational leader [*Organisationsleiter*, or *Orgleiter*] of the party with confidence. A week prior to the national party conference, Scholem had already announced the left's victory in the pages of *Der Funke*, a special publication circulated among Berlin KPD functionaries. 'The opposition has become the majority', he wrote, while at the same time warning of the arduous tasks that lay ahead: 'The KPD Left is entering a zone of renewed dangers. Should it fail to precisely recognise the dangers it faces, [...] it will suffer shipwreck, and with it the entire party'.<sup>174</sup>

Scholem then formulated a list of potential threats, expressing particular concern about some of his left comrades' desire to found independent, Communist-led trade unions: 'In a Red Federation of Trade Unions emerging in

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chairwoman of the party. Arthur Rosenberg was responsible for international affairs and, together with Karl Korsch as new editors-in-chief of the *Internationale*, for the 'ideological line'. On this division of labour see Jentsch 2005, p. 423 and p. 477, an. 101; Weber 1969b, p. 74f.

172 Paul Schlecht and Anton Grylewicz were also caught up in the manhunt, and were tried together with Maslow; see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 580. Maslow's influence on the Opposition is proven by a conspiratorial letter sent by Geschke, Schneller and Scholem to Piatnitsky in Moscow on 11 June 1925, in which the fact of a secret correspondence from Maslow facilitated by his lawyer is revealed. The letter was written in defence of Maslow, who Iwan Katz had again accused of working for the police. See RY 5/1 6/10/80, Bl. 87 ff.

173 Weber 1969b, p. 105.

174 Werner Scholem, 'Die Gefahrenzone der Opposition', *Der Funke* 2, 1 April 1924. I would like to thank Mario Keßler for pointing this article out to me.

this fashion, particularly the right currents in the KPD would, together with syndicalist and anti-party elements, cook up something impossible for any party leadership to digest'. According to him, the left's task was to link up with frustrated members leaving the ADGB without appearing as 'splitters' in the eyes of the working masses.<sup>175</sup> With a view to these difficulties, Scholem warned against the illusion that the new leadership 'will turn the world upside down in a matter of weeks'. They would 'not partake in any confrontation that is artificially precipitated and then portrayed as an "action"'. Instead, the party must develop its capability to intervene in mass struggles and mould them into a 'revolutionary front'. Only then would Scholem 'address, at a certain high point, the question of seizing power in practical terms'.<sup>176</sup>

Ironically, Scholem regarded the party itself as the greatest obstacle on the path to revolution. The KPD was immature, incapable, unprepared, and first had to be educated for the revolution. Scholem warned that "left-ness" has become fashionable inside the party', and the new course had taken root only superficially. One of the main obstacles standing in the party's way was the old leadership: interestingly enough, when it came to the trade unions, Scholem was less afraid of the failure of actual policies, than of their exploitation by 'opportunists' and 'rights'. The old leaders remained far too influential in his eyes: 'one needn't speak of sabotage to grasp that such a party apparatus is no suitable instrument in the hands of a left *Zentrale*', Scholem explained, and concluded: 'the old apparatus must be turned over'. Nonetheless, the left had to tread cautiously in Scholem's eyes, or risk losing touch with the rank and file, for it was only together with the mass of average members that the party could become 'what until now could not exist in the German party: the Bolshevik core'. Werner Scholem thus called for the 'Bolshevisation' of the KPD before the term was an official slogan. Scholem elaborated on the historical context of the new line in an article commemorating the seventh anniversary of the October Revolution, in which he discarded the ideas of his former idol Rosa Luxemburg. As far as her position on organisation and her faith in spontaneous mass actions were concerned, Scholem argued that Luxemburg's concepts had remained influential in Germany for far too long, and ought to be replaced by 'Lenin's teaching on the role of the party'.<sup>177</sup>

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175 Ibid.

176 Ibid.

177 Scholem argued that spontaneism and reformism were essentially the same: 'It is those who are revolutionary when victory is approaching. It is the adherents of spontaneous mass actions, in which the party essentially does not distinguish itself from the unorganised mass and in whose case we need to ask ourselves by what principles they differ from

Scholem's new slogan also contained a hidden reference to the factional struggles occurring inside the Russian party. With Ruth Fischer's support, the KPD had already passed a resolution in February of 1924 stating: 'Not de-Bolshevisation of the R(ussian) CP, but Bolshevisation of the European parties'.<sup>178</sup> The resolution was directed against the 'petty bourgeois' Russian opposition, and thus a message of support for Stalin. Scholem's demand for a 'Bolshevist core' was more than a metaphor, it was intended in a very literal sense – and as *Organisationsleiter*, he now had the authority to implement his ideas.<sup>179</sup>

The most detailed source material concerning his time as the KPD's leading organiser is a speech given at a party meeting in September 1924, as well as a report Scholem wrote to Moscow in the following month.<sup>180</sup> He deployed dra-

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the Second International', Werner Scholem, 'Die historische Lehre des 7. November: Die Rolle der Kommunistischen Partei', *Rote Fahne* 151, 7 November 1924.

178 The text of the resolution read as follows: 'The Communist Party of Germany has followed with the utmost interest the struggle of the Bolshevist leadership and the overwhelming proletarian majority of the Russian party against an Opposition that tends toward the petty-bourgeois and non-Bolshevist. The Communist Party of Germany has clearly understood that not all parts of the party are yet able, following the death of Lenin, to cope with the charges and retreats of this momentous struggle of the Russian proletariat at the same pace and with the same firmness in the face of the mounting difficulties of the proletarian state, which for the time being yet stands alone. Only the tested Bolshevist leadership is capable of holding the party together and leading it to further victories. "Not the De-Bolshevisation of the RCP, but the Bolshevisation of the European parties", so that they will be able to successfully lead the masses through the struggle, that must be the Communist International's slogan. In that struggle against the liquidationist current, which represents the greatest danger to the Comintern as long as the revolutionary wave builds up only slowly, the Communist Parties of Europe will, without lapsing into any kind of "infantile disorders" of radicalism, develop their Bolshevist core. The Central Committee of the RCP can always depend on the full support of the Communist Party of Germany in its fight against any emerging revisionist threat', *Sitzungsprotokolle der Zentrale der KPD*, Sitzung 8. Februar 1924, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/2/16. It is worth mentioning that the term Bolshevism is not defined here. Otto Langels notes the term's appeal as a placeholder, which various German and Russian factions filled with highly divergent meanings; see Langels 1984, p. 37.

179 *Sitzungsprotokolle der Zentrale der KPD*, Sitzung 10. April 1924, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/2/16.

180 Werner Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro der Zentrale der KPD für die Zeit vom 10. April bis 1. Oktober 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/4/24, cited in the following as *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*. Attached to the report is a speech by Scholem at a 'Conference of Political and Organisational Secretaries, Editors-in-Chief on 4 September 1924' [*Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*], also located in SAPMO-BArch,

matic language to describe the state of the KPD: 'Following the Frankfurt party conference we took over the party in an organisational state that would have left a dog wailing'.<sup>181</sup> Further on it reads, more specifically: 'True organisational-political work had been impossible inside the party since October 1923. [...] Adding to this were the results of the period of illegality lasting for several months and ending 1 March, which left behind a field of rubble in the individual districts. The months-long internal party discussions that eventually led to a total revolution within the party did not come to their conclusion until the Frankfurt party conference'.<sup>182</sup> The 'field of rubble' Scholem describes extended to aspects as fundamental as membership lists: 'In any event, the party emerged from the illegal period plucked to such a degree that only three or four districts in the entire Reich had even a vague idea of their membership numbers'. The entire organisation lay in shambles: 'The old central apparatus had collapsed. Up to the Frankfurt party conference, 90 percent of party employees had supported – politically and organisationally – the fight against the current which was now in charge of the party. As a precondition for any other work, the *Orbüro* at headquarters therefore had to first build a foundation within the central apparatus'.<sup>183</sup> The '*Orbüro*' denotes the *Organisationsbüro* from which Werner ran the party apparatus. It is interesting to note how Scholem again emphasises the role of his opponents inside the party. Unable to conceive of the rebuilding of party structures as a collaborative project, reorganisation was closely tied to his faction's mandate to lead the party as a whole, which he in turn glorified as a 'party revolution'.<sup>184</sup>

Scholem began by reorganising the staff of the central leadership, skilfully combining practical constraints in terms of downsizing and cost cutting with the installation of more 'reliable' personnel.<sup>185</sup> Party apparatus and headquarters were cut down to nine departments, which Scholem listed in sharp KPD-

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RY 1/I 2/2/4. Scholem would later complain that he never received a response to the report, claiming it had been intercepted. The Comintern rejected these claims, see 'Gegen die falschen Behauptungen des Genossen Scholem', *Rote Fahne* 239, 16 October 1925.

181 *Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4.

182 See Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*.

183 *Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4.

184 *Konferenz der Pol-Sekretäre und Redakteure der KPD am 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4.

185 Scholem served with Thälmann and Hugo Eberlein on a specially convened 'Down-Sizing Commission', see *Zentrale der KPD*, 10 and 25 April 1924, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/16.

speak: 'Politburo, *Orbüro*, Secretariat, Trade Union department, Agitprop, Printing department, Red Aid and legal department, M and N'. The list provides a glimpse into his vast range of responsibilities; Scholem was not only in charge of the organisation's administration and organisers in the *Orbüro*, but also of party finances, the entire party press, political campaign work in the form of 'agitation and propaganda', as well as the sections 'M and N', which referred to the party's illegal military wing and intelligence service.<sup>186</sup> As official documents rarely mention the conspiratorial departments beyond these two letters, they retain a certain aura of mystery to this day, barely appearing even in the extensive archives opened since 1989. Later rumours of Scholem serving as an agent in a KPD-run espionage network may well have originated here.<sup>187</sup> One ought to keep in mind, however, that the KPD's illegal sections in 1924 were in similar condition to the aforementioned membership lists. The 'field of rubble' may in fact have been most apparent within the 'M' department, for the police had targeted it specifically, and successfully – as Minister Severing's parliamentary exhibition of confiscated arms in 1923 demonstrated. All these apparatuses and departments converged in a back courtyard of Rosenthaler Straße 38 on the fringes of Berlin's Scheunenviertel district. The neighbourhood was not considered among the best addresses in the Reich's capital, known for narrow alleyways, dilapidated buildings and overcrowded streets, particularly after scheduled restoration work had ground to a halt during World War I. Workers from the nearby Borsig factory rented sleeping quarters by the hour here, while many destitute Jews from Eastern Europe found their first accommodations upon arriving in Berlin in the neighbourhood's tenements. Kaftans and sidecurls as well as prostitution and petty crime characterised the district's street life. In the midst of all this stood KPD headquarters, where Werner Scholem would pursue his 'party revolution'.<sup>188</sup>

The Young Communist League of Germany [*Kommunistische Jugendverband Deutschlands*, KJVD] also had its office in Rosenthaler Straße in 1924.

186 The departments mentioned in the source were part of a de facto unified apparatus dedicated to planning uprisings, sowing discord in the military and police, and gathering information. This apparatus, however, underwent several major transformations over the party's history. See Kaufmann, Reisener, Schwips, Walther 1993; on its later phase see Feuchtwanger 1981, Preiffer 2008. The KPD's 'BB-Resort' was dedicated to industrial espionage for the Soviet Union, see Grundmann 2008.

187 On this see the section 'Espionage and Intrigue: Werner Scholem as a Literary Figure'.

188 The KPD would only be able to afford a more distinguished building, the 'Karl-Liebknecht-Haus' on what was then Bülowplatz, in 1926; see Friedmann 2011.

Scholem paid special attention to the organisation and even travelled to the KJVD national conference in Leipzig, seeking to win over the youth to the new party line with a rousing speech. Scholem, who began his own political career in self-organised socialist educational circles, now envisioned a different task for the youth: 'Every functionary must be aware that he is a political functionary, [...] that his primary task is not educational work or some cultural hogwash, etc., but organising the young workers at the workplace for the fight for the revolution'.<sup>189</sup>

During this period, Werner's daily routine consisted of meetings, written correspondence and public appearances; his appointments were administered by Cläre Casper, a veteran campaigner from the 1918 council movement.<sup>190</sup> Scholem also attended to work as a Reichstag deputy and prepared his interventions at political meetings, such as in Potsdam on 1 May 1924, which he did more or less 'on the side'. Even May Day, the universal holiday of the international proletariat, was a 'labour' day for Scholem. He cancelled a speech scheduled for that afternoon to return to the office.<sup>191</sup>

A large stack of letters that survives in the archives provides an idea of what Scholem's desk must have looked like in 1924.<sup>192</sup> Striking when reading the many letters from across the republic is not only his productivity, but above all the immense power with which his new post was invested. Among the documents are countless job applications, including some rather bizarre pieces such as a business graduate from Berlin-Schöneberg applying to help Scholem purge and reorganise the party 'in a military sense'.<sup>193</sup> Werner was the party's

189 *KJVD – 8. Reichskongress vom 10–12. Mai 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 4/1/4, Blatt 7. On the contradictions of KPD educational work see Krinn 2007.

190 Cläre Casper (sometimes recorded as Kläre Kasper and Claire Kasper in source materials) was elected to the leadership of the January 1918 council movement and was subsequently the first woman active in the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. Unlike her male colleagues, however, she was only used for 'organisational' work. She served as secretary in the executive of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, afterwards in the KPD central office. Her service as Scholem's assistant is documented in a letter from Scholem to a 'Comrade Bauer' on 16 April 1924, *Korrespondenz des Orbüro mit Bezirken*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/60. On Caspar's earlier history with the Revolutionary Stewards see Hoffrogge 2014, p. 29, p. 50 f., p. 64, p. 107, p. 213.

191 See Werner Scholem to Albert Hesse, 16 April 1924, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/60.

192 *Personal und Kaderfragen 1920–1929*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/35; as well as *Korrespondenz des Orbüro mit Bezirken*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/60.

193 Kurt Scheel from Schöneberg, holder of a business degree, wrote in his 17 December application: 'The task at hand, after the purging of our party of indifferent people and hacks has been ensured by the vote of 7 December, is to consolidate it more in terms of a

central authority when it came to employment in the apparatus, deciding over hiring and firing in positions ranging from stenotypist to editor-in-chief. His time was thus understandably valuable; alongside countless petitions requesting consideration for this or that job are regular requests for personal meetings, which were – half-ironically – known as ‘audiences’. Private relationships were also taken advantage of: the application of a certain Amalie Esser contains a letter alongside the usual résumé of qualifications and prior experience, boldly marked ‘private’, to ‘Dear Comrade Scholem’. In this letter, Werner is reminded of the ‘shared holidays in Rothenburg in 1923’. The young woman from Dahlem was evidently in financial distress, and requested a secretarial position with the KPD. Rather nonchalantly, she asks Scholem: ‘Should you, as I have heard, really have a say in this, please arrange for a post that doesn’t tie me down from morning till late at night!’<sup>194</sup> Was this a former lover calling in a favour from an old flame? Unfortunately, no response survives.<sup>195</sup>

The KPD was a highly coveted employer, as full employment was largely unknown in the Weimar Republic even during the economic boom; a meagre unemployment insurance, still well below subsistence levels, was first established in 1927. The appeals sent to Scholem therefore often detailed quite unfortunate circumstances. Communists who had spent years in prison for their beliefs and were now unemployable desperately hoped for a job; activists facing prosecution pleaded to be considered for a Landtag mandate somewhere in the provinces in order to receive parliamentary immunity. Scholem had the authority to fulfil or deny these requests. The party’s central office not only prepared the candidate lists decided on at party conferences, but was also authorised to issue a ‘party order’ for a parliamentarian to forgo his or her mandate and allow successors to move up the ranks. This means that Scholem not only made decisions over secretaries and functionaries, but could even revoke and redistribute Reichstag mandates if deemed necessary.<sup>196</sup>

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better organisation and stricter discipline, not least in the military sense, than has taken place thus far. That would serve as a basis to build on. Regarding my inclination, adequacy and work experience, I feel called upon to assume charge of one of these elaborate areas of activity’, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/35.

194 Letter from Amalie Esser to Werner Scholem, 20 November 1924, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/35.

195 A second application from Amalie in 1927 suggests, however, that she was not given the position; Amalie Esser to the KPD *Orbüro*, 8 September 1927, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/35.

196 Parliamentary deputy Hans Stetter, for example, accused Scholem of using the dissolution of the Reichstag in October 1924 to ‘politically and personally vanquish’ him through the



His reach thus already extended far beyond the Rosenthaler Straße courtyard, but Scholem aspired to more. After reorganising the structures of the central leadership to his satisfaction, he shifted his attention to the KPD's district leaderships. In a report, he describes to what extent the party's left turn had already altered conditions on the ground: 'All other district leaderships were thoroughly shaken up by the party revolution during the debates prior to the Frankfurt party conference. Not a single district leadership remained unchanged in its composition'.<sup>197</sup> Yet Scholem did not trust the revolution to proceed automatically. His goal was the 'creation of politically reliable and organisationally strong district leaderships throughout the Reich as well as the strengthening of their authority'. He took decisive action, transferring and recalling functionaries in order to restructure the districts to his liking. KPD party discipline stipulated that party employees were not permitted to refuse a new post, even if it implied moving to a new city. Most functionaries' financial dependence on the party provided Scholem with a powerful lever in enforcing his decisions. In his report to Moscow, however, he claims to have applied this lever only scrupulously: 'We refrained from interfering with staff selection as much as possible, and pursued a politics of trust and responsibility vis-à-vis those secretaries who, despite their previous political views, were taken on by the new district leaderships; and we removed those secretaries we had discharged, around whom a circle of resentment can too easily form in the districts, out of the districts to the furthest extent possible so as to aid the new district leaderships in beginning their work. We uncompromisingly supported the district leaderships in their stance against KAPist and anti-mandarin sentiments among the membership'.<sup>198</sup>

Recognisable is Scholem's effort to appear politically reliable to Comintern chairman Zinoviev and dissociate himself from ultra-left voluntarism.<sup>199</sup> The 'anti-mandarin sentiment' casually mentioned by Scholem, however, reveals that his measures were by no means universally popular. That said, by October he accomplished the 'readjustment' of 22 of the 27 district committees

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courts. According to Stetter, he faced 22 criminal proceedings, and refusing him a spot as a candidate ended his parliamentary immunity. See Stetter 1926, p. 11. I would like to thank my colleague Uwe Fuhrmann for making me aware of this pamphlet.

197 See Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*. The left had in fact won majorities at the district party conferences in February and March 1924; see Weber 1969b, p. 60 ff.

198 Ibid.

199 Relations with Zinoviev were tense due to the left's decision to go it alone – following the Frankfurt party conference, four weeks would pass without communication between the leadership and the Comintern, see Jentsch 2005, p. 423 f.

in the left leadership's favour, at least according to his own account.<sup>200</sup> The leadership of the biggest district, Berlin-Brandenburg, was 'in the personal hands of prominent members of the *Zentrale*, although the duplication of responsibilities caused by this led to great work overloads for certain individuals'.<sup>201</sup>

One of these 'prominent members' was doubtlessly Scholem himself, who ensured that no new oppositional grouping could emerge in Berlin. As far as the districts were concerned, his aim was the 'creation of a Bolshevist body of functionaries' whose defining feature, in his view, ought to be 'the discipline of a corps'. Scholem was intent on turning this virtue, described by him as the 'foundation of Bolshevism', into 'each and every comrades' second nature [...] down to the lowest party cells'.<sup>202</sup> He was quite aware, however, that discipline in a political movement was only possible when tied to political conviction, which is why functionaries' newspapers resembling Berlin's *Der Funke* were soon distributed in several districts. Scholem wrote on this matter: 'The characteristic tone of *Der Funke* emerges out of the blend of uncompromising discussion of individual shortcomings, good political clarification and pedagogical-organisational educational articles, all composed in finest Leninist style'.<sup>203</sup> Scholem, who wrote for *Der Funke* frequently, was rarely at a loss for self-praise. Nevertheless, pedagogical articles alone would not suffice: 'In order to establish a more precise control over the individual districts' activities, the leadership shall install a special controller whose task is to inspect the districts' organisational state. [...] Assuming this sort of control has proven indispens-

200 See Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*. However, the KPD *Zentralausschuss* meeting on 20 July 1924, at which all resolutions were passed unanimously by representatives of the various districts, shows that resistance to the new leadership had been broken; see Weber 1969b, p. 77.

201 See Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*. A statement of accounts concerning work in the Berlin-Brandenburg district also survives in the archives: *Bericht der Bezirksleitung der KPD Berlin-Brandenburg über die Arbeit der Organisation vom Oktober 1924 bis 1. Mai 1925*, Berlin.

202 *Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4.

203 *Der Funke* took its name from the Russian 'Iskra', a party publication originally founded by Lenin. The names of other functionaries' circulars also made reference to Lenin's vanguard philosophy: *Der Rote Organisator* ['The Red Organiser'] in Pomerania, *Organisator der Revolution* ['Organiser of the Revolution'] in East Prussia, *Der Bolschewistische Kurs* ['The Bolshevist Course'] in Halle, the Thuringian *Der Bolschewist*, *Der Leninist* in Wasserkante, and *Der Revolutionär* in the Lower and Middle Rhine. See Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*.

able and provided the leadership with the opportunity to lend a helping hand in fixing weak spots in the organisational body'.<sup>204</sup>

Scholem also sought to restructure financial relations between the districts and party headquarters. When he assumed office, the districts all existed 'at the cost of the *Zentrale*', which paid the salaries of local functionaries yet received little in return.<sup>205</sup> Scholem concluded: 'The accounting and payment of mandatory contributions was an unknown issue in the districts'. This was about to change. Following a period of inflation and illegality, he sought to accustom the party to 'returning to a sound cash management, accounting and balancing of receipts and expenses, given the current conditions'. This included the financial reorganisation of party-owned companies, many of which had hitherto operated at a loss and required ongoing subsidies. The KPD's economic power was by no means insignificant, owning several newspapers, a print shop, publishing houses and bookshops. The new *Orgleiter* envisaged a novel concept for this network of companies: 'The subsidies had to be eliminated and the capital-devouring enterprises had to be gradually converted into profitable businesses'. Werner Scholem, then, had become a businessman after all – albeit on behalf of his party. Unfortunately, his father never expressed any appreciation for this later turn in his life. By the mid-1920s it was widely known throughout the KPD that Arthur Scholem not only avoided his son, but actively slandered him as well. His relationship with his mother, on the other hand, remained strong. She even seemed impressed by Werner's developing political career, particularly after his trip to Moscow. According to Betty, Werner told her 'fantastic things about that utterly Asiatic city with its mixture of a hundred different tribes. It seemed to me that he spoke slightly less nonsense than before, meaning that he appears to have matured a bit'.<sup>206</sup>

Werner's blossoming into a Communist manager, however, had little to do with his father's entrepreneurial legacy. His ambition in business matters was driven purely by political motives, for the aforementioned KPD 'subsidies' came exclusively from Moscow, and the more successful Scholem was in streamlining the party's finances, the more independent the new leadership could be. Records from October of that year demonstrate Scholem's initial success: the number of dues-paying members increased from 88,000 to about 120,000.<sup>207</sup>

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204 Ibid.

205 KPD membership dues were collected by local treasurers who sold members stamps for their party books. The districts were then obliged to forward the dues to the central office, making the national party reliant on the cooperation of the local districts.

206 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 8 April 1924, Scholem 2002, p. 132.

207 According to Scholem's figures in *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*.

Scholem pushed recruitment aggressively, opposing a tendency towards conspiratorial isolation acquired during the period of illegality. In Scholem's eyes, these habits of necessity had evolved into a downright 'expulsion epidemic', which he derided as purely '*meshugga*', forcefully arguing to bring both old and new members back into the fold.<sup>208</sup> In his opinion, the KPD was 'hardly still a mass party' with a membership of over 100,000, and set a membership target of 300,000. Although he would not come close to reaching this number, a degree of consolidation was in fact realised. Membership dues not only arrived at headquarters in greater quantities, but with greatly increased regularity. Only the rural districts continued to require subsidies from headquarters.

The second major source of income Scholem eyed was the KPD press, whose total circulation reached the respectable figure of 266,000 in September 1924.<sup>209</sup> Scholem was nevertheless intent on expanding, and asked KPD editors to produce content that would appeal to the masses. 'No one will buy the papers if they're boring', he succinctly remarked. Scholem praised the *Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung* (NAZ) as a model for increasing its circulation five-fold to 35,000 in a peak month. The fact that this was mostly owed to tabloid journalism around the case of paedophile serial killer Fritz Haarmann did not seem to bother the *Orgleiter* much.<sup>210</sup> The NAZ had revealed police failures during the investigation in a widely circulated issue, for which Scholem praised it to the skies: 'That was the Haarmann month. The NAZ, which despite its ban a few months ago has a circulation of more than 7,000 copies today, has conducted the Haarmann campaign the way we wished others would conduct it as well. The completely unfounded hesitation to exploit such matters [...] for our press

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208 He wrote: 'The comrades wouldn't dream of recruiting new members, they prefer to stick with their own kind. The expulsion epidemic is still rampant in the entire party. [...] We have lost so many members as a result of this expulsion epidemic, I'd say it must be tens of thousands. [...] We reviewed the conditions under which the expulsions were implemented and found the most bizarre justifications: "Did not appear at an evening payment meeting", or "Lazy!" or "brags a lot but does little", etc. Now this is of course very nice, but I believe that the district leaderships have enough reason to stand up against this spirit. For it is hardly likely that this will strengthen the party, because a mass party naturally requires a reservoir', *Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4. See also Jentsch 2005, p. 433.

209 According to Scholem's figures in *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*.

210 Haarmann had killed and dismembered at least 24 boys and young men in Hanover. As he worked as a butcher, many suspected that the body parts were sold to local restaurants. His trial in 1924 was a major media event, Haarmann was sentenced to death and executed. See Blazek 2009.

still dwells in the editors. They are overly conceited politicians and believe it inappropriate to exploit such a murder case. In fact, it is imperative to exploit such a matter politically. [...] I am fully convinced that Haarmann would have contributed to a great success in Hanover had there been general elections'.<sup>211</sup> Exploiting the case of mass murderer Haarmann to help the party win elections? This suggestion only makes sense after some further contextualisation of the scandal: the sex offender, serial killer and alleged cannibal Fritz Haarmann was in fact a confidential police informant, and was only able to conceal his deeds for so long because investigators chose to pursue other leads.<sup>212</sup> The KPD was the first to publish these revelations, holding the police publicly accountable for the actions of their confidant for the first time.

That said, not all of the KPD's journalistic successes relied on such macabre incidents. For the first time in months, the party began to initiate political campaigns and operate proactively, mobilising old members and attracting new ones in the process. The party's first success was unquestionably the Reichstag elections on 4 May 1924. Scholem ran the campaign from party headquarters, and was immediately rewarded by the SPD with a rather unflattering caricature in the Social Democratic press. His face was now known across the republic.

Betty Scholem considered the doodle 'marvelous', noting how it 'skillfully captures his characteristic expression and the look of his ears'. She was 'almost proud', for '[b]eing caricatured is part of a politician's job'.<sup>213</sup> Admiration for her son's career aside, she gave her vote to the liberal democrats of the DDP, not the KPD.<sup>214</sup>

The elections were a success for the Communists nonetheless. Despite having been illegal as recently as March of that same year and the demoralising phase that preceded it, the party secured 12.6 percent of the vote and entered the Reichstag with a parliamentary delegation of 62 deputies. The Communists had thus overtaken the USPD, which in 1920 had still been the strongest force left of the SPD but now, with a result of 0.8 percent, failed to accrue even a single mandate. Alongside the electoral campaign, Scholem also organised a May Day campaign, an anti-war campaign marking the 10th anniversary of August 1914,

211 *Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4.

212 The police attempted to obscure this fact by excluding the press from the trial, a move the Communist press criticised harshly. See W. Zink, 'Die politische Seite des Haarmann Prozesses', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 166, 22 December 1924.

213 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 8 April 1924, Scholem 2002, p. 132.

214 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 5 May 1924, Scholem 2002, p. 132.

**Beilage des Vorwärts**

Sonabend, 5. April 1924

**Kommunistische Spitzenkandidaten.**

*Baby Werner Scholem bezieht seine geistige Nahrung an der Brust von Mütterchen Moskau.*

FIGURE 22 *'Baby Werner Scholem receives his intellectual nourishment from Mother Moscow', Vorwärts, 5 April 1924.*

a workers' congress, and an internal mobilisation to restructure the party's rank and file on the basis of workplace cells instead of geographic districts.<sup>215</sup>

Although the latter two campaigns delivered only mediocre results, a KPD-led anti-fascist day of action would soon unleash powerful political momentum.<sup>216</sup> The occasion was a 'German Day' planned for 11 May 1924 in Halle, a large political demonstration organised by the *völkisch* and fascist movements. Scholem was determined to prevent this from happening: 'The KPD leadership decided to organise a counter-rally, [...] even though, confronted with the

<sup>215</sup> Werner Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*. A list of all KPD campaigns conducted in 1924 can be found in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/706/14. Werner viewed the workplace cells as important tools in the electoral campaign, see Werner Scholem, 'Die letzten Aufgaben der Betriebszellen im Wahlkampf', *Rote Fahne* 170, first insert, 20 November 1924.

<sup>216</sup> The workers' congress was obstructed by police, see Jentsch 2005.

alliance of armed fascists, the army, uniformed police and all the departments of government, it was clear from the outset that we would not be able to beat the fascists and drive them out of Halle. [...] We could not let that action in Halle take place without any kind of counter-rally by the workers, however, otherwise we could have been sure that the fascists would grow increasingly bold and government authorities increasingly tolerant of them.<sup>217</sup>

Werner Scholem was not the only one to view the event with suspicion; even the bourgeois *Frankfurter Zeitung* criticised what it saw as state support for the march: 'The consequence, then, is that the reaction is allowed to disseminate under the protection of the Prussian police, while its adversaries experience the full scale of state force, as this is the only way of preventing even worse from happening. Likewise, it appears very peculiar that the republic's army participated in the celebrations in Halle by dispatching a traditional company [*Traditionskompanie*], [...] and that it appears to have been possible for the *völkisch* groups to get to Halle with chartered trains, while the railway service failed to show such commitment to the counter-demonstrators'.<sup>218</sup>

The increased political pressure nevertheless helped the Communists win permission for a counter-rally on 11 May, a 'German Workers' Day' to which it mobilised thousands of supporters from the surrounding region and beyond. Scholem portrayed the rally as a huge success in his report, while glossing over the day's tragic outcome: a shootout between workers and uniformed police towards the end of the march resulted in numerous injuries and several fatalities. The argument over who was responsible for the incident went on for quite some time in the press and the courts. Scholem, however, gave no further comment on the matter, betraying neither guilt nor doubt. He cared only for the ultimate outcome: in Halle, the KPD had finally made a renewed show of strength, and the party now began organising counter-demonstrations against right-wing marches in other cities as well.<sup>219</sup>

217 Werner Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/4/24.

218 'Die Ereignisse in Halle', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 13 May 1924.

219 Scholem mentions anti-fascist events in Limbach and Fürstenwalde in his *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*. Activities of the *völkisch* right had died down by June 1924, but would flare up and prompt a KPD counter-mobilisation again the following year. A KPD national party conference declared on 31 October 1925: 'Hitler was supposed to speak in Chemnitz today. However, the pressure of the workers has forced the Social Democratic Minister of the Interior in Saxony to prohibit Hitler from speaking. Nevertheless, the *völkische* were allowed to hold their rally. The Communist Party called for a counter-manifestation. It brought more than 5,000 workers by train, while on the site of the rally there were about 10,000 demonstrators. There were about 650 uniformed fascists. Civil society joined our

The provocations of the right, but also the formation of the Social Democratic Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold,<sup>220</sup> a paramilitary organisation for the defence of the Republic, fuelled the KPD's desire to establish a fighting force of its own. Initial attempts emerged spontaneously but were quickly harnessed and centralised by headquarters. Scholem declared: 'The leadership ensured the centralisation of the local groups that were emerging spontaneously in the districts, the creation of a universal statute, an insignia, a common uniform, and the creation of a special publication'.<sup>221</sup> The new organisation was named the Roter Frontkämpferbund ['League of Red Front Fighters'], but remained unarmed in spite of its militaristic name so as to avoid legal harassment,<sup>222</sup> making the organisation's militaristic appearance all the more important. Scholem understood this as well, assuring his comrades: 'We will see to all requests for badges, hats, coats and similar revolutionary accoutrements as quickly as possible'.<sup>223</sup> Although it took a while to integrate the remains of Communist armed groups into the new organisation, conceived more as a marching formation than an actual paramilitary, the model eventually became widely accepted. By the time Ernst Thälmann was appointed leader of the group in 1925, the position was associated with a high level of prestige and bolstered his standing considerably.

The KPD under Ruth Fischer and Werner Scholem's leadership thus appeared to be moving forward, but old and new contradictions stewed beneath the surface. The shift to 'factory cells' tied to the workplace, intended to replace the old district level group structure entirely, proved particularly controversial. As Scholem would later admit, the new leadership failed to implement this new structure as demanded by the Comintern within the expected time frame.<sup>224</sup> An even greater problem emerged with regard to Communist work in

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demonstration, which was a complete success for the KPD'. Although the cited figures cannot be verified, they demonstrate a growing awareness by the KPD of the danger posed by the Nazi movement. See SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 1/2/4.

220 'Imperial Banner Black-Red-Gold', named after the colours of the young republic.

221 Werner Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*.

222 On the RFB see Schuster 1975, as well as Voigt 2009.

223 *Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4.

224 Scholem would conclude in mid-1925 that the workplace cells were stagnant, while the local districts could not be liquidated for fear of losing members. See Werner Scholem, 'Einige noch ungelöste organisatorische Fragen', in *Die Internationale*, 8, party conference special issue, 12 July 1925. Scholem had written much more positively about the workplace cells six months earlier: Werner Scholem, 'Die letzten Aufgaben der Betriebszellen im Wahlkampf', *Rote Fahne* 170, first insert, 20 November 1924.



the trade unions: the KPD's left wing had always been particularly opposed to the reformist policies of the mainstream trade unions.<sup>225</sup> However, in the summer of 1924 the 5th World Congress of the Communist International obliged the party to work in the very unions they had spent so many years denouncing.<sup>226</sup> The existing but marginal Communist-led 'unions' and leftist trade unions were to be disbanded. KPD members were now expected to work, as Communists, in the trade unions of the ADGB dominated by Social Democrats. Even trade union sceptic Werner Scholem supported this resolution, picking a fight with precisely the forces that had swept him to power.<sup>227</sup> For his part, the *Organisationsleiter* considered the problem to be largely solved by October 1924: 'It was possible, however, through intensive belabouring of the individual districts, groups and sections, to thoroughly convince a majority of active members of the necessity of the trade union line and at least oblige another part through disciplinary means.'<sup>228</sup> This did not occur without a degree of friction, however: Paul Weyer, a longstanding member of the Berlin district leadership, was expelled for his refusal to submit to the new trade union policy and took many members with him.<sup>229</sup> In cases where no split occurred, KPD members nevertheless often refused to join the large trade unions citing Social Democratic influence, or were unable to do so because of previous expulsions.<sup>230</sup> Ironically, Scholem had to be reminded of the resolution by his own local party

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225 The Brandlerites and the Middle Group concentrated on political work within the ADGB unions. Scholem had reduced the trade union department at party headquarters, as most of Brandler's followers were to be found there. See Weber 1969b, p. 75.

226 The 5th World Congress also brought reconciliation between the KPD and Comintern, see Jentsch 2005, pp. 439–65; Weber 1969b, p. 81 ff. On the trade union debate see also Langels 1984, p. 24 ff.

227 Scholem described trade union work as 'a decision of the greatest significance for the party as a whole, in fact a decision that may be more important than any of the decisions taken by the leadership since the Frankfurt party conference'. This speech saw him support a deadline for joining the ADBG unions of 1 December for functionaries and 1 February for rank-and-file members. See 3. *Tagung des Zentralausschusses der KPD 18.–19. Oktober 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/1/23.

228 Werner Scholem, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Orbüro*.

229 Wilhelm Schumacher and Paul Kaiser were also expelled in this way. Weyer would later lead the left-wing trade union 'Deutscher Industrie-Verband'. See Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 1019 and Langels 1989.

230 Scholem also rejected the notion of expelled trade unionists forming left-wing unions, see W.S. [Werner Scholem], 'Der zweite Reichskongreß des Verbandes der ausgeschlossenen Bauarbeiter', *Rote Fahne* 109, 19 September 1924.

cell: while prescribing this step for others via disciplinary measures, he had not yet joined a trade union himself.<sup>231</sup>

Even more troublesome than the disagreements around the trade union question, however, were the ongoing conflicts with the 'rights' and the Middle Group. Scholem saw his primary task as keeping his old opponents away from any responsible functions within the KPD,<sup>232</sup> yet many of these people were experienced orators and organisers who could not be easily replaced.<sup>233</sup> Often-times, functionaries were given tasks they were ill-suited to perform, and discontent within the party spread as a result.<sup>234</sup> The matter grew almost grotesque when Scholem demanded the removal of a stenotypist from Lower Saxony on political suspicions. Comrades from her district, a largely rural region, replied ironically: 'If she really sought to pursue factional activity, surely she would have the least opportunity to do so in our district.'<sup>235</sup>

Werner Scholem was well aware of the growing dissatisfaction with his reforms, explaining: 'There are two distinct perceptions within the party organisation of the policies the leadership has pursued in order to form stable district leaderships. According to one of these perceptions, there are bloodstained hangmen in the leadership who, following the example of Eulogius Schneider, travel the country chopping off heads with their guillotines. From time to time these comrades state, when for once they do in fact speak to us openly, that now the time should finally have come when the leadership no longer asks about the political past of a comrade it is placing in a position of respons-

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231 In a circular issued by the Berlin district committee on 25 July 1925 and later confiscated by authorities, Scholem is found on a list scolding members who had yet to join trade unions. See *Akten des Oberreichsanwalt gegen Fuchs und Genossen*, BArch, R 3003, 14 a J 296/25, Band 2. Ruth Fischer, on the other hand, had done as instructed and joined the confectioners' union.

232 Scholem would complain of 'irresponsible former party leaders' at a meeting of Berlin functionaries on 16 June 1924, whom he intended to 'cut down' in retaliation for their sabotage; see Weber 1969b, p. 78.

233 August Thalheimer spoke of a turnover of the 'entire middle and lower leadership' and a break with the party's revolutionary tradition. Wilhelm Pieck, on the other hand, submitted to the new leadership, although he never formally broke with Brandler. See Jentsch 2005, p. 431f.

234 Rosi Wolffstein, for example, complained in a letter to Zinoviev on 2 April 1925 that bureaucratic moves against experienced comrades were immobilising the party. See RGASPI, F. 324, op. 1, d. 555, Bl 45.

235 The Lower Saxony district committee wrote these words in a complaint regarding Scholem's order to fire stenographer Lotte Bachofen, see SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/14/27.

ibility'.<sup>236</sup> But Scholem was unwilling to change course, and felt encouraged by support from the other side: 'On the other hand there are many comrades who, in contrast to the aforementioned perception, accuse the leadership of being too soft and exercising too much leniency vis-à-vis various comrades who did not hold the left's standpoint before the Frankfurt party conference'. Although he admitted that 'merely firing them is not enough', he nevertheless complained of 'compromising characters' within the organisational office.<sup>237</sup> His leadership style also led to controversies at the central office, such as when he tried to sack head treasurer Artur König for incompetence during the party's financial reforms. A heated quarrel broke out, in which Scholem was accused by Thälmann and others of trying to push workers out of the party leadership.<sup>238</sup> For the first time, the harmonious relationship between worker functionaries and intellectuals in the KPD left was in jeopardy. Scholem was unable to win the argument, although he would be proven right after the fact when König's risky investment strategies ended up costing the party 100,000 Reichsmarks. The treasurer would finally step down from his post the following year.<sup>239</sup>

Scholem was a highly talented organiser and demanded the best from those around him. Scholem's forceful interventions helped to bring the KPD back to its feet, but he proved less talented at leading the party towards an internal consensus. His powerful new position within the party arguably left room for certain concessions: the left's retreat in the trade union question, for example, could have initiated a process of reconciliation with the pragmatists of the erstwhile leadership. Scholem's strength, however, was in polemic, not compromise; during an official party visit to Prague, his final report accused the leaders of the Czech sister party of being 'rights in disguise' exhibiting 'boorish behaviour', and 'sleepyheads of the first degree'. Scholem recommended Comintern intervention to sort them out. He would have taken on the task himself but was unable, as a German, to conduct himself 'authoritatively' enough in

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236 *Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4. Eulogius Schneider (1756–94) was a Franciscan preacher who joined the French Revolution in Strasbourg in 1791, and sentenced many an opponent to the guillotine as chairman of a revolutionary tribunal, until being executed himself in 1794. Describing Scholem as an 'executioner' seems to have been common in the party. Hans Stetter, for instance, refers to 'party executioner Scholem', see Stetter 1926, p. 11.

237 *Konferenz pol. u. org. Sekretäre, Chefredakteure vom 4. September 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/4.

238 Weber 1969b, p. 105.

239 Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 471.

Prague.<sup>240</sup> Scholem was absolutely sure of the correctness of his path. The left's overwhelming majority at the Frankfurt party conference had convinced him that taking other currents into consideration was no longer necessary, neither in terms of content nor in form. His political dominance was reinforced by another development within the KPD, namely the ban on internal factions, also introduced at the Frankfurt conference and prohibiting party members from forming both formal and informal oppositional currents.

Individual dissenting opinions were still permitted in internal discussions, but dissenting members were no longer allowed to speak as a group. The Russian party had already introduced such a ban in 1921, and now sought to transfer it to the KPD in the course of the Bolshevisation campaign.<sup>241</sup> The Comintern delegation had hoped the ban would also push the left to cease its harassment of Brandler's supporters. The left, however, saw things differently, as Ruth Fischer explained at the Frankfurt conference: 'We are against factionalism in all its forms once we have a majority. We intend to turn the party into a coherent one.'<sup>242</sup> Werner Scholem made Fischer's words a reality. In an article published on the anniversary of the November Revolution, he wrote: 'The renowned "freedom of opinion", that is to say, the freedom to wheel and deal with the bourgeoisie and the freedom to engage in reformist politics, does not exist in this party.'<sup>243</sup> The left leadership's uncompromising line was accentuated by Scholem's distrusting nature. In an article tellingly entitled 'Enemies on All Sides', he warned: 'But the right is still alive, albeit lacking an organised faction, and it may again become a danger once it senses that the current leadership is weak.'<sup>244</sup> Scholem saw himself surrounded by enemies – Social Democrats, the police, ultra-left renegades, and the old Brandlerites – and demanded unity from his Berlin power base. He emphatically told them: 'the more danger, the more honour! Once the organisation in Berlin manages to kill off the moles it will be able to handle the bourgeoisie, the Social Democrats and the new syndicalists.'<sup>245</sup>

240 Werner Scholem, *Auszug aus einem Bericht des Vertreters der KPD in Prag*, RGASPI, F. 495, op. 18, d. 350.

241 The KPD *Zentralvorstand*, in which representatives of the city's various districts gathered, declared the factional ban discussed at the Frankfurt party conference binding on 11 May 1924.

242 Quoted in Jentsch 2005, p. 389.

243 Werner Scholem, 'Die historische Lehre des 7. November: Die Rolle der Kommunistischen Partei', in *Rote Fahne* 151, 7 November 1924.

244 Werner Scholem, 'Feinde Ringsum', in *Der Funke*, 2, No. 16, 15 September 1924. Again, thanks to Mario Keßler for pointing this out to me.

245 Ibid.

Scholem's favourite enemies, however, continued to be the 'rights' and 'opportunists' within his own ranks. At a meeting held in October of 1924, he revealed, in a denunciatory tone, the existence of an oppositional grouping that circulated its own newsletter in violation of the ban on factions.<sup>246</sup> According to Scholem, resolutions on tax policy were being used as a pretext to establish a platform for 'rights' and the Middle Group. He regarded the attempts as clumsy and described the whole affair as a dragon 'whose tongue already hangs from its jaws'. He took the movement very seriously nonetheless, as it was allegedly controlled by a number of German 'factional emigrants' from Moscow: 'Around the time that Comrade Stalin published his speech, which represented a kind of covert answer to some of the currents within the Russian party, the re-organisation of factional work began here as well'.<sup>247</sup> Scholem, who led a well-organised opposition within the KPD for over two years, now saw to it that his political opponents were denied the same opportunity. With the attitude of a prosecutor, he proudly detailed how he tricked an envoy of the opposition into revealing his true political motives.<sup>248</sup> Scholem did not hesitate to refer to Stalin's manoeuvres against his own party rivals to justify his actions.<sup>249</sup>

Occasionally, his methods even frustrated close friends and longstanding companions who were otherwise on his side. Berlin Communist Lilly Korpus would complain in a personal letter to Ruth Fischer of an atmosphere of distrust inside the Berlin KPD. Scholem had transferred her husband seemingly without reason, and she now speculated on 'diverse combinations' of motives for the move. She suspected jealousy or romantic intentions on Scholem's part, but would later learn that he merely, rather profanely and paternalistically, sought to protect her from her husband's negative political influence.<sup>250</sup>

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246 Hermann Weber refers to correspondence from Brandler, Thalheimer and other members of the old membership detained in Moscow to their German supporters. Explicitly factional letters were sent by Karl Jannack, allegedly with the support of Radek and the Soviet embassy, in October 1924, ultimately leading to his expulsion; see Weber 1969b, p. 78f.

247 *Dritte Tagung des Zentralausschusses der KPD 18.–19. Oktober 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/1/23.

248 Scholem explained: 'We managed to arrange the matter in such a way that this comrade openly and clearly told the truth. He didn't know that we had the whole thing in our hands. He was provoked into speaking for 20 minutes, so that he spoke correctly and presented that which had been written down for him [by the Right Opposition]'; see *3. Tagung des Zentralausschusses der KPD 18.–19. Oktober 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/1/23.

249 Ruth Fischer also expressed her rejection of the emerging opposition inside the Russian party at the 5th Congress and drew a parallel to 'Social Democratic tendencies' in the Western European parties. See Jentsch 2005, p. 460.

250 The letter reads: 'I have had a grave altercation with Comrade Scholem that may impede

Scholem's fears were the product of a more general paranoia cultivated by the left since 1921: should 'right opportunism' ever take power in the KPD, the party would soon be 'liquidated' and transformed into a second Social Democracy.<sup>251</sup> Every single one of Scholem's measures were intended to preserve the KPD's 'Communist face', but foundered on the reality that the KPD was a social movement that could not be controlled through bureaucratic means alone. Scholem's mechanical leadership style also failed to cultivate personal relationships, as another case shows, triggered by Reinhold Schönlink – an old friend from Werner's youth in Halle who had stood by him during his bitter imprisonment in 1917.

Schönlink was unimpressed by the consolidation of the KPD and published an article in *Klassenkampf*, a KPD publication, in October 1925. In it, he described the USPD's 1920 split as an 'irreversible political mistake'.<sup>252</sup> According to Schönlink, the breaking away of an independent Communist party had weakened the workers' movement in Italy and facilitated the rise of fascism there. Finally, the leadership had found a true liquidationist: Schönlink openly questioned the KPD's existence, arguing that the Independent Social Democracy had been the better alternative. The *Vorwärts* was delighted to see any instance of Communist self-doubt, and reprinted Schönlink's deliberations for a Social Democratic readership. Reacting to this media disaster, the leadership voted by a large majority to expel Schönlink from the KPD.<sup>253</sup> In contrast to the

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my continued employment in the Berlin organisation. The most significant aspect of it was that Scholem informed me that a certain political distrust existed towards me. I had long suspected that the reasons for my husband's transferral which Scholem had told me previously were invalid, let alone significant enough. Owed to the fact that he hadn't told me the true reasons until yesterday, I of course thought of the most diverse combinations, which I did not withhold from our friend Golke but rather told him explicitly so as to pass on to Scholem. Scholem got very upset about this and explained to me during a personal conversation that my presumptions were mistaken, but that they wanted to "rescue me on behalf of the Berlin organisation" and had resorted to transferring my husband for that reason; Letter from Lilly Korpus to Ruth Fischer, 4 October 1924, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/64.

251 Scholem misjudged the political ambitions of the KPD 'right': after Brandler, August Thalheimer and Jakob Walcher were expelled from the KPD for opposing Stalin, they neglected to join the SPD like Paul Levi before them, and instead formed their own, independent 'KPD Opposition' (KPO). Following the war, Brandler would found the 'Gruppe Arbeiterpolitik' rather than join the SPD as many other surviving Communists did; see Becker 2001.

252 *Klassenkampf*, 14 October 1925.

253 On the Schönlink debate see *Sitzung des ZK der KPD am 20. Oktober 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/1/32. The leadership began referring to itself as a 'Central Committee' [*Zentralkomitee*, ZK] in mid-1925.

leadership's constant warnings against 'reformism' and 'liquidationism', Schönlink was the first Communist since 1922 to actually express the wish to return to Social Democracy. Surprisingly, Scholem neglected to pounce on him immediately, and refused to vote for the expulsion. He publicly justified this at a party conference in late October 1925: 'Why should Schönlink be excluded? No one is behind him in the Halle district. His position has been known for a long time, and if anyone wanted to expel him the opportunity was there all along. Now he has been expelled in a demagogical act. Those who have expelled him have taken the same path as Schönlink himself. The plan is to use Schönlink's expulsion to expel us [...] from the party as well'.<sup>254</sup> Why the sudden change of heart? Werner Scholem, who had written optimistic reports about the success of his 'party revolution' to the Comintern in October 1924, now found himself with his back to the wall a year later. He defended his old friend Schönlink not out of personal conviction, but out of pure fear: Scholem's reputation had become so tarnished within the party that he feared expulsion himself.

### The Apparatus Strikes Back: The Left Opposition on the Defensive

Werner Scholem implemented a structure as *Organisationsleiter* that the KPD had already formally adopted at the Halle party conference in 1920. The centralism stipulated by the 21 Conditions never became a reality, however, as the power struggle from 1921–4 led to the formation of several distinct power centres within the party. Although this did little to increase the party's political effectiveness, it certainly made it more democratic. The opposition was regularly able to push through its demands against the will of the leadership by relying on its strongholds in the local districts.<sup>255</sup> Scholem knew this kind

<sup>254</sup> At the same time, Scholem also derided Schönlink as a 'windbag' and left-wing Social Democrat 'who had strayed into our party', see *Reichsparteikonferenz der KPD in Berlin vom 31. Oktober bis 1. November 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/11/2/4.

<sup>255</sup> Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten is thus incorrect to claim that the March Action in 1921 marked a 'conclusion of the successive marginalisation of "Luxemburgism"'. Koch-Baumgarten argues that a 'Bolshevisation' of the KPD begins here, and not in 1924. This is true in the sense that the Comintern began exerting massive pressure on the party at this point, but could not really control it before 1925. The factional struggles in the intervening period, although conducted in an authoritarian manner, nevertheless demonstrated continued internal democracy in the KPD. Only with the complete exhaustion of factional struggles under Thälmann's leadership would the KPD's political autonomy end entirely. See Koch-Baumgarten 1986, p. 16.

of 'dual power' all too well and sought to end it once and for all during the Bolshevisation campaign. He had succeeded by late 1924, and managed to combine his consolidation of power with a reorganisation of the party as a whole. However, once this consolidation was complete, his opponents no longer found themselves on the defensive. Scholem had offered them no chance to integrate themselves into the new order, instead fighting them from above relentlessly. Any failures on his part, which were of course inevitable, would now provide potential targets for this pent-up discontent. The first such event would be the snap Reichstag elections in December 1924, called after the dissolution of parliament. The KPD received only 9 percent of votes and lost 17 Reichstag mandates, while the SPD gained 31 additional seats.

Werner Scholem was re-elected despite being unable to campaign: he had gone underground after the Reichstag's dissolution to avoid renewed criminal proceedings against him, while police camped out in front of his house day and night. Scholem complained about the predicament in two articles addressed to his constituency. He challenged the rival Social Democratic candidate to a public debate, which could easily be arranged by SPD police president Richter or Minister of the Interior Severing. Of course, neither of them dreamed of doing so. Scholem considered the reason for the criminal proceedings to be so irrelevant that he failed to even mention it.<sup>256</sup> Only during a police interrogation in 1933 would he state that he had again been charged with 'preparing to commit high treason'.<sup>257</sup> Proceedings were called off in 1928 following a general amnesty, but this was neither his first nor would it be his last experience with Germany's political judiciary.

In November 1924, renewed court proceedings and Scholem's going into involuntary hiding entailed that, in contrast to earlier such occasions, he was unable to openly defend himself against anti-Semitic attacks. Moreover, these now rose to another level: one of the Nazis' election posters featured a caricature of Werner Scholem, in which 'German workers' were called to emancipate themselves from their Jewish leaders. Apart from Scholem, the poster also showed caricatures of Ernst Schwarz and Iwan Katz, both of whom were com-

256 Werner Scholem, 'Zur Wahl in Potsdam I', *Rote Fahne* 168, 26 November 1924; Werner Scholem, 'Die letzten Aufgaben der Betriebszellen im Wahlkampf', *Rote Fahne* 170, first insert, 20 November 1924.

257 Scholem indicated that his 'belonging to the Central Committee in the years 1924 and 1925' had led to the proceedings. See 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 19. Mai 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1, Bl. 44.



rades of his in the KPD's left wing.<sup>258</sup> But left-wing Communists were not the only ones vilified – Social Democrats of Jewish descent, such as Paul Hertz, were included as well. The message the self-proclaimed 'National Socialists' tried to convey was clear: the Marxist workers' movement as a whole was nothing but a 'Jewish conspiracy'. The campaign yielded little success, however. The Nazis lost half of the votes from the May elections. A mere 3.5 percent for the Nazis was matched by a total of 34.9 percent for SPD and KPD combined. The workers' parties saw an overall increase in their share of votes, while the Nazis had been unable to penetrate working-class milieus. Within the camp of the workers' movement, however, the KPD had lost a significant portion of votes to the SPD.

The electoral defeat of December 1924 was due neither to Scholem's absence nor to the left's leadership style, but rather to economic stabilisation: society had calmed following the crisis year of 1923, unemployment was on the decline and inflation had subsided. This stabilisation heralded the beginning of the 'Roaring Twenties', which lasted five years before the world economic crisis broke anew in 1929. Beyond repression and problems of their own making, Scholem and the left leadership also faced a structural dilemma: the Communist movement in general, and Scholem's left-radical variant in particular, lost a degree of mass appeal in times of economic recovery.

Werner seemed to be vaguely aware of this fact at best. In his analysis of the electoral defeat, he preferred to blame the 'utter incompetence of the organisational secretaries' for the failure. Faced with complaints about his leadership style, he rebuffed them: 'Some comrades revolted and said: if we talked to our members like that they would leave us in droves. But of course you're not supposed to talk to them like that, it's just me talking to you like that. You lot are not the kind of comrades who need to be treated with kid gloves, are you?'<sup>259</sup> But even Scholem was forced to admit: 'The elections of 7 December took place during complete silence and peace, elections in a pacifist-democratic era.'<sup>260</sup> He considered this to be a temporary phase, however.

258 See Bundesarchiv Berlin, Bildarchiv Plak 002-039-007. Ernst Schwartz had also been a member of the Berlin KPD district leadership from 1922 to 1924. Whether or not he was from a Jewish family is unknown, although the NSDAP reviled him in an anti-Semitic context.

259 *Konferenz der Zentrale mit den Or-Sekretären 5. März 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/4. Werner delivered an extensive analysis of the election in an article: 'Auf dem richtigen Wege! Die organisatorischen Lehren der Wahlkampagne für die KPD', *Rote Fahne* 180, 12 December 1924.

260 *Konferenz der Zentrale mit den Or-Sekretären 5. März 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/4.



FIGURE 23 Nazi Party campaign poster, 'German Worker! These are your Leaders' [*Deutscher Arbeiter! Das sind Deine „Führer“!!*], November 1924, with caricatures of Paul Hertz (SPD), Ernst Schwarz (KPD), Rudolf Hilferding (SPD), Eugen Epstein (KPD), Alfred Janscheck (SPD), Werner Scholem (KPD), Iwan Katz (KPD)

Adding to Scholem's difficulties was his inability to consolidate the membership over the long term: figures stagnated at around 120,000 in 1925, responsibility for which was laid at the feet of the new leadership. Both Scholem and his opponents measured the KPD against its size prior to 1923, when it had counted almost 300,000 members. This highpoint, however, had been inherited from the old USPD and would not be reached again until 1932, at the height of the global economic crisis.<sup>261</sup> It was therefore not Werner Scholem and Ruth Fischer who were responsible for the loss of members, but the 1923 fiasco and subsequent economic recovery.<sup>262</sup> During his time in office, Werner Scholem was forced to acknowledge a 'relative stabilisation' of capitalism, but would not consider changing his political line as a result.<sup>263</sup> It was precisely in such times of stagnation, he felt, that exposing the bankruptcy of the system and educating a 'solid body of [Communist] functionaries' to assume revolutionary leadership in the next crisis became all the more important. In an editorial discussing the December elections, Scholem saw the party 'On the Right Path!'<sup>264</sup> Ignoring the electoral defeat, the KPD maintained its left course well into spring 1925, by which time clear divisions among the leadership were beginning to emerge.

These were precipitated by presidential elections, when the unexpected death of President of the Reich Friedrich Ebert on 28 February 1925 triggered snap elections for a new head of state. Scholem saw an opportunity to correct his December setback, giving little consideration to potential shifts in the population's mood, and telling his comrades: 'Even if those philistines marched

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261 The KPD had 294,230 members in September 1923, but shrank rapidly afterwards. The party reached a low of 95,000 members in the second quarter of 1924. The number rose in autumn and hovered around 120,000. Continuous growth would not resume until the end of 1930: the KPD reached the 200,000 mark in February 1931, and the last conclusive statistics from 1932 indicate 252,000 dues-paying members. See also Weber 1969b, pp. 362–4.

262 Hermann Weber also concludes that the decline in membership was unrelated to the expulsions of Middle Group supporters and Brandlerites, but rather to the overall political situation; see Weber 1969b, p. 54 and p. 78.

263 He spoke of a 'temporary ebb' of the revolutionary movement in November 1924, see Werner Scholem, 'Die historische Lehre des 7. November: Die Rolle der Kommunistischen Partei', *Rote Fahne* 151, 7 November 1924. At a meeting of the leadership on 3 May 1925, Scholem even claimed to have predicted the stabilisation and thus saw no need to change course: 'We knew in '23 what would happen in August '24. We knew how the Dawes Plan would play out. The Dawes evaluation was already available. Hindenburg is a novelty, but not a fundamental matter', see *Sitzungsprotokolle der Zentrale der KPD 1924*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/16.

264 'Auf dem richtigen Wege! Die organisatorischen Lehren der Wahlkampagne für die KPD', *Rote Fahne* 180, 12 December 1924.

behind Ebert's coffin, we all know that he enjoyed no sympathies among the masses, as he was the representative of a despised system'.<sup>265</sup> Together with the rest of the leadership, Scholem organised a campaign to elect a 'Red President'. Ernst Thälmann was deemed most suited for the role due to his general proletarian appearance.

Werner announced his intention to win the election with Thälmann as his candidate: 'The personality question will play a major role in the outcome of these elections. If we assume that there will only be a Black-White-Red and a Red candidate, it would amount to a crime if the party didn't win, then it would be disastrous if we didn't make any advances. [...] Should we face an SPD candidate, then the situation is not so easy'.<sup>266</sup> The party's optimism aside, Thälmann received only 7 percent in the first round of elections on 29 March, coming in fourth. His results were even lower than the last general elections. Scholem's campaign was a failure.<sup>267</sup>

As none of the candidates accrued a majority in the first round of voting, a second round was scheduled, for which the political right nominated a surprise candidate: retired Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg.<sup>268</sup> The retired Marshal was often hailed as the 'Hero of Tannenberg' for having commanded and won a decisive battle in 1914 that drove Russian troops off of German territory. Hindenburg may have won the battle, but he lost the war – nevertheless, he stood the best chance of winning the election, as he also enjoyed support from the right wing of the Catholic Centre Party, despite being a Protestant himself. Hindenburg represented 'Black-White-Red' Germany, that is to say, the Germany of World War and counter-revolution. Scholem, who himself had served as an ordinary front soldier under Hindenburg in 1916, knew this all too well.

Ruth Fischer was attending an enlarged plenary of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) in Moscow when Hindenburg's candidacy was made public. Reflecting on events since the failed December elections, she committed herself to a shift in policy that would cause significant discord within the Left leadership. Ruth Fischer conceded that, in light of the current

265 *Konferenz der Zentrale mit den Or-Sekretären am 5. März 1925*, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/I 2/4/4.

266 *Ibid.*

267 The left disagreed: in a major article in the party press, Arthur Rosenberg blamed the result largely on low rates of participation, called a common candidate of the SPD and various liberal forces a 'disgrace for the SPD' and urged the KPD to conduct more political agitation, see Arthur Rosenberg, 'Was bedeutet die Präsidentenwahl?', *Rote Fahne* 73, 13 March 1925.

268 Electoral rules at the time permitted nominating new candidates who had not participated in the first round.



FIGURE 24 Werner Scholem at the anti-war day in Potsdam, 2 August 1925. Scholem commented 'striking grimace!'.

‘non-revolutionary situation’, the KPD needed more political breathing room. In concert with Zinoviev, she declared her support for a common SPD candidate against Hindenburg, a position Maslow had already recommended from his prison cell.<sup>269</sup> Presidential candidate Ernst Thälmann, however, was less than enthusiastic about giving up his role.<sup>270</sup> With Maslow in prison and Fischer stuck in Moscow, Scholem would have the last word. Together with Arthur Rosenberg he drafted a circular on 15 April 1925 arguing against a ‘united front tactic from above with the Black-Red-Gold bloc’.<sup>271</sup> This line would become more appealing when the SPD chose to support Centre Party candidate Wilhelm Marx, meaning that no Social Democratic candidate was left in the race, only a Catholic who apart from his name had nothing in common with Marxism whatsoever. The situation Scholem had hoped for was now reality: the KPD was the only progressive force left standing between Catholic conservatism on one side and Protestant monarchism on the other. With this development, the party occupied the role Werner had always intended for it, representing the defiant and uncorrupted core of the labour movement. Scholem and Rosenberg managed to win out against the Comintern, and Thälmann stood for election a second time.

It was quite clear that he would not win, but the party was shocked when he received only 6.4 percent of the vote in the second round and Hindenburg was declared the winner by a slight margin on 26 April. Given that 13 million Germans had voted for the SPD-supported Marx, Social Democracy could now easily blame the Communists for facilitating the reaction’s ascent to power. This decision would continue to haunt the KPD, for it was Hindenburg who, despite initial reluctance, declared Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany eight years later. The presidential elections of 1925 were a pivotal moment not only for the KPD, but for the trajectory of the Weimar Republic as a whole.

Ruth Fischer settled accounts with those left in charge during her absence immediately after returning from Moscow, and penned an ‘open letter’ to ADGB and SPD warning against the dangers posed by the ‘Hindenburg monarchy’ and a new war. Fischer appealed to her reformist counterparts, ‘Towards the formation of the Red Front, against monarchy and the dictatorship of heavy industry’<sup>272</sup> – a complete reversal, from left radicalism to the united front. Fisc-

269 Weber 1969b, p. 106.

270 Weber 1969b, p. 107.

271 This ‘Rosenberg-Scholem platform’ is reproduced in Keßler 2003, pp. 259–61.

272 *Rote Fahne*, 28 April 1925, as well as *Rote Fahne*, 1 May 1925. See also Weber 1969b, p. 107. Otto Langels identifies a gradual shift on the part of Fischer and Maslow beginning in early 1925, see Langels 1984, p. 16, pp. 49–58.

her was undeterred by her years of denouncing the united front as a 'Zeigner-esque disgrace'. Backed by the Comintern, she intended to implement the new strategy with or without the rest of her comrades from the left leadership. At first, the move seemed to work. Ruth Fischer and the absentee Maslow quickly won over the erstwhile Middle Group followers to their side. The coup was sealed when the floundering 'Red President' Ernst Thälmann unexpectedly switched over as well,<sup>273</sup> a defection that would mark the beginning of a major political career. The once all-powerful *Organisationsleiter* Werner Scholem, by contrast, found himself isolated. Nevertheless, this realignment was by no means a smooth transition. On the contrary, it produced factional conflicts escalating to a point unknown in party history even prior to 1923.

At first, Scholem attempted something rather unique for him: self-criticism. In a meeting of the central leadership on 3 May, he claimed to have pointed out the membership's unrealistic expectations before the left had even taken power,<sup>274</sup> and made the case for working together to find a way out of the current impasse: 'For in such a situation, nobody should say I'm a jackass. It can be proven that we participated in 9 of the points and simply didn't see it coming. It's really quite absurd to say that we thereby condemned our politics of the past ten months as fundamentally wrong. Isn't that right? Ruth, don't you say yourself that we made some mistakes in certain aspects, but that we are not the kind of idiots to not realise that? After all, you didn't possess the philosopher's stone before your departure to Moscow either.'<sup>275</sup>

However, Scholem was unwilling to change his mind on fundamental political questions. While Ruth Fischer, learning from the Hindenburg fiasco, aimed to prevent a right-wing shift in the Prussian Landtag, Scholem continued to resolutely denounce the idea of the KPD tolerating an SPD minority government under Otto Braun in Prussia. Scholem believed this path would ultimately ruin the KPD: 'The price we must pay for such a policy is too high. The price is confusion of our own party, the danger that this act of toleration will not be the last of its kind, that over the next five-year period a system of such policies could crystallise further, which may well lead to the obliteration of the party's class character.'<sup>276</sup>

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273 Joining them was treasurer Artur König. His financial speculation had incurred significant losses to the KPD treasury and led to conflicts between Scholem and him; see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 470 f. and Weber 1969b, p. 105.

274 He cited, justifiably, his article 'Die Gefahrenzone der Opposition', in *Der Funke*, 3, 1 April 1924.

275 *Sitzung der Zentrale der KPD am 3. Mai 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/2/16.

276 Ibid.

The debates continued. When Ruth Fischer won support for her new policies from a majority of districts at a meeting of the KPD *Zentralausschuss* on 10 May 1925, critics Scholem, Rosenberg and Iwan Katz remained in the minority. The support of the *Zentralausschuss*, a body of representatives from the KPD districts, was crucial here, for it rarely exercised its authority to discipline the central leadership. But now, with headquarters divided, it took sides and made a decision – against Scholem. The Scholem, Rosenberg and Katz minority warned of grave dangers, but nonetheless reaffirmed their observance of party discipline in a declaration read aloud by Scholem: ‘We consider it our self-evident duty to aid in preserving the painstakingly achieved unity of the party. We do so despite the grave reservations we harbour with view to the leadership’s policies, and not only in the spirit of formal discipline but of truly internalised Bolshevik discipline.’<sup>277</sup> But the announcement proved to be too little, too late, and Scholem was deposed as *Orgleiter*.<sup>278</sup>

Had Scholem simply sided with Fischer and kept his criticism to himself, he probably could have retained his post. His decision shows that when in doubt, sticking to his own political principles was more important to him than his career. The old left was irreversibly split following this break, and a new opposition began to form: an ‘ultra-left’ wing, of which Werner Scholem became the leading organiser. Plunged from his former position of authority, he now found himself confronted with the consequences of his own policies. ‘Bolshevised’ party culture no longer permitted the existence of an organised opposition. Seen from this perspective, the declaration issued on 10 May 1925 was both Scholem’s initial act of rebellion as well as a sign of his continued adherence to party discipline.

Behind the scenes, however, Scholem was less inclined to limit himself to official channels. Bypassing the leadership entirely, he and Rosenberg turned directly to Comintern chairman Zinoviev.<sup>279</sup> Their long letter from 12 May 1925 survives in the Moscow archives and provides an unfiltered snapshot of the political contradictions pulling at the KPD in the spring of 1925. Scholem and Rosenberg saw in the administration of President Hindenburg and Chancellor Luther a ‘government of the National Federation of German Industry, equipped with fascist and nationalist slogans’. They feared even worse for the coming

277 The ‘Declaration of Rosenberg, Scholem, Katz’, personally read aloud by Scholem at the *Zentralausschuss* meeting is located in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/65, as well as in the *Zentralausschuss* minutes, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/I 2/1/25.

278 Weber 1969b, p. 110; Langels 1984, p. 73 ff.

279 ‘Sinowjew-Fonds’, *Letters to G.I. Zinoviev*, RGASPI, F. 324, op. 1, d. 555, Bl. 106 ff.



period: 'Currently, it is hard to say with any certainty whether the Black-White-Red dictatorship may one day turn into a monarchy. A return of the Hohenzollern can certainly not be ruled out'.<sup>280</sup> Following the election of Hindenburg, both were forced to acknowledge the impact of the 'Black-Red-Gold' opposition consisting of Centre, SPD and Liberals: 'The workers are largely for the republic, as they fear even worse oppression under the monarchy. But it is a hideous exaggeration to ascribe the position the SPD has among the German proletariat today to the question of the republic alone. Eight million workers in contemporary Germany vote for the SPD. Firstly, because in light of the stabilisation they no longer believe in a revolution and, secondly, because they believe that under capitalist rule their petty quotidian problems are better taken care of by the SPD than by us'.<sup>281</sup> In Scholem and Rosenberg's eyes, the social question had primacy over the formal contours of the state. In their analysis, the democratic constitution only masked an already existing dictatorship of industrial capital. In another text from 3 May, they declare that at most a 'technical distinction' separated Hindenburg and a 'Wilhelm III'.<sup>282</sup> Such brash claims provided an ideal pretext for their adversaries to attack them – in an attempt to further isolate the duo, the central leadership immediately demanded they publish their ideas.<sup>283</sup> Harsh criticism of Scholem and Rosenberg also emanated from the Comintern, which, combined with the general uproar following the Hindenburg election, quickly pushed them onto the defensive.

Facing growing pressure, they were finally forced to respond, and declared their dedication to the struggle against the monarchy in a clarifying statement.<sup>284</sup> Nevertheless, they had no intention of cooperating with the SPD in

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280 Scholem and Rosenberg had argued as late as April that the republican coalition was 'not a real factor in contemporary German politics', as the SPD also regularly entered coalitions with the monarchist DVP; see 'Erklärung von Arthur Rosenberg und Werner Scholem', in Keßler 2003, pp. 259–61.

281 *Sinowjew-Fonds*, Letters to G.I. Zinoviev, RGASPI, F. 324, op. 1, d. 555, Bl. 106 ff.

282 Keßler 2003, pp. 115–17; Langels 1984, p. 54. The *Resolution zu den gegenwärtigen Streitfragen innerhalb der KPD* issued by Katz, Rosenberg and Scholem on 3 May 1925 can also be found in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/65.

283 The *Polbüro*, a higher body within the leadership, wrote: 'The comrades who acted against the decisions of our *Zentralausschuss* were repeatedly called to theoretically expound their views in an article. They would not do so'; see 'Ein Rückzugsgefecht', *Rote Fahne* 151, 5 July 1925.

284 Scholem and Rosenberg declared: 'It is untrue that the signatories claimed at any point during the party debates that the Communists were indifferent as to whether Germany is ruled by a monarchy or a bourgeois republic, or that the Communist Party should cease to

this fight: 'If we use such tactics we will distract the German worker masses from the class front and turn them into a pawn in the manoeuvres between two factions of the bourgeoisie, the Catholic heavy industry (Centre) and the manufacturing industry and commercial capital (Democrats)'.<sup>285</sup> Instead, Scholem and Rosenberg put forward the slogan 'A workers' and peasants' government of the working masses [...], combined with sober commentary by the party on all current affairs, with the skilful deployment of economic and political partial demands, with the most thorough work in the workplaces and trade unions. Only then can we assume the leadership of the opposition to Hindenburg'.<sup>286</sup> This programme was more symbolic than anything else, for how ought the KPD lead the democratic opposition against monarchism while stagnating at 7 per cent and isolated by the SPD and liberals alike?

Well aware that they had returned to an oppositional role, Scholem and Rosenberg assured Zinoviev of their willingness to compromise: 'We refrained from putting forward a counter-platform in the leadership of the *Zentralausschuss* and thus prevented a focal point for a renewed left faction within the KPD. [...] In a party like the KPD, which is on the verge of becoming a Bolshevik party, an opposition which does not seek to become a faction can behave in no other way'.<sup>287</sup> Scholem was caught up in a bundle of contradictions: as a revolutionary in non-revolutionary times, as an opponent of monarchism who also refused to defend the existing republic, and as an oppositional politician in a party that did not tolerate opposition.

Although Zinoviev would in fact read Scholem's appeal, his annotations to the text indicate that the chairman was more interested in the strategic assessments it offered.<sup>288</sup> As far as Scholem's political line was concerned, Zinoviev

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manoeuvre altogether in this situation. The disagreement rather concerned the question about the best way to confront the monarchist threat and in which way the Communist Party should manoeuvre in the given situation', *Erklärung Rosenberg-Scholem vom 12. Juni 1925*, in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/65. A similar declaration would appear in July: Werner Scholem and Arthur Rosenberg, 'Einige Bemerkungen zu der Resolution der Exekutive über die Lage in der KPD', *Rote Fahne* 151, 5 July 1925.

285 *Sinowjew-Fonds*, Letters to G.I. Zinoviev, RGASPI, F. 324, op. 1, d. 555, Bl. 106 ff. This represented a differentiation on Rosenberg's part, who had compared the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold to fascism in 1924. Scholem, Rosenberg and Katz now turned against a conflation of monarchy and republic, a view which they publicly stood by in a newspaper article later that July; see *Neue Zeitung*, Munich, 10 July 1925, as quoted in Weber 1969b, p. 111; as well as Keßler 2003, p. 109.

286 *Sinowjew-Fonds*, Letters to G.I. Zinoviev, RGASPI, F. 324, op. 1, d. 555, Bl. 106 ff.

287 *Ibid.*

288 Zinoviev mostly marked parts of the document addressing tactical and international

demonstrated few sympathies. He needed a strong KPD, as he required the backing of strong sister parties for factional fights inside his own organisation.<sup>289</sup> Scholem was unceremoniously dropped, and within a month Zinoviev was negotiating with Clara Zetkin to bring back the *grande dame* of German Communism as a pragmatic corrective to the collapsing left leadership.<sup>290</sup>

In the final analysis, one could say that the election of Hindenburg was the decisive catalyst behind Scholem's downfall. He and his fellow oppositionists had taken over the KPD during a time of widespread disintegration, and consolidated it to an extent that it could stabilise and enjoy initial electoral successes. In fact, the KPD vote tipped the scales in Hindenburg's favour and also could have made the difference in electing Wilhelm Marx. But Scholem nevertheless remained unwilling to exploit the KPD's increased political weight to parlay political influence – to him, the potential ideological damage appeared greater than any possible gains. The party base saw things differently, however. Between May and July 1925, the enthusiasm of the Frankfurt party conference disappeared as quickly as it had materialised. Soon afterwards, the KPD would engage in successful united front tactics in a referendum campaign on the expropriation of the German nobility; critics on the left found themselves isolated.

It was during this phase that Werner Scholem suddenly changed his tone, polemicizing in an article against comrades who believed 'that the Prussian army before the war represented the ideal of a Leninist party'. Instead, Scholem demanded 'a decentralisation of the implementation of our political tasks'. Contrary to people 'who faint when they hear the word party democracy', he called for 'independently thinking' district leaderships. Particularly when it came to selecting district leaderships, the party ought to place its faith in the 'healthy instincts of our membership'.<sup>291</sup> Scholem was preparing for another

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questions. Scholem's warning that KPD cooperation with Paul Levi and the left SPD would lead to them taking over the anti-Hindenburg opposition was noted with nine exclamation points, while a claim that an SPD government would favour the League of Nations over the Soviet Union was marked with five exclamation points. See *Sinowjew-Fonds*, Letters to G.I. Zinoviev, RGASPI, F. 324, op. 1, d. 555, Bl. 106 ff.

289 Weber 1969b, p. 108.

290 K. Tsetkin P'ismo G.E. Zinov'evu [Letter from Clara Zetkin to G.I. Zinoviev], 29 June 1925, RGASPI, Komintern, F. 528, op. 2, d. 404. She was ultimately stopped by Ruth Fischer and her supporters, see Weber 1969b, p. 117.

291 Werner Scholem, 'Einige noch ungelöste organisatorische Fragen', *Die Internationale*, 8, national party conference special issue, 12 July 1925. See Langels 1984, p. 63. Langels interprets Scholem's demands not as a strategic move, but rather a political controversy

round of dual power between districts and the central office, but he had already 'liquidated' this structure of independent districts while in office, and even his power base in Berlin had eroded significantly. Ruth Fischer disassociated herself from the 'ultra-lefts' at the district party conference on 6 and 7 June and won the rank and file over to her side, while Scholem and Rosenberg lost their posts in the Berlin leadership.<sup>292</sup>

When the KPD's tenth party conference convened in the Prussian Landtag in Berlin from 12–17 June, the left was again in the minority, enjoying the support of a mere dozen of 170 delegates.<sup>293</sup> These brave dozen were forced to undergo public criticism in an open letter from Zinoviev. He deployed the full authority of the Comintern to warn against Scholem and his like-minded comrades, whom he considered responsible for the KPD's 'ultra-left feverish state'. Scholem dryly retorted that he 'had the pleasure of noting that, up until May, Comrade Ruth Fischer and the other comrades as well as myself had fallen into an ultra-left feverish state'.<sup>294</sup> Fischer may have backed down, but Werner stood by his principles: 'We will not follow wherever we're told, we will not act according to the Bible passage in the Book of Ruth, where it says: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God"'.<sup>295</sup> Minutes of the conference record 'general amusement' at Scholem's Biblical knowledge, but delegates seem to have missed the real irony: namely, that they had surrendered their party to a fatal external dependency, glorifying the Soviet Union as something not dissimilar to the promised land of the Old Testament.

Scholem himself bore much responsibility for this myth-making. He had risen to the top of the party in November 1923 by viciously denouncing Heinrich Brandler's policies and creating the legend of a 'German October' rather than engaging in political analysis or reappraisal. Now he was beaten at his own

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between the Comintern and the 'ultra-lefts' concerning their respective understandings of Leninism.

292 See Weber 1969b, p. 110, as well as reports in the *Rote Fahne* on 9 and 10 June 1925.

293 Alongside the three members of the leadership Scholem, Rosenberg and Katz were the delegates Hans Weber, Herbert Müller and Adolf Hoffmann (Rhein-Saar), Heinrich Giwan and a delegate named Konrad from Berlin, Arthur Vogt and Bruno Lau from Leipzig, Wilhelm Kötter from Bielefeld, and Ernst Lohagen from Kassel. See Weber 1969b, p. 112.

294 *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des 10. Parteitags der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Sektion der Kommunistischen Internationale) – Berlin vom 12.–17. Juli 1925*, Berlin 1926, p. 392; see also Langels 1984, p. 59 ff.

295 *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des x. Parteitages der KPD*, p. 563. For an interpretation of this quote along the lines of a 'secular messianism' see also Buckmiller and Nafe 2002, p. 71.

game, outmanoeuvred by a campaign that viewed past events as little more than political ammunition for the present. Ruth Fischer began claiming in several publications prior to the party conference that the central office had been split into a 'left' and an 'ultra-left' wing ever since Frankfurt.<sup>296</sup> This move signified not only a repudiation of Scholem, but of her own past as well.

Despite the enormous differences that emerged at the tenth party conference, Werner Scholem, Arthur Rosenberg and Hans Weber were re-elected to the leadership as representatives of the opposition. Scholem's constant assurances to respect party discipline and accept majority decisions may have contributed to this concession. Incidentally, the central leadership would abandon its traditional name, *Zentrale*, and begin calling itself a 'Central Committee' [*Zentralkommittee*] soon thereafter.<sup>297</sup> Moreover, Ruth Fischer was also resisting Comintern demands to accept Clara Zetkin and other 'rights' onto the new Central Committee. When the question was raised at a closed meeting prior to the party conference, she tacitly accepted Scholem's quiet support against Moscow's demands.<sup>298</sup> This tactical manoeuvring, however, antagonised the Comintern. In early August 1925, the new KPD leadership was summoned to Moscow once again. The delegation's visit also marked the next stage of the inner-Russian conflict, in which Stalin now moved to side-line his erstwhile ally Zinoviev.<sup>299</sup>

As a result of the never-ending conflicts within its own leadership, the KPD increasingly became a pawn in the Soviet power game. The party grew less and less able to act on its own authority, while interventions and encroachments from Moscow became ever more brazen and unrestrained. Until 1925, the KPD's own internal dynamics had dominated party developments. Zinoviev had failed to impose his conditions on the left in Frankfurt, just as his list of suggested candidates was vetoed by the tenth party conference. Zinoviev thus had to manoeuvre further if he was to control the KPD. The will to do so certainly existed, as leaders in Moscow had long ceased to believe in a German revolution. Werner Scholem was aware of this and like Ruth Fischer spoke out

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296 Weber 1969b, p. 111.

297 Hugo Urbahns was also elected in absentia as a fourth representative of the Left Opposition. Urbahns had been sentenced to ten years in prison for his participation in the Hamburg uprising earlier that year, but was released in October 1925 after the Reichstag insisted upon his parliamentary immunity. See Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 960.

298 See Weber 1969b, p. 117.

299 Weber 1969b, p. 121.

in the KPD Politburo against travelling to Moscow; both were forced to back down after being threatened with disciplinary measures,<sup>300</sup> and the power play continued.

In Moscow, the Comintern finally succeeded in driving a wedge between Fischer and Thälmann. After further delegates sided with Thälmann, Fischer finally signed another ‘open letter’ harshly critical of her own leadership, albeit only out of respect for ‘party discipline’. Fischer was accused of an ultra-centralist and bureaucratic leadership style that had led to the KPD’s internal ossification. Maslow, on the other hand, was accused of attempting to build a ‘specifically Western European’ Communism in opposition to the Comintern, which was allegedly why he had not moved forcefully enough against the ‘anti-Communist tendencies’ of the ‘ultra-lefts’.<sup>301</sup> According to Otto Langels, the Comintern’s main preoccupation is hidden within this accusation against Maslow: namely, widespread concern in Moscow that the left KPD leadership would reunite and form ‘the new centre of a Western European Marxism independent of Moscow’.<sup>302</sup> Indeed, as early as September 1925 lecture materials were appearing at the central office in which comrades were warned of Maslow’s attempt to create a special ‘Western European Left-Communism’. The materials were intended as a template for public speakers, and explained that the main problem with Fischer, Maslow and Scholem was their independent line: ‘The Communist Party of Germany was not seen primarily as a section, as a district of the Comintern, but as a more or less “independent power” fighting for its own positions against the Comintern to the furthest extent possible’.<sup>303</sup> The Comintern’s letter to the German party was intended to prevent this. The document ingeniously tied a legitimate criticism of the left leadership’s failures to distorted omissions and claims; real discontent over their administrative style, which likely was due more to Scholem than to Fischer, was combined with the damning accusation of ‘Anti-Communism’. The only figure who went unmentioned was Thälmann, who – although he supported these policies for years – was spared criticism because the Comintern needed him as a proletarian figurehead and obedient lieutenant. Ruth Fischer, by contrast, signed the letter in order to save her own skin and demonstrate ‘party discipline’, yet was

300 Weber 1969b, p. 122.

301 The Comintern also called for improvements in trade union work and the factory cells, as well as a democratisation of party life as a whole; see Weber 1969b, p. 125.

302 Langels 1984, p. 70.

303 ‘Referentenmaterial für die Parteidiskussion’, Nr. 1, published by the Berlin Central Committee of the KPD, 25 September 1925, in *Akten des Oberreichsanwalt gegen Fuchs und Genossen*, BArch, R 3003, 14 a J 296/25 Band 2.

really ending her own political career. Werner Scholem received a similar offer to side with the Comintern prior to the letter's publication, but neglected to respond.<sup>304</sup>

The letter was printed in the party press on 1 September and went off, in the words of Hermann Weber, 'like an unexpected bomb' in the party ranks, as Ruth Fischer had thus far concealed her differences with the Comintern. That same day, an internal conference was convened to decide on the cases of Fischer and Maslow. Present were the political leaders of the districts, the editors of the party press and the Central Committee. The open letter was approved with a vote of 93 to 10. As a consequence, not only was Scholem removed from the Politburo, but Fischer was compelled to leave the Secretariat as well. Authority was now delegated to Ernst Thälmann.<sup>305</sup>

Given Fischer's unreliable position, it now fell to Scholem to gather the last remaining left forces inside the party. He published a declaration in the Halle KPD newspaper *Klassenkampf* on 19 September publicly rejecting the open letter. That same edition featured an appeal by Scholem and Rosenberg titled 'For the Unity of the German Left'.<sup>306</sup> The paper condemned the Comintern's open letter as a gateway to conquest by the right. As far as Ruth Fischer was concerned, it read: 'We will leave it to Ruth Fischer to deliver her own political death sentence by putting her name under this document'. The blow was a strong one, but of little help: striking at Fischer only meant furthering the disintegration of the KPD left. The article worked against its stated goal. Ruth

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304 The offer referred to a 'particular group of workers' who were 'not the worst people'. The Comintern feared Scholem's power base in Berlin and sought to marginalise him. The letter concluded with the words: 'The Communist International is convinced that Germany will now see the emergence of an honest, plainly proletarian leadership without foolery, without petty diplomacy, an honestly proletarian Central Committee which seeks to connect to the masses and closely cooperates with the Comintern in the best comradely spirit. The near future will show whether this will bear fruit. I would appreciate it if you shared your views with me openly', *Brief an die Genossen Weber und Scholem vom 23. August 1925*, anonymous, in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/65. Hans Weber, also mentioned in the letter, was a KPD supporter of the Left Opposition in the Palatinate district, who would later become a leading figure of the 'Wedding Opposition'.

305 Fischer and Scholem remained members of the Central Committee, as did Maslow. Fischer's signature also brought the support of many of her followers, allowing Thälmann and his allies to secure power relatively quickly. Berlin remained the last district to resist this turnover in leadership, both in the district as well as in the *Zentralvorstand*, where the sub-districts assembled. See Weber 1969b, p. 127.

306 'Erklärung des Genossen Scholem' and 'Für die Einheit der deutschen Linken' by Arthur Rosenberg and Werner Scholem, *Klassenkampf*, 19 September 1925.

Fischer also neglected to approach her old allies, and continued to publicly support the Comintern's letter. Yet her constant tactical manoeuvring would grow increasingly hollow. According to a Comintern progress report, Fischer defended the letter 'only out of discipline and only during votes'.<sup>307</sup>

Benefiting from the situation was Ernst Thälmann, for the quarrelling left remained fragmented and unable to act during the decisive months of September and October 1925 when he consolidated his power. Although Scholem travelled the country extensively, confronting Thälmann and repudiating his political line in presentations at conferences and party meetings, the impact of this agitation remained limited, for the Central Committee and the Comintern had more institutional tools at their disposal than the shattered left.<sup>308</sup> The *Rote Fahne* polemicised fiercely against Scholem and Rosenberg in articles with titles like 'Down with the Petty Bourgeois Anti-Bolshevist Spirit'.<sup>309</sup>

Nonetheless, what remained of the Left Opposition did enjoy some regional successes, such as in Berlin. Here, the left was so strong that it even managed to insert an article authored by Scholem into the KPD's theoretical journal. Its title was, rather tellingly, 'The Berlin Organisation: Once Again a Levee Against the Right!' and represented another comprehensive attack on Ruth Fischer.<sup>310</sup> In Scholem's eyes, she bore responsibility for the breakdown of the Berlin organisation. The right-wingers had now 'scaled the ramparts and encroached upon the camp of the Berlin organisation which they have so fervently loathed for the past five years, this organisation which defeated the Brandler rule within the party [...] They watch the disintegration of the Berlin district leadership and the convulsion among the rank and file with great pleasure'. Scholem condemned all 'enemies of the Frankfurt party conference decisions', either 'open or covert Brandlerites' who were leading the party into

307 As reported in a progress report titled 'Die Krise der KP Deutschlands' by Pepper, head of the ECCI intelligence department, 13 November 1925, in SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/432, Blatt 74. On the split in the left in these months see also Langels 1984, p. 71.

308 Scholem travelled to Erfurt on 27 September to jeer Thälmann at a party workers' conference, and would agitate against a combined list of KPD and SPD in the coming municipal elections at a meeting of the Berlin *Zentralvorstand* two days later. See *Sitzungen des Zentralvorstandes (KPD Berlin)*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/14. The aforementioned progress report wrote about the event in Erfurt: 'Following a presentation by Comrade Thälmann and a co-presentation by Scholem marked by equal levels of combativeness, the resolution presented by the ZK was approved by 119 to 59 votes, with 4 abstentions', see *Vertretung der KPD beim Exekutivkomitee der Komintern*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/432, Blatt 66.

309 Ruth Fischer was not spared, either, see *Rote Fahne* 218, 22 September 1925; continued in *Rote Fahne* 219, 23 September 1925.

310 *Die Internationale*, 8, 10, 15 October 1925.



'right-wing disgrace'. He believed the membership in Berlin had no other choice but to form a wall against these new 'Zeigner politics'. Scholem's rhetoric was as powerful as it was desperate. The metaphors of war and struggle suggest he viewed these events as a threat to his entire life's work. To him, 'right' Communists were really Social Democratic enemies undermining the very essence of the Communist movement – not only in Germany, but across the globe.

Scholem spoke frankly with two comrades from the suburb of Spandau during a train ride on 7 October 1925: 'Yes, the current Executive is good, but Zinoviev's position has been rattled. Zinoviev can be toppled, and next may come Trotsky, and then what do you do? By the way, there are ongoing attempts to limit the focus to Russia. Zinoviev hinted at something of the like in his Zimmerwald article. The Russians are mostly concerned with building their state and intend to dissolve the whole business [Comintern]. What happens in Germany then? Then 50,000 will join the SPD, 80,000 will become apathetic and 20,000 will stay with us.'<sup>311</sup> Scholem had a sharp sense for the contradictions of the Soviet leadership and its oscillation between world revolution and diplomatic necessity. He had watched closely in 1923 as faith in the world revolution eroded and the International declined in influence in favour of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was not Trotsky, however, but Scholem's erstwhile ally Stalin who brought this dynamic to its logical conclusion. Under his rule, the Comintern would be reduced to a pawn of Soviet diplomacy and ultimately dissolved in 1943.

Werner Scholem expresses his fears in more detail in a letter to his brother, whom he continued to address with 'Dear Gerhard'. Gershom, with whom correspondence had more or less ceased entirely, had asked him indirectly – via his mother Betty – for an assessment of the situation inside the KPD. Until now, Werner's answer has been dated to 1926. However, both the reference to an upcoming party conference as well as striking similarities to the aforementioned conversation in the train suggest that the document is really from the autumn of 1925.<sup>312</sup> Werner explains that the Executive of the Comintern 'no longer wants a left leadership in Germany'. He outlines the reasons for this in

311 *Erklärung von Ernst Lösche und Richard Zymkowski*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/64.

312 The undated letter to Gerhard Scholem is listed as document 93 in the collection *Mutter und Sohn im Briefwechsel*, edited by Itta Shledetzky, Scholem and Scholem 1989. Scholem refers to a 'coming national conference of our party, where I will speak as a co-presenter' – the national KPD party conference from 31 October to 1 November 1925 (SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4), at which Scholem responded to Thälmann's speech. The letter was thus written before 1 November 1925.

an elaborate analysis: 'Russia is currently undergoing an enormous economic boom. Yet this is not, as it has turned out and as it could hardly have been expected otherwise, a progression towards socialism, but instead a state capitalist development representing the foundation of a new type of state, a workers and peasant power. [...] That current in Russia which eliminates the remainders of the Bolshevik foundations, will surely seek to foster sympathies for a democratic workers-and-peasants state of Russia by liquidating the Comintern. [...] No one dares to raise this question openly, however, and the situation is such that one cannot openly ask such a question.'<sup>313</sup>

Scholem's analysis is intriguing. He again identifies the 'Trotskyist current' as the anti-Bolshevik force within the Soviet Union, the degeneration of which he conceives as a kind of Social Democratic variant of state capitalism. Scholem felt uneasy expressing this openly. He warns Gershom to never show the letter to anyone and concludes with the prediction that 'The whole matter will end with my expulsion from the party before too long'.<sup>314</sup> From his own experience, Werner Scholem knew just how quickly criticism of the Comintern was denounced as 'anti-Bolshevik' and 'anti-Communist'. What he could not have imagined, however, was that not just the written word but even casual remarks could be dangerous. The letter to his brother would remain secret, but the aforementioned train riders from Spandau immediately denounced Scholem to the Central Committee.

This material was then used at the KPD's first Reich party conference, held on 31 October and 1 November 1925 in the building of the Prussian Landtag in Berlin.<sup>315</sup> The conference was attended by 235 delegates from all over Germany, tasked with debating the domestic political situation as well as the KPD's tactics. Effectively, however, the conference would inaugurate Werner Scholem's political ostracism from the party. The KPD's tendency to mercilessly personalise tactical mistakes reached new heights at this particular gathering. Just as Brandler was held accountable for the mistakes of the entire party up to 1923, Scholem now became the scapegoat for all of its failures between then and the Hindenburg election in 1925. No one else was available to occupy this role: Ruth Fischer had submitted to the party line, and 'Red President' Ernst Thälmann, the main protagonist in the disastrous electoral campaign, already occupied the role of prosecutor.

<sup>313</sup> Scholem and Scholem 1989, pp. 137–9.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> *Reichsparteikonferenz der KPD in Berlin vom 31. Oktober bis 1. November 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4; see also Langels 1984, p. 78 ff., as well as Weber 1969b, pp. 133–7, and the brief report in *Rote Fahne* 254, 3 November 1925 and 255, 4 November 1925.

Ernst Thälmann reckoned with the left leadership, without mentioning his own involvement in virtually all of their actions and misadventures. His verdict on Scholem reads as follows: 'Sectarianism at the head of the party, personal dictatorship, suspension of party democracy [...]. All these are different aspects of a single phenomenon – separation from the masses'.<sup>316</sup> Thälmann demanded 'that we must rebuild the entire leading staff of our organisation so as to ensure that it is not led by some half-artistic, half-literary bohemians, but leftist workers with a long-standing party record who have worked in the workplaces'. Since Thälmann himself was deeply implicated in most of the left's mistakes, he opted for crude anti-intellectualism instead.<sup>317</sup> The next accusation took on a similar form: Thälmann cited an informant's denunciation of Scholem's speech on the train, and criticised him for not supporting Reinhold Schönlink's expulsion from the party. In this way he skilfully drew a line from the 'right' to the 'ultra-left' currents in the KPD. Thälmann concluded: 'But if we respond to the specific situation we must be unambiguously clear what kind of threat is facing the party. At the time of the Brandler leadership, it was the right danger; now, in times of an ultra-left threat, it is the Scholemist danger'.

Werner found himself on the defensive as never before. His response began with a definitive rejection of the form of the debate itself: 'It is being conducted under the stigmatisation of this group as an anti-Bolshevist group, [...] a group of people who are infringing against the foundations of Leninism. [...] This form of debate, this content, is wrong, and it will lead, as it already has, to a situation in which matters are not debated openly, and many comrades will not have the courage to express their views in light of the way such questions are framed'. Scholem also proclaimed his adherence to the 'sacrosanct principles of the Comintern' and Leninism, but insisted upon freedom of discussion within this framework. He protested vehemently against the 'generous method' of introducing records of private conversations 'with some comrades who see it as their duty to denounce me' into party debates. He countered Thälmann's anti-intellectual agitation with the words: 'You don't become a party leader by tucking away your tie and collar in order to appear more proletarian, but by

316 This and following quotes from: *Reichsparteikonferenz der KPD in Berlin vom 31. Oktober bis 1. November 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4.

317 It is important to note, however, that the intense and largely polemical attacks on the KPD Left Opposition within party structures and at conferences referred exclusively to their level of education, not their Jewish background. Thus, anti-intellectualism in the KPD was not necessarily of an anti-Semitic nature, although this combination would often appear in other places; see the two studies found in Bering 1982 and Bering 2010.

standing politically for a serious line before the party' – at which point he was interrupted by howls of protest from the delegates.<sup>318</sup>

Scholem's 'serious line' was another warning against a 'bloc between SPD and KPD'. He emphasised critique of such a coalition policy as the old left's core issue: 'I fought for this position at 50 meetings before the Frankfurt party conference. [...] Thälmann fought for it, Comrade Ruth fought for it, and now that you're trying to stigmatise us as ultra-lefts you claim all that isn't true. Be honest!'<sup>319</sup> In his final remarks, Scholem expressed particular scorn for Central Committee member Hermann Remmele. Remmele had described Maslow as the KPD's 'best Leninist mind' as recently as July, but now denounced him as an 'anti-Bolshevist'. Scholem remarked dryly: 'Comrades, I admit – I am "stubborn", I am "ultra-left", I am unable to comprehend very much as I am inherently a bit thick – but Comrade Remmele, that's the true Bolshevist, for he has mastered the elasticity of caving in twice in two months'.<sup>320</sup> Scholem's appeals amounted to little, as Thälmann had prepared the conference well. Delegate elections had been held in the factory cells for the first time, with the explicit purpose of stripping the traditionally left-leaning neighbourhood organisations of their representatives.<sup>321</sup> Enjoying a comfortable majority, Thälmann then installed a 14-person 'Scholem Commission' tasked with reviewing his adversary's political methods.

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318 Scholem mocked one of Thälmann's trademarks, the 'notorious removal of his collar in the middle of a public speech [which] brought him more popularity than his rhetoric ever could'; Leviné-Meyer 1977, p. 67.

319 SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 1/2/4.

320 Ibid.

321 A report written in the name of the Central Committee of the KPD on 20 October 1925 admits the political intentions behind the new voting method: 'Accordingly, for the first time it is not the residential districts who vote, but the district meetings of the cells, that is the workplace cells as such. Comrades in Berlin are frantic, calling it a violation, but we will implement this new voting method at any cost, even against the will of the district leadership; and we hope to receive a majority through this' (SAPMO-BArch RY 5/I 6/10/80, Blatt 162). Given the left's weakened state, the ZK could easily have achieved a majority through the regular voting method as well. This move demonstrates, however, how unsure of itself Thälmann's group was. A protest against the voting method was presented at the conference by Hans Weber, expressly in Scholem's name. This formal protest worked against Ruth Fischer who, as a representative of the Berlin-Brandenburg district, publicly welcomed the new method (SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 1/2/4). Scholem and the opposition would later criticise the replacement of membership assemblies with delegate conferences. The membership became atomised, the power of the apparatus grew, and votes were manipulated by functionaries when necessary. See 'Der Parteitag des schlechten Gewissens', *Mitteilungsblatt (Linke Opposition der KPD)*, 7, 15 March 1927.

At this point, a delegate from Berlin spoke out in defence of the accused, specifically with view to the charge of ‘undemocratic leadership’: ‘I must say, had there been a greater number of proletarians present to witness the practical evidence of party democracy, a majority of them would have voted with their feet immediately’. In his view, it was a disgrace that freedom of discussion would allow Scholem to present his argument, only to be ‘followed by a motion which amounts to a demand for action to be taken against Scholem for daring to publicly represent our principles, for daring to present our views.’<sup>322</sup>

Even Thälmann was forced to acknowledge that Scholem enjoyed considerable support among workers, which is why he thought it unwise to proceed against him with ‘statuary means’, because ‘through such a step, in such a situation, workers may indeed be driven away, but we need them for the class struggle, for the revolution’. The left’s base continued to pose a threat, and represented a further reason to single out Scholem and even construct a spectre of ‘Scholemism’ around him, but the attack against Werner was equally directed at Ruth Fischer, as Thälmann even admitted: ‘I have to confess to you, comrades, that I am less unsettled by the organised ultra-left faction of the Scholems, as by the residue of Scholemism in those who are only voting unconditionally in favour of the ECCI’s open letter for reasons of discipline’.

Scholem refused to testify before the commission.<sup>323</sup> Two members even resigned in protest against the body’s bias against Scholem.<sup>324</sup> The ‘Scholem Commission’ was convened nonetheless and presented a rather predictable

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322 *Reichsparteikonferenz der KPD in Berlin vom 31. Oktober bis 1. November 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4.

323 He wrote in a personal declaration that the commission was ‘constituted in the majority by decided opponents of my political methods’, and its judgement thus clear from the outset. In addition, party statutes stipulated that only a party court of arbitration could be tasked with investigating breaches of discipline. See *Erklärung Scholems vom 1. November 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4, Bl. 751, also in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/65.

324 Commission members Neuhauser (Cologne), Besser (Magdeburg) and Lau (West Saxony) submitted declarations in support of Scholem. They refused to cooperate after realising that not only Scholem’s party discipline, but also his political work was to be investigated: ‘As a consequence of this decision, the signed delegates, of whom comrade Neuhauser from Cologne has voted for the Central Committee’s resolution, must refuse to participate in negotiations for a commission that is no more than political comedy. In no way is it the right of a commission to make party-political decisions’. They were particularly critical of the fact that Scholem’s speech was to serve as a piece of evidence: ‘It has thereby become evident that not Scholem as an individual, but Scholem’s entire political group is to be put in the dock’; see *Reichsparteikonferenz der KPD in Berlin vom 31. Oktober bis 1. November 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4.

judgement to the plenary assembly on the conference's second day: 'Comrade Scholem is unworthy of fulfilling the function of a member of the KPD's Central Committee. Comrade Scholem is therefore relieved of his function as member of the Central Committee'.<sup>325</sup>

The main plenary session of the conference approved his removal in the face of loud and energetic protests. After Scholem angrily demanded to be given the floor several times and was refused, he accused the meeting's chair, Wilhelm Pieck, of 'violating' the conference. Pieck ignored him and exhorted the plenary to 'maintain a frosty silence towards the behaviour of these comrades'. Scholem received only 11 of 235 delegates' votes for his motion to dismiss the chair of the meeting. The overwhelming majority of delegates heeded Pieck's advice. A frosty silence thus ended Scholem's career in the KPD. He returned to being an ordinary member, but his time in the party was running out.

### Scholem Versus Stalin: A Question of Democracy?

At the party conference, Werner Scholem had declared on behalf of his current 'that we don't seek to be a grouping within the party, but that we will work and remain in the place we are assigned by the party, as according to the resolutions of the party and the International'.<sup>326</sup> He thus accepted party discipline and the ban on internal factions, placing him in a rather irresolvable dilemma: opposition without organisation was ultimately a contradiction in terms, while the faction's constant affirmation of party unity and discipline reinforced the authority of the Central Committee and the Comintern. Scholem's earlier conversation with comrades on the train demonstrates how far from awestruck by the Comintern's authority he really was, yet he had no choice but to feign precisely such awe in order to receive an audience inside the party. The failure of the revolution in Germany, the cult of personality around Lenin in the wake of his death, and the 'Bolshevisation' of the party organised by Scholem himself had radically altered the climate inside the KPD. Party discipline, initially born out of the necessity for united activity, degenerated into unquestioned obedi-

325 Scholem's 'systematic baiting' of the Central Committee was cited as justification. Proof thereof was presented in the form of Scholem's refusal to testify before the commission, he had chosen 'the path of obstruction and sabotage'. The commission thus created the breach of discipline it intended to punish. See *Beschluss in der Angelegenheit des Genossen Scholem*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4, Bl. 753 ff.

326 *Erklärung Scholem, Rosenberg, Thiede, Giwan Jüdicke Vogt, Reichsparteikonferenz der KPD 31. Oktober und 1. November 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4, p. 215.

ence to the leadership. Critics, whether 'right' or 'ultra-left', were subjected to derision and marginalisation regardless of how they framed their arguments. The period from November 1925 onwards would thus witness Scholem's quixotic endeavour to appear disciplined and oppositional at the same time, to refrain from overt factionalising while still constituting a current.

This manoeuvring took place under the banner of 'open discussion' and 'party democracy'. As paradoxical as it may seem, the term 'democracy' became a central point of debate in the KPD in mid-1925 despite Bolshevisation and the ban on internal factions. Werner Scholem began calling for more internal democracy and more authority for the districts in July 1925.<sup>327</sup> At the same time, Scholem's own deposition had been justified with reference to the lack of democracy under his leadership: in a letter dated 1 September 1925, the Comintern urged the 'normalisation and democratisation of party life', while a functionaries' meeting held on the same day condemned the 'personal dictatorship of an inner circle inside the *Pol-Büro*' during the Scholem era.<sup>328</sup>

A closer look at the events of the 1 November 1925 party conference, however, reveal that this democracy debate was largely a pretext for other, less noble intentions. Thälmann only criticised Scholem's 'personal dictatorship' to replace it with his own. Scholem, in turn, demanded democracy so as to better organise a faction against Thälmann. To the Comintern's representatives, on the other hand, democratising the KPD really meant installing an obedient leadership by appointing Thälmann. In light of these circumstances, Moscow's praise for the shift in the party's internal climate following Scholem's removal rings rather hollow: 'And it is noticeable that, perhaps for the first time ever, there are in fact serious discussions within the KPD. No longer is it common practice to give a presentation and conclude the discussion that same evening by adopting a resolution. Now, problems are addressed thoroughly and every opinion is listened to.'<sup>329</sup> Can this turn be attributed to the 'democrat' Ernst Thälmann? Or did open debate continue inside the party precisely because Scholem and his followers rejected party discipline and pursued an oppositional practice?

It seems evident that the democracy debate within the KPD had little to do with subsequent debates among historians around the KPD's descent into Stalinism. In the context of Stalin's later regime of terror, the intrinsic value of

327 Werner Scholem, 'Einige noch ungelöste organisatorische Fragen', *Die Internationale*, party conference special issue, 12 July 1925.

328 Weber 1969bb, p. 127.

329 'Die Krise der KP Deutschlands' by Pepper, head of the ECCI intelligence department, 13 November 1925, SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/432, Blatt 66.

internal democracy appears self-evident, but for actors at the time democracy represented little more than a means towards the ultimate goal of revolution. This is not to imply that the KPD was authoritarian from its conception: in 1925–6, every faction not only saw it necessary to invoke democracy in factional resolutions, but was in fact obliged to win majorities at countless party meetings in order to gain power. Party democracy remained in place for the time being, which is why Scholem was more concerned with political questions – despite his complaints about Thälmann’s foul play – than with the overall condition of the party as such. He feared a conquest of the Comintern by ‘right’ currents more than anything else, and although he sensed the danger of the world Communist movement abandoning its democratic character, he was only capable of conceiving of this danger in terms of ‘liquidationism’ and ‘opportunism’.

This also had an impact on his perception of the inner-Russian factional struggles: up until 1926 he considered Trotsky, not Stalin, to be the ‘right’ threat.<sup>330</sup> He wrote to his brother along these lines, and would also vigorously condemn ‘Trotskyism’ as Communism’s ‘right wing’ a total of five times at the November 1925 party conference, accusing it of threatening the ‘foundations of the Communist International’. Zinoviev, on the other hand, was seen as the guarantor of a revolutionary line.<sup>331</sup> In their early oppositional documents, Scholem and Rosenberg freely quote Joseph Stalin’s speeches to substantiate their own views, with Rosenberg making positive reference to Stalin’s ‘forceful and clear remarks’ on opportunism in July 1925.<sup>332</sup> It was not until a further trip to Moscow that their view of the Russian factional struggles would change decisively. The occasion was the plenary session of the ‘Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International’ scheduled to take place

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330 The KPD leadership had already condemned ‘Trotskyism in its old and new forms’ in a major article towards the end of 1924, see ‘Zur Diskussion mit dem Genossen Trotzki’, *Rote Fahne* 156, 13 November 1924.

331 Scholem was not alone in the Comintern with his position, as Isaac Deutscher concludes: ‘While the triumvirs were confronting Trotsky, Trotskyism haunted the Comintern. Then the leaders who by their views or sentiments had been tied to their President, Zinoviev, either joined in denouncing him or were effaced’, Deutscher 1962, p. 398. For Scholem’s condemnations of Trotskyism see *Reichsparteikonferenz der KPD 31. Oktober und 1. November 1925*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 1/2/4, pp. 121–4, p. 128 and p. 147 of the minutes.

332 As Rosenberg stated at the KPD’s 10th party conference. Scholem and Rosenberg also referred positively to Stalin on 15 April 1925, see Keßler 2003, p. 118 and p. 259. The shift would only come later: ‘Only after the Trotskyists had formed a bloc with the Leningraders [around Zinoviev] did Trotsky cease to haunt to the German Left’, according to Rüdiger Zimmermann 1978, p. 52 (an. 3).



in Moscow from 17 February to 15 March 1926. The Comintern was determined to clarify its relationship with its left critics at this meeting, and thus invited Scholem, Fischer and Rosenberg from the German party. In contrast to previous occasions, however, the delegation was not a purely German matter: other European critics of the Russian line such as Polish party leader Domski and Amadeo Bordiga from the Italian Communist Party had also been summoned.<sup>333</sup> Uniting them were concerns about a possible turn towards Russian nationalism on the part of the Comintern. The KPD Left Opposition, which had initially emerged as a local phenomenon in Berlin and Hamburg, thus became implicated in the wider conflict over the future of world Communism in the aftermath of the 1917–23 revolutionary upsurge.<sup>334</sup>

Given the high stakes involved, Werner Scholem was eager to expound his views before the International. Not all dissidents agreed with him, however. When Scholem and Fischer volunteered to go to Moscow, comrades from all sides made great efforts to distance themselves from them: both Iwan Katz and Karl Korsch, as well as the 'Wedding Opposition' led by Hans Weber, noted in their respective declarations that Scholem and his followers did not represent them and had no mandate to do so whatsoever.<sup>335</sup> This discord among the various left factions was symptomatic. Although a national conference of the KPD left wing had already been held on 24 January 1926, violating the ban on factions, the opposition was unable to agree on a common programme. A covert observer monitoring the meeting on behalf of the Central Committee counted 50 attendees.<sup>336</sup> According to that participant's report, Katz suggested a coordinated boycott of membership dues, but was met with criticism: 'Scholem disapproved of issuing the leaflet and forming a strike committee.

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333 'L. Domski' as well as 'H. Kamienski' were pseudonyms of Polish Communist leader Henryk Stein (1883–1937), who had been active in the Polish CP since its founding in 1918 and joined its leadership in 1924. He was expelled as a Trotskyist in 1928 and murdered in 1937. Amadeo Bordiga (1889–1970) was the founder and first chairperson of the Italian CP. He was expelled for "Trotskyist" activities in 1930. See Lazitsch and Drachkowitz 1986, p. 37 and p. 99.

334 This was also reflected in the Comintern's programmatic debates, see Vatlin 2009, p. 111 ff. Behind the debate concerning the relative stability of capitalism was a wider power struggle within the Comintern, which would have been disrupted by plans for world revolution, see Deutscher 1962, p. 391f.

335 The various declarations can be found in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/65. The 'Wedding Opposition' was the strongest of the 'ultra-left' groups, and was located not only in the Berlin district of Wedding but also in the Palatinate region, Hans Weber's childhood home; see Bois 2008, pp. 58–67.

336 A report is located in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/64, Blatt 445 ff.

This resulted in a great row, during which Scholem was pelted with coffee cups'. Scholem, attacked in rather unduly fashion, sought to avoid giving the KPD leadership any excuses to initiate expulsions. He won a majority for this position, but real unity would elude him: 'When Scholem's motion to disapprove of the behaviour of comrade Katz was approved with 22 to 19 votes, Katz and Weber left the conference, followed by Jädike, Kötter and Vogt-Leipzig and others. Korsch and Schwarz largely stayed out of this altercation with Katz and Weber and sided with Scholem. Immediately after the national conference of 24 January 1926, the Weber group attempted to form an independent faction: Korsch and Schwarz now joined this faction.'<sup>337</sup> The specific constellation of individuals listed in this snapshot would change over time, but the general pattern would remain. In contrast to 1921–3, the KPD Left Opposition failed to become a cohesive unit, almost as if the protagonists sought to corroborate their opponents' caricature of 'intellectual troublemakers' by splitting into ever more rival groups.<sup>338</sup> These groups and grouplets, however, were divided not only by personal vanity, but by meaningful tactical differences as well. While Katz and Weber went on the offensive, Scholem and Rosenberg sought to avoid provoking the KPD. They also refused to collude with Ruth Fischer and her 'double-entry bookkeeping' of formally accepting the leadership's twists and turns in order to retain a modicum of acceptance inside the party. Ultimately, only two of the various 'ultra-left' groups were represented in Moscow: the faction around Rosenberg and Scholem, and Ruth Fischer's group including Hugo Urbahns and her partner Maslow.

Grigory Zinoviev destroyed any lingering illusions of an alliance between him and the left wing of the KPD in his opening speech to the 6th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI on 20 February 1926. Hermann Weber believes that Zinoviev was already under the influence of the Stalin faction at this point, which had smashed his power base in the Leningrad party apparatus in January 1926 and removed him from all important party positions.<sup>339</sup> Whether he was trying to save his own skin or simply repeating his reservations concerning the left wing of the German party from 1923, he excoriated the KPD's erstwhile leaders. The opposition had not been invited to debate, but to be humiliated.

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337 Ibid.

338 See Langels 1984, Zimmermann 1978, Bois 2014.

339 Weber 1969b, p. 143. A Zinoviev speech from 28 December 1925 was printed in the *Rote Fahne* in January 1926, in which Zinoviev named Scholem as the leader of the ultra-left current in the KPD and warned him against 'exploiting' the debates in Russia; see 'Die Tätigkeit der KPD-Delegation im EKKI – Die Rede des Genossen Sinowjew', *Rote Fahne*, 6 January 1926.

An entire section of Zinoviev's speech was titled 'The Primary Mistakes of the Ultra-Lefts', in which he criticised their 'purely formal conception of the united front tactic' and 'excessive eagerness to expose', which he explained as follows: 'They attempt to expose the Social Democratic leaders in a way that simply exposes their own incapability. We saw this in the German party especially during the leadership of Ruth Fischer. I remind you of the episode with the Hindenburg election'.<sup>340</sup> Scholem interrupted by yelling 'Very true!' in an attempt to strike a blow at Ruth Fischer, despite the fact that he was responsible for organising the electoral defeat himself. Zinoviev, however, took the embarrassing interjection surprisingly favourably. In the middle of his speech, he suddenly offered Scholem a truce: he addressed the left not as a class enemy, but as comrades of the International. Nevertheless, Scholem would first have to accept the Comintern's open letter: 'This letter is one of the Comintern's most fortunate documents'. Scholem interrupted him before the audience a second time: 'I don't believe that!' Zinoviev resigned himself: 'If you still don't think so and can't be convinced otherwise soon, you are hopeless'.<sup>341</sup> Scholem was as impatient as he was stubborn. Sticking to his political line mattered more to him than remaining in the leadership of the KPD.

Instead, he tried to gain political ground with a speech of his own. First, he expressed his agreement with the Comintern's assessment of a 'relative stabilisation' of capitalism, declaring 'that I am firmly convinced that the civil war in Europe will certainly not end with a swift victory of the proletariat, but that it will be a long process, one that has already begun, [...] a process that cannot simply culminate in a coup d'état'.<sup>342</sup> This 'process' was also why Scholem considered a Social Democratic turn to be the greatest danger facing the movement. He brusquely rejected Zinoviev's offer and sought to win over Stalin instead.

Scholem had heard rumours 'that Comrade Stalin, during a meeting on the German question at the Comintern's Presidium, responded to the question as to why he saw any particular threat posed by that group around Rosenberg and myself that he did so because these comrades (he stated my name) had failed to recognise the new processes within the German workers' movement and continued to do so. I don't know who informed Comrade Stalin, but I would like to take the opportunity here to express that not only since yesterday, but

340 ECCI (ed.) 1926, *Protokoll – Erweiterte Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale – Moskau, 17. Febr. bis 15. März 1926*, Hamburg, p. 50.

341 ECCI (ed.) 1926, p. 58f.

342 ECCI (ed.) 1926, p. 72.

at least since the beginning of the year 1925, have Rosenberg and I pointed to the newly emerging developments among German workers'.<sup>343</sup> Scholem then tried to dissociate himself from Ruth Fischer and shift all blame to her: 'We are pleased to receive belated legitimation from the chair of the C[ommunist] I[nternational] for the struggle we conducted against this dilettante method of Ruth Fischer's' – but the plenary reacted with mere 'amusement'.<sup>344</sup> Scholem's attempt to distance himself from Ruth Fischer and appear as the critic who had been right all along would inevitably fail, for he pursued two contradictory goals at once – to retain his political line while receiving the International's blessing.<sup>345</sup> Zinoviev had rejected Scholem's overtures from the beginning, and Stalin was equally disinclined to take him up on the offer.

Werner nevertheless concluded his speech with an appeal to political cooperation: 'We expect this session of the Enlarged Plenary to conclude the fight against us as an ultra-left, anti-Bolshevist and anti-Communist faction. We are of course not as naïve to believe that the differences within the KPD will be liquidated from this very day onward. There will always be a current that emphasises the role of the party, and there will always be a right current. These currents, which surface at certain instances, will quarrel with one another, but they will at the same time be able to work together on the decisions of the International'.<sup>346</sup> With this statement, Scholem called for nothing less than a relaxation of the ban on factions and the freedom to form a current within the KPD.

However, when a 'German Commission' convening parallel to the ECCI session addressed events in the KPD in detail, Scholem's erstwhile ally Stalin coldly dismissed the motion. In his capacity as chairman of the Commission, Stalin declared: 'I only want to focus attention on one passage in his speech and to examine it critically. Scholem is now in favour of inner-party democracy. He therefore proposes that a general discussion should be started – that Brandler and Radek and everybody, from the Rights to the "ultra-Lefts," should be invited, a general amnesty declared and a general discussion opened. That would be wrong, comrades. We don't want that. Previously, Scholem was opposed to inner-party democracy. Now he is running to the other extreme and declaring

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343 ECCI (ed.) 1926, p. 73.

344 ECCI (ed.) 1926, p. 74.

345 Scholem was only prepared to admit a single mistake: 'That we did not move from a petty faction to a whole party soon enough; while we were preparing to correct this mistake and move from a clique to a party, the Executive of the Comintern forcefully cast us into the role of an anti-Comintern faction', ECCI (ed.) 1926, p. 75.

346 ECCI (ed.), p. 82.

in favour of unlimited and absolutely unrestrained democracy. Heaven save us from such democracy! The Russians have an apt saying: "Tell a fool to kneel and pray, and he will split his forehead bowing." (*Laughter.*) No, we don't want that sort of democracy'.<sup>347</sup>

Stalin struck at the heart of what Scholem refused to accept: in his many declarations and musings on the politics and tactics of Communism, on 'right' threats and 'left' strategies, Scholem had failed to understand that the democratic character of the Communist movement possessed inherent value and a dynamic of its own. By this time, it was too late to demand internal democracy. Scholem was also mistaken about the political constellation of the actors involved, for it was by no means Trotsky and Radek who signified an authoritarian 'state capitalist' development in Russia, but rather Stalin, who would soon elevate the interests of the Russian state above those of the revolutionary movement. From outside, however, this could be seen very vaguely at best.<sup>348</sup> Stalin was inclined to send others ahead of him: the first brochure on 'Socialism in One Country' was composed by Bukharin, while Stalin himself would not acknowledge his adherence to the position before January 1926 in his anthology *Concerning Questions of Leninism*.<sup>349</sup> Although he completely misunderstood Stalin's role in this process, Scholem anticipated developments more clearly than most in the fall of 1925 when he identified a 'new type of state' emerging in Russia. Scholem also showed sharp political instincts when rejecting the emerging Stalinist ritual of public political capitulation. When Zinoviev demanded he withdraw his previously held views, Scholem categorically refused, explaining 'that I don't regret my stance in the slightest and haven't come here to complete my personal road to Canossa, not to kneel before anyone, but that I stand by my position: I will not sign a letter in which I am referred to as an anti-Communist, anti-Bolshevist, even corrupt element debauched by the bourgeoisie'.<sup>350</sup>

Whether motivated by personal pride, political instinct or revolutionary determination, neither here nor at any later point in his life would Werner

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347 Stalin 1954, p. 119.

348 Isaac Deutscher describes the caution with which Stalin conducted factional struggles: 'He acted from behind the scenes, mainly through his lieutenants who sat on the Executive of the International. Unlike Lenin, who had addressed every congress of the Comintern [...] Stalin, holding no post in the Government, never addressed any congress of the Comintern. [...] He looked with disdain upon the great ideological debates, in which Lenin had indulged with eagerness and gusto [...]', Deutscher 1962, p. 395 f.

349 Stalin 1954, pp. 11–96. On Trotsky's critique see Trotsky 2012.

350 ECCI (ed.) 1926, p. 76.

Scholem publicly recant his political views.<sup>351</sup> His prosecutor Zinoviev, however, would soon abandon himself to the will of the party entirely. He was expelled from the CPSU, arrested and banished twice after 1927 and readmitted each time following displays of public repentance and self-flagellation. In 1936, a broken, psychologically damaged Zinoviev would sign a fabricated confession in which he admitted to being a fascist agent. He was executed on Stalin's orders on 25 August 1936.

Scholem for his part refused to take even the initial steps down this path. At the ECCI plenary session, he delivered a public statement contradicting the Comintern's resolution on the German question.<sup>352</sup> This constituted an almost unthinkable affront: a lone Communist daring to challenge the International and publically disagree with its line.

This difficult decision was accompanied by grave self-doubt. At a later meeting of the KPD Central Committee, Scholem admitted that since January 1926 he had 'wondered whether the political cause is correct, if the collapse perhaps means that our political ideas are wrong'.<sup>353</sup> He was only able to see things clearly after attending the ECCI plenary: 'In Moscow, where the differences regarding the Russian question clearly showed that there was no way of bridging the contradicting positions, I realised that doubts about the left ideas I had held for years are impermissible, and I openly voted against the resolution and declared that I couldn't vote for the resolution because otherwise I'd be striking my own past in the face. I was then put on leave, and was indeed ill, I spent several weeks in bed'.<sup>354</sup>

The political crisis became a crisis of personal identity for Werner Scholem such as he had not experienced since the war. In joining the KPD in late 1920 and the Berlin Opposition in 1921, he finally found the political home he sought following a long journey that began with Zionism and later Social Democracy before finally arriving at Communism. All this was now called into question, with friendships and alliances falling apart in the process: Arthur Rosenberg, Scholem's main ally on the Berlin left from the very beginning, had broken with him and switched over to the majority side. He later described the KPD left's tactics as a 'phase of superficial radicalism', and left the party in

351 Scholem of course changed his mind on certain questions such as party organisation and internal democracy, but he consistently refused to abandon positions as an act of political submission.

352 ECCI (ed.) 1926, p. 580. Hugo Urbahns delivered a similar declaration on his, Ruth Fischer's and a Berlin comrade named Maslowski's behalf.

353 *ZK der KPD am 5. November 1926*, SAPMO BArch, RY 1/1 2/1/49.

354 *Ibid.*

April 1927.<sup>355</sup> Scholem remained with the Left Communists, whose publication, the *Mitteilungsblatt*, now condemned Rosenberg as a renegade. The rift ran deep, for the former friend had taken countless supporters with him, isolating Scholem completely.<sup>356</sup> Werner took weeks to come to terms with the events in Moscow and resituate himself. It was not until 10 July 1926 that he again dared to appear in public: 'I held a speech on the day Maslow got out of prison, to express where I stand and to bring the gossip about where I stand to an end'.<sup>357</sup> Scholem waited outside Tegel prison together with 500 other Communists who had come to greet their spiritus rector Arkadi Maslow. After being informed of his transfer to police headquarters at Alexanderplatz, a demonstration formed and marched to Schillerpark in Wedding, a distance of at least 5 kilometres. When they arrived, Scholem delivered a brief speech on behalf of Maslow while also expressing his own views. That same evening, the freed Maslow spoke to an audience of 900 in a crowded hall and argued passionately for unity on the left. Scholem, who had fiercely polemicised against Ruth Fischer and Maslow for months, accepted the peace offer.

A report reads: 'Scholem underscores Maslow's deliberations. Despite the remaining minor differences he is willing to support Maslow in all matters and wants this to be perfectly clear'.<sup>358</sup> Scholem and Maslow's remarks were transmitted to the KPD leadership by agents sent to observe party dissidents. The Central Committee placed a silent informant in every oppositional meeting,<sup>359</sup> meaning that Thälmann was aware of rapprochement between the previously

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355 Keßler 2003, p. 125; Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 744.

356 Hermann Weber confirms: 'Scholem's group became meaningless following Rosenberg's switch to the Central Committee', compelling him to start over from the beginning; see Weber 1969b, p. 156.

357 *Sitzung des ZK der KPD am 5. November 1926*, SAPMO BArch, RY 1/1 2/1/49.

358 See SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/64, Bl. 475.

359 Beyond recording speeches and private conversations, more aggressive methods were also deployed. Theo Kögler complains in a letter to the Central Committee from 2 September 1926: 'This morning, 3 comrades who arrived at my home under the pretext of picking up a party typewriter conducted what amounted to a thorough search of my house'. They stole a letter that remains in the archives to this day. Kögler was furious: 'I hereby lodge a vehement protest against those responsible for this sordid fight against comrades with different political opinions, and against the *Polbüro* of the KPD for these outrageous spying methods, which I will make known among the membership in Neukölln. Additionally, I declare that the Central Committee's methods will not prevent me from organising with all of my power the fight against a leadership that is destroying the Communist Party'. See *KPD-Bezirk Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz – Innerparteiliche Auseinandersetzungen*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 3/1–2/64.

hostile followers of Scholem, Urbahns, Fischer and Maslow as soon as it began. Katz and Korsch were no longer involved, having abandoned the inner-party struggle and formed their own left-radical groups.<sup>360</sup>

Nevertheless, the Central Committee extended Scholem an offer to work for the *Rote Fahne* in September 1926. Perhaps a last attempt to integrate the stubborn oppositionist?<sup>361</sup> Scholem accepted, but only managed to last two months.<sup>362</sup> Meanwhile, tensions inside the party continued to rise. A confidential report by the Soviet press agency TASS from 7 September noted: ‘Since the return of Ruth Fischer and the arrival of Maslow from prison, the efforts at uniting the ultra-left groups are intensifying, as is well known. The ring leader in this was the Urbahns-Maslow group, while Scholem distinguished himself as the special agent of rapprochement’.<sup>363</sup> In July, Scholem also approached the Wedding Opposition led by Hans Weber. Talks were positive, but failed to produce a binding agreement.<sup>364</sup> Because of these and other activities, the KPD leadership had long ceased to consider Scholem a comrade, labelling him an ‘agent’ instead.

Scholem’s most effective act during this period was likely organising the so-called ‘Declaration of the 700’ – a petition of oppositionists from various factions designed to exert pressure on the KPD leadership. Scholem was the ringleader of this endeavour, although he did not admit to it publicly.<sup>365</sup> He

360 Katz had been expelled from the party in January after his Hanover followers occupied the offices of the local party newspaper. Korsch was expelled in May 1926, see Weber 1969b, p. 139, pp. 151–3.

361 The KPD Politburo decided on 2 September 1926 that ‘Comrade Scholem will resume his former duties at the *Rote Fahne*’, SAPMO BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/6.

362 See SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/65.

363 *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD und Berichte über Ultralinke und Leninbund. 1926–28*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/705/22.

364 Weber 1969b, p. 158.

365 The precise authorship of the Declaration of the 700 is controversial among scholars. Pierre Broué names Scholem as the author, while Marcel Bois suggests it may have originated with the Wedding Opposition (Broué 1997, p. 17; Bois 2008, p. 62; Bois 2014, pp. 212–27). The fact that several members of the Wedding Opposition publicly opposed the petition would suggest that it was not authored by the group; see Weber 1969b, p. 163. Eye-witness accounts collected by Hermann Weber from Wolfgang Bartels, Wilhelm Riechen and Theodor Koegler confirm Scholem’s leading role (letter from Hermann Weber to the author, 12 July 2012). Several documents also prove Scholem’s involvement: Scholem admitted to organising the petition during a Politburo session on 2 November 1926 (SAPMO BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/6); and appeared together with Hugo Urbahns for the opposition at a meeting of the Central Committee on 5 November to negotiate an end



described the action to the party leadership as follows: 'The collection of signatures represented an act of solidarity with Comrade Zinoviev, the chairman of the Communist International, whom you attacked, as well as with the political views held by Zinoviev which you banned from the party press by refusing to publish any positions emanating from the Russian Opposition'.<sup>366</sup> How quickly things had changed. Zinoviev, whom Scholem confronted rather crassly in March 1926, had since been marginalised and forced out of the Russian Communist Party's Politburo by the long underestimated Stalin. This development compelled him to move closer to his former adversaries, particularly Trotsky.<sup>367</sup>

Scholem had also learned his lesson and distanced himself from Stalin once and for all. He now sought to defend the heritage of the world revolution together with the Old Bolsheviks. The Declaration of the 700 thus dealt exclusively with the Russian question, expressing solidarity with the 'Leningrad Opposition' around Zinoviev and Kamenev, demanding a return to 'true, genuine Leninism' and rejecting the notion that the German working class supported Stalin. According to the Declaration, only Thälmann and the leadership's relentless hurling of accusations of 'anti-Bolshevism' had prevented members from expressing open solidarity with the Russian Opposition.<sup>368</sup> The letter was published on 11 September 1926 and represented the first critique of Stalin's absolute rule of any public significance in Germany. The fact that more than 700 active party functionaries had signed the letter, including parliamentary deputies Urbahns, Schlecht, Schütz, Schwan and Scholem, attracted considerable attention. A movement on this scale could no longer be dismissed as the intellectual aberrations of individual 'ultra-lefts'. Moreover, the letter represented an appeal for unity of the KPD's left wing. Scholem had achieved something remarkable.

The KPD leadership was accordingly upset. The party press derided the letter as a 'rogue attempt to split' and a 'shameful document of the most despicable anti-Bolshevist sort'.<sup>369</sup> Nevertheless, Scholem and his co-authors forced the KPD to allow an open debate on the factional struggles in Russia. Two factors prevented the opposition from advancing further: the unity of these

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to the petition campaign (SAPMO BArch, RY 1/1 2/1/49). Therefore, even if he may not have been the author of the declaration, Scholem, together with Urbahns, was certainly mandated to negotiate on behalf of the Group of 700.

366 *Sitzung des Politbüro vom 2. November 1926*, SAPMO BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/6.

367 Weber 1969b, p. 142, p. 159.

368 Weber 1969b, p. 162.

369 Weber 1969b, p. 163.

critical voices was still rather fragile, a fact the KPD exploited successfully.<sup>370</sup> In addition, the declaration referred solely to the Russian question, while the question of an alternative Communism in Germany went unmentioned. The left depended on the outcome of Soviet factional conflicts, barely discernible when looking on from Germany, and ultimately stumbled into a trap: on 16 October 1926 the Russian Opposition undertook an unexpected tactical retreat. Trotsky and Zinoviev suddenly admitted to violating party discipline, tremendously weakening the position of the German Left Communists. Thälmann and the Stalin faction, on the other hand, found their position reinforced at the height of the party conflict: in their view, the capitulation of Russian oppositionists proved that the current line was correct for both Russia and the world.<sup>371</sup>

Thälmann and his allies quickly went on the offensive, choosing Werner Scholem and Hugo Urbahns as their first victims. Both were summoned to headquarters together with Wilhelm Schwan on 2 November 1926.<sup>372</sup> Thälmann commenced the interlocution with an offer that the opposition would be allowed to publish in the party press again, although he first wanted to confer on some unanswered 'questions' at the next meeting of the Central Committee. Thälmann's 'questions' merit repeating here:

1. I submit (myself) to party discipline, which is applicable to every party member, recognise the resolutions of the Central Committee as binding, including for myself, and I oblige to enact all party decisions.
2. I condemn any factional efforts within the KPD and oblige to work with the utmost commitment to dissolving the existing factions and groupings.
3. Above all, I pledge to cease all contact with the expelled Maslow, Ruth Fischer, etc. and to fight their smear campaign against the dictatorship of the proletariat as well as the counter-revolutionary agitation of the Korsch-Schwarz [group].

<sup>370</sup> On 18 September, for example, a declaration was published in which members of the Wedding Opposition distanced themselves from Scholem as a 'vacillating element'. See 'Die Weddinger Opposition und die Erklärung Urbans-Scholem-Weber', *Rote Fahne* 207, first insert, 18 September 1926.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> *Politbürositzung vom 2. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/6. Thälmann appears here under the pseudonym 'Nicolai', which an uncensored line of the transcript reveals.

4. I reject any attempts to form international factions within the Communist International and will combat any 'theory' that defends the freedom of factions and groupings as an anti-Leninist and anti-Bolshevist theory.
5. I (refers to Urbahns) hereby withdraw the statement delivered at the party workers' conference in Berlin on 20 October 1926.
6. I (refers to Scholem and Schwan) condemn the 'statement' put forward to the party workers' conference by comrades Urbahns and Schimanski.<sup>373</sup>

One can imagine what impression this list made on the three oppositionists. Thälmann had not even bothered to add question marks to his 'questions'. He demanded the opposition's total political surrender. Werner Scholem refused: 'I would like to say that this is unacceptable; that you stage a barrage for weeks without even speaking to us. If you wished to establish communication with us, you could have done so before. Now you show up, 24 or even 12 hours before the Central Committee's meeting, demanding a response from us.'<sup>374</sup> He then went on to state: 'We will not entertain the idea of capitulation, for our cause is the pursuit of a struggle for political ideas within the framework of the party and party decisions.'<sup>375</sup> Urbahns and Schwan also refused to accept Thälmann's demands. The meeting ended inconclusively despite heated contributions from both sides. Scholem and his comrades had succeeded in presenting their views not only to the Politburo, but to the entire Central Committee, whose meeting took place not the following day, but on 5 November 1926.<sup>376</sup>

It would mark the endpoint of Scholem's journey through the Communist movement, and the affair itself had the feel of a subpoena. Thälmann opened the session by establishing that the Russian Opposition had surrendered and that 95 percent of the membership in Germany, including in the left's Berlin stronghold, stood behind the Central Committee. He denounced the Declaration of the 700 as a 'split' once more and accused Scholem and his comrades

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373 Ibid.

374 Scholem was particularly scornful of the ban on contact with expelled former members, stating that 'to present us with a declaration banning us from speaking with Maslow and Ruth Fischer would be ridiculous'. Both had behaved as if they were still members, so opposing them 'would mean fighting against ourselves. It is not a personal question', see *Politbürositzung vom 2. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/6.

375 *KPD Politbüro, Sitzung vom 2. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/6.

376 *ZK der KPD, Sitzung vom 5. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/1 2/1/49.

of breaching party discipline for refusing his ‘questions’.<sup>377</sup> Thälmann demanded Scholem cease all contact with those expelled from the party, but Scholem declined, explaining: ‘The question of Ruth Fischer and Maslow, against whom Dengel has issued excommunications in a downright Old Testament-like fashion reminding me of those issued by the prophets in Israel, is not a question of personality or character’.<sup>378</sup> By referring to the Old Testament, Scholem captured quite well the manner in which party discipline was treated as an article of political faith. Members were expected to blindly venerate a leadership which derived a quasi-holy authority from the revelations of the Russian Revolution.<sup>379</sup> Correspondingly, Thälmann concluded with the following remark: ‘How long are we supposed to endure these politics enacted by comrades who violate even the most basic principles, and who proceed to mock the character of the Russian party and accuse a large part of the Russian sister party’s membership of opportunism’.<sup>380</sup> Derision of the Russian sibling was tantamount to blasphemy in the new KPD. At the end of his speech, Thälmann called for practical consequences, namely, that the oppositionists resign their parliamentary mandates.

Scholem roundly refused: ‘Resigning our seats would rob us of the possibility of speaking in the party. You know very well that we cannot appear in the party once in illegality, that we would hardly last for two meetings before being apprehended. Urbahns will be put in fortress detention for years and I also have a pending criminal investigation. It is as clear as day that a resignation

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377 Thälmann based his argument on party statutes. Scholem dryly remarked that both his as well as Fischer’s expulsion had been conducted under breach of party statutes. Only a national party conference had the right to elect and remove the Central Committee. Scholem had been much less enthusiastic about these statutes the year prior: ‘If you’re looking for a good time, I recommend reading our party statutes. One could hardly imagine a more obsolete monstrosity of a statute! It would fit well in a museum of antiquities, but not in the membership books of workers whom we have recently won for the Communist Party’. Nevertheless, even here he also advocated for decentralisation and rejected a uniform statute for all parties of the Comintern. See Werner Scholem, ‘Einige noch ungelöste organisatorische Fragen’, *Die Internationale*, 8, special issue for the party conference, 12 July 1925, p. 64.

378 *ZK der KPD, Sitzung vom 5. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/1 2/1/49. Scholem did not clarify which specific remark by Philipp Dengels he was replying to.

379 Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten characterises KPD debates in the late Weimar Republic as quasi-religious and observes that the Soviet Union was increasingly ‘stylised as a holy land, Marx, Engels, Lenin [...] honoured like the founders of a religion’, see her introduction in Flechtheim 1986, p. 39.

380 *ZK der KPD, Sitzung vom 5. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/1 2/1/49.

would immediately lead to illegality, otherwise I wouldn't give a toss about the mandate. I certainly don't intend to live off the rather faded lustre of a parliamentarian'.<sup>381</sup> The renewed trial on charges of high treason, brought against him between the two rounds of elections in 1924, was only temporarily halted by his parliamentary immunity, and he was likely to end up in pre-trial detention should he lose his seat.<sup>382</sup> Thälmann knew this all too well and calculated coldly that Scholem would either leave the Reichstag and go straight to prison, or would be exposed as a violator of party discipline.

Yet Scholem had another reason to decline the request, for their seats in parliament represented, apart from the Declaration of the 700, the opposition's last remaining means of exerting pressure on the apparatus to ensure a modicum of internal freedom of discussion. Thälmann then demanded that the Declaration of the 700 be withdrawn before any further negotiations could take place. Scholem rejected this as well: 'We would be idiots if we revoked our declaration prematurely, meaning: should we later end up not reaching an agreement – and we're not at a horse market where you can swindle us – we will have withdrawn the declaration and thereby alienate those comrades who have signed it'.<sup>383</sup>

The session consisted of eight hours of speeches, replies, recesses, accusations and defamations. The tone grew increasingly acrimonious as time went on. Scholem lost his composure after being called a 'demoralised element', and shouted back: 'If we were demoralised elements we would do as we are ordered, as others in this room will be familiar with [...] don't blame me for maintaining my old position in this question even in this hour, or for informing those worm-like comrades, who have huddled around the current Central Committee, who have never had the courage to vote for a political line, who have always voted as they were told, that I do not consider them entitled to speak of demoralised elements'.<sup>384</sup>

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381 Ibid.

382 Scholem mentions a house search in October 1924 in a letter to his lawyer Kurt Rosenfeld dated 13 January 1925 (SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/4/35). He chose to live underground between the elections while the police camped outside of his home (Werner Scholem, 'Zur Wahl in Potsdam I', *Rote Fahne* 168, 26 November 1924). Re-election and with it renewed immunity in December 1924 interrupted the investigation, which was ultimately quashed by a general amnesty on 13 July 1928. Scholem claimed to have been prosecuted for high treason during an interrogation in 1933; see 'Vernehmungprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 19. Mai 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1, Bl. 44.

383 *ZK der KPD, Sitzung vom 5. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/1 2/1/49.

384 Ibid.

Scholem, who had curbed freedom of speech within the KPD considerably, now became – through the twists of history – one of its most vigorous defenders. He and Urbahns were especially displeased with one particular assumption contained in Thälmann's conditions: 'If we subscribe to those terms, we would be obliged to implement this political line. It would amount to capitulation, and we would denounce our struggle as directed against the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia. Either we capitulate, then we would soon be dead dogs, neither could we continue to represent the opposition within the party'.<sup>385</sup> Scholem instead offered to stop promoting the Declaration, to cease collecting signatures and to then negotiate under a state of 'ceasefire'. Thälmann declined the offer. There was nothing left to discuss. It was time for the party to vote. The Central Committee subsequently resolved – against the votes of Hugo Urbahns, Paul Schlecht and Hans Weber – 'to expel comrades Urbahns, Scholem, and Schwan from the Communist Party of Germany and to demand from them the relinquishment of their Reichstag mandates entrusted to them by the KPD into the hands of the party'.<sup>386</sup>

Scholem's career in the KPD was over. His Communist biography illustrates better than most the distinction between the mechanisms of *Bolshevisation* and *Stalinisation*.<sup>387</sup> The former was pioneered by Scholem, superimposing a centralist structure onto the KPD intended to heighten the party's capacity for intervention and agitation. Scholem's steadfast refusal to abandon his beliefs through 'capitulation' is exemplary of the primacy of the political within the KPD left. Scholem had never demanded such capitulation from his own opponents inside the party, despite his often authoritarian leadership style. The process of *Stalinisation*, by contrast, transformed the KPD into a vehicle of interchangeable political substance, determined by the requirements of Stalin's rule, Soviet foreign policy considerations and later even the dictator's shifting moods. It depended on personal and political capitulation, and broke the will of countless individuals while implementing its often incomprehensible shifts in course.<sup>388</sup> The fierce conflicts surrounding the replacement of the left-

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385 Ibid.

386 Candidate member Schimanski also voted against the expulsion, see *ZK der KPD, Sitzung vom 5. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/1 2/1/49.

387 Here Ruth Fischer is also of note. Mario Keßler emphasises her level of personal independence, which made her unreliable as a placeholder for the Moscow leadership. The same was true of Scholem and other 'ultra-lefts' like Korsch and Rosenberg; see Keßler 2013a, pp. 242–5. On the Stalinisation debate see LaPorte et al. (eds.) 2008.

388 The cult of personality also played a decisive role here. The Stalin cult in the Soviet Union found its counterpart in the KPD's Thälmann cult, which the SED cultivated until

wing KPD leadership demonstrate, however, that no automatism existed in this sequence of events.<sup>389</sup> Scholem's KPD career exhibits a crucial ambivalence – he was both a protagonist and champion of *Bolshevisation*, as well as a determined opponent of *Stalinisation*.

In the months following the Central Committee meeting, Werner Scholem would move heaven and earth to have his expulsion repealed, although he seems to have sensed that the party's instruments of power were more effective than his own from the outset: 'You will slander and defame each one of us personally and try to spread lies that we are counter-revolutionary elements, agents of Pilsudski and Chamberlain, traitors of the workers' movement who stand on the other side of the workers' barricades. When you write suchlike, you know that you are lying. You know that we have faithfully stood by the side of the workers' movement for many years and that we never, at no crucial moment, raised our hand against the revolutionary workers.'<sup>390</sup>

Scholem polemically anticipated what the Marxist-Leninist history books of the Eastern Bloc would later write about him and his comrades-in-arms: an 'ultra-left' grouping that had temporarily managed 'to conceal their sabotage against the Marxist-Leninist course of the KPD with pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric'.<sup>391</sup> Scholem remained true to the Communist idea in the face of such slander, but no longer had the political home he once found in the Communist Party.

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1989. For a deconstruction of Thälmann's role in the establishment of a 'Leninist Central Committee' see Kinner 1999, p. 79 ff.

389 The conclusion of this process remains controversial. Some critics of the Stalinisation thesis view the KPD as an undemocratic project from its 1919 beginnings, while others argue that the expulsion of the Ernst Meyer wing in 1928 marks the definitive end of democracy in the KPD. See Mallmann 1996; Reuter 2003. On Communist leadership cults in general see Morgan 2017.

390 *ZK der KPD, Sitzung vom 5. November 1926*, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/1 2/1/49.

391 Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED – Kommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte der örtlichen Arbeiterbewegung 1987, p. 200.

## A Reluctant Defector: Werner Scholem as Dissident (1926–8)

Werner Scholem's expulsion from the Communist Party of Germany on 5 November 1926 shook his Communist political identity, proudly cultivated since 1920, to its very core. He was certain that his vision of Communism corresponded to the party's true ideals which the Thälmann leadership had betrayed, and that the KPD would soon descend into reformism. Scholem predicted a 'coalition policy' similar to that practiced by the SPD with the Catholic Centre Party in the Prussian Landtag. Accordingly, he refused to play any part in the legislative process during his time as a Reichstag deputy both before and after his expulsion from the KPD, as will be reconstructed over the following pages based on his 1924–8 parliamentary speeches. Werner's attitude, however, was not simply an abstract 'rowdy politics' devoid of deeper content. Rather, Scholem's provocations were specific and targeted, the correctness of his contrarian stance reinforced time and again by state repression up to and including police raids inside the halls of parliament. Legal overreach by police and judiciary only confirmed Scholem's belief that the bourgeois state was beyond reform and parliament was only fit to serve as a stage for political propaganda. Following his expulsion from the party he thus directed his polemics against the KPD as well as its newfound willingness to cooperate with parliament. Scholem eagerly sought to reclaim the Communist mantle for himself, while simultaneously was almost comically unable to shore up even a modicum of consensus among the 12 ex-KPD members in parliament.

Nevertheless, Scholem managed to consolidate the expelled dissidents by reapproaching Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow in 1927. While Karl Korsch and Arthur Rosenberg remained at arm's length due to their radical public critique of the Soviet Union, Scholem and Hugo Urbahns became leading personalities of the Lenin League [*Leninbund*], a party which conceived of itself as an association of 'orthodox Marxists-Leninists' defending Lenin's legacy. The political mythology of 'Red October', however, was inextricably tied to Moscow, where Stalin now consolidated his absolute rule. The Left Communists continued to regard Stalin first and foremost as a reformist. Although they deserve credit for coining the term 'Stalinism' and developing the first critique of this phenomenon within German Marxism, their overemphasis of Stalin's 'reformist'



policies obscured the radically authoritarian nature of the Soviet state itself. The Russian Opposition of Old Bolsheviks grouped around Grigory Zinoviev and later Leon Trotsky, from which the Lenin League would soon take its political cues, eventually disappointed its German followers with a series of tactical retreats. Zinoviev in particular proved extremely reluctant to position himself against the heritage of Red October. Scholem found himself robbed of political legitimacy following Stalin's 1928 left turn, ending his involvement in the Lenin League and with it his political career as such in May of that year.

### A Left Communist in the Reichstag

Werner Scholem chose not to give up his parliamentary mandate after being expelled from the KPD in November of 1926. He did this not only to delay pending criminal investigations, but also for the two years of stable income that finishing his term would bring. Expulsion from the party also meant the end of a functionary's salary, a reality that helped enforce conformity and Stalinisation inside the party.

In addition to the security a parliamentarian's salary provided, the Reichstag also offered Scholem and other dissidents an exceptional political stage. Their many differences notwithstanding, the expelled deputies joined up to form the Left Communists caucus. In light of their conflicting political positions, however, it was more a union of convenience than anything else, and with a total of about a dozen members was not large enough for formal recognition as a parliamentary group.<sup>1</sup> Before turning to Scholem's activities as a Left Communist parliamentarian, let us review his Reichstag career since 1924. This depiction shall remain very brief, however, as Scholem's political positions and parliamentary style were already covered in detail during his time in the Prussian Landtag, a far more formative period in the development of his political personality. Moreover, the centre of Scholem's political activity from 1924 onward was not the parliament, but the party apparatus – to such an

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1 Discord can be observed in Scholem and others' decision to distance themselves from Ernst Schwarz's comments on the Soviet Union on 17 December 1927, *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*, 253. Sitzung, StB. p. 8639A. Equally stubborn differences persisted between them and Korsch and Katz, but the group of 'Left Communists' managed to stick together nonetheless. According to Marcel Bois (2014), the group encompassed a total of 15 individuals counting all accessions, resignations, and deaths. This meant that they never counted 15 members at one time, which is why they never became a formally recognised parliamentary group. On the political differences between these individuals see also Langels 1984, pp. 82–126.

extent that he failed to speak a single time between 1924–6, only reappearing on the scene as a dissident in 1926.

Long absences from parliament were not unusual among the KPD parliamentary group. KPD deputies saw themselves not as conventional politicians or topical experts, but as agitators and propagandists for the Communist idea. In practice, this meant that a skeleton crew was often considered sufficient to deliver major speeches and intervene in parliamentary debates.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the party's 65 deputies instead served as state-funded agitators: 'With all expenses, including free train tickets, paid, they were to mobilise the masses in the provinces', as Thomas Mergel writes in his study on the parliamentary culture of the Weimar Republic.<sup>3</sup> That said, this pragmatic approach to parliament as a political stage was not unique to the Communists, but originated in the Kaiserreich SPD, which had vacillated between revolutionary rhetoric and hopes for democratisation in light of the imperial parliament's almost total powerlessness.<sup>4</sup> The SPD also pursued a strategy of categorical opposition in the Reichstag from time to time, such as when deputy Otto Friedrich Antrick held an eight-hour speech to block the approval of new tariff regulations in 1902.<sup>5</sup> The KPD built on this tradition, although veterans like Paul Levi and Clara Zetkin emphasised parliamentary etiquette and serious dialogue in the party's earliest years, so as to better expose the limits of parliamentarianism in line with the united front tactic.<sup>6</sup> When the new legislative term coincided with

2 A KPD job listing for parliamentary secretary from 1923 states: 'The comrade must be prepared to complete certain political parliamentary tasks independently, as most members of the Reichstag fraction have little time for parliamentary responsibilities', Inquiry from 'Julius' to the KPD *Orbüro*, 19 March 1923, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/4/35.

3 Reichstag deputies could ride trains free of cost across the entire republic. On the KPD in the Reichstag more generally see Mergel 2002, p. 315. For a GDR perspective see Haferkorn, Leidigkeit, Hermann and Ruch 1980, pp. 11–35; Hermann and Ruch 1977, pp. 53–9. For the KPD's view see the pamphlet *Der Reichstag 1924–1928 – vier Jahre kapitalistische Klassenpolitik*, Berlin 1928 (anonymous); as well as *Handbuch der kommunistischen Reichstagsfraktion 1924–1928*, Berlin 1929. On the KPD's relationship to parliamentarism in general see Bavaj 2005, pp. 71–108 and pp. 102–7.

4 These conflicts manifested themselves in debates around revisionism and the mass strike, although positions oftentimes overlapped: revisionists also supported the mass strike as a means of pushing for democratisation. See Kuhn 2003, p. 110f. and pp. 118–26.

5 The speech was regarded as the single longest speech in the history of the Reichstag, yet failed to achieve its aim, as the new law was passed in the early morning hours. See *Deutscher Reichstag*, 10. Legislaturperiode, 235. Sitzung am 13. und 14. Dezember 1902, Stenographische Berichte (StB), Vol. VIII, p. 7181c.

6 Zetkin and Levi represented the KPD by themselves as of June 1920, for the KPD had only

the KPD left's accession to power in February 1924, however, the style at times became a kind of radical obstructionism, often described in the literature quite drastically as 'rowdy politics'.<sup>7</sup>

Ruth Fischer was the most well-known proponent of this approach.<sup>8</sup> She greeted the assembled deputies on 2 June 1924 with the words 'Highly esteemed shadowy figures! Highly esteemed phantasms!' and addressed the parliament as a 'comedic theatre' in which roles were as follows: 'The German proletariat can see from the very beginning of this democratic-republican parliament that it is not this parliament that rules Germany, that you are nothing but masks, the jumping jacks of the capitalists'.<sup>9</sup>

This new style was not universally embraced by parliamentary colleagues in the KPD. Hans Stetter, who occupied a Reichstag seat for the KPD from May to October 1924, recalled those particular sessions as nothing less than horrific:

The parliamentary group convened without the slightest political or organisational preparation on the day of the opening session, not a single motion had been prepared, a political debate was rejected at short notice by the leadership, with the explanation that the parliamentary group was to carry out the resolutions of party headquarters exclusively anyhow. Any spectacle that was performed in the plenary assembly was decided upon beforehand by the parliamentary group meetings. [...] Whoever did not actively participate in the spectacle was subsequently chided and even labelled a 'Social Democrat' by individual members of the parliamentary group [...] Those few comrades who were sincerely intent on serving the tremendously suffering proletariat even in the context of the parliament, via the development of motions etc., were scorned and ostracised as reformists and 'only-parliamentarians'.<sup>10</sup>

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accrued two mandates in its first Reichstag election. Only the merger with the USPD Left in December 1920 brought new deputies and the status of a parliamentary group. The founding generation of the KPD was only represented by Zetkin after Levi was forced out of the party in 1921. The elections in May 1924 were also a novelty, in that they were the first in which the KPD stood for elections under its own name and constituted its own parliamentary group in the Reichstag. See Flechtheim 1948, p. 118; Mergel 2002, p. 315.

7 Mergel 2002, p. 316. Ossip K. Flechtheim writes of 'rowdy scenes', see Flechtheim 1948, p. 118.

8 On Ruth Fischer in parliament see Keßler 2013a, p. 205 ff., as well as Hering and Schilde in Arnold 1999, pp. 347–74.

9 *Deutscher Reichstag*, Dritte Wahlperiode 1924, 4. Sitzung am 2. Juni 1924, Stenographische Berichte (StB), Vol. 381, Berlin 1924, p. 43 Dff.

10 Stetter 1926, p. 7 f. On Stetter and his conflicts with the KPD see Fuhrmann 2013.

'Rowdiness' aside, then, strict control over parliamentarians on the part of the leadership marked another element of the new parliamentary strategy. A leading figure in this development was Iwan Katz, whom Stetter called a 'prime political censor'. Yet, as Stetter also stressed, acts of obstruction were not deployed randomly, but in a very targeted manner: 'When the decisive vote on the Dawes Plan was scheduled for 29 August, the parliamentary group discussed the possibility of an obstruction to prevent the vote from taking place. Deputy Bartels [...] suggested that a comrade be selected who, at the very moment the chancellor would attempt to deliver a statement concerning the vote, would slap him in the face, so that the whole caboodle would run wild and the session would be interrupted. I immediately suggested Bartels himself, and the matter was resolved!'<sup>11</sup> Although they had to forego the slap, other means of provocation were frequently deployed. The KPD did not hesitate to interrupt Reichstag sessions by chanting slogans, blowing whistles, or, as in one instance, loudly playing children's trumpets.<sup>12</sup> The SPD tried to scandalise such behaviour, which Scholem found absurd: 'That talk about the Communists' "politics of children's trumpets" is supposed to imply that the Social Democrats' parliamentary respectability will put food on the tables of workers' families.'<sup>13</sup> Occasionally, the KPD's tactics were actually successful: Berlin Communist Ernst Schwarz was able to prevent the vote on the Dawes Plan almost single-handedly by ignoring calls to order and refusing to leave the plenary hall. As parliamentary rules of procedure did not account for such incidents, the session had to be postponed. The press was frantic: an individual Communist had succeeded in blocking parliamentary approval of an international treaty, albeit only for a day.<sup>14</sup> After a few months, however, even Ruth Fischer was forced to admit that the new tactic had its limitations. She wrote in the *Rote Fahne*: 'Our parliamentary group's demeanour is often misunderstood [...] The racket possesses a demonstrative character. It seeks to illustrate the irreconcilable opposition of the Communist deputies to the bourgeois class state.'<sup>15</sup> She was compelled to back down in early 1925, after Moscow pressured

11 Stetter 1926.

12 Winkler 1993, p. 268; Mergel 2002, p. 169; Keßler 2013a, p. 207.

13 Werner Scholem, 'Zur Wahl in Potsdam I', *Rote Fahne* 168, 26 November 1924.

14 The Dawes Plan was intended to solve the reparations question – at the expense of German workers, according to the KPD. Schwarz forced the vote to be deferred; see Mergel 2002, p. 169 f.

15 Ruth Fischer, 'Über die politische Lage und unsere Aufgaben', *Rote Fahne*, 15 Oktober 1924; Hering and Schilde, 'Verehrtes Marionettentheater – Ruth Fischer im Reichstag 1924–1928', Arnold 1999, pp. 347–74.

the KPD to adopt a more pragmatic approach in the wake of the Hindenburg election. The KPD parliamentary group as precursor to the ‘fun guerrilla’ of the West German student movement thus remained a single episode in the history of the Weimar Republic, representing one of the more extreme tactics in the Communist arsenal, which ranged from pragmatic calls for reform to uncompromising political ‘exposure’.<sup>16</sup>

Werner Scholem was also a supporter of Fischer’s tactic. He denied his mother’s request for a visitor’s ticket to the Reichstag opening session, which Betty later complained about to Gershom: ‘Werner said that was impossible. Most likely I wouldn’t whistle and make the necessary volume of noise, which is the reason his party has to give the tickets to someone more reliable!’<sup>17</sup> Gershom also received news about his brother’s adventures from elsewhere – Walter Benjamin wrote him from Capri, where Werner’s parliamentary appearances had become a popular topic of conversation: ‘Europe is haunted by this deputy Scholem. Even the Pan-Germanists at the next table in the café are talking about him. He unleashes – and rightfully so – a storm of *Risches*. I for my part find his ascendancy to fame rather sad.’<sup>18</sup> *Risches* denoted the common anti-Jewish prejudice that stubbornly persisted despite 100 years of Jewish emancipation. Walter Benjamin labelled Werner a ‘rogue’ and expressed pity for Gershom’s misfortune in having such an embarrassing brother: ‘What a great Kabbalist one must be to purge oneself of the fraternal ties to this subject’. Scholem’s uncle Georg also complained about his nephew in a similar fashion, claiming that Werner’s stunts in parliament had driven clients away from his practice. Betty dismissed this notion: ‘I let out a mocking laugh and asked him if he hadn’t ever heard of anti-Semitism!’<sup>19</sup> Although Werner’s provocations largely resembled his earlier conduct in the Prussian Landtag, the national stage of the Reichstag earned his actions far more attention. In the Reichstag as in the Landtag, he was regarded first and foremost as a Jew, and was subjected to renewed anti-Semitic attacks.

A glimpse at parliamentary minutes reveals that Scholem had little need for ‘children’s trumpets’ during his speeches. He tended to provoke with political content, underscored by the occasional expletive, and would generally soften his tone after his second call to order to avoid an adjournment of the session. Scholem had more than enough ammunition for these appearances, speaking

16 Not until the KPD’s 1928 ‘left turn’ would it again focus more on extra-parliamentary activity; see Bavaj 2005, p. 107f.

17 Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 3 June 1924, Scholem 2002, p. 133.

18 Walter Benjamin to Gerhard Scholem, 13 June 1924, Benjamin 1995–2000, Vol. II, p. 468.

19 Betty Scholem to Gerhard Scholem, 3 June 1924, Scholem 2002, p. 108.

primarily on state repression and the fight for the KPD's parliamentary rights during these first months. Discrediting oneself through excessive 'spectacle' would have been counterproductive in this context.

The opening session of the Reichstag dealt with the parliamentary immunity of three KPD deputies who had been arrested at the beginning of the session. Scholem, 'greeted by the right with much clamour' even prior to his first appearance, demanded 'that the members of parliament who have been detained by the government of this republic of scoundrels be freed'.<sup>20</sup> Scholem's temper was owed to the fact that police had launched a targeted search for KPD deputies with pending penal proceedings just in time for the inauguration of the Reichstag. The latter were forced to enter the parliament discreetly, for their immunity was only effective after the parliament's formal inauguration. Quite pragmatically, then, the police simply arrested the wanted individuals on their way to the session. As far as this practice was concerned, Werner Scholem demanded that the immunity of those arrested be confirmed unceremoniously before electing the presidium.<sup>21</sup> The motion was dismissed, however, and when it was finally debated during the sixth parliamentary session, Scholem claimed that harassment had increased in the meantime. Scholem described how a 'police squad outfitted for war' occupied the Reichstag building's entrance number three and was then ushered into the Reichstag hall, accompanied by an 'army of informants', each with a 'suspicious jailbird's face'.<sup>22</sup> Section 1A of the Berlin police – the so-called 'political police' that had arrested Scholem in 1921 – marshalled its collective might in the fight against Communism. Scholem protested against this 'undignified treatment', and promptly received a call to order for calling the Reichstag a 'parliament of disgrace'.<sup>23</sup> The police, however, were unmoved. On 4 July 1924, police officers entered the Reichstag building and raided the KPD parliamentary group's offices – lacking any legal basis to do so, as it later turned out.<sup>24</sup> This police siege of parliament was repeated once more in August.<sup>25</sup> After parliament was dissolved later that year, police

20 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 1. Sitzung am 27. Mai 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 4B.

21 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 2. Sitzung am 28. Mai 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 10D, p. 17A, p. 18B, p. 21C. Scholem insisted that the motion for a far right deputy be discussed together with those of the KPD, as he feared that the parliament would otherwise grant the German nationalists amnesty individually while leaving the Communists in prison.

22 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 6. Sitzung am 4. Juni 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 68C.

23 *Ibid.*

24 A court would later confirm that the police measures were illegal; see Haferkorn et al. 1980, p. 13, an. 19.

25 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 26. Sitzung am 28. August 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 998A. Arresting

even began monitoring Scholem's apartment, compelling him to conduct his election campaign in hiding through newspaper articles, while other deputies were arrested on the spot at public campaign rallies and meetings.<sup>26</sup> Scholem vehemently attacked these practices and decried the police presence inside parliament, as is recorded in a court file: 'According to a report by the Stuttgart police presidium dated 13 November 1925, Scholem was characterised by exceptionally boorish behaviour and was sentenced to a fine of 90 Reichsmarks for resisting and insulting police officers during such a row'.<sup>27</sup>

Both press as well as judiciary were uninterested in the content of his criticisms. Scholem's behaviour was considered 'rowdy', no matter what the reasons behind it may have been. Werner found many occasions to protest, such as when police banned the KPD parliamentary group's newsletter.<sup>28</sup> Scholem accused Berlin police president Richter, an SPD member, of personally ordering the bulletin's 'disappearance'. This sort of abuse of administrative authority provided Scholem with more than enough material to 'expose' the true nature of the state. Thomas Mergel therefore concludes in his study of Weimar parliamentary culture: 'In practice, the Communists could only be committed to the rules when these were interpreted in their favour at least on some occasions'.<sup>29</sup>

Yet these were few and far between, and Scholem exploited the police's authoritarian behaviour for his political work in the meantime. In August 1924, he proposed that the detained KPD deputies be brought to parliament, in handcuffs if need be, at least for the vote on the London Agreement on Reparations. This would allow the Communists to demonstrate the conditions under which Germany was compelled to vote on what Scholem described as the 'London Enslavement Pact'.<sup>30</sup>

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deputies during session remained taboo. Following Ernst Schwarz's blockade in 1924, however, this was accepted as well. See Mergel 2002, p. 171.

26 The Supreme Court in Leipzig had approved the arrests and even issued the warrants itself. See Werner Scholem, 'Zur Wahl in Potsdam I', *Rote Fahne* 168, 26 November 1924; as well as Werner Scholem, 'Die letzten Aufgaben der Betriebszellen im Wahlkampf', *Rote Fahne* 170, first insert, 20 November 1924.

27 *Anklageschrift des Oberreichsanwalts vom 18. Oktober 1934*, BAArch R 3017, Akte 13 J 195/33. The exact reason for this scene is unknown, but accusations of insulting a civil servant and resisting state authority suggest that some sort of protest against police presence in the Reichstag was involved.

28 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 25. Sitzung am 17. August 1924, StB. Vol. 381, p. 987B.

29 Mergel 2002, p. 173.

30 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 25. Sitzung am 17. August 1924, StB. Vol. 381, p. 957A. The KPD would also criticise the Dawes Plan in its December 1924 electoral platform, claiming that it placed the burden of reparations exclusively 'on the shoulders of the working masses'.

In a keynote address on 24 June, Scholem turned to the Weimar Republic's political judiciary.<sup>31</sup> While not a single officer of the 775 who participated in the Kapp Putsch had yet been held accountable, the fighters of the March Action and the Hamburg Uprising were promptly sentenced by specially convened tribunals. Scholem criticised this practice, quoting Article 105 of the Weimar Constitution: 'Special courts are inadmissible. No one may be denied their rightful judge.'<sup>32</sup> Although Scholem referred to the constitution in his speech, this did not mean he intended to acknowledge bourgeois legal norms, let alone request clemency. In order to rhetorically evade the contradiction between claiming constitutional rights while rejecting the constitution as such, Scholem titled his speech 'Tear Down the Mask of Democratic Jurisdiction!'<sup>33</sup> Scholem, who had himself been a political prisoner under both the Kaiserreich and the republic, considered the Weimar judiciary anything but objective and democratic, viewing it as a thoroughly politicised institution functioning exclusively in the interests of the ruling class.<sup>34</sup> He called for 'proletarian justice' and praised the Soviet Union's example: 'In Russia, those who stand for the reaction suffer; in Germany, those who stand for the revolution

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Here and elsewhere, the KPD addressed the German Nationals directly – not in an attempt at reconciliation, but rather to unmask their claim to represent 'the German people'. Scholem's talk of a 'Enslavement Pact' also makes more sense in this context, and can also be found in the electoral platform. See Bureau des Reichstages (ed.), *Reichstags-Handbuch*, III. Wahlperiode 1924, Berlin 1925, pp. 141–7. Scholem also spoke against the Dawes Plan at the Berlin party conference in October 1924, calling for a report on 'full socialisation' of the economy, see *Rote Fahne* 132, 16 October 1924.

- 31 See *Deutscher Reichstag*, 10. Sitzung am 24. Juni 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 240B ff.
- 32 Scholem similarly criticised the jurisdiction of the State Constitutional Court for the Protection of the Republic and the treatment of Communist suspects by the court's chief prosecutor Dr Riedner, who in one court session went so far as to declare execution by firing squad legitimate. See Katz, Scholem and Stöckner's motion from 9 August 1924, Drucksache Nr. 430, 2. Wahlperiode 1924 as well as Scholem and Katz's interpellation from 13 August 1924, Drucksache Nr. 433, 2. Wahlperiode 1924.
- 33 The KPD faced a similar dilemma with the Reichstag rules of order, which they did not accept, while simultaneously seeking to enjoy the rights they ensured. The logical conclusion of this stance, namely accepting the rules of order only when convenient, eroded the party's credibility, as it ultimately amounted to distinguishing between 'justified' and 'unjustified' parliamentary rebukes, which often depended on who was moderating the presidium at any given moment. In this aspect, Paul Löbe was much better at integrating the KPD than Max Walraff; see Mergel 2002, pp. 169–73.
- 34 Those who called for a neutral judiciary were promptly mocked by Scholem. SPD deputy Alwin Saenger described Scholem as a 'lark of democracy', *Deutscher Reichstag*, 10. Sitzung am 24. Juni 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 245C.



suffer'.<sup>35</sup> Scholem zealously defended a political trial by the Soviet leadership against the Socialist Revolutionary Party as early as 1922.<sup>36</sup> He demanded not the abolition of the political judiciary as such, but rather a political judiciary on behalf of the proletarian majority.<sup>37</sup> It was not until his break with Stalin that he began to realise that reactionaries were not the only victims of Soviet political justice.

Regardless of his critique of the Weimar state, Scholem would never try to relate to the right's nationalist and racist line of argumentation. His attack on the 'London Enslavement Pact' remained an isolated episode. During the second Reichstag session, Scholem made it unmistakably clear that the Communists were persecuted for their internationalist stance: 'But it is the same criminals all over, the same Communists who turn against nationalist sedition, the same Communists (interjection from the right: "And Jews!") who fight the oppressors in their own country'. It only took a day for Scholem to be confronted with his first anti-Semitic interjection in the Reichstag, and countless others would follow. When Scholem spoke of the 'splendid republic' [*famose Republik*], someone in the audience yelled 'Moses republic'.<sup>38</sup> According to the Reichstag minutes, the slur came either 'from the right' or directly from the benches of the Nazis, who held 32 seats in parliament under the name 'National Socialist Freedom Party' [*Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei*].<sup>39</sup> Scholem reacted to the interjections with a bellicose irony that, due to occasional misunderstandings, often rose to the level of sheer mockery. For instance, when chiding the Nazis for vilifying class struggle as 'Jewish-Marxist machinations' while simultaneously deploying socialist rhetoric, he garnered a 'Very true!' from their ranks. Scholem retorted: 'You see, I might as well defect to your side'.<sup>40</sup> When someone shouted that every Jew was a traitor, he launched into another round of persiflage: 'Well of course, Jews in particular! Naturally. As we all know, the real rascality (amusement) lies in the race. Gentlemen, I told you before how easy it is to copy your speeches. It doesn't take much intellect to do so'. The Nazis responded with 'commotion and interjections'.

35 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 10. Sitzung am 24. Juni 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 241B.

36 Werner Scholem, 'Die Berliner sozialistische Arbeiterschaft für das Moskauer Urteil', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 169, 24 August 1922.

37 See *Protokolle des Preußischen Landtags*, 189. Sitzung vom 30. November 1922.

38 Ibid.

39 This refers to the May 1924 elections, when the NSDAP entered a common list with the 'German Völkisch Freedom Party' in order to get around the post-putsch ban on the party. The Nazis campaigned as the NSDAP again in December 1924 and received 14 seats.

40 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 10. Sitzung am 24. Juni 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 240D.

His sense of irony notwithstanding, Scholem took the Nazis very seriously. He urged active resistance to fascism, especially against their demonstrations. As long as the state refused to prohibit far-right marches, the workers would have to mobilise against 'this brood with their coats, their swastikas, all the officer-esque posturing, the vermin with the calf faces' themselves. When the president of the Reichstag admonished Scholem for his 'absolutely unparliamentarian expressions', the latter tersely responded: 'I must admit I am at a loss for parliamentarian vocabulary to describe an association as unparliamentarian as the fascist gangs'.<sup>41</sup>

Such scenes illustrate that it was not the 'rogue' Scholem who was responsible for the *Risches* prejudice as Walter Benjamin gathered from the conservative *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The fact that Scholem received calls to order for *objecting* to anti-Semitism in the Reichstag, as well as in the Landtag before that, indicates that the KPD's interventions were not meaningless spectacles,<sup>42</sup> even though they included provocations and infringements of the rules directed against their political opponents. The underlying motive was the often stridently exaggerated fight against the SPD, but also a critique of anti-Semitism and police repression. These aspects were rarely noted in contemporary reports.

Although the KPD's interventions were often justified, deputies proved unable to forge a coherent strategy in response to the right's provocations. Instead, the stabilisation of capitalism gradually forced the party to take traditional 'politics', that of parliamentary motions and concrete reforms, more seriously. The KPD parliamentary group's secretary, Walter Stoecker, began pushing for more regular attendance of and contribution to parliamentary debates and committees by Communist deputies in the autumn of 1924.<sup>43</sup> His task was made significantly easier when Ruth Fischer committed herself to defending democracy after Hindenburg's election. By mid-1925, Stoecker was able to ensure that a core group of deputies dedicated themselves mainly to parliamentary work.<sup>44</sup>

41 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 9. Sitzung am 6. Juni 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 218D.

42 Even when sabotaging parliamentary sessions, the KPD operated with a goal in mind – such as when it forced the session on reparations to be adjourned, see Mergel 2002, p. 169f.

43 Mergel 2002, p. 316f.

44 Stoecker claimed that 17 of 45 deputies of the third legislative period belonged to this team, while others were compelled to spend longer periods of time in Berlin. Even former 'ultra-lefts' like Arthur Rosenberg agreed to work in parliamentary committees. Rosenberg's historical knowledge would prove useful in debates on expropriation of the nobility and the stab-in-the-back myth [*Dolchstoßlegende*]; see Mergel 2002, p. 318; Keßler 2003,

Werner, for his part, was not part of this team. By the end of 1924, he had ceased to take the floor in plenary sessions entirely, and instead devoted himself to work at party headquarters. Only his expulsion from the party would elevate the priority of Reichstag attendance and provide Scholem with a new role: that of a dissident defending the Communist idea against his former comrades.

That said, his polemics frequently targeted other Left Communists. Scholem's first appearance as a dissident was a brief speech on 17 December 1926 distancing himself from a statement made by Ernst Schwarz, a fellow member of the Communist opposition. Schwarz saw evidence of 'capitalist reconstruction' in Russia and vigorously polemicised against secret armaments cooperation between Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup> Scholem dissociated himself from this position on behalf of deputies Schwan, Schütz, Urbahns and Ruth Fischer, declaring: 'The Opposition within the Communist Party of Germany continues to represent the views of revolutionary Communism only within the framework of the Communist International'.<sup>46</sup> Scholem continued to hope for a shift in the Comintern, even at this late stage, yet his statement was received with mere 'amusement'. Prior to that, Ernst Schwarz had also been repeatedly interrupted by cheers of 'ironic bravo', as the conservative deputies in particular took great pleasure in watching the three Communist currents turn on each other.

Each of the groups claimed to represent 'true' Communism, an aspect Werner Scholem also stressed regularly. When asked, he replied: 'I have said before that I speak as a representative of the Communist Party as opposed to the representatives of the two Social Democratic Parties'.<sup>47</sup> From now on, Scholem would refer to the KPD as 'New Communists', 'dutiful united-front Communists' or simply as Social Democrats. By this point, he categorically rejected the sort of reforms he had pursued while in the Landtag. He called a KPD initiative to relax the penal codes futile, even damaging. In his view, a Communist's duty was to respond with the 'means of obstruction'. Instead of judicial reform, Scholem demanded the abolishment of bourgeois law in a council republic:

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p. 127 f. In GDR literature, this obstructionist period was largely ignored, while the 'practical parliamentary struggle for democracy and partial social demands' was praised as an achievement of the 1924–9 legislative period, see Hermann in Leidigkeit and Ruch 1977, p. 57.

45 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 253. Sitzung am 17. Dezember 1926, StB, Vol. 391, p. 8636B and following pages. On Ernst Schwarz and his group, the 'Determined Left' [*Entschiedene Linke*], see Langels 1984, pp. 122–6 and Bois 2014.

46 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 253. Sitzung am 17. Dezember 1926, StB, Vol. 391, p. 8639A.

47 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 325. Sitzung am 22. Juni 1927, StB, Vol. 393, p. 10995B and following pages.

‘The victory of the workers, not decades away but in our lifetime, will create a state in which high treason will be defined as betrayal of the workers’ councils, in which property offences will die off simultaneously with the socialisation of property, and in which the best and wisest functionaries of the working people (interjections on the right: “Scholem!”) will be chosen to arbitrate and administer justice!’<sup>48</sup>

Scholem’s deliberations were continuously interrupted by ‘amusement’ and derisive interjections. His categorical radicalism, which had earned him a degree of respect as long as he enjoyed the backing of the KPD, appeared rather helpless from the isolated position he now found himself in. Scholem had organised political campaigns on a mass scale during his time as KPD *Orgleiter*, whereas now his programme was reduced to an abstract utopia. The fact that a dozen ‘Left Communists’ could not even agree among themselves about this utopia hardly contributed to Scholem and his comrades being taken more seriously.

The Left Communists’ quarrels tended to revolve around the nature of the Soviet Union. Despite privately considering the Soviet state to be a form of state capitalism, Scholem continued to defend the achievements of the October Revolution, such as its school system, in public: ‘I declare that we find one of the best expressions of the victorious October Revolution in Russia’s school system. The Russian educational system represents the path to the ideal which the German working class aspires to in its struggle against the capitalist economic order.’<sup>49</sup> At the same time, Scholem was always keen to distance himself from the Russian Revolution’s current administrators. He rejected the ‘agitprop style of the Stalin-Comintern’ as well as the ‘Stalinist KPD’. He regularly lamented the ‘miserable role of the Stalin-Communists, who today no longer represent the will of the workers and the proletariat’.<sup>50</sup>

After the KPD voted to approve the budget of the state judiciary in the Mecklenburg Landtag, Scholem even predicted a more general reconciliation between the KPD and the Weimar judiciary: ‘The *Reichsgericht* today still fatuously persecutes people who represent the politics of the Stalin-Communists. The *Reichsgericht* will eventually come to realise that it is endowed with a good class instinct, that the discourses of these Stalinists on the dictatorship of the proletariat are about as substantial as the speeches on the future state by Wels or Hermann Müller prior to the war, where on 1 May and 18 March the talk about

48 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 325. Sitzung am 22. Juni 1927, StB, Vol. 393, p. 10998A.

49 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 340. Sitzung am 19. Oktober 1927, StB Vol. 394, p. 11560C.

50 *Deutscher Reichstag*, 370. Sitzung am 28. Januar 1928, StB Vol. 394, p. 12466D.

the future state very much resembled that of the Stalinists' talk on 7 November about the dictatorship of the proletariat'.<sup>51</sup>

Although he continued to defend the USSR in public, Scholem understood ten years after the October Revolution that the regime in Russia had undergone a fundamental transformation, also engulfing the International and the KPD, where 'Stalinists' were now in charge. But what did that mean? Scholem saw Stalinism through the lens of 1914, regarding it as another variant of Social Democracy, little more than the accommodation of capital and the bourgeois state on the part of the workers' movement. As peculiar as this may seem today, several factors supported his analysis: Stalin's foreign policy in 1925 was aimed at establishing the Soviet Union as an equal partner on the world market and in international diplomacy, as dictated by the logic of a bourgeois *raison d'état*. However, Scholem's comparison was also deeply flawed: despite its abandonment of class struggle, Stalin's regime exhibited little evidence of a more general move towards parliamentarism, popular sovereignty or the rule of law. On the contrary, the Soviet Union continued to distance itself from both these poles, becoming instead a body politic without any legal norms, whether bourgeois or 'proletarian', and lacking the most basic legal guarantees of protection of the individual from the state.

Although Scholem presented his analyses with a familiar level of repartee, his internal doubts were unmistakable: was the Soviet Union capitalist, as he privately thought, or was it still a revolutionary example, as he claimed in public? How and at what point could he disentangle the Russian Revolution from its Stalinist present? How to address the KPD's claim as the sole inheritors of the revolutionary legacy? Should his Left Communism reform or transcend the KPD? These contradictions shaped Scholem's attempts to build a Communist opposition both in- and outside of parliament.

### The Lenin League: Werner Scholem Finds a Party

Scholem remained spiritually and intellectually engaged to his party even after his expulsion, often declaring that the leaderships of KPD and Comintern had violated party statutes while he remained true to the movement's founding principles.<sup>52</sup> The party reacted to these feelings of belonging with provocations

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51 Ibid.

52 A formal complaint issued by Scholem, Fischer and Urbahns on 16 November 1926 can be found in SAPMO-BArch, RY 5/1 6/3/432, Blatt 140 f.

and insults. When Ruth Fischer, Hugo Urbahns, Werner Scholem and others held a meeting on 5 December 1926, a KPD delegation intervened to disrupt it. A KPD internal report reads: ‘Upon the arrival of several party members who pointed out the party’s work, demonstrations, etc., a torrent of abuse broke out. Expressions like “fascist boys, provocateurs, rogues” etc. were used. Ruth Fischer attempted to address those present. She urged her followers to leave the meeting, but her call went unheeded. When leaving the room, Scholem called out to the members of the faction: “Comrades, if anyone tries to steal your material, just smash their face in”. Meanwhile a raiding squad [of the police, RH] had arrived, but no arrests were made.’<sup>53</sup>

Scholem and Fischer were confronted with a dilemma. They had tied their entire political identity to the KPD, repeatedly insisting that there could only be one workers’ party – the same workers’ party that had now cast them aside. This paradox may explain Scholem’s rather violent outbursts against his former comrades. Yet despite the official KPD’s ongoing provocations, he remained incapable of conceiving of an alternative path to pursue socialist politics.

When Scholem and Fischer were unexpectedly requested to attend the 7th Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI together with Urbahns and Schwan from 22 November to 16 December 1926, they thus decided to accept after a brief debate. Both were eager to explain and justify their views one last time. However, they were so suspicious of the Comintern by this point that they demanded visas for their return trip in advance, fearing detainment in Moscow.<sup>54</sup> Scholem, who had praised the Russian judiciary as an example for the world in the Reichstag a year prior, now feared being under its jurisdiction even for the length of a conference. Soviet citizen Arkadi Maslow preferred to remain in Germany altogether. Another Moscow visitor was suspicious of the eerie atmosphere in the city as well – Walter Benjamin. In December 1926, he wrote to Gershom Scholem: ‘Through some peculiar coincidence, I believe I am currently sharing this stay in Moscow with your brother whom, as far as I have

53 *Reichsfraktionssitzung der Ruth Fischer-Urbahns-Gruppe 5. Dezember 1926 in Berlin*, SAP-MOBArch, RY 1/1 2/3/64.

54 Scholem mentions ‘disquieting experiences’, as Ruth Fischer had been detained in Moscow for months in 1925–6. See Werner Scholem, Ruth Fischer, Hugo Urbahns, Wilhelm Schwan, *Die Wahrheit über die Verhandlungen mit der deutschen Opposition in Moskau – Bericht der Genossen Urbahns, Ruth Fischer, Scholem und Schwan*, Berlin 1927. Given the pamphlet’s style, Scholem appears to have been the primary author. On Fischer’s forced detention in Moscow see Keßler 2013a, p. 254f. On the debates of the 7th ECCI plenary see the minutes contained in *Erweiterte Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale. Moskau, 22. November bis 16. Dezember 1926*, Hamburg-Berlin 1927.

gathered, has been delegated to the current enlarged plenary of the Comintern as representative of the German “opposition”. Let me assure you that I am not here in any official mission’. Benjamin informed him that he was merely working on a few articles for the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, continuing: ‘Although I of course learn many things that are useful and interesting to know’.<sup>55</sup> Yet Benjamin neglected to write about these interesting things, instead explicitly stating that he would only confide in his diary for the time being. Benjamin sympathised with the Communist idea, but like Gershom harboured a great deal of scepticism towards its organisations. That said, he nevertheless continued to draw on Marxist theory in his own intellectual endeavours, something Gershom had discarded prior to World War I.<sup>56</sup>

Betty Scholem, for her part, cultivated a rather pragmatic relationship with Soviet Communism – with a view to Werner’s uncertain financial situation she wrote: ‘The boy has a real cross to bear. Yesterday evening he left for Moscow, summoned before the bar of the highest party tribunal. I hope he can reach some agreement with that rabble. I simply do not understand why, beginning with the Social Democrats, he has always opposed his own party’.<sup>57</sup>

Werner Scholem had a head of his own. Reaching an agreement seemed unlikely at this point, nor was it really desired in the first place. The representatives of the Opposition had been called on at short notice and given an ultimatum to appear in Moscow within 24 hours. Their Russian comrades were in fact somewhat surprised when they actually arrived.<sup>58</sup> Disembarking in Moscow, Scholem later wrote, ‘Comrades were denied passes for entering the Kremlin and the Comintern buildings and housed in a hotel where they were to be completely isolated from the party’.<sup>59</sup> Although the Comintern had summoned the German oppositionists to appear before the International, the conference chair was determined to prevent them from appearing before the international delegates at all costs – something that would have been unthinkable at the previous plenary session in February 1926. Instead, a special com-

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55 Walter Benjamin to Gershom Scholem, 10 December 1926, Benjamin 1995–2000, Vol. III, p. 217.

56 His socialism remained that of an anarchistic individualism: Gershom neglected to join Jung Juda’s kibbutz in Palestine, Beth Sera, although he remained friendly towards them. See Zadoff and Zadoff in Stambolis 2013, pp. 633–42.

57 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 7 Dezember 1926, Scholem 2002, p. 157.

58 Clara Zetkin had vehemently opposed the Opposition’s invitation, see K. Tsetkin P’ismo v Sekretariat IKKI [Letter from C. Zetkin to the ECCI Secretariat], 2 December 1926, RGASPI, Komintern, F. 528, op. 1, d. 102.

59 Scholem et al. 1927.

mission was convened which dealt with each of the four representatives individually in separate formal meetings. The testimony given in these meetings was later used to humiliate and ridicule them during the main plenary. Their refusal to answer trick questions with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ was interpreted by ECCI secretary Otto Kuusinen as proof of their ‘contemptible hypocrisy and double dealing’.<sup>60</sup>

Scholem and his comrades responded with a declaration excoriating the entire process, while also insisting that they had complied with all of the Comintern’s demands. They reaffirmed their willingness to accept the Comintern’s decisions and reasserted: ‘In a Leninist party factions are inadmissible and harmful’.<sup>61</sup> But the factions, of course, already existed. Scholem and his comrades’ strategy consisted of initially demonstrating an absolute willingness to cooperate, so as to better legitimate some of their own demands after the fact. By doing so, they hoped to at least temporarily confuse Stalin and his followers. Scholem suspected a tactical manoeuvre behind the invitation, and later stated ‘that Stalin [...] considered himself to be so powerful as to offer a generous gesture of reconciliation: of course, this gesture would only come at a certain price: public condemnation of the Russian Opposition [...] by the German left which could claim having been “misled” and “cheated” [...]. But Stalin’s plan, which of course also included the public rehabilitation of Brandler for which the left was to provide the fig leaf, foundered on the unexpected appearance of the Russian Opposition at the enlarged plenary’.<sup>62</sup>

Scholem saw through Stalin’s merciless Machiavellianism. At the same time, he refused to accept that his old arch-rival Heinrich Brandler could also be one of Stalin’s victims. Brandler had been ‘cominterned’ in Moscow and prevented from returning to Germany, neutralised by disciplinary proceedings against him since March 1925 – a trial Scholem had himself helped to initiate in Berlin!<sup>63</sup> Stalin’s twists and turns could not be understood through a left-right factional logic; his interest in the German quarrels was limited exclusively to power politics. Scholem, on the other hand, could not comprehend such an

60 Ibid, see also Otto Kuusinen’s depiction in ‘Extracts from the Resolution of the Seventh ECCI Plenum on the Expulsion of Maslow, Ruth Fischer, Urbahns, Scholem, and Schwann from the German Communist Party’, Degras 1952, pp. 348–50. Scholem had described the KPD leadership as the ‘main enemy’ and tried to blackmail the commission with threats to publish confidential material. Kuusinen described the commission’s work as an ‘interrogation’ to ‘determine whether they are Communists or anti-Communists’.

61 Werner Scholem et al. 1927.

62 Ibid.

63 Becker 2001, p. 262 ff.



approach: he had been politically ruthless by conviction during the Bolshevisation campaign, and remained so after his expulsion. His last trip to Moscow in December 1926 would end the only way it could have, with the condemnation and expulsion of the opposition from the world Communist movement.<sup>64</sup>

Seeing that a new beginning was necessary, Werner Scholem and Hugo Urbahns took the first step by launching a circular titled the *Mitteilungsblatt* in early 1927.<sup>65</sup> A total of eleven issues of the paper were published bi-weekly from January to May 1927, and represented an attempt to gather expelled comrades and dissident party members in establishing a new public face of the opposition. Politically, they sought a return to the KPD, as the *Mitteilungsblatt* boldly announced in an open letter to the 11th party conference.<sup>66</sup> Scholem and Urbahns, in concert with the Russian Opposition, sought to rid the KPD and the Comintern of the Stalin faction and put the movement back on the 'right', that is to say, left track. They were joined in this by Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow, who also signed the petition for re-admission.<sup>67</sup> Yet Ruth Fischer would not become the group's figurehead, as her reputation had been tainted by previous political manoeuvring. Instead, Hugo Urbahns established himself as the group's leading personality. Similar to Ernst Thälmann, he could draw on political credibility from his role in the Hamburg uprising, for which he had sat in prison until 1925.<sup>68</sup> This had elevated him to the status of a legend in the party, which is why the emerging oppositional group was initially referred to simply as the 'Urbahns Group'. Here, too, Scholem assumed the role of back-room organiser. While Urbahns was listed as publisher of the group's paper,

64 'Extracts from the Resolution of the Seventh ECCI Plenum on the Expulsion of Maslow, Ruth Fischer, Urbahns, Scholem, and Schwann from the German Communist Party', Degras 1952, pp. 348–50.

65 *Mitteilungsblatt (Linke Opposition der KPD)*, published by Hugo Urbahns. The *Mitteilungsblatt* is available in its entirety in the RGASPI archive in Moscow: *Materialy 'levoi opposicii' v KPG* [Materials of the 'Left Opposition' of the KPD], RGASPI, Komintern, F. 495, op. 293, d. 81a.

66 'Offener Brief an den Parteitag', *Mitteilungsblatt* 5/6, 1 March 1927.

67 Signatories were listed as: Bücher/Hamm, Joko/Berlin, Jonny/Hamburg, Kelch/Dortmund, Klaps/Danzig, Kögler/Berlin, Körner/Dortmund, Krupke/Breslau, Malachinski/Danzig, Maslow, Möller/Rostock, Petrasch/Ruhrgebiet, Ruth Fischer, Scholem, Schütz, Schwan, Straphet/Danzig, Czerkus/Dortmund, Sydow/Elbing, Straphel/Danzig, Urbahns. See *Mitteilungsblatt* 5/6, 1 March 1927. 'Joko' was the nickname of Joseph Kohn. He would help Scholem's daughter Edith escape Germany in 1934, see chapter 7 of this volume.

68 Urbahns began a hunger strike with six other inmates in May 1925, which the KPD supported with a solidarity campaign for the 'brave Hamburg fighters', see *Rote Fahne* 107, 13 May 1925.

Scholem managed subscriptions and bulk orders.<sup>69</sup> Karl Korsch and Iwan Katz, who continued to polemicise relentlessly against the Comintern, remained outside of the Urbahns Group, as did the Wedding Opposition around Hans Weber, who operated very carefully so as to avoid being expelled from the KPD themselves.

The *Mitteilungsblatt* served not only as the Urbahns Group's means of agitation, but also as one of intra-group communication. In addition to ubiquitous accusations of reformism, international questions featured increasingly prominently in the group's discussions. Historian Rüdiger Zimmermann described them as the 'conscience of the world revolution', as they were the only Marxist voice in Germany consistently denouncing Stalin's political twists and turns, largely motivated by Russian foreign policy.<sup>70</sup> China, for example, was such an occasion: Mao's Communists had forged an alliance with the nationalist Kuomintang on Stalin's orders. The *Mitteilungsblatt* criticised this tactic, and was validated when the Kuomintang turned on its former allies in April 1927, crushing a strike in Shanghai and nearly eliminating the Communists in an outright massacre.<sup>71</sup> In September of 1927 the group even managed to publish a report directly from Shanghai – a rare source of inside information countering the Comintern narrative.<sup>72</sup> From June 1927 onward, the *Mitteilungsblatt* was renamed the *Fahne des Kommunismus – Zeitschrift der orthodoxen Marxisten-Leninisten* ['Banner of Communism – Journal of the Orthodox Marxists-Leninists']. It now sought to reach a broader readership as a weekly published every Friday. A degree of consolidation could not be denied, with reports from abroad and documents of the Russian Opposition earning the journal a reputation and often putting the official Communist press in an awkward position.<sup>73</sup>

69 Scholem's Kopstockstraße 7 address is listed to order subscriptions in the first issue, 1/1927. Scholem also sold the pamphlet *Wahrheit über die Verhandlungen mit der deutschen Opposition in Moskau* from this address.

70 Zimmermann 1978, p. 11.

71 'Gegenrevolution in China', *Mitteilungsblatt* 9, 20 April 1927. On China and the KPD Left Opposition see also Zimmermann 1978, pp. 53–8.

72 According to 'Berichte aus Schanghai', *Fahne des Kommunismus* 27, 16 September 1927.

73 Discussion of the 'Russian question' had been forbidden in the official KPD press since 1926, and the Comintern was under no circumstances to be criticised. In an annual retrospective, the *Fahne des Kommunismus* wrote: 'Even die-hard rights sullenly complained to the helpless Central Committee that they could only inform themselves about the Comintern situation through the *Fahne des Kommunismus*. No one read our paper more diligently than the theoreticians of the Central Committees of the WKP and KPD' – WKP

In the columns of the *Fahne des Kommunismus*, the Left Communists around Scholem and Urbahns discussed next steps for the world movement extensively. Basing themselves on Lenin's theory of imperialism, they considered the Soviet Union as well as the revolutionary aspirations in the colonies points of rupture in the capitalist world system, which currently found itself in a phase of only 'relative stabilisation', meaning that possibilities for revolution remained.<sup>74</sup> In order to realise these possibilities, however, an alliance between the Soviet state and the struggles in both the industrialised countries as well as the colonies was necessary. Stalin's policy of 'Socialism in One Country' aimed for the opposite, based on the assumption that world capitalism would recover and the corresponding need to industrialise the Soviet Union through integration into the world market. The identification of 'Stalinism' with 'reformism' by Scholem and the Left Communists was thus more than just an echo of 1914. Their allegations were confirmed by contemporary developments: Soviet policy in China, the quiet dismantling of the councils in Soviet Russia, or concessions made to the market economy under the New Economic Policy (NEP).<sup>75</sup> Similar developments were occurring in Western Europe: in Britain, the pro-Soviet trade unions formed an alliance with the Social Democratic unions, while the USSR negotiated an economic agreement with France entailing the repayment of the Russian Empire's outstanding debts of 60 million gold francs.<sup>76</sup> Scholem and his comrades considered these and other actions tantamount to betrayal of the cause, measuring Stalin's praxis against Lenin's

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was a Russian acronym for the CPSU, see *Fahne des Kommunismus* 42, 30 December 1927; see also Zimmermann 1978, p. 48.

74 The theory of 'relative stabilisation' was developed by Eugen Varga in reference to Lenin, see Haferstroh 1984 and Haferstroh 1989.

75 The *Fahne des Kommunismus* remarked: 'Lenin's doctrine of the Soviets in the revolutions of our era is irreconcilable with those truly Menshevist platitudes of Martynow-Stalin, which allegedly "proved" [...] that councils are impractical, impossible, harmful and wrong in China, and who in the meantime were striking secret deals with the Chiang Kai-sheks and Wang Jingweis', *Fahne des Kommunismus* 25, 2 September 1927. The end of the councils in the USSR was proclaimed by the Left Communists after the All-Russian Council Congress was not convened in 1928, in violation of a constitutional provision that it occur yearly, which the *Fahne des Kommunismus* described as a 'silent coup', see issue 2, 13 January 1928.

76 See 'Zur Charakterisierung der Stalinschen Außenpolitik', *Fahne des Kommunismus* 29, 30 September 1927. Despite their criticisms of the Anglo-Russian trade union alliance, the Left Communists defended work in the ADGB unions and distanced themselves from the syndicalism of Korsch and the KAPD, see 'Entschiedene Linke – unentschiedene KAPD-isten', *Mitteilungsblatt* 11, 15 May 1927.

theory and reaching devastating conclusions. Yet precisely because of this fixation on Lenin, they remained reluctant to call the concept and the organisation of the Comintern as such into question, instead declaring: 'Our organisational objective continues to be the re-unification of all Communists in the old Leninist Communist International'.<sup>77</sup>

In August 1927, the *Fahne des Kommunismus* carried a renewed appeal to re-admit all those expelled from the KPD on its front page. The occasion was Stalin's failed attempt to expel his rival Trotsky from the Russian party. Leon Trotsky, long ostracised as part of the 'right', had become a point of reference for the German Left Communists since his alliance with Zinoviev in April 1926.<sup>78</sup> The Opposition regarded his ongoing membership as a victory, perhaps even a sign of reconciliation between the two currents. They faithfully promised that 'should there really be honest and unambiguous steps towards an accommodation that would convince us that our pursuit of Communist unity and coherence is met with real good will, we will advocate the dissolution of all factional elements, the discontinuation of our publication, [...] and a cessation of any independent political steps'.<sup>79</sup> Although this offer was certainly tactically motivated, it nevertheless evidences a helpless refusal to break with the KPD and its understanding of 'Leninism'. Their reference to Lenin enabled the Left Communists to formulate a critique of Stalinism as much as ten years before the 'Great Purge' of 1937 shocked the world, but their stubborn insistence on a 'true Leninism' simultaneously constituted an extremely narrow conception of Marxism. Lenin had pursued a highly pragmatic approach to politics throughout his lifetime, committing numerous shifts in course which he never denied and readily engaging with criticism from Trotsky, Zinoviev and Rosa Luxemburg. The 'Leninism' coined in 1925, by contrast, rested on the fiction of a somehow supra-historically correct 'line' which none were permitted to criticise. Their bitter and irreconcilable differences aside, Scholem and Thälmann shared this fiction. Scholem, however, had stayed true to what he believed to be 'left' and 'Leninist' with remarkable fortitude since his first factional debates in 1922, while Thälmann discarded and adopted various positions over the course of his political career. Nevertheless, questions of integrity mattered little in these debates, for Leninism had long ossified into a revolutionary mythology

77 *Mitteilungsblatt* 11, 15 May 1927. This corresponded to the pamphlet published in early 1927 titled *Der Kampf um die Kommunistische Partei. Plattform der linken Opposition der KPD*, see also Zimmermann 1978, p. 37, fn. 10.

78 Zimmermann 1978, p. 46.

79 'Antrag an das Exekutiv-Komitee der Komintern um Wiederaufnahme', *Fahne des Kommunismus* 24, 26 August 1927.

over which Moscow had a monopoly. Stalin's regime had embalmed not only Lenin's corpse, but his theory as well: the canonical introductory text, *Concerning Questions of Leninism*, was authored by Stalin himself.<sup>80</sup>

German Leninists thus had little chance of advancing an alternative narrative. The Left Communists' application for re-admission to the Comintern was rejected in *Pravda* on 18 September 1927. For months, their appeals to Communist unity had come to nothing. Neither begging nor threats seemed to work, and the expulsions continued. By cleverly pitting the various factions against one another, the leadership had managed to remove countless dissident functionaries by the beginning of the year. In March 1927, the KPD party conference in Essen was in the position to conclude 'that the party discussion is now being brought to an end'.<sup>81</sup> Following this initial purge, all who maintained contact with expelled comrades or even attended their meetings were expelled as well. Entire party branches were declared outside of the party for inviting Hugo Urbahns as a discussant to meetings. Stalin did not seek unity or rapprochement, but submission. Meetings of the Urbahns Group were disrupted by members of the Roter Frontkämpferbund, while the left began setting up a security detail of its own with oppositional RFB groups. Police were forced to clear a hall following riots at an opposition meeting in Aachen in August 1927.<sup>82</sup> Often enough, however, organised disruption was unnecessary, as the hatred towards the 'splitters' fomented by the KPD press encouraged spontaneous attacks. When Werner Scholem spoke on the topic of 'Stalinism and Leninism' at a meeting in Rünthe near Dortmund, escalation ensued after the first contribution from the floor. A miner charged Scholem: 'The lefts of today [...] are lumpen and unemployed, who no longer work and seek personal enrichment through a revolution. [...] We in the KPD are relieved to be rid of these lefts. When he attempted to repeat the phrase of the "lumpen, who no longer work", a commotion erupted that lasted some 10 minutes. There was even almost a fist fight between a Communist and an ultra-left who had already grabbed beer mugs and chairs, prevented only by some sober-minded people who stepped in'.<sup>83</sup> Scholem offered the opposition's publications to the miners, which by

80 Stalin 1954, pp. 11–96.

81 Zimmermann 1978, p. 64 f.; *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des XI. Parteitag der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Sektion der Kommunistischen Internationale). Essen vom 2. bis 7. März 1927*, Berlin 1927.

82 Zimmermann 1978, p. 71 f.

83 *Polizeibericht zu einer Versammlung der 'Ultralinken' in Rünthe bei Dortmund vom 8. Januar 1928*, StA Münster, Reg. Arnsberg, Nr. 14443. I thank my colleague Marcel Bois for pointing out this document.

now also included the *Volkswille* newspaper published in Suhl, but to no avail – the police report describes the meeting’s sad ending: ‘The Communists, and with them the majority socialists left the meeting hall exclaiming “You’ll never get a foothold in Rünthe, we don’t need your paper!”, so that only 8 to 10 ultra-lefts remained who seemed to have travelled to Rünthe from Dortmund.’<sup>84</sup> The massive wave of KPD expulsions did in fact bring new members to the Urbahns Group. Another police report referred to it as the ‘main group of the opposition’ in late 1927, for which an explanation was provided: ‘This growth of the opposition can doubtlessly be related to the harsh measures taken against the Opposition in Russia, including countless expulsions and the banishment of prominent leaders.’<sup>85</sup> Zinoviev and Trotsky were excluded from the Russian Communist Party after all on 15 November 1927. In December, their ‘United Opposition’ publicly declared its solidarity with the Urbahns Group.<sup>86</sup>

The left now stood on its own political feet, not by choice but by necessity. The *Fahne des Kommunismus* critically reported on repressive measures taken against the Russian Opposition, which in turn earned it new subscribers. Circulation in September 1927 is reported to have reached some 15,000 copies.<sup>87</sup> The combination of the KPD’s repression and the counter-narrative provided by the Left Communists led to a situation in which the Urbahns Group could legitimately demand in early 1928 what Werner Scholem had only cautiously requested in 1925: the re-institution of party democracy in the KPD.

The party would blatantly ignore this demand, although massive opposition within the Roter Frontkämpferbund compelled the Central Committee to refrain, at least temporarily, from further expulsions and confine itself to ‘arguments’ instead.<sup>88</sup> The Left Communists thus felt obliged to tighten the structures of their provisional grouping. In October 1927, a national conference attended by 120 delegates was held in Berlin. In a report on the meeting, the *Fahne des Kommunismus* praised the atmosphere among participants: There was ‘no compulsory unanimity [...] because neither do we have secretaries nor

84 Ibid. KPD troops also managed to stop Urbahns from speaking at a meeting in the Berlin suburb of Weißensee by giving long contributions, citing party by-laws, moving to extend speaking times and loudly singing the Internationale. See ‘Bericht von öffentlicher Versammlung des Leninbundes in Weißensee am 30. November 1928’, *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD sowie Berichte über Ultralinke und Leninbund*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/705/22.

85 ‘Bericht des Polizeipräsidiums Berlin, Abteilung Ia’, cited in Zimmermann 1978, p. 89.

86 Zimmermann 1978, p. 86.

87 Zimmermann 1978, p. 77.

88 Zimmermann 1978, p. 77, an. 89.



FIGURE 25 *Announcement of the Lenin League May Day rally in 1928 (Fahne des Kommunismus, 20 April 1928)*

are we in the position to transfer or sack comrades who hold different views'.<sup>89</sup> The group's public announcements often highlighted the fact that they allowed 'free debate' – that which had once been taken for granted at Communist meetings was now advertised like a rare commodity.<sup>90</sup>

Werner Scholem often appeared as a featured speaker at these meetings: on 7 October 1927 he gave a presentation on the topic of '10 Years of the Soviet Union', on 27 January 1928 he asked the crowd of a large meeting at the Kindl brewery in Neukölln: 'Why Was the Russian Opposition Banished?', and on 1 May 1928 he gave the keynote speech at the Left Communists' May Day celebrations in the large auditorium of the Schultheiß brewery in Berlin.<sup>91</sup> Scholem and his comrades remained under constant surveillance, however: both the KPD and Berlin police section 1A regularly sent informants to meetings.<sup>92</sup> The group nevertheless furthered its organisational work and gradually consolidated its structures. District conferences were held in early 1928, followed by another national conference in March of the same year. A party statute was drafted and a national leadership elected, to which Scholem belonged. By now,

89 *Fahne des Kommunismus* 33, 28 October 1927.

90 See *Fahne des Kommunismus* 32, 21 October 1927, which announced a meeting in the 'Pharus-Sälen', Müllerstraße 142, on 28 October at which Fischer would speak on the topic of 'The Fight of the Left Communists and the Russian Opposition Against the Current "Leadership" of the Soviet Union and the Comintern'.

91 See *Fahne des Kommunismus* 30, 7 October 1927; 4, 27 January 1928 and 15, 13 April 1928 as well as *Bericht von der Maifeier des Leninbundes, Schultheißbrauerei, Hasenheide*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/705/22.

92 Even the Soviet newswire service TASS collected information on the left, see *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD* as well as *Berichte über Ultralinke und Leninbund*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/705/22.

local groups were active all over Germany, their strongholds being in Berlin, the Ruhr region and Baden, although groups also existed in towns like Suhl, Rostock and Stargard.<sup>93</sup> In the Hamburg district of Altona, the group even participated in local elections under the name 'Left Communists', but continued to deny any aspirations towards becoming a 'second party'. This bizarre stance was maintained even when the Left Communists convened at a formal founding congress in the Prussian Landtag in Berlin on 8–9 April 1928. This venue, in which the KPD had once been founded, now served as the site where the Urbahns Group received its new name – from now on, the Left Communists would call themselves the Lenin League.<sup>94</sup>

At the conference, Werner Scholem presented the national leadership's report, painting the state of organisation in rather optimistic tones: despite the 'appalling' campaign being waged by the KPD, the organisation now counted around 100 local groups, five to six thousand functionaries and employees, and up to 100,000 Communist sympathisers.<sup>95</sup> Scholem failed to mention to what extent these new structures constituted the formation of a second party; even Hugo Urbahns would only hint at the fact that the Lenin League could not continue to work towards the restoration of the KPD from outside forever. As if affirming this notion, the conference took the highly controversial decision to participate in the upcoming Reichstag elections with their own list of candidates.<sup>96</sup> Scholem was among the more determined opponents of the decision, and an open conflict ensued only days after the founding conference, as a KPD informant reported: 'Both Maslow and Fischer were attacked by Scholem and by other discussants in an extremely harsh manner. Scholem declared that he had also initially been in favour of calling for a vote for the KPD, but was bowing to the majority. He then proceeded to accuse Maslow and Fischer of cowardice because they had deliberately embarked on a private trip and only returned to Berlin one day before the conference so as to elude the controversies over the participation in the elections.'<sup>97</sup> The climate inside the Lenin League was

93 Zimmermann 1978, p. 95f. On the Lenin League see also Bois 2014, pp. 253–92.

94 *Fahne des Kommunismus* 15, 13 April 1928.

95 Zimmermann 1978, p. 102.

96 Basing himself on a police report, Rüdiger Zimmermann reports of intense controversies within the national leadership as early as 2 and 4 April, although a majority would ultimately vote for participating in the elections – opposition came primarily from Maslow and Fischer; see Zimmermann 1978, p. 103.

97 'Linke Kommunisten – Bericht von der Funktionärsversammlung Neukölln am 16. April [1928]', *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD sowie Berichte über Ultralinke und Leninbund*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/705/22, Blatt 153. Another



tense. Beyond political differences between the leading protagonists, personal distrust played a role as well. The Central Committee was well aware of these developments, as it was able to draw on reports from the dissatisfied Left Communist Theodor Kögler: 'Kögler and Scholem are accused by Maslow and Fischer of merely waiting for the right occasion to subordinate themselves to the Central Committee. Scholem and Kögler in turn charged the Maslow current with attempting to re-align themselves with the party and claimed that they were refraining from public appearances so as to not lose support among the membership'.<sup>98</sup>

The conflict was papered over by a formulaic compromise: the election lists would remain in place, while Werner Scholem, despite being an opponent of the project as such, received a spot at the top of the list. The underlying reason for these and other tensions was the Lenin League's ongoing self-deception concerning its relationship to the KPD. They had long been expelled and reorganised in a new structure, and yet clung to the notion of somehow still being part of official Communism. Things turned even more absurd when the party's founding conference resolved: 'The Lenin League is not intended to be a second party'.<sup>99</sup> Lenin himself had founded the Bolsheviks through a split in 1903, but his self-proclaimed successors in Germany lacked the courage to follow his example. A break was made even more complicated by confusing news from Moscow.

At the 15th party conference of the CPSU in December 1927, Stalin succeeded not only in driving a wedge between Trotsky and Kamenev's United Opposition, but even managed to force them into capitulation. Over the course of events, the group around Zinoviev and Kamenev fully submitted to the party conference's decisions. Among other things, they declared their contact with the Fischer-Maslow group in Germany had been a grave mistake.<sup>100</sup> The Trotskyists, by contrast, committed themselves to abiding by the party conference's resolutions, but insisted on the right to express their views. From the per-

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report in the same file states that Scholem spoke in favour of the electoral lists. This discrepancy may relate to the fact that the second report is from a 'public' statement made at the founding conference of the Lenin League, where Scholem supported the majority line out of party discipline. See *Die Reichskonferenz des 'Lenin-Bundes' (Ostern 1928)*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/705/22.

98 See 'Gespräch mit Theodor Kögler am 29. Januar 1928', *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD sowie Berichte über Ultralinke und Leninbund*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/705/22, Blatt 153.

99 *Fahne des Kommunismus* 15, 13 April 1928 as well as Zimmermann 1978, p. 94, p. 104.

100 Zimmermann 1978, p. 87.

spective of the German Left Communists, the situation was utterly disastrous. Zinoviev, known across Germany as the ‘Man from Halle’, had thus far served as their political foundation. All of a sudden, he publicly denounced them. What motivated Zinoviev to take this step? By the time of his own expulsion from the party in 1927, he must have realised that opposition *within* the party, which under Stalin had congealed into an apparatus, was impossible. The next logical step, then, would have been opposition *from outside*. Such a move, however, would render him an opponent of the party and the Soviet state – a Red variation of the White diaspora which had waited for the collapse of the revolution from London and Paris for the last decade. This was unthinkable for both Zinoviev as well as Kamenev. Their capitulation was unconditional. They preferred to give themselves up than to fight against their life’s work, regardless of the state of its degeneration.

The Left Communists were thus left with Trotsky as their only remaining point of reference, although they criticised his followers’ tepid behaviour all the same.<sup>101</sup> At a meeting in late January 1928, Scholem publicly sided with Trotsky, vehemently denouncing his deportation to the Russian hinterland.<sup>102</sup> From that time onward he was regarded as a ‘declared Trotskyist’ within the Lenin League.<sup>103</sup>

Complicating matters for the Left Communists far more than political repression was the fact that Stalin began to adopt their arguments. As early as January, Scholem had noted in an agitational speech that the language of the Stalinists had ‘again become infuriatingly ultra-left’.<sup>104</sup> Signs would soon grow stronger that a change of course in the Soviet Union was on the horizon. A failed harvest in 1927 had impacted the food supply in the cities, and for the first time since 1921 pressure on farmers to deliver goods was increased.

101 ‘Der 15. Parteitag der WKP’, *Fahne des Kommunismus* 41, 23 December 1927.

102 ‘Bericht aus der Versammlung der Urbahns-Opopposition, Kindl-Brauerei, Neukölln, Hermannstr.’, *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS, SAPMO-BArch*, RY 1/1 2/705/22. The report is undated, but must have been written after Trotsky’s banishment on 17 January 1928.

103 According to a statement by Theodor Kögler: ‘K. related during the conversation that the national leadership of the Left Communists included three distinct currents which surfaced in the form of long debates at each and every meeting. Maslow, Ruth Fischer, Bruno Mätzchen and Schimanski represent the Zinoviev line, albeit somewhat covertly. Kögler and Scholem are decided Trotskyists. This is also true for Winkler and Deutschmann who are however not members of the national leadership’, see ‘Gespräch mit Theodor Kögler am 29. Januar 1928’, *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD sowie Berichte über Ultralinke und Leninbund*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/705/22, Blatt 153.

104 *Polizeibericht zu einer Versammlung der ‘Ultralinken’ in Rünthe bei Dortmund vom 8. Januar 1928*, StA Münster, Reg. Arnsberg, Nr. 14443.

This occurred against the resistance of the 'right' of the Russian Communist Party, which had always opposed the forced requisitioning of goods and advocated market relations in agriculture.<sup>105</sup> Both the Russian Opposition and the German Left Communists welcomed the new course, while the *Fahne des Kommunismus* took great pleasure in railing against the 'kulaks'. They commented on the shooting of 20 peasants with the words: 'It would be ideal if the Russian counter-revolution was finally effectively born down upon'.<sup>106</sup> Werner Scholem justified such casualties with the plight of the cities, explaining that 'hunger is widespread in Russia because the kulaks have withheld grain'.<sup>107</sup> The urban-rural antagonism between the urban working class and the millions of Russian peasants represented one of the Russian Revolution's greatest contradictions. In an attempt to match the reality on the ground to their political theory, the German Left Communists regarded the cities and the industrial proletariat as the true bearers of the revolution. To them, Zinoviev and the urban 'Lenin-grad Opposition' represented a bulwark against Stalin and his rural state capitalism. When Stalin suddenly and violently turned on the peasants, the Left Communists were perplexed. Things became even more curious when this 'left course' resulted in a foreign policy shift: the 9th plenary of the ECCI stated that the establishment of workers' councils was a mandatory precondition for the victory of the Chinese Revolution, while declaring Social Democracy the proletariat's main enemy.<sup>108</sup> Having eliminated all of his critics, Stalin could now afford such a volte-face. Far from eroding his credibility, the move actually instilled renewed hopes in the last remaining oppositionists that 'constructive' work in the party would again become possible.

Given this complex set of factors, it is understandable why the Lenin League debated so long and so intensely over its participation in the May 1928 Reichstag elections, as this would represent the crucial last step on the path to becoming a 'second party', and the Left Communists would finally position themselves outside of the Comintern. An already weighty decision was made all the more complicated by the Soviet leadership's apparent taking heed, albeit extremely cautiously, of the left's criticisms. As Stalin's new course was consolidated between February and April, the newly founded Lenin League found its existence called into question.

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105 Zimmermann 1978, p. 107.

106 'Kampf der Gegenrevolution', *Fahne des Kommunismus* 14, 17 June 1927.

107 'Bericht von der öffentlichen Versammlung der linken Kommunisten', undated, *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD sowie Berichte über Ultra-linke und Leninbund*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/705/22.

108 Zimmermann 1978, p. 107.

Of course, neither Stalin nor any of his followers bothered to address the Left Communist critique directly.<sup>109</sup> Instead, on 4 May 1928 the ECCI's presidium issued an offer to all oppositionists, albeit as individuals: anyone who distanced themselves from the Lenin League as an 'anti-proletarian' and 'anti-Bolshevist' organisation would be allowed to return to the KPD after a six month probationary period.<sup>110</sup> This offer proved extremely demoralising for what remained of the opposition, as a sizable number of members accepted, and the leadership soon felt the effects as well. Werner Scholem, who had issued a euphoric report at the group's founding, turned deeply pessimistic.

On 6 May he submitted an organisational report to the national leadership in written form, because in his view it was 'not possible to submit an objective oral report in the current atmosphere'. Conflicts within the leadership had escalated to the point that certain members no longer spoke to one another. The report indicated that many of the 90 local chapters consisted of 'no more than 2–3 comrades' and the total number of members amounted to only 2,500 – half as many as estimated just a month earlier. Scholem's report continued: 'The comrades' activity leaves much to be desired. No Left Communist has so far spoken in discussions at the campaign events of the KPD and the SPD. Apparently, the speakers are too fainthearted. The most difficult problem is the fact that we are currently completely separated from the KPD. Not in the slightest are we informed about their intentions and plans, we don't even know their candidate lists. In a number of local groups, the KPD's subtle tactics pose the danger of subversion, particularly in Königsberg and Frankfurt (Oder). In financial terms, the situation is disastrous. There is no proper accounting whatsoever. In Suhl, thousands of Marks were paid out. If this continues like that we will lose everything'.<sup>111</sup>

Scholem, who had campaigned for and built up the League in countless meetings over several months, was at odds with himself. The organisation enjoyed a rather mediocre track record, and now its very purpose appeared

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109 The Lenin League demanded as early as February 1928: 'It is time to prove the honesty of the left turn, or rather, it is the duty of honest comrades to force this proof, so that all of the expulsions and banishments are rescinded and the opportunists among the ranks are attacked', *Fahne des Kommunismus* 8, 24 February 1928.

110 Zimmermann 1978, p. 111.

111 The report was given to the KPD three days later by an informant and immediately made public. See *Betr. Linke Kommunisten*, 9.5.28, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/705/22 as well as *Rote Fahne* 110, 11 May 1928. The mention of Suhl refers to the Lenin League newspaper *Volkswille's* bankruptcy, which the KPD had driven to ruin by selectively distributing copies of the *Rote Fahne* free of charge.

questionable. For years, Scholem's political thought had proceeded from the assumption that the 'right' KPD would descend into reformism. Under these conditions, it was completely legitimate to found a new organisation honouring Lenin's legacy as a revolutionary alternative to both the 'two Social Democratic parties' and Russian state capitalism. But should the Comintern, and with it the KPD, return to being a revolutionary organisation, then no other Communist organisation had the right to exist, and would in fact represent an obstacle to Communism's triumph.<sup>112</sup> Scholem did not intend to stand in the way of such a development, and took the necessary steps. A day later he sat down and wrote another letter: his resignation from the Lenin League.<sup>113</sup>

Scholem was very thorough in everything he did, including the retreat that would ultimately end his political career. He withdrew his candidacy for the Reichstag and called on all Lenin League members to vote for the KPD, explaining:

The Left Opposition within the KPD has for years considered the reunification of all Communists on the basis of Leninism the goal of its struggle, and has always vehemently rejected the claim that it was seeking to form a second Communist Party [...] The founding congress of the Lenin League, however, has resolved the very opposite line. Lacking any serious consideration of the current situation in Soviet Russia, in the Comintern and in the KPD, and without even taking into account the resistance of the proletarian elements against the dangers of liquidation in Soviet Russia [...], a majority guided by utterly unpolitical considerations voted in favour of entering a candidate list of our own for the upcoming elections. This resolution effectively signifies the establishment of a

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112 Lenin League member Albert Müller claims that Scholem's change of heart occurred at the aforementioned functionaries' meeting in Neukölln on 16 April 1928, during the debate on the elections: 'Scholem's change of mind was caused by the publication of the letter concerning his speech in Neukölln in the *Rote Fahne*. He wanted to release a statement to justify himself and point out that Ruth Fischer had not even been present at said meeting. Urbahns, however, did not allow this', see 'Mitgliederversammlung Gross-Berlin des Leninbundes bei Ewald, Skalitzerstr, 13,5,28', *Berichte der Berliner Abt. der TASS über die innerparteiliche Lage der KPD sowie Berichte über Ultralinke und Leninbund*, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/705/22.

113 An original copy of Scholem's resignation with handwritten annotation from 7 May 1928 can be found in SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/1 2/3/65, Blatt 271. It was also issued in Max Hesse's name and published in *Fahne des Kommunismus* 20, 18 May 1928.

second Communist Party, even though it is clear that such a party would have neither the possibility nor the right to exist.<sup>114</sup>

After maintaining his course over the past years in the face of blackmail and attempted coercion, holding onto his version of Left Communism despite massive hostility, spying, and the loss of all positions of power, Scholem now submitted. He did so out of conviction, as always. His hint at ‘successful resistance’ against the ‘dangers of liquidation’ in the Soviet Union indicates that he truly hoped for a left turn on Stalin’s part. Scholem, undeterred by even the severest of threats, now fell victim to his own belief in the myth of the October Revolution. In the autumn of 1917, when he had almost given up hope in the solitary confinement of Halle’s Penal Facility 1, Russia had been the sole light on his horizon, and a source of ideological solace when his second order of conscription arrived. The ensuing German Revolution would win him to the fight for socialism over Palestine once and for all.<sup>115</sup> When Germany’s revolution ultimately failed and the world revolution slipped out of view for years, Soviet Russia was all that kept the revolutionary flame alight. Accordingly, Scholem accelerated the ‘Bolshevisation’ of the KPD.<sup>116</sup> Although he had closely observed and harshly criticised developments in the Soviet Union, he was still reluctant to abandon his intellectual homeland. He reacted to his expulsion from the party by claiming the political legacy of the revolution all the more forcefully: it was not Rosa Luxemburg, but Lenin who would become the Left Communists’ patron saint – evident not least in their paper’s self-description as ‘Orthodox Marxists-Leninists’, whose first editorial read ‘Hands off Soviet Russia!’<sup>117</sup> Unlike Karl Korsch or Iwan Katz, Scholem never distanced himself from the Soviet Union publicly. He genuinely wanted to believe in the possibility of rapprochement in the world Communist movement. If

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114 Ibid, emphasis in original.

115 See Werner to Gershom Scholem, 20 February 1918 and 26 December 1918, NLI Jerusalem.

116 Scholem used the failure of the German revolution to justify Bolshevisation: ‘The painful defeat of 1919, 1920 and 1921, the many frustrated hopes, the ever mounting waves of reaction, the social and political oppression of the German proletariat raise the question more than ever as to what exactly a revolutionary party must look like in Germany’, see Scholem, ‘Die historische Lehre des 7. November: Die Rolle der Kommunistischen Partei’, *Rote Fahne* 151, 7 November 1924.

117 *Fahne des Kommunismus* 12, 2 June 1927 – 12 was the first issue, as the *Mitteilungsblatt* count was simply continued. Scholem had dismissed Luxemburg’s organisational concepts in 1924, see Werner Scholem, ‘Die historische Lehre des 7. November: Die Rolle der Kommunistischen Partei’, *Rote Fahne* 151, 7 November 1924.

nothing else, this is the only plausible explanation for why he would reinterpret Stalin's left turn as a victory for the opposition and unconditionally abandon years of work despite the obviously superficial nature of Stalin's policies.

Others felt the same. Ruth Fischer and Maslow issued a similar statement only two days later, resigning from the Lenin League and calling on all members to follow suit.<sup>118</sup> The disaster became public when both statements were printed in the *Fahne des Kommunismus* on 12 May 1928. The Lenin League found itself stripped of its leadership, and members were furious. The local group in Suhl felt so betrayed that it turned on Communism altogether and collectively joined the SPD.<sup>119</sup> With the exception of Hugo Urbahns, all leading candidates for the May elections had withdrawn their names. The League's result was correspondingly catastrophic: a mere 0.26 percent.<sup>120</sup> The organisation seemed headed for total collapse. Although it survived in rump form, this was only possible by abandoning its founding dogma. The remaining activists abandoned 'ultra-left' tactics after a series of internal controversies. The League would be one of the few groups to argue for a united front in the face of the Nazi threat in the early 1930s, albeit unsuccessfully.

Werner Scholem stood apart from this struggle, despite how many times he had confronted and fought the Nazis in his political career. He once formulated his political goal as 'to join the organisational elasticity of Bolshevism with its unbendable political rigidity'.<sup>121</sup> Ultimately, rigidity would prevail. Scholem had shed the elasticity he once showed as a radical activist in the USPD and as Communist school reformer in the Prussian Landtag. For Karl Korsch and Arthur Rosenberg, their ultra-left dogmatism represented a transitional stage from which they drew the strength to redefine Marxist theory.<sup>122</sup> For Scholem, it remained his final political destination.

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118 Paul Schlecht, Fritz Schimanski and Bruno Mätzchen capitulated with them. The declaration was issued on 9 May 1928, *Plattform, Resolutionen u. Artikel von I. Katz, A. Rosenberg, W. Scholem*, SAPMOBArch, RY 1/1 2/3/65, Blatt 278; also in *Fahne des Kommunismus* 20, 18 May 1928.

119 The *Fahne des Kommunismus* wrote that a 'corrupt clique' in the leadership had handed the newspaper over to the SPD. 'Scholem's desertion' was simply part of a long planned 'manoeuvre', in which all of the parties involved were promised lucrative positions in the SPD. See *Fahne des Kommunismus* 20, 18 May 1928.

120 Zimmermann 1978, p. 118.

121 'Auf dem richtigen Wege! Die organisatorischen Lehren der Wahlkampagne für die KPD', *Rote Fahne* 180, 12 December 1924.

122 Rosenberg and Korsch would go on to become founding figures of a critical form of Marxism that influenced the New Left and the student movements, often distinguished from

Perhaps he secretly hoped to undergo six months of probation and return to the Communist movement once again – it certainly would have meant the world to him. Scholem is said to have attempted, by participating in a campaign against the construction of an armoured battleship, to ingratiate himself with KPD members.<sup>123</sup> Yet this endeavour was futile, as even his mother could not help but see: ‘Yes, well, Werner does have a talent for getting caught between two stools. Now the party’s leadership is pursuing precisely the politics for which he was expelled at the time. But that’s of little comfort to him, for he is out nonetheless [...] It’s not that simple, you can’t constantly keep chopping and changing, going in and out of the potatoes. It’s a permanent back and forth with Werner, but what can I do! Nobody likes to be told what to do, and this is true particularly for Werner with his helical ideas about revolution and politics’.<sup>124</sup>

Werner stayed ‘out of the potatoes’, as it were, for the probationary membership offer only applied to ordinary members, who were re-admitted to the party individually, and only after publicly repenting. The Lenin league’s leadership, however, was out of the party for good. The only member of the national leadership allowed to re-join in 1929 was Fritz Schimanski, a fate that ended more as a curse than a blessing: while in Moscow exile, he was arrested by the NKVD secret police in 1936, tried and sentenced for his previous activity in the Lenin League and executed on 22 November 1938.<sup>125</sup> Other survivors, too, were unable to shed their stigma as renegades: Bruno Mätzchen, who had capitulated together with Schimanski, was purged from the East German ruling party SED as late as 1951.<sup>126</sup> Werner Scholem, however, would never join a political party again.

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Leninism as ‘Western Marxism’. Important texts include Arthur Rosenberg’s *Democracy and Socialism* (1938) and *History of Bolshevism: From Marx to the First Five-Year Plan* (1932); as well as Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy* (1972). On the intellectual profile of Western European Marxism see Kroll 2007 and Anderson 1976.

123 Zimmermann 1978, p. 116; *Volkswille*, 1, 179, 17 October 1928. The battleship was a prestige project of the German navy. The SPD had campaigned in the 1928 elections with the slogan ‘Food for Children, not for Battleships’ and won. Minister of the Interior Carl Severing, Minister of Finance Rudolf Hilferding and Ministry of Labour Rudolf Wissell, however, voted for the ship’s construction during coalition negotiations. It was brought into service in 1931 under the name ‘Deutschland’ and used by Hitler for a display of military might in the Spanish civil war in 1937, as well as in World War II.

124 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 18 June 1928, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 169.

125 Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 784f.

126 Mätzchen was readmitted to the SED in 1957, but would not be awarded the Patriotic Order of Merit in Bronze until his 75th birthday in 1976; Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 570f.



## Back to the Lecture Hall: Family and University Life in Berlin

### 'At Home with Communists': Emmy and Werner in Private

'Just imagine, Werner has now been expelled from his party, I have no idea what will become of the boy!' So begin Betty Scholem's comments on her son's political fate in 1926, summarising in a few short sentences what Werner was unable to admit to others, let alone himself: 'He really has landed at the wrong feeding trough, without any kind of proper qualifications or useful skills! For the past two years, ever since he found himself in opposition to the dominant tendencies of his party, his wife has wanted him to take up studies, but she couldn't convince him. It worries me quite a bit, but what can *I* do?'<sup>1</sup>

After leaving the Lenin League with a bang in 1928, Werner Scholem looked back on an almost decade-long career as a professional politician, a time during which he had never bothered to acquire 'useful skills'. On the contrary: his father's drive to instil a sense for profitable entrepreneurship in his sons had been the original reason for Werner's rebellion. As a revolutionary, both his life and his thoughts reflected the priorities of a future society, not the practical necessities of his everyday life. The council republic, the proletarian justice of Soviet Russia, the Chinese Revolution – Scholem's attention was fixed on distant revolutionary vanishing points, not the world around him. Although he followed wage struggles and trade union politics with a degree of journalistic detachment, he essentially considered them as much a nuisance as, say, haemorrhoids, as he told his brother in 1914.<sup>2</sup> Although Scholem enjoyed more influence among Berlin workers than most of his left-wing peers in the KPD, he shared their political blind spots. As a rule, he viewed the quotidian logic of wage labour and the constraints and compromises it entailed as breeding grounds for 'right dangers', and regarded social reform in general to be the terrain of his irreconcilable opponents, the opportunists and liquidators. He could never quite identify with these practical, reformist concerns, except for that brief phase during which he developed an interest in school reform. After this

1 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 8 November 1926, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 150 f.

2 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 22 September 1914, Scholem 1995, p. 14 f.

attempt failed, Werner became a committed political voluntarist, driven solely by will and intellectual conviction, in contrast to the material need that propelled most to join the ranks of the labour movement.

Instead, it would be the women in his life who would remind him time and again of the unpleasant compromises of the capitalist lifeworld: Emmy urged him to return to university, Betty wanted him to find steady employment. She pressed the questions that Werner tried to avoid: 'The moment the Reichstag is dissolved or new elections are called, he will be left high and dry. [...] But what else can he do? If his own party's paper refuses to hire him as a journalist, the newspapers of other political persuasions certainly won't print his articles'.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the Scholems had been financially dependent on the party for years. Werner as a member of parliament and as editor of various publications, Emmy as a stenotypist at KPD headquarters, where she worked from 1921 onward. They shared a common workplace in Rosenthalerstraße, although their relationship at work was far from equal. Werner found himself in the spotlight while Emmy remained largely invisible. She had foregone her own political career to transcribe her husband's speeches – several minutes from that time carry her initials. On the other hand, Emmy's position provided her with a degree of personal freedom. In early 1925 she travelled to Moscow without Werner to work as a congress stenotypist for several weeks.<sup>4</sup> She managed to travel and earn some money while active in the party, but her political work remained largely confined to appearances at educational workshops.<sup>5</sup> Correspondingly, she played no role in the KPD's permanent factional struggles, and even distanced herself from Werner's opposition in 1926. In a letter to the Berlin district leadership, she stated 'that I do not agree with the opposition and have no ties to any factions'.<sup>6</sup> Had the party conflict led to divisions in the family as well? This seems unlikely, as Emmy's statement was not a personal attack, but rather one of many acts of self-assertion she was compelled to perform in her relationship with Werner.

It was her husband's factionalising that forced her to give up her position at party headquarters after four years. She wrote that she had resigned 'because

3 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 7 December 1926, Scholem 2002, p. 156f.

4 *Lichnoe delo Sholem, Emma* [personnel file Emma Scholem], RGASPI Moscow, Komintern, F. 495, op. 205, d. 9797; as well as letter from Betty to Gershom Scholem, 20 April 1925, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 128.

5 Emmy remained active in KPD educational work until 1926. She wrote that after Werner's expulsion she no longer served as a 'course leader or speaker'; Emmy Scholem, 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorganges (7. April 1954)'; *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA Niedersachsen, NDs. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351. On KPD educational work see Krinn 2007.

6 *Emmy Scholem an die BL Berlin der KPD*, 22. November 1926, SAPMO-BArch RY 1/1 2–3/65.

I had already been harassed and removed from my position as a stenotypist in the *Polbüro* by Ruth Fischer in the summer of 1925 following her differences with my husband, and I didn't wish to experience suchlike again. I explicitly stress here that the decision did not come easily at the time, for I would have much rather remained directly employed by the party, and that I resigned only in light of the whole situation'.<sup>7</sup> Emmy took up a new position at the Soviet trade mission in Lindenstraße, clerking in a department importing German machinery to aid Soviet industrialisation.<sup>8</sup> Yet this gesture of submission would be in vain, as the party pressured the Soviets to dismiss her following Werner's expulsion in 1926. Given that she 'was the wife of former Comrade Scholem', party functionary Hans Pfeiffer explained, there was reason to suspect that she 'had participated in some oppositional activity or another'.<sup>9</sup> Emmy wrote: 'I was also told that one reason for my dismissal was that my position in the trade mission was indirectly funding the oppositional faction. To this I can only respond that my husband's financial situation is completely independent of my earnings. [...] It would only be me personally who would be harmed by a dismissal, as I would subsequently be utterly dependent on my husband financially, which I wanted to avoid at all cost'.<sup>10</sup>

The KPD was a man's world, in which nobody thought twice about punishing Werner's wife and family for his political stance. Werner's eight-year-old daughter Edith was even kicked out of the Communist Young Pioneers.<sup>11</sup> The party sought to restrict Emmy to the status of housewife in order to cut Werner off from additional financial resources. The idea that she may have had her own opinion on the situation in the party never occurred to those involved. Precisely because no one bothered to ask her, Emmy eventually felt obliged to stake out a position of her own – against Werner. Her dissociation from her husband was an act of personal and professional self-assertion, as she sympathised with the Left Communists both privately and politically.<sup>12</sup>

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7 Ibid.

8 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Emmy Scholem vom 16. Mai 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1, Bl. 37–40.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, circa 1988.

12 'Ever since my husband parted company with the Communist Party in 1926, as did most of our personal friends like Professor Dr Arthur Rosenberg and many others to whom I pledged solidarity, I have not been politically active', see 'Emmy Scholem, Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorganges (7. April 1954)', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA Niedersachsen, NDs. 110 w Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

Her efforts proved futile, however, and she was fired after only one year in the Soviet trade mission. Nevertheless, her principled insistence on maintaining financial independence would pay off eventually. Unlike her husband, Emmy had in fact trained and worked in a profession, albeit against Werner's will, and it was now up to her to feed the family. She applied for multiple positions, but was regularly interrogated about her last name and subsequently rejected on account of Werner's reputation.<sup>13</sup> It took her some time to secure a position matching her qualifications. Recounting her occupational biography later in life, Emmy looked back: 'In 1927 I started working as a secretary at the company *Gewerka G.m.b.H.*, Berlin W 15, Brandenburgische Straße 27. This firm was the publisher of "Kurze Steuer- und Rechtsnachrichten" ["News in Taxation Law"] as well as "Handbuch des Rechts" and "Steuer-Handbuch" ["Law Manual", "Tax Manual"]. In early 1928 I became the head clerk and acquired knowledge of the work of a controller of accounts as well as broad knowledge of the tax system. At the end of 1931 the owner of the company changed. The new owners were Dr S. Turnheim and Dr C. Wurm, both of whom worked in the company and acquired half of the company's shares each. As I was in charge of running the company's operative business at the time, and both gentlemen were unable to deal with that as they had to attend to their respective fields of expertise, my salary was immediately raised to 400 Marks per month and I received 10 percent of Dr. Wurm's and Dr. Turnheim's shares, respectively'.<sup>14</sup>

It is difficult to imagine Werner Scholem working at a publishing house for tax manuals. Instead, Emmy was the family member devoting herself to sober, gainful employment. Her income was somehow sufficient to pay their rent and maintain their living standard, which was worth defending, as the family had moved into larger quarters in 1925. Encouraging the move was a new family member, Renate Scholem, born on 2 February 1923 – the republic's year of crisis – and lovingly referred to by the rest of the family as 'Reni'.

The new apartment was located in Klopstockstraße 7 in the Hansaviertel district of Berlin. Thanks to the tedious post-1945 compensation process for victims of the Nazi regime, we can learn from several witnesses how things must have looked like in the Scholem home. Emmy gave the following description:

13 'Prior to that I had already applied for different positions to no avail, because due to my last name they always looked into my record and realised that my husband was the former Communist deputy Scholem', 'Vernehmung Emmy Scholem vom 10. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Bd 8.

14 Emmy Scholem, 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorganges (7. April 1954)', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA Niedersachsen, NDs. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

‘The apartment consisted of four rooms, bathroom, kitchen and a vestibule. The dining room interior was especially pretty, a gift from my mother-in-law, [...] it included birch wood furniture, a long buffet, a beautiful glass cabinet, a nice table, armchairs and chairs, beautiful crystals, plenty of crockery and Rosenthal porcelain, as well as silver cutlery, etc., furthermore a *chaise lounge* and a carpet and a rug. It also housed our particularly extensive library with its precious archive. My husband was a collector of manuscripts, too, which were also kept in the living room. The bedroom, in dark mahogany, had a particularly nice wardrobe. [...] The children’s room was furnished as a bedroom-living room for our two daughters [...] The kitchen had a refrigerator and all necessary utensils. In addition, there was a sewing machine, a typewriter, hairdryer, heating pad and other electrical devices like a toaster’.<sup>15</sup>

The apartment is only mentioned in Betty Scholem’s letters when she ‘tidied up’ and donated her own used furniture to the family, as Werner’s domicile was clearly sub-standard in her eyes.<sup>16</sup> Emmy’s proletarian relatives from Hanover, on the other hand, were deeply impressed by the family’s urban luxuries, unaware of their second-hand provenance. They reverently described the house with its own caretaker and separate entrances for staff and ‘masteries’. Emmy’s half-sister Lina recalled: ‘I for my part was quite impressed by the furnishings, as the apartment was a lot nicer than the rather simple apartment we had at the time’. Her brother-in-law concluded: ‘It corresponded to the situation and positions the Scholems found themselves in’.<sup>17</sup>

These statements again demonstrate that Emmy and Werner had climbed Weimar Germany’s social ladder together, cultivating a middle-class lifestyle in spite of their proletarian political standpoint. Werner never seemed to be bothered by this. Betty, however, would joke about certain contradictions found in everyday life ‘at home with Communists’, as she described Werner’s household.<sup>18</sup> On the occasion of a shopping trip with Werner, Betty noted that her son, a member of parliament, needed a coat that could not be ‘the latest thing in fashion but a rather inconspicuous one, suitable for a defendant of the people’.<sup>19</sup> A similar conflict arose when Edith asked for expensive pyjamas and an extravagant doll case. While her parents disapproved, her grandmother was

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15 Ibid.

16 Such as during a move in 1929, see Betty to Gerhard Scholem, 7 May 1929, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 190.

17 Statements by Grete Schütz, Eduard Schädler, Lina Schädler from *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA Niedersachsen, NDs. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

18 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 19 April 1924, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 128.

19 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 8 April 1924, Scholem 2002, p. 132.

delighted: 'Emmy is always terribly bothered when the child expresses such wishes, but I have quite a bit of fun watching how neither Communism nor the courtyard apartment can suppress the child's refined character'.<sup>20</sup>

The courtyard apartment was history, and the grandmother saw to it that her grandchildren had the appropriate dolls for their new setting. These family encounters and shopping trips had to remain secret for years, as Arthur Scholem's ban on contact with his wayward son remained in effect, even extending to Werner's children. While Arthur Scholem attended to official business, Betty trod 'forbidden paths' to see her grandchild Renate at Emmy's parents' house in Hanover.<sup>21</sup> She and Werner would only meet if the father's presence could be ruled out, or simply met outside of the home to begin with. One such covert meeting took place at the 'Bellevuecafé' near Potsdamer Platz in February 1925. Werner, at the peak of his political career, had managed to free up an afternoon to spend with his mother. They barely managed to utter a few words before Werner's brother Erich joined them with unexpected news: Arthur Scholem was dead.

He died just as he had lived: at work, where he collapsed on a staircase, having suffered from severe pneumonia three years prior. Aware of his declining health, Arthur had already come to terms with his own mortality, but no one anticipated a death quite this sudden. Snatched from Betty's life, she missed her husband dearly, yet stoically accepted her fate, writing to Gershom: 'That is how he died, working restlessly, without lingering illness, a merciful end'.<sup>22</sup> Arthur was buried in the Jewish cemetery in the Berlin district of Weißensee. His gravestone stands to this day.<sup>23</sup>

Werner and his father never reconciled, but his death brought an end to the secrecy and tension surrounding Werner's relationship with his family. Though his political ideas continued to be met with disapproval, the family nevertheless drew closer together. His elder brothers begrudgingly accepted Werner's politics and peculiarities and helped out wherever they could. Erich and Reinhold paid for him to accompany Emmy on a spa retreat, and offered to support Werner's university studies financially.<sup>24</sup> Contact with Gershom also resumed – Werner scribbled 'why don't you write me for once?' in the margins

20 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 2 September 1924, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 109 f.

21 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 16 September 1924, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 113.

22 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 9 February 1925, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 119.

23 It is located in plot G5 near the former entrance to the cemetery.

24 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 7 December 1926, Scholem 2002, p. 156; 18 September 1928, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 178.

of one of Betty's letters in April 1925.<sup>25</sup> He even supplied his brother in far off Jerusalem with clippings from the *Rote Fahne* and other publications, although no deeper exchange between the two would result.<sup>26</sup> The brothers lived in two vastly different worlds by this point, and maintaining contact between them largely fell to Betty – 'mother will faithfully inform you, I'm sure', Werner once wrote.<sup>27</sup>

In Berlin, Werner grew closer to his 'thoroughly bourgeois relatives', as he called them.<sup>28</sup> His resignation from active politics in 1928 also gave him more free time and softened his ideological zeal. He recovered his friendship with Arthur Rosenberg, who had left the KPD six months after Werner.<sup>29</sup> In a later police interrogation, Scholem reflected on his mood at that time: 'I had realised that the workers' movement in its traditional form was lost, and particularly so owed to the KPD whose entire politics took no notice of the situation in Germany and whose leadership and body of functionaries I considered utterly incapable and rotten. Following my experience in the Lenin League, I regarded any activities on behalf of one of the sects as completely futile. I felt bereft of a political home, as did the many other thousands of former Communists over the past years who, as is well known, include almost all the party's former leaders and functionaries. I would like to add that my wife and I voted mostly for USP[D] or SAP during elections.'<sup>30</sup>

This statement from 1933 was partially an attempt to distance himself from the KPD in the police's eyes, but also points to a real disorientation and destabilisation of former certainties in Scholem's thinking.<sup>31</sup> Rosenberg would process

25 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 20 April 1925, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 128.

26 See the aforementioned undated letter from Werner to Gershom in the fall of 1925, in which both the *Rote Fahne* as well as the text of his platform with Arthur Rosenberg are mentioned; see Scholem and Scholem 1989, letter no. 83, p. 137 (falsely dated 1926). The next surviving letter from Werner to his brother is from 1930, see letter no. 51 in Werner and Gershom's correspondence in the GSA at the NLI Jerusalem.

27 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 23 March 1931, NLI Jerusalem. Werner began sending letters again in 1930, albeit only once a year.

28 Werner explains: 'That year [1928, RH] I privately spent more time with my thoroughly bourgeois relatives, with whom I had only established closer relationships after my resignation from active politics', *Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 8. Juli 1933*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Bd 8.

29 Rosenberg's statement of resignation in April 1927 can be found in Kefler 2003, p. 263. The rekindling of their friendship is mentioned by Scholem in *Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 8. Juli 1933*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Bd 8.

30 Ibid.

31 Scholem's tactic during interrogations in 1933 was to give information portraying him in

this shock in a public fashion through his later historical scholarship, whereas Scholem's disassociation from the Stalinised KPD remained limited to private conversations and the ballot box. We therefore cannot determine to what extent Werner really moved towards the USPD or the Left-Social Democratic 'Socialist Workers' Party' [*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei, SAP*].<sup>32</sup> If this really was the case, then it was likely related to the Russian question: many ex-Communists who defended the Soviet Union but harshly criticised the Stalin leadership later made peace with the left wing of Social Democracy, where some political space for non-Stalinist socialists existed. Although he may have supported them in private, Werner never joined either the USPD or the SAP. Nevertheless, he kept his eye on politics: Scholem is said to have published articles under a pseudonym in Trotskyist publications such as *Permanente Revolution*. A letter from Roman Wells to Leon Trotsky from 1931 states as much, and includes a remark concerning Scholem's general agreement with the positions of the Trotskyist 'Left Opposition'. Alas, as Scholem's pseudonym remains unknown, it is impossible to say how many articles he published.<sup>33</sup> According to Ruth Fischer, Scholem even corresponded directly with Trotsky himself, sending him reports on German politics, although no such letters have sur-

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an unpolitical light. He avoided outright lies so as not to contradict Emmy's testimony, which was being conducted separately. In this context, his statement concerning their voting patterns seems authentic, albeit unconfirmed.

- 32 The Socialist Workers' Party of Germany [*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, SAP*] was founded in 1931 as a left-wing split from the SPD and joined with what was left of the USPD. Kurt Rosenfeld, Werner Scholem's lawyer, was a founding member. The SAP campaigned for a united front against fascism, but was ignored by both SPD and KPD. See Drechsler 1965.
- 33 'Comrade Ludwig has certainly already written you about the fact that I spoke with Comrade Scholem. After a long conversation, this comrade declared himself willing to work on our publication and organisation beginning in September 1930. Concerning his particular views, Comrade Ludwig, who spoke with him later, informed you that Comrade Scholem should be integrated into our work. The minor differences of opinion concerning the question of building an organisation appear to be unimportant at this time. They will disappear in the course of comradely and collective work together. We must attract particularly talented comrades. Personal vanities around the question of whom the 'leadership' should belong to cannot be allowed to play a role. For now, no political differences appear visible. Scholem explained that he is in agreement with the political line of the Left Opposition', letter from Roman Well to Leon Trotsky, 15 July 1930, *Trotsky Archive*, Houghton Library, Harvard University, BmS Russ13.1 5263. Thanks to Marcel Bois for providing me with the text of this letter. On Scholem and his contributions to *Permanente Revolution* see also Bois 2014.



vived. This personal connection therefore remains unconfirmed.<sup>34</sup> It seems clear, however, that Scholem, who had aligned himself with Trotsky's views in early 1928, stuck to this orientation over the next ten years, even under the most severe conditions: Ernst Federn, a fellow inmate in the Dachau concentration camp, met Scholem in 1938 and described him as a follower of Trotsky, albeit one who was highly sceptical of the latter's turn towards the united front policy.<sup>35</sup>

Scholem was still intellectually involved in politics after 1928, but no longer assumed a public role. His retreat from the political stage was definitive, which may have been the consequence of a personal crisis. While rekindling relationships with former comrades like Rosenberg and Karl Korsch, he remained persona non grata within Communist Party milieus. Scholem reported that because of his plans to resume university studies, he 'was considered not only a renegade, but indeed a "bourgeoisified" element. Old friends I would meet in the streets would approach me in a downright hostile manner'.<sup>36</sup> Werner Scholem's political trajectory had reduced his political and personal milieus to a small fraction of their former size.

Werner also began to look older. His hair had already thinned during his time in party headquarters, but by 1928 he was almost bald. Scholem, once the young rebel ready to turn the world upside down, now accepted that other

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34 'My friend Werner Scholem, the former Reichstag deputy then studying law at the University of Berlin [...], corresponded with Trotsky and gave him information about the German Party. Scholem never stopped arguing about the necessity of cooperating with Trotsky in building up an international opposition. We, however, refused to do so because until the very last days of the Hitler victory, despite our conviction that Thälmann's brand of national Communism would be defeated by the Nazis, we thought that a spontaneous uprising of the German workers against the rising National Socialist regime would basically modify the situation'; Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 499. No such exchange between Trotsky and Scholem exists in Trotsky's papers at Harvard University. Pierre Broué hints at a personal connection between Trotsky's son Leon Sedov and Scholem. According to him, it was Sedov who convinced Scholem to work with the Left Opposition in Germany; see Broué 1993. Thus, it may be that Scholem corresponded with Trotsky through Sedov, or that Sedov passed information on to his father and was then misconstrued by Ruth Fischer. Suggestions of this connection may be hidden in the correspondence of Trotsky and Sedov, which is kept at Stanford University's Hoover Institution (Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection, 1801–1982, Series 231). Unfortunately the author was unable to examine these sources, as they are entirely in Russian.

35 See Kuschev 2003, Vol. II, p. 361; see also chapter 7 in this volume.

36 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 8. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Bd 8.

forces had gained the upper hand. Dependent on outside support, Werner's status was far below that of his 'thoroughly bourgeois relatives' who had at least built an existence of their own. During better times, Betty's friends used to turn to Werner in search of employment for their sons, but he had always rejected them as non-members of the Communist Party.<sup>37</sup> Now he faced his own broken dreams, both politically and professionally,<sup>38</sup> and struggled to come to terms with the situation.

Nevertheless, his life crisis offered opportunities as well, such as in family life, for Werner Scholem had never quite grown into his role as a father. He abstractly contemplated a desire for children as a young man, but found very little time for his actual family. The newspaper, the Landtag, the Reichstag, the Central Committee, the revolution – Werner was an absentee father, a man who moved ever forward, only rarely glimpsing back at his family in the rear-view mirror. Although Emmy managed to resist being reduced to the housewife role Werner intended for her, this cut down on precious family time even more. A maid and the family's grandparents had to fill in instead. Edith had already spent a great deal of time in Hanover, whereas Renate was taken there shortly after her birth and raised almost entirely by Emmy's parents, spending only brief vacations at her parents' home.

It was not until 1933 that Werner would bring his youngest daughter back to Berlin to provide her with a better education, although this was precluded by her parents' arrest shortly thereafter. The judiciary also played a role in hindering the Scholems' family life: Edith Scholem's first clear memory of her father is a visit in prison in late 1921. Edith had just turned three years old, and her father sat in pre-trial detention for the *Rote Fahne* proceedings.<sup>39</sup> Werner's criminal prosecution and subsequent period in hiding again deprived the children of their father for several months in 1924, while his final arrest in 1933 tore the family apart once and for all.

Werner would never again have an opportunity to make up for what he had neglected since 1918. Renate Scholem, over ninety years old today, remembers

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37 Betty Scholem writes: "The Russian family Perelman have, without even first consulting me or Grete B, approached Werner and pestered him to place their son Bruno, who has arrived from St Petersburg as well now, at the Russian trade mission. Werner asked whether, all other qualifications aside, he was a Communist and a member of the party. What indignation from Mrs Perelman for such an imposition! – What a diplomatic lad Werner is after all!", Betty Scholem to Gershom Scholem, 7 April 1925, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 126.

38 Ibid.

39 Interview Edith Capon, née Scholem, circa 1988.

her father only from a distance, as a figure whom she occasionally spent holidays with. She lives in England under the name Renee Goddard and related her childhood memories to the author in numerous personal interviews.<sup>40</sup> In them, she described her father as a disastrous but comical homemaker, who would produce a grotesque mess in the kitchen only to end up frying a couple of eggs. During meals, rules were strict: 'Children at the table are to be as quiet as fish' [*Kinder am Tische: stumm wie die Fische*] was one of Werner's house rules. This stiffness was in stark contrast to the relaxed pace of everyday life with the Wiechelts in Hanover. Renate was happy there, got along well with her grandparents and harvested peas in the garden where her grandfather August Wiechelt had constructed a small playhouse for her. Her parents appeared almost as intruders in this world: 'they smelled strongly of soap, which I thought was terrible',<sup>41</sup> as she later recalled. This was her first memory of Werner, and must have been from around the age of three or four. When she was to enrol at a new school in Berlin, the young girl grew ill and had to be sent back to Hanover.<sup>42</sup> At first, Renate was somewhat afraid of her father: 'He was so different from grandfather. And he simply couldn't accept that I came from a working-class neighbourhood and was very fond of that – allotment garden and all that – he couldn't have cared less'.<sup>43</sup>

Not a particularly flattering assessment of Werner Scholem the proletarian leader. Although this distance between father and daughter would improve over time, a hint of rejection can nevertheless be detected in Renee Goddard's voice when she speaks of her childhood. She knew that Emmy also had a difficult relationship with Hanover and her stepfather August, stressing in several conversations how eager her mother was to escape the household. Emmy referred to August Wiechelt as 'merely a worker',<sup>44</sup> whereas she aspired to something greater. Little Renee ultimately enjoyed a happy childhood in Hanover up to 1933, but remained haunted by doubts as an adult. Due to these long periods of separation, her relationship with her mother and elder sister also

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40 The following quotes are taken from interviews with Renee Goddard (née Renate Scholem) and her husband Hanno Fry by Ralf Hoffrogge on 29 May 2011 and 8 October 2009 in Hanover; they have been complemented by two further reports by Renee Goddard: Goddard 1997 and Goddard 2008.

41 Goddard 2008.

42 An interview from 2009 reports 'She was fetched to Berlin to start school there, but fell ill with anorexia and was sent back to Hanover', see Howald 2009.

43 Goddard 2008.

44 Goddard 1997, as well as interview with Renee Goddard and Hanno Fry on 29 May 2011, Hanover.



FIGURE 26 *Emma and August Wiechelt in front of the garden shed named 'Renatenhäuschen' in Hanover-Linden, Renate Scholem (somewhat indiscernible) in front*

remained strained throughout her life. 'She sent me to this place she hated', she comments on Emmy's decision. Of course, this does not deny Werner's complicity in the arrangement. According to Renee, both her parents were 'too busy saving the world'. That diffuse, confusing political life, incomprehensible to a child and never discussed by Emmy in her later years, was more important to them than raising their daughter. Renee reports that she rebelled by acting in a 'direct, indiscreet and tactless' manner – at least 'during her better moments'.<sup>45</sup>

While Werner would largely remain an absent father to Renate, he cultivated a stronger relationship with Edith, mostly because she was five years older and therefore had more time to relate to Werner before he was arrested in 1933. In

45 Ibid.



FIGURE 27 *Werner with his niece Irene Scholem (Erich's daughter) and his daughter Renate Scholem*

a letter from prison dated 1935, Werner writes that Edith had 'been very close' to him as a child, and speaks of a 'particularly affectionate love'.<sup>46</sup> Even at the end of her life, Edith could still recall long conversations with Werner and a

46 Werner Scholem to Edith and Emmy Scholem, 22 September 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem IPW Hannover*.

long winter walk through the Grunewald forest on Berlin's western outskirts. The walk was taken on Christmas Eve 1932 – their last Christmas with their father,<sup>47</sup> as Werner would be taken from the family the following spring. He made an effort to stay in touch throughout his imprisonment, however, and was overjoyed when Edith sent him a letter at the Lichtenburg concentration camp. With the benefit of hindsight, Werner reflected on his own childhood, writing to Emmy: 'You know what I would have had to write my own father when I was 17, and I can still say today that it was not my fault. The whole matter with my father was always a cautionary tale to me, which is why I am so delighted to learn that Edith relates to me so very differently. At least in this regard, the years between 1928 and 1933 were not wasted.'<sup>48</sup> Werner had built a new relationship with Edith since her tenth birthday, and when Renate reached that same age in 1933, he sought to bring her to Berlin and start over with her as well. However, Nazi persecution made such a fresh start impossible. It was Renee who in later years searched for her lost father, trying to recover his fading memory in interviews and opening his letters to researchers, hoping to learn more about him. Edith, who had known much more of Werner in her youth, was too traumatised by his death, and would not share her memories of their father for decades.

What, then, prevented Werner from being a father to his daughters when they were younger? The hectic routine of political life, a lack of time, important political projects – these and other factors constitute only part of the answer, behind which an open question mark remains. Werner seems to have suffered from some sort of inability or unwillingness to deal with his daughters as young children. The roots of this behaviour may be found in his own childhood: namely, Werner had grown up the son of an absent father who enforced a strict domestic regime while spending most of his own time in business meetings. The Central Committee became to Werner what the print shop had been to Arthur: a public sphere that signified 'real life' and took priority over private and family matters. Arthur Scholem, in turn, had also gone through a similar father-son conflict, although he would ultimately adopt Siegfried Scholem's patriotism and business sense. Werner Scholem altered the political composition of this dynamic a generation later, but everyday life – vacillating between strictness and unsureness – would remain the same. The contemporary role model for men was not that of a loving and caring father participating in family life, something Werner Scholem was not keen to change. Would he perhaps have treated a son differently?

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47 Interview Edith Capon, née Scholem, circa 1988.

48 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 20 October 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem IPW Hannover*.

Emmy had always hoped for a boy, after all, and this wish had almost come true. According to Renee Goddard, Emmy became pregnant again briefly after Edith was born, but the boy died during birth.<sup>49</sup> Nothing on the topic can be found in any of Werner's letters. Renate was born after this incident – and stated that she was taken to her grandparents only sixteen days later.<sup>50</sup> Was she a wanted child, simply born with the wrong gender? Was this why she was taken out of the household so hastily? We cannot say.

Besides, it is doubtful whether Werner would have treated a little boy much differently. Always a man of his intellect, he lacked playful patience. Though principled in his better moments, he could be terribly stubborn and dogmatic in his worst. He understood education as an exclusively intellectual endeavour, and was unable to deal with small children. In 1931 he wrote to his brother in Jerusalem: 'Edith is already a real teenage girl, unfortunately without any interest in the sciences, however, even though she is a bright child. The younger one, Renate, is a *goy* without any frills. One can't yet say how she will turn out'.<sup>51</sup> Werner evaluated a 12-year-old girl according to her aptitude for science, and tellingly did not pay more attention to Edith in his letters until she was a teenager. It is thus no coincidence that he planned to bring Renate to Berlin to further her education, but waited until she had finished primary school to do so. In Werner's view, secondary school was when intellectual development truly began, anything prior to that was mere child's play. Renee recalls being told she would learn to 'speak properly' in Berlin.<sup>52</sup> Werner sought to provide his daughter with a level of middle-class education inaccessible in the Wiechelt household. Interestingly, he uses the Hebrew word *goy* to describe his daughter: a non-Jew. He uses the term almost pejoratively, but at the same time never showed an inclination to 'raise the children Jewish', as he had once expressed. On the contrary: 'The word "Jewish" never crossed our father's lips'.<sup>53</sup> Renate first encountered the word in 1933, when she overheard her neighbours in Hanover-Linden complain of 'Jews and Polacks'.<sup>54</sup> It would be some time before she realised that the complaints were probably related to her.

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49 Goddard 2008; as well as Interview with Renee Goddard, 8 October 2009.

50 Ibid.

51 *Goy* is a Hebrew word for a non-Jew; see Werner to Gershom Scholem, 23 March 1931, NLI Jerusalem.

52 Interviews with Renee Goddard on 8 October 2009 and 29 May 2011 in Hanover.

53 Goddard 2008.

54 Interview with Renee Goddard, 8 October 2009, Hanover.

Werner concluded the precious few lines he wrote his brother about his daughters in 1931 with the words: 'This, the portrait of the family today'.<sup>55</sup> It almost seems as if he was aware of how utterly alienated his daughters felt. But Werner apparently could not help it, lacking a role model from which to learn such behaviour. Only Betty, and perhaps their nanny Mimi, had cultivated emotional ties to the boys during his own childhood. Werner's personal experiences offered no other model of masculinity. Where were those silly men who could not only speak to teenagers, but also impress children in primary school age? An absent father in Neue Grünstraße, Gildemeister's boarding school in Hanover, the Samson School in Wolfenbüttel with its 99 iron-rod beds – such was Werner's childhood. His early manhood, on the other hand, consisted of barracks training and trench warfare. Werner's letters depict the end of his adolescence as consumed with the fear of death, barbarisation and de-humanisation. Infantryman Scholem returned from the war in good physical condition, but no one asked about his mental or emotional state.

Scholem avoided his family for a long time, delegating responsibility to Emmy and escaping into a visionary future. He viewed himself as an ascetic professional revolutionary to whom private life was largely a distraction. Only when the revolution subsided did he move closer to his family, although he was unable to fully immerse himself in family life even then, and continued to flee his obligations.

Rather than climbing the party ladder, he now embarked on lengthy climbing tours to Saxon Switzerland or the Austrian Alps.<sup>56</sup> Renate was once permitted to hold his backpack for a little while before his departure, but was never allowed to accompany him.<sup>57</sup> Hiking tours were strictly for adults, mostly Scholem's old friends like Karl Korsch.<sup>58</sup> At a later point Werner would even become an active member of a liberal Alpine climbing association, something he never could have done as a Communist in the Weimar Republic, where workers' sports and middle-class clubs were strictly separated.<sup>59</sup> The club in question was the German Alpine Club of Berlin [*Deutscher Alpenverein Berlin*],

55 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 23 March 1931, NLI Jerusalem.

56 These destinations are mentioned in Werner Scholem's photo album held in Renee Goddard's private collection, as well as in a letter from Betty to Gershom Scholem, 12 March 1935, Scholem 2002, p. 264.

57 Interview with Renee Goddard, 8 October 2009, Hanover.

58 A photo of Korsch on one of these trips can be found in Scholem's photo album, Renee Goddard, private collection.

59 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 8. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Bd 8.



which had left the overarching German and Austrian Alpine Club [*Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein*, DÖAV] in 1924.<sup>60</sup> Pressured by anti-Semitic members, the DÖAV had permitted some local chapters to introduce an 'Aryan paragraph' excluding Jews. Anti-Semitism became so widespread in the organisation that the liberal Vienna 'Donauland' section was expelled in the face of massive pressure and boycott threats four years later, meaning that no Alpine Club in the entire city permitted Jewish members. The association's mountain chalets now featured signs reading: 'Jews and members of the Donauland association are not welcome here'. As the federation succumbed to rising and aggressive anti-Semitism, a further split occurred in Berlin when liberal and Jewish members founded the German Alpine Club of Berlin.<sup>61</sup> This split was already in place by the time Scholem discovered Alpinism, but remained present in the form of organisational aftershocks.<sup>62</sup> By the 1920s, the new Alpine Club had erected the Friesenberghaus, its own chalet in the Zillertal Alps. It was finally completed and held its dedication ceremony in July 1932 with Scholem in attendance.<sup>63</sup> As a climber, Werner encountered a scenario similar to the one his father knew from his time as a gymnast in the 1880s: the cult of the body and *völkisch* romanticism ruined the liberal culture of a sports movement, turning it into a vehicle for the rise of political irrationalism.<sup>64</sup> Fascism, which would not come to power until 1933, began establishing strong-

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60 Achraimer 2009.

61 Achraimer 2009, p. 308. Scholem mentions membership in the 'German Alpine Club' in police testimony (*Vernehmungsprotokoll vom 8. Juli 1933*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 8). The anti-Semitic split meant that Scholem was able to join the newly-founded German Alpine Club of Berlin. This group formed its own federation together with the 'Donauland' section and a section in Munich.

62 His friend Hans Kaufmann wrote an article about the split in the Alpine Club in the pages of the *Abwehr-Blätter*, a magazine published by the Society for Combatting Anti-Semitism. See Kaufmann 1925.

63 This is confirmed by court testimony given by Dr Hans Kaufmann in 1935, which Betty Scholem later recounted. Although she identifies the location as the 'Kufstein Alps', the identical timing suggests it was the same event. See Betty to Gershom Scholem, 12 March 1935, Scholem 2002, p. 264; Achraimer 2009, p. 309, p. 314. The Friesenberghaus was confiscated in 1938 and transferred to the Berlin section of the German Alpine Club in 1968, as the few surviving members could no longer maintain it. It has served as an 'International Educational Institution against Intolerance and Hate' since 2003; see Zebhauser 2003.

64 In fact, founding members of the Alpine Club loyal to the liberal tradition protested against both growing anti-Semitism as well as aggressive forms of *völkisch* agitation involving the recruitment of far-right activists from outside the group for support; see Zebhauser 2003, p. 298.



FIGURE 28 *German and Austrian Alpine Club sign banning Jewish hikers and members of the liberal 'Donauland' section from entering a mountain hut, circa 1924*

holds throughout public life where it asserted its grotesque racialist fantasies as 'normality' much earlier.

Scholem himself, however, does not mention the moral abysses of Alpinism in his writings. On the contrary – he regarded the mountains as a protective fortress against life's political and professional impertinences. Together with climbing partners like lawyer Dr Hans Kaufmann, Scholem escaped the problems of the real world.<sup>65</sup> Numerous pictures have survived in Werner's private photo album Emmy managed to smuggle into exile, all of which are meticulously labelled in Werner's handwriting. In the photographs, erstwhile Reichstag deputy Scholem brandishes a hiking stick and poses in a loose jacket in front of an Alpine panorama. A picnic in the woods and group photos exhibit a striking resemblance to the picture of the Workers' Youth hiking trip in 1913, of which a photograph also survives. Scholem is twice seen climbing

65 Kaufmann served as Scholem's lawyer for a time after 1933, and a letter from Betty describes the duo's connection through the Alpine Club; Betty Scholem to Gershom Scholem, 27 June 1933 and 12 March 1935, Scholem 2002, p. 239 and p. 264.

a tree like a little boy. The most impressive picture captures Scholem on the summit of a mountain in Saxon Switzerland over the Whitsuntide weekend of 1929. An exhausted but triumphant Werner Scholem raises his fist and grins at the world – in no other picture does he appear so unrestrained and joyful. ‘I’m really only alive during the summer, when I can go climbing. I hope I fall off a cliff somewhere before I turn into an old man’, Werner wrote to his brother, remarking: ‘I would recommend you become a climber as well, for you also have rock walls down there, do you not? You could thus die handsomely before you get fat.’<sup>66</sup>

Scholem’s retreats into nature provided him with him a brief respite from his legal studies and the cultivation of a bourgeois existence he had always loathed. The climbing pictures appear less stiff than the few photographs of Scholem and his daughters. In the former he wears a hiking outfit, in the latter his Sunday best and tie – a broad smile on the mountain summit, a faint smirk on the garden bench. He loved his wife and children nonetheless, and their forced separation from 1933 onwards plunged him into a severe existential crisis. His letters from prison deal almost exclusively with family matters. Her father’s distance aside, Renee Goddard also tells of affection and gifts from Werner: plums while she recuperated in hospital, a doll, an Easter bunny made of marzipan – small gestures that have survived in her memories.<sup>67</sup> Although torn between filial attachment and a desire to escape it all, Werner never considered abandoning his family. While Erich and Gershom both went through a divorce, Emmy and Werner stayed together despite the many difficulties they encountered.

Few historical documents have survived that could provide a glimpse into their everyday marital life; private and intimate matters were omitted in letters, and very few were written prior to 1933 at all, as the two saw each other on a daily basis. Their relationship nevertheless became the subject of extensive literary speculation, with much written about free love and extramarital affairs. Arkadi Maslow would take these speculations the furthest in his aforementioned novel, *Die Tochter des Generals*. A great deal of the story’s suspense derives from a politically charged affair Scholem’s alter ego Gerhard Alkan conducts with the daughter of an influential family. Maslow, who of course knew Scholem quite well, spared no details in his literary treatment, assigning the novel’s hero and his wife ‘Elly’ a libertine and free-wheeling open relationship. The literary Werner Scholem fathers a child in Moscow, while his wife under-

66 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 23 March 1931, NLI Jerusalem.

67 Interviews with Renee Goddard on 8 October 2009 and 29 May 2011, Hanover.



FIGURE 29 *'Climbing Tour in the Saxon Rocky Mountains; Whitsun 1929 (Titled by Werner Scholem himself)*

goes several abortions in Berlin. He is particularly fond of blond stenotypists, whom he adds to his daily itinerary after selecting them from his notebook, and is prone to dictate shorthand notes after committing the love act, while

Elly has an 'intolerable penchant for the sentimental, for moonlight, Luneburg moorland sheep, and chaste phrases'.<sup>68</sup> At night, the two cuddle in their marital bed picking apart their various affairs and concluding that they both like each other best after all. Maslow described this as a kind of infantilism 'that could prove interesting to a psychologist', although the novel ultimately says a great deal more about Maslow's own psyche than it does about the Scholems' married life. Maslow's female characters in particular, for the most part rather naïve and impressionable women, lend the novel a seedy undertone. Groping scenes in a cinema, two naked sisters kissing each other good night in their bedroom – many depictions suggest the author was not entirely capable, despite his undeniable literary eloquence, of separating his characters from his own fantasies. This may be why the motif was a recurring theme in the masculine world of literature. Franz Jung depicts an ironic monologue by Scholem about marital and extramarital relationships, about the biology of glands and the sex drive. What follows is an inevitable affair, albeit one that Scholem is not particularly enthusiastic about.<sup>69</sup> Alexander Kluge takes up the thread and spins a fictional biographer conducting research on Scholem: Hong Tze Fei from Beijing University obtains the names of at least five affairs conducted by Scholem in 1931, 'two of which occurred in the opera house'.<sup>70</sup>

Unfortunately, this biographer from Berlin does not have access to these Chinese sources, perhaps appropriate for the sake of maintaining Scholem's posthumous privacy. That said, sufficient evidence does exist of two affairs in Emmy and Werner's relationship, which played an important role in the tragic escapes and arrests of 1933. These are addressed in the following chapter. Moreover, evidence suggests that although 1933 separated the couple physically, their relationship persisted. The Scholems continued to write each other for as long as they could, and Emmy never remarried despite subsequent relationships. As late as 1967 she declared: 'I do not wish to marry (at 70!), I have become entangled with the name Scholem, and Scholem I shall remain'.<sup>71</sup> She remained faithful to her husband to the very end, at least if the term is separated from a purely sexual meaning.

Within the sexual context, which occupies centre stage in fictionalised depictions of the Scholems, less clarity exists. A statement from his daughter Edith attests to her father's penchant for womankind and also suggests that

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68 Maslow 2011, p. 23 ff.

69 Jung 1997, here p. 219. The affair is also discussed in Hans Magnus Enzenberger's novel *The Silences of Hammerstein*, although with less embellishment.

70 Kluge 2003, p. 26.

71 Emmy to Gershom Scholem, 7 February 1967, NLI Jerusalem.

Emmy generally did not object to such affairs.<sup>72</sup> Notions of open relationships and women's sexual liberation were commonplace within the KPD. Ruth Fischer, for instance, composed a brochure on the 'Sexual Ethics of Communism', in which the institution of marriage was rejected as mere 'frills and furbelows of religion and ethics'.<sup>73</sup> Emmy and Werner were surely familiar with these and similar texts, although it remains unknown to what extent they served as inspiration. Renee Goddard hints that her mother tolerated Werner's extramarital affairs, but admits in the same breath that Emmy never really spoke much about the past, let alone mentioned names.<sup>74</sup> Susanna Capon, daughter of Edith Scholem, reports that Emmy had a number of admirers surrounding her well into old age.<sup>75</sup>

The only proven fact in this regard is that Emmy Scholem received a contraceptive coil in 1928. Conceived as an emancipative measure, the step simultaneously reinforced existing gender relations, as contraception remained a woman's issue and a woman's concern. Emmy's body would bear the consequences of pregnancy, while now it endured the consequences of contraception as well, for the procedure lead to dangerous complications. Betty Scholem advised her daughter-in-law on several occasions to consult her sister Käthe Schiepan regarding the 'contraception thing'.<sup>76</sup> Schiepan had studied medicine abroad and opened her own doctor's practice in Berlin in 1906, one of the first woman resident physicians in German history.<sup>77</sup> Emmy, however, chose to confide in the KPD's doctors, which infuriated Betty: 'She went to some man again and only afterwards to Käte, half-dead, who only admitted her for my sake'.<sup>78</sup> Solidarity with the men of the KPD was more important to Emmy than solidarity with the women of the family, something Betty could not comprehend. Though she sympathised with Emmy, she often had trouble developing a real

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72 Emmy was only opposed to Werner's relationship with Marie Luise von Hammerstein, Edith Capon claims that this was due to the high position of her father, which could become dangerous for Werner; Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, circa 1988; more in the section 'The Hammerstein Case – Novels and Realities'.

73 Friedländer 1920 [= Ruth Fischer, RH]. See also Keßler 2013a, p. 52 f.; Reinhardt 1992, pp. 17–28.

74 Goddard 2008.

75 Interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013. Love letters to Emmy, such as one from Isidor Aufseher in 1946, survive, but all of them postdate Werner's death; see *Nachlass Emmy Scholem IPW Hannover*.

76 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 18 September 1928, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 177 f.

77 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 9 July 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 241.

78 Ibid.

connection to her.<sup>79</sup> Except for where life and death were concerned, neither Betty nor Werner and Emmy mentioned their love lives in written correspondence.

What, then, remains of Werner Scholem, the private figure? He strived to be part of the political vanguard, but remained a man of his time as far as his personal life was concerned. Fervently dedicated to his career, his wife and children were often little more than an afterthought, and the family's primary role was to provide him with moral support. The open relationship between the two, of which only fragments of evidence exist, did little to change this more general relation. Time and again, Emmy had to fight for her personal freedom. The Scholem children, then, stood between two parents not particularly inclined to sacrifice much of their own lives for the next generation's sake. The extended family, from Werner's brothers to Emmy's parents, were crucial in filling this gap. Nevertheless, Werner was also expected to contribute from time to time. He pursued his own projects with Emmy's support for almost ten years, but was thrown back into the traditional male breadwinner role after this phase concluded. Werner desperately needed to find employment in order to feed his family.

### Life as a Lawyer

'I decided to take up studying law, hoping to become a lawyer. From Easter 1927 I studied at the University of Berlin.'<sup>80</sup> This was Werner's account of the new chapter in his life, which began even before he left the Reichstag. Ten years prior, he had dismissed the thought of studying law as '*nebbich*', but was now forced to change course against his better judgement.<sup>81</sup> He studied at the Friedrich Wilhelm University, today's Humboldt University, on the grand Unter den Linden boulevard in the heart of Berlin where Karl Marx once discovered philosophy and debated Young Hegelians about the world spirit and social transformation. Yet Werner found no spiritual awakening in the university's storied halls: 'As I was already in my mid-30s at the time, the whole adjustment to studying, combined with the rather devastating collapse of my world view,

79 Betty attributed this to Emmy's Christian background and the 'other way of thinking' this entailed, as well as her low level of education, see *ibid*.

80 'Vernehmungprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 8. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Bd 8.

81 'Some insist that I should switch to law – *nebbich!*', Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 23 June 1916, NLI Jerusalem.

caused me quite some difficulties', he wrote in retrospect.<sup>82</sup> Betty was unsure of his prospects as well: 'He wants to study law and the boys want to help him do so, but will he manage?! With his pessimism, his low self-confidence and his well-known name, it is *not* certain that he will accomplish his goal'.<sup>83</sup> Werner did not conceal these difficulties. In a letter to his brother, he admitted that he was not very talented in 'actual civil law' and viewed the whole ordeal as 'merely a degree to earn my daily bread, not a matter of the heart'.<sup>84</sup> Emmy and Betty also received pessimistic reports from Werner about university on a regular basis. Betty was reminded of Werner as a school boy: 'After he whined to me for years that he would never pass the *Einjährige*, which he of course did eventually manage, only to fall back into the complaining during his *Abitur*, now the whole thing is starting all over again with regard to his legal clerkship. I really feel sorry for his wife, as I do for Werner as well of course; I believe it is quite the challenge to start law studies at age 32, especially with the exams being more of a gamble than in other departments'.<sup>85</sup>

Gershom, to whom these lines were addressed, sought to give his brother encouragement. Despite Werner's 'barely sufficient' marks, Gershom considered a 'mature age [...] in many ways an advantage as far as university studies are concerned. I remember from my own time at university that the people who began their studies later excelled in many aspects'.<sup>86</sup> The two brothers in a way now competed for Betty's favour: whereas before only Gershom had sent wish lists of sought-after books to his mother, Werner's literature requests now added to the pile.<sup>87</sup> Emmy's income alone was insufficient to finance his studies, which included both tuition fees as well as books and other supplies. Betty stepped in, and continued to contribute funds even after the Scholem print shop was dealt a heavy blow by the world economic crisis. In 1931, she wrote: 'Whatever I do have I'll use to help Werner, who has been pulled into all of this'.<sup>88</sup> Werner had already received a portion of his inheritance from his father's business. Although Arthur had left the family with, as Gershom put it, a 'will like a feudal knight', he had been unable to disinherit his son

82 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 8. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Bd 8.

83 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 7 December 1926, Scholem Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 152.

84 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 23 March 1931, NLI Jerusalem.

85 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 17 July 1928, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 174.

86 Gershom to Betty Scholem, 6 September 1928, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 176.

87 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 18 September 1928, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 178.

88 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 28 July 1931, Scholem 2002, p. 193.



entirely. Legal stipulations and intra-family solidarity prevented this,<sup>89</sup> making Scholem's material situation at least halfway secure.

But how was Werner to adapt to the academic milieu he had once derided as a hotbed of right-wing student corps and their 'barbaric mindset'? By the late 1920s, these 'barbaric' sentiments thrived on campus as never before.<sup>90</sup> The universities were overcrowded: democratic reforms had greatly expanded access to higher education, but neither facilities nor staff had been expanded to match this development since the Kaiserreich. *Völkisch* groups began blaming the influx of 'Galician', that is, Jewish, students for this institutional congestion in the early 1920s, and demanded that their numbers be limited by a 'numerus clausus'.<sup>91</sup> A branch of the National Socialist German Students' League [*Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*, NSDStB] existed at the University of Berlin as early as 1926, but counted barely 30 members by the end of that year.<sup>92</sup> This was not much considering that 13,000 students attended the university. The dominant groups were the corps and student fraternities. Although they often harboured anti-Semitic views, their calls for special laws against Jewish students remained propaganda and were largely ignored by those in charge. In fact, independent Minister of Cultural Affairs Carl Heinrich Becker furthered efforts to democratise the universities. Scholem's friend Arthur Rosenberg was among those who benefited from this, allowed to return to lecturing as a professor of ancient history. The Minister of Cultural Affairs even began searching for a professorial position for him in 1930, in the face of fierce resistance from the university. The board of evaluators considered him 'unworthy' of professorial tenure and attested a 'lack of scientific qualification' on his part.<sup>93</sup> Rosenberg eventually received an appointment, but was not allowed to lecture on modern history. As was so often the case, the old authorities managed to dilute democratic reforms through formalities and institutional blockades.

While Rosenberg was compelled to deal with scholars of ancient history, Werner dedicated himself to law. He was fortunate enough to find two aca-

89 The comment on Werner's inheritance is found in a letter from Gershom, who was concerned about his own portion following the collapse of the Danat-Bank in 1931, see Gershom to Betty Scholem, 5 August 1931, Scholem 2002, p. 195.

90 Grüttner 1995, p. 19 ff.

91 'Numerus clausus' means approximately 'limited number' in Latin. The *völkisch* demand for a numerus clausus for Jewish students is not the same numerus clausus, common at German universities today, that restricts students from studying certain subjects based on secondary school performance.

92 Reschke 2011. On the Nazi student organisation see Faust 1975, Giles 1985, Grüttner 1995.

93 Keßler 2003, p. 152 f.

dem teachers, Martin Wolff and Heinrich Triepel, who appreciated his efforts despite their political differences.<sup>94</sup> Triepel was a member of the nationalist DNVP, but opposed its anti-Semitic wing around Alfred Hugenberg and would ultimately leave the party in protest in 1930. At the time of Scholem's enrolment, he was acting vice chancellor of the University of Berlin and enjoyed considerable prestige as an expert in international law.<sup>95</sup> Martin Wolff, the son of a Jewish merchant family similar to Scholem's, held the chair for 'Civil Law, Commercial Law, and International Private Law' and was a particularly popular lecturer, whose appearances were said to have been frequently overcrowded.<sup>96</sup> Scholem managed to get on with both of them. Rather than fight for proletarian justice, he now studied the bourgeois legal system, and may indeed have benefited from his 'mature age', setting him apart from other students. Although he remained thoroughly pessimistic well into his second year and complained frequently, he ultimately regained his composure in time to complete a degree through time-consuming and costly diligence. Werner himself wrote about the time around his final examinations: 'Anyone familiar with law studies will know that it is utterly impossible, and particularly so for someone at an advanced age as myself, to actively engage in any other activities simultaneously. Since 1929 I was not only at the university every morning and in the library of the law faculty every afternoon, but beginning in March 1929 I also saw my tutor, the lawyer Dr Neye [...], every day'.<sup>97</sup> A personal photograph captures his daily routine: Scholem stares at the camera with a rather sullen expression, a portrait of Lenin above his desk for motivation – the Russian revolutionary leader had also studied law at one point. 'While cramming', Werner titled the picture.

Werner Scholem passed his first state examination on 2 March 1931, concluding four years of university studies. In a long letter authored shortly afterwards, he thanks his brother Gershom for his well-wishing and recounts:

94 Scholem mentioned both as references, see 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 19. Mai 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1, Bl. 44.

95 Marcon, Strecker, and Randecker 2004.

96 Heinrichs, Franzki, Schmalz, Stolleis 1993, pp. 543–4; as well as the entry on 'Martin Wolff (1872–1953)', Beatson and Zimmermann 2003.

97 *Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 19. Mai 1933*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1, Bl. 44. His tutor Walther Neye (1901–89) had established a practice of his own on Kurfürstendamm in 1928. He joined the NSDAP in 1933, but managed to hide this fact after 1945 and served as rector of the Humboldt University from 1952–7. See Kleibert 2009.

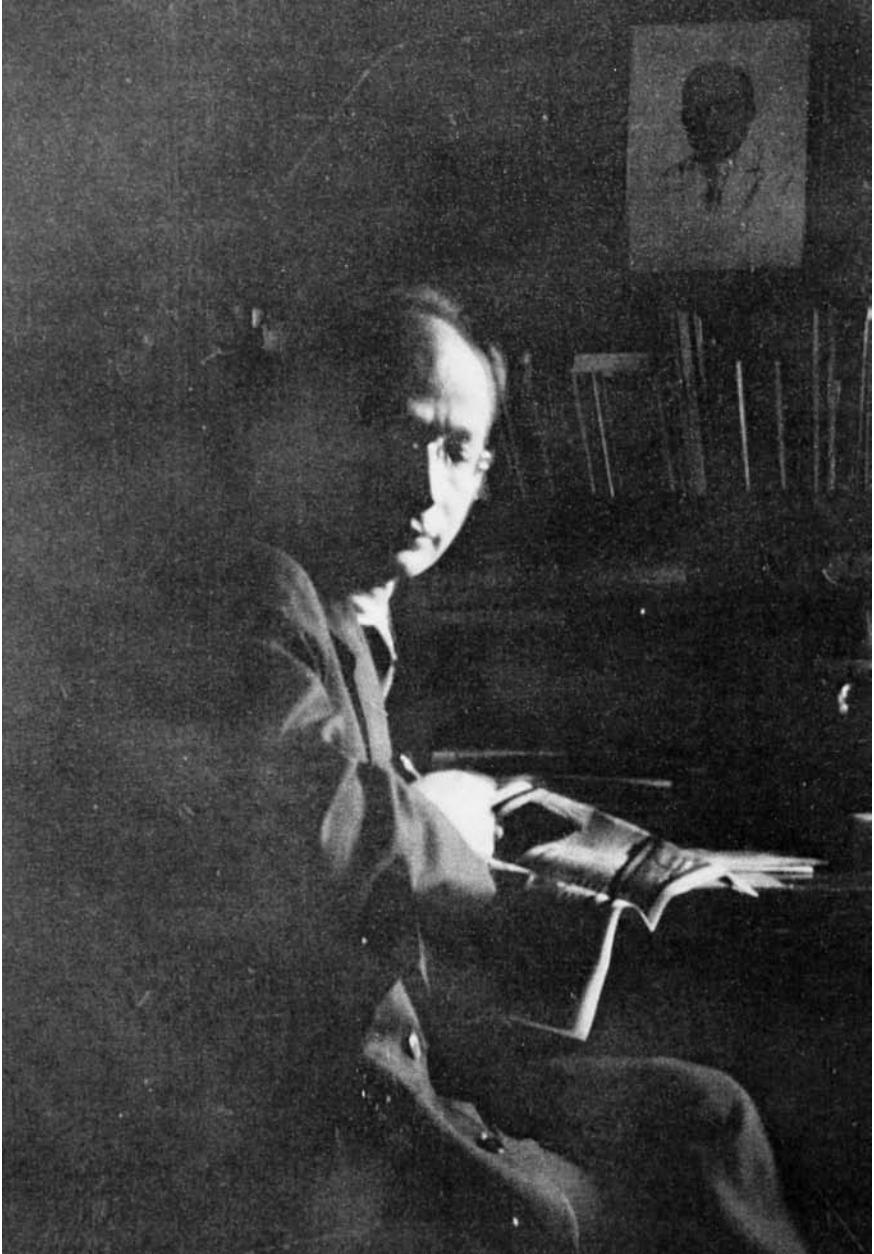


FIGURE 30 *'While cramming', circa 1927–31*

Thank you for your good wishes, which probably contained, as did those of all my other friends, a slight irony. Well, what can one do? The study course was certainly no picnic for me, and I most likely had to work a lot more than the average student. The sorcery of examination, which took no less than half a year, was especially terrible. That is where 3/5 of all candidates fail their clerk exams, compensating for the lack of a numerus clausus. [...] But it's all over now. I did very well in my oral exam, as I was mainly examined on the subject of ancient Roman matrimonial law – a rather irrelevant matter with regard to a lawyer's daily practice, but, all the same, very decorative for an exam. Besides, my examiners included Professor August Müller, former undersecretary of the Noske socialists under Wilhelm II, and now an economist. He asked me a heap of questions on national economics, to which I responded well. Whenever he came across something I was not too familiar with, he ended his questions, stating: 'Well, you know that anyway from your practice'. He probably didn't know those things himself.<sup>98</sup>

Werner began his judicial clerkship immediately after his exams, a mandatory three-year training period including placements with lawyers, courts and other authorities. Only afterwards would he be allowed to practice as a lawyer. He wrote to Gershom:

So now I am a law clerk and have taken up my new position today. For once I have stayed in Berlin, being married and all, having been assigned to the district court [*Amtsgericht*] in Pankow (!! ) for the initial 6 months. My appointment was somewhat delayed, because prior to that I had responded to the court of appeal's inquiry as to whether I had any kind of previous convictions by stating that based on the national amnesty law of 1928 I was 'without previous convictions'! They all probably took a good look at my record following this, but found nothing, as my previous record has in fact really been deleted. So it is possible to get into exalted positions after all. Today I began working as a deed clerk for the department of civil trials in Pankow. This will continue for another 3 years, before I can finally

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98 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 23 March 1931, NLI Jerusalem. August Müller (1873–1946) became State Secretary [*Staatssekretär*] in the Reich Economic Office in November 1918, which roughly corresponded to the position of a minister. He had already served as State Undersecretary in the Office of War Provisions in 1916, and was thereby the first Social Democrat to formally occupy a government post. He became a senior lecturer at the University of Berlin in 1920 and joined the DDP in 1925. See Zimmermann 1998.

complete my assessor exam, after which I will of course not start working as a judge, but as a lawyer.<sup>99</sup>

Persecuted and harassed by the German judiciary since 1917, Werner Scholem now unexpectedly became a representative of the law himself. The irony of this predicament was not lost on him, but also did not stop him: in October 1931 he transferred to the district court in Berlin's Mitte district.<sup>100</sup> He could not stay away from politics entirely, however, announcing to Gershom his intention to become active for the movement once again, this time as a lawyer: 'Then politics will of course begin once more, as I have by no means defected to the bourgeoisie – neither the German nor the English one (I beg your pardon!!). I expect that in 3 to 4 years, conditions here will necessitate a re-orientation on the part of the workers' movement anyway. But then again, it is a real advantage to not be a party official anymore.'<sup>101</sup>

Werner's hint at the 'English bourgeoisie' was a jab at Gershom, implying that the Jewish settlers in British Palestine were protected by the imperialist power. Werner had abandoned Zionism once and for all, and still hoped for a change in the labour movement's fortunes. Indeed, the political situation cried out for re-orientation. The world economic crisis, which almost ruined the Scholem family business in 1931, had engulfed the entire republic. Little remained of the 'Roaring Twenties' by the time Werner left university. The Weimar Republic was shaken to its very foundations to a degree unseen since the crisis of 1923, which many had since tried to forget. The crisis fuelled political radicalisation and created hundreds of thousands of new Communists, but their old political adversaries gained ground as well. Hitler and his party, the danger of which Scholem had foreseen in 1923, became the largest mass movement in the far-right camp.

In fact, one of the Nazi movement's first major breakthroughs at the University of Berlin took place during Werner's time of enrolment. By 1929, Berlin's initially tiny National Socialist student group had grown to 170 members. When Scholem completed his studies in 1931, the figure had doubled to 320 active supporters.<sup>102</sup> This explosive growth was encouraged by a change in the organisation's leadership. Baldur von Schirach, the 'Student Group Führer' from Munich, shifted the League, hitherto known for a 'proletarian' aesthetic,

99 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 23 March 1931, NLI Jerusalem.

100 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 15 September 1931, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 252.

101 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 23 March 1931, NLI Jerusalem.

102 Reschke 2011, p. 21.

towards the fencing fraternities and student organisations. After all, no substantial ideological differences existed between the Nazis and the corps students, and all that was needed were some concessions to the elitist habitus for the centralised Nazi student federation to establish leadership over the locally fragmented fraternities.<sup>103</sup> After receiving 15 percent of the vote in the student administration elections at the University of Berlin in 1928, the Nazis rose to 23 percent in 1929, prompting a suspension of the elections the following year – to no avail, for as early as 1931 the Nazi list already had 64 percent of the vote.<sup>104</sup> That same year, the Nazis gained a majority in the German Student Union [*Deutsche Studentenschaft*], the umbrella federation of all student administrations.<sup>105</sup> This landslide victory ensured the Nazis' political hegemony among Germany's university students a full two years prior to their national assumption of power. Scholem's warnings against the reactionary potential of German universities in the 1920s had proven accurate. In fact, the students had even overtaken their reactionary professors from the right, ensuring that timid attempts to reform the system from above would fail miserably.

Scholem, however, declined to comment on the unprecedented collapse of academic freedom occurring before his eyes. Did he perhaps underestimate the Nazi danger after all? If we rely on Arkadi Maslow's novel, the Nazis treated him as a person commanding respect: 'The students who were Nazis [...] did not dare speak to him as with an "*Untermensch*", but did so as they would to a person of higher-ranking authority, and in some cases they addressed him as a superior and dangerous – and thus esteemed – adversary'.<sup>106</sup> Could this literary depiction be accurate? It may well have been the case that Werner, a veteran of World War I, evoked a certain sense of awe among the younger Nazis. Most of them had only heard of the war in school, missing the opportunity to prove their manhood by a few short years. Either way, a degree of respect from some National Socialist students would offer little protection over the medium term. Nazis unfurled the swastika from the university balcony in January 1932, assaulting their Jewish peers and blocking them from entering lecture halls.<sup>107</sup> The university administration intervened in such cases for the time being, but it would not be long before this became impossible as well.

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103 Grüttner 1995, p. 21.

104 Reschke 2011, p. 21.

105 Walter Lienau, a Nazi, was elected chairman in July 1931; see Grüttner 1995, p. 19, as well as the table of election results in the annex.

106 Maslow 2011, p. 38.

107 Reschke 2011, p. 23.

Werner for his part did not cling to university life. To him it was a hotbed of reaction, far from a reliable indicator of the situation in the rest of the country. Gershom, who visited Berlin in the autumn of 1932, summarised Werner's views at the time: 'The severe economic crisis since 1929 reignited the hopes of a left revolution in Germany in him, and when I visited him in Berlin in 1932 he was indeed expecting it. Either the revolution will come, he said, or the rule of barbarism will'.<sup>108</sup> It would be the last time the two brothers saw each other. Gershom later commented that Werner had been 'blind to his personal situation', despite his deep knowledge of the political crisis. Gershom recalls him remarking that 'they won't harm me – after all, I'm a veteran who was wounded in action'.<sup>109</sup> For Gershom himself this represented a degree of 'naïveté that went beyond my comprehension'. That said, the chaotic situation in Berlin in 1932 must have appeared anything but decided. The KPD was recruiting hundreds of thousands of new members while the Nazis began making inroads among sections of the working class. It was only a matter of time before one of these forces would bring the ongoing crisis to an end. The organisational split in the labour movement was all that prevented it from pushing back the National Socialist movement, which hardly had any opponents within the institutions of the state, as most conservative civil servants sympathised with the radical right. The SPD refused to accept this reality and continued to reject any cooperation with the Communists, whom they regarded as enemies of the state and left extremists, calling them 'Kozis', the Nazis of the left.<sup>110</sup> The KPD did its share to confirm this perception as well, having returned to the 'ultra-left' course once drafted by Scholem himself in the 1920s. The KPD now viewed the SPD as the main enemy, even describing Social Democrats as 'social fascists'.<sup>111</sup> Rather than uniting to fight the real Nazis, the two workers' parties quarrelled and called each other fascists.<sup>112</sup> In the meantime, Werner stood aside from this battle, despite his past as an outspoken anti-fascist.

He intended to complete his training before returning to politics, but sensed by late 1932 that little time remained to change things for the better. He warned his brother in gloomy tones: 'The night of the long knives has been postponed for now, but something will happen here next year. The Nazis will eventually

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108 Scholem 1997, p. 181.

109 Ibid.

110 See K.L. Gerstorff, 'Eiserne Rote Front', *Die Weltbühne*, 5 July 1932. The article also points out, however, that these slogans enjoyed little support among the rank and file, and that in Berlin SPD and KPD members worked together against the Nazis.

111 Ibid; see also Weber 1969b, p. 239 ff.

112 See Weber 1982.

come to power. I hope I'll be away and climbing then. You'll certainly have many visitors from Berlin in that case, Bibi, you're both a hope and a relationship. Not too much can happen to me, as I have been accustomed to abstaining from worldly goods for 20 years'.<sup>113</sup>

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113 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 14 November 1932, NLI Jerusalem.



## The Triumph of Barbarism (1933–40)

### The Arrest

Werner's grim premonition came true on 30 January 1933. Adolf Hitler, whose movement Scholem had denounced, mocked, and warned against for a decade, was appointed Chancellor of the Reich by ageing Field Marshal Hindenburg. The KPD viewed this appointment as a brief interlude, just another improvised political manoeuvre that would soon bring about the collapse of the whole rotten system, optimistically predicting: 'After Hitler, us'.

This would prove to be a dangerous illusion, as Hitler immediately went about smashing any potential organised resistance. The SA was promptly declared an auxiliary police, legalising street terror against the labour movement. Hitler had always been very clear about who his most dangerous adversaries were, namely Jews and Marxists, but many viewed his extremism as mere dramatic phrase-mongering. Even Werner's own family underestimated the Nazi danger for quite some time – Betty Scholem would entertain the notion of waiting out Nazi rule in Germany as late as 1935.<sup>1</sup> She cited her Italian vacation in 1930, where Jews remained by and large safe eight years after the establishment of a fascist dictatorship. In fact, a 'kind police inspector' had even refunded her visitor's tax after her purse was stolen to compensate her for the inconvenience.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, the German fascists behaved quite differently towards Jews, but would they really make Jewish life impossible? Even Werner thought, in spite of his pessimism, that he would not 'face too much harm'. He only worried about the fate of his 'worldly goods', by which he meant the bourgeois career he had only reluctantly taken up to begin with.

Werner Scholem was not climbing a mountain, but rather ill in bed at the time of Hitler's seizure of power. Betty wrote in early February 1933: 'The flu is going around, and "Heil Hitler" can be heard all over the market. [...]

1 She would write Gershom from Merano in mid-1935: 'You're right, we don't view things at home the right way! Because we are not yet being beaten to death, or deported within 24 hours to the tune of "but your money stays here", we think to ourselves, with a certain sense of inertia, that all will turn out fine eventually', Betty to Gershom Scholem, 27 April 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 386.

2 See Betty to Gershom Scholem, 28 October 1930, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 224 ff., as well as his response from 30 October, Scholem 2002, p. 189.

Werner was in bed for a whole 8 days and did not improve whatsoever.<sup>3</sup> It was the anniversary of Arthur Scholem's death, and Betty paid a visit – through 'driving snow, gales and the freezing cold' – to Arthur's grave in Weißensee. Her thoughts dwelled on the past as she pondered death and old age. She did not mention political changes much, leaving it to Werner to express these fears after recuperating. After visiting him, Betty wrote: 'His beloved jeremiads are now in full swing. He considers the political situation to be extremely grave, and draws from it the most disastrous conclusions for himself. If he were still a member of the party, it would certainly be even worse for him! I had a good time in spite of this doom and gloom. The stuffed squabs were delicious'.<sup>4</sup>

A month after Hitler's inauguration, it gradually became clear that Werner had been too optimistic. In the night of 27–28 February, the Reichstag building went up in flames – a fiery symbolic end to the republic. '[S]omething so idiotic you can even imagine it was a contracted job', Betty wrote, reflecting widespread mistrust of the officially circulated version that the fire was set by a Communist arsonist.<sup>5</sup> Whoever set the Reichstag on fire, the Nazi regime benefited from it greatly. An unprecedented wave of arrests was set in motion the following night, sweeping up Werner Scholem with it.

Betty wrote Gershom the very next morning to inform him of what had happened in Klopstockstraße: 'Early this morning at around 4:45 a guard and two others appeared, and, as no one opened the door when they rang, they opened it with a picklock. Lovely, isn't it? They searched the house for an hour, even the child's room. They found *nothing*, for the simple reason that Werner did not have anything forbidden in the apartment. But they had orders, so they took him with them anyway'.<sup>6</sup>

Emmy was unsure what to do. Werner's office was immediately informed, and someone had to organise him a lawyer. As Betty wrote, however, 'both Jews and Communists are more or less out of the question if we're to accomplish anything'.<sup>7</sup> No one else could be found to take the case, and they ended up hiring Kurt Rosenfeld, the same Jewish socialist who had defended Werner in 1921. Emmy remarked in this regard: 'At that time, however, the old civil servants were all still in their former positions and in the various administrative

3 See Betty to Gershom Scholem, 7 February 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 273 f.

4 See Betty to Gershom Scholem, 14 February 1933, in Scholem 2002, p. 217.

5 See Betty to Gershom Scholem, 28 February 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 219. The historical controversy around who actually committed the deed remains unresolved, for an overview see Giebeler 2010.

6 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 28 February 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 220.

7 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 28 February 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 278 f.

bodies, and former Prussian Minister of Justice and Member of the Reichstag, Dr Kurt Rosenfeld, [...] was thus able to successfully intervene on behalf of my husband and secure his release after about one week of police custody'.<sup>8</sup> Although Werner's arrest had obviously been the result of a specific order, the Nazi hold on power was not yet stable enough to eliminate the last vestiges of legality. On 5 March 1933, the day of the dying republic's last national elections, Werner was released. Back home at his mother's kitchen table he was rather relaxed: 'Werner was very composed and didn't understand our excitement in the least. He said that it's happened before and that he'd experienced far worse things during four years of war'.<sup>9</sup> Emmy, by contrast, was utterly 'disturbed and distraught'. She had rushed back and forth between police headquarters and the Moabit prison in search of him, but was not even allowed to leave him some clothes to sleep in. Terrified, she dared not return to their apartment and stayed with friends for several nights.<sup>10</sup>

Werner, on the other hand, was hardly concerned with his personal safety; instead he was more worried about the worthlessness of his hard-earned degree under the Nazis. As Betty explained, '[l]awyers and teachers have it the worst: they can be completely barred from their professions'.<sup>11</sup> Her anxiety would be proven justified just two weeks later: the Nazi government introduced the 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service' on 7 April, banning Jews from all forms of employment in the state apparatus – including Werner's position as a legal clerk. One last glimmer of hope was the exception for veterans of the First World War, the so-called '*Frontkämpferprivileg*' which Hindenburg had insisted upon. According to a letter Emmy wrote to Gershom, Werner placed his hopes in this clause for quite some time: 'He is so deeply crushed by our adversity, [...] he really believed up to the very end that as a war veteran he would be able to become a lawyer after all. He buries his hopes only all too reluctantly'.<sup>12</sup> Given his past political affiliations, Werner could hardly prove his readiness to 'defend the national state wholeheartedly at all times', as the law required. It took effect in April 1933; Werner was discharged from judicial service on 1 August 1933.<sup>13</sup>

8 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorganges Werner Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungssakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDS. II W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

9 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 5 March 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 221.

10 Ibid.

11 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 19 March 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 284; Scholem 2002, p. 222.

12 Emmy to Gershom Scholem, 4 October 1933, NLI Jerusalem.

13 'Upon expiration of 31 August 1933 followed his release from judicial service in compliance

It was not his arrest, but rather the prospect of being blacklisted that now drove Werner to contemplate emigration. He prolonged his next hiking trip by a few days to visit Prague, where he planned to look into the possibility of earning a doctorate at the German University.<sup>14</sup> Although unable to work as a lawyer abroad, he could study and earn a doctoral degree that might later be recognised in Germany, after the Nazis had left the government. Scholem hoped to wait out the Nazi's reign somewhere beyond their reach. In Prague, he visited a friend named Anton Goldberg, who had recently gone into exile. In a letter to Gershom, Goldberg reports he had 'strongly encouraged' Werner 'to stay and not tempt his fate. There was no objective reason for him to go back, and all the more so for him to stay. But he couldn't be persuaded'.<sup>15</sup>

Others escaped as quickly as possible. In March 1933, Werner introduced his old comrade Ruth Fischer to a colleague from the left-wing Friends of Nature [*Naturfreunde*] association, a branch of the labour movement that organised affordable hiking expeditions for the urban working class. He would take her across the 'green border' to Czechia.<sup>16</sup> As a climber, Werner knew the border region well and could have fled without a passport, but simply did not see the need to leave Germany in such a rush. In his eyes, the Nazis threatened his career but not his life, and he planned to delay a possible emigration until finding more lucrative prospects. Werner also sent inquiries to several Swiss universities, and due to a letter of recommendation stood a good chance of being accepted.<sup>17</sup> 'In contrast to his typical pessimism, he was hopeful', as Betty reported from her visit to the Klopstockstraße shortly afterwards.<sup>18</sup> It was Saturday, 22 April 1933. Werner planned to travel to Switzerland to prepare his

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with article 2 of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service in the area of judicial administration from 7 April 1933 (RGBl. I, page 175) as decreed by the Prussian Minister of Justice on 14 August 1933 II g z, 8/8; 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorganges Werner Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

14 *Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 19. Mai 1933*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1, Blatt 44.

15 Anton Goldberg to Gershom Scholem, 31 October 1933, NLI Jerusalem.

16 Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 531.

17 Emmy reported in a deposition that Werner had visited Switzerland during the journey to Prague, while Betty only mentioned written correspondence and a planned trip. This may be a misunderstanding related to Werner's trip to Saxon Switzerland after his stay in Prague. See *Vernehmungsprotokoll Emmy Scholem vom 16. Mai 1933*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1, Bl. 37–40; as well as Betty to Gershom Scholem, 25 April 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 230.

18 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 25 April 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 230.

emigration the very next day.<sup>19</sup> After his mother had returned home, Werner left his apartment one last time to receive Emmy at the station, who was returning from a business trip around eleven o'clock in the evening.<sup>20</sup> They went back to the apartment, where their daughters Edith and Renate awaited them. Edith would later recall that a worried Emmy did not want to spend the night at home, but Werner simply laughed off his wife's concerns.<sup>21</sup> The family went to bed. What happened next would etch itself into the daughters' memories like nothing else in their lives ever had, before or since. Both Renate and Edith, ten and fourteen years old at the time, were able to provide meticulous and detailed reports even decades later, independently of one another yet practically identical, of a night that would fundamentally alter their lives forever.<sup>22</sup>

At half past five in the morning, police knocked on the door once again. They were neither SS nor SA, just ordinary police. Emmy opened the door while Werner hid in the bedroom. Perhaps they were unaware of his presence? A pretext was quickly invented to send Edith into the room where he waited. The girl warned her father not to come out under any circumstances. Meanwhile, Emmy spoke with the officers, who were growing increasingly agitated. They falsely assumed that Werner had already escaped and sought to find out more about his current whereabouts, not even bothering to search the apartment.<sup>23</sup> Instead, they harassed Emmy with crude, sexual jokes in front of her daughters and hounded her relentlessly about Werner's location. Ten-year-old Renate looked on helplessly, unable to comprehend the scene unfolding before her

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19 His departure was scheduled for Sunday afternoon. See Betty to Gershom Scholem, 25 April 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 230. The trip is also mentioned in a letter from Gershom Scholem to Walter Benjamin, 4 May 1933, Scholem 1992, p. 42.

20 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 25 April 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 230.

21 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, circa 1988, see also the following footnote. Emmy reported a similar scene, see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 1 October 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 398.

22 The depiction of Scholem's arrest is based on interviews with Renee Goddard and Hanno Fry on 29 May 2011 and 8 October 2009 in Hanover, as well as the filmed 2008 interview *Manche Toten sind nicht tot – Renee Goddard über ihren Vater, den legendären Sozialisten Werner Scholem*. Betty Scholem also reported several details, probably based on what she heard from Renate Scholem and the family maid, see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 25 April 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 230. A further description is provided by Werner's daughter Edith Capon, née Scholem. There exists only one documented instance of her speaking about her past, a private audio recording made with her friend, director Frith Banbury, which will be cited in the following as 'Interview with Edith Capon ca. 1988'.

23 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 23 October 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 341.

eyes. Only years later would she ask herself: what did the policemen want? Was the police's appearance related to the Nazi ideology of 'racial defilement'? All she can recall today is disgust, incomprehension and her mother's words, 'not in front of the children!'<sup>24</sup>

As the insults grew increasingly aggressive, Werner eventually lost his temper. Throwing caution to the wind, he stepped out of the bedroom and confronted the officers: 'What do you want from my wife?'<sup>25</sup> The police were perplexed, not having orders as to what to do should they encounter Scholem. 'Shall we bring him?', they asked their superiors on the telephone.<sup>26</sup> This line echoes in Renee's memory even today: the response was affirmative, he was to be taken. Werner, and this time Emmy as well, were arrested and transported to police headquarters at Alexanderplatz.<sup>27</sup> The daughters remained in the apartment, together with the maid Selma Prause who stood by in shock.

At eight in the morning, Emmy called from the police station: 'Edith should leave', was the message. Taking a small suitcase, the fourteen-year-old girl left the apartment.<sup>28</sup> No one knew where she had gone, assuming and hoping that Emmy had instructed her beforehand. She went into hiding in Hanover and only reappeared in Berlin a week later.<sup>29</sup> She would have to fend for herself later on as well.

When Erich Scholem arrived at the apartment in Klopstockstraße at eleven o'clock, he found only the terrified Renate and the family maid. The child was taken to Betty. After Edith's return, she and Renate visited the apartment again – but an aura of apprehension now emanated from their former home: the Zucker family, Jewish neighbours who had known the girls well, now avoided them out of fear for their own lives.<sup>30</sup> Both daughters then lived with Erich for a while until finding a place to stay in Hanover. Edith was allowed to pay her father a brief visit, but her parents' fate remained unclear. Only rarely were Betty and other family members granted 'permission to speak', meaning ten minutes of monitored conversation with Werner or Emmy, who were

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24 Interview with Renee Goddard and Hanno Fry, 29 May 2011.

25 Ibid.

26 The phone call is also mentioned in a letter from Betty to Gershom Scholem, 23 October 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 341.

27 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorganges Emmy Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

28 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 25 April 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 230.

29 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 1 May 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 232.

30 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 300.

detained in separate facilities.<sup>31</sup> The news delivered in these conversations was usually bad. Emmy suffered from severe biliary colic and was nearing her breaking point.<sup>32</sup> Werner, on the other hand, was more familiar with life inside a prison cell, but times had changed over the last ten years. In 1917, the May Day demonstration had passed by his cell window in Halle, and in Moabit in 1921 the party had supplied him with bail money, a lawyer and even supported him with a solidarity campaign. By 1933, by contrast, Scholem was alone. After chewing him up and spitting him out, the labour movement itself had been smashed to pieces with hardly a whimper. Far from being transformed into a council republic, the German state fell into the hands of socialism's worst enemies. When Gershom was appointed to a professorship in Jerusalem in 1933, Werner congratulated him in a last letter from prison, while simultaneously taking a bleak look at the shattered fragments of his own future:

You have achieved something because you gave up trying to become someone in Germany. If you'd become a professor here in Germany, you might be roaming the world the way some of my friends and law teachers are. [...] Six years of legal studies and internship were entirely in vain. I've thus squandered the most decisive years of my life, without managing to obtain amnesty for my previous political activity. This will remind you of our conversation last year during your visit, when I predicted this would happen, and then was derided by everyone as a 'pessimist'! This only goes to show how little of a pessimist I really was. I was an optimist blinded by rose-coloured glasses, for it never dawned on me that they would make mincemeat even out of retired old hackneys. After leaving the Communist party in 1926, I never could have imagined that anyone would still accuse Emmy and me of high treason. *Nemini par-cetur!*<sup>33</sup>

We've been in for almost half a year now, and I expect it will take as long before we are put on trial at the *Reichsgericht*. Even though we are entirely innocent I see no chance of release anytime in the near future, because some individual whom I've never met in my life is incriminating me to a most adventurous extent. [...] I don't see what my two girls are

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31 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 28 May 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 235.

32 Ibid.

33 Latin, 'No One is Spared!' Werner refers here to the well-known graduation song '*Gaud-eamus igitur*' (So Let Us Rejoice), also known as '*De brevitae vitae*' (On the Shortness of Life).

ever going to do here, just as I am at a loss with regard to my own future job, should I actually be released one day. We will have to emigrate, for the children's sake alone, who are now growing up in 'Aryan' surroundings with Emmy's relatives, which will doubtlessly lead to the most unpleasant consequences given the various prospective laws against Jews and other coloureds. [...] It must be high season for you down there. Whether it is the most noble of people who are now discovering a love for Palestine, I would doubt. Indeed, the mental state of German Jews is in general quite perplexing under these circumstances. The strength of character so often praised in the past during similar episodes in the Middle Ages, seems to have suffered in the same way as our belief.<sup>34</sup>

He signed the letter with 'Your brother Job'. Werner Scholem, who always defined himself as a Communist, was left with only his Jewishness at this late stage in his life. Although his detention was of a political nature, his future was irretrievably destroyed by that same fanatical hatred of Jews that haunted him during the war. For a decade, Scholem fought for a better future together with the Germans, and afterwards spent five years trying to at least be left in peace by them. Now, neither was possible.

### Separate Paths: A Family Falls Apart

Only recently reunited in the wake of Renate's return, Werner and Emmy's arrest would definitively break the Scholem family apart. Renate and Edith stayed with relatives, the parents were detained in separate locations and only allowed to see each other once every two weeks, their letters were subject to censorship.<sup>35</sup> Emmy in particular found the routine insufferable from the outset: 'I was at the police prison at Alexanderplatz, where I was subjected to several very unpleasant "interrogations". My health suffered greatly from this. I was later taken to the women's prison in Barnimstraße [...]. Treatment was significantly better there, and there were no more "interrogations". Next, I was transferred to [...] Alt Moabit Prison, where treatment was normal. During my

34 Werner to Gershom Scholem, 5 October 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 249; Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 334 ff.

35 Werner mentions the bi-weekly visits in a letter from 23 November 1933, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover. Emmy and Werner's permission to write each was revoked in summer 1933, preventing further correspondence until January 1935. See Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 313.



time in detention I developed severe bilious and gastric disorders. I was already in great pain when I first arrived in Moabit, and I have spent part of my time in custody in the sick ward of Moabit Prison'.<sup>36</sup>

Troubling Emmy far more than the violence during interrogations she only hinted at was the utter uncertainty of their predicament. Both were kept in the dark as to their alleged crimes for three weeks. After eleven days, Emmy went so far as to formally request a hearing to find out the reason for her arrest.<sup>37</sup> The police, however, took their time. It was not before 16 and 19 May, respectively, that they were finally questioned and confronted with the charges: accused of attempting to 'subvert' the army with KPD propaganda.<sup>38</sup> The accusations were primarily against Emmy, who was still a KPD member at that point. She now faced what Werner had already endured twice in his life: a criminal trial on charges of high treason.

Thus, by the time she was transferred to Moabit in early June 1933 at the very latest, these proceedings were conducted fully in line with the criminal procedure code. Treatment was, in Emmy's words, 'normal': interrogations were recorded, appeals were taken into consideration, a coroner supervised the whole process.<sup>39</sup> According to court files, the trial was very similar to the case against Werner in 1921. The charge of high treason the same, and the same institutions were involved: Berlin's uniformed police carried out the arrests and interrogations, while the investigation as such was conducted by the Supreme Court [*Reichsgericht*] in Leipzig. Beyond the contents of these files, however,

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36 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorganges Emmy Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

37 'Emmy Scholem an Oberstaatsanwalt der Politischen Abteilung 1a im Polizeipräsidium Berlin, Gesuch um Vernehmung, 3. Mai 33 (Abschrift)', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1.

38 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Werner Scholem vom 17. Mai 1933' and 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Emmy Scholem vom 19. Mai 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1. It remains unclear whether these interrogations are the same ones referred to by Emmy in her 1954 testimony, or if perhaps other attempts to intimidate her occurred beforehand, which seems plausible given the aforementioned sexual harassment by police.

39 Betty dates their transfer from 'protective custody' to pre-trial detention to 7 or 8 June 1933, Betty Scholem to Gershom Scholem, 27 June 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 313. According to her certificate of release, Emmy was transferred to Moabit on 8 June 1933, preventive custody is only mentioned for Werner's first arrest. See 'Entlassungsschein Emmy Scholem', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351, as well as *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1.

things looked much worse. For months, Erich Scholem was not even able to find his brother a lawyer, as Betty reported: ‘Every evening after closing shop, Erich visits attorneys, and every single one turns him down [...]. Werner is outraged at the “cowardly and despicable behaviour” of the attorneys. He’s deeply depressed in particular about a personal friend he was sure would represent him: Dr Kaufmann, the head of the Alpine Hiking Association.’<sup>40</sup> Nobody wanted to defend a Jewish Communist. Without a lawyer, the Scholems could neither view their files nor submit petitions, and were thus completely at the mercy of the authorities. They finally found someone in summer, a lawyer named Braubach who took their money but remained totally inactive for four months. Werner released him from his mandate in December 1933, and took his chances writing a pleading letter to his former law tutor, Walther Neye. But Scholem’s erstwhile teacher had already made his peace with the changing political climate and, having joined the Nazi Party, ignored Scholem’s cry for help.<sup>41</sup> Just when all hope seemed lost, Werner’s old hiking friend Hans Kaufmann changed his mind and agreed to take the case after all.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, he was unable to achieve much for Werner.

After seven long months, an unexpected turn of events finally occurred: Emmy was granted a suspension of her sentence because of her chronic biliary illness: ‘I was conditionally released from custody on 24 November 1933, but had to report to the police several times a week. My husband remained in prison and the charges of high treason against me were sustained. There were also renewed house searches of friends whom I had visited.’<sup>43</sup>

Emmy’s release was thus only a minor relief. The police began to use her as bait. By August 1933, they had even placed Betty Scholem’s apartment under surveillance, which the ageing woman would only learn from friends of Gershom’s.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, repression of the Jewish community in Germany

40 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 27 June 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 313; Scholem 2002, p. 239.

41 See Werner Scholem to Dr Walter Neye, 14 December 1933, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover. Neye was a member of the NSDAP and the National Socialist Association of Legal Professionals, but later denied both in the GDR; see Kleibert 2009.

42 When exactly he took on the case remains unclear. Betty mentions Werner’s ‘friend from the Alpine Association’ for the first time on 7 March 1934, see Scholem 2002, p. 256. See also ‘Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs Emmy Scholem’, *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

43 *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BACh, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1.

44 Gershom to Betty Scholem, 23 August 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 326.

was intensifying. After Jewish civil servants were universally dismissed Jewish doctors were gradually stripped of their professional accreditation, a measure directly affecting Werner's aunt Käthe.<sup>45</sup> The Scholem family, living in constant fear of police persecution and state repression, transferred funds abroad while family members travelled to Czechia or Switzerland just to send a few uncensored letters. Betty summarised the atmosphere in the summer of 1933: 'All of the Scholems are under enormous pressure because of Werner, they all fear being somehow drawn into it all, and they have good reason to do so. We are living in totally unjust times, there are plenty of laws but there is no justice.'<sup>46</sup>

Emmy agreed. Although she had left the prison walls behind, her outlook was bleak: the trials were still pending, Werner languished behind bars, and their family life lay in tatters. Not even the outer shell remained: they were forced to vacate the Klopstockstraße apartment as early as September 1933, when both were still in detention.<sup>47</sup> Emmy's life appeared in free fall: 'When I returned from prison I no longer had a home. [...] I had to find a place to stay at friends' houses, who were then, in return for offering me shelter, rewarded with a search warrant. As I was quite ill at the time, I went to Hanover to stay with my parents in early December 1933 [...] Both my daughters were there as well, living with my sister. I had to go to Berlin from time to time to speak with our lawyer, and twice a month I was allowed to see my husband for a few minutes.'<sup>48</sup> These brief visits were hardly enough to brighten the mood – to Emmy, they merely underscored the hopelessness of their predicament. After much hesitation, she thus took a desperate step: 'Following the urging of my lawyer, Dr Hans Kaufmann, [...] to avoid renewed arrest, and for the sake of my two daughters, and in the hope of being able to work towards my husband's release from abroad, I fled the country in February 1934.'<sup>49</sup>

This came as a shock to Werner, all the more so because he had not heard from her in weeks. Werner's desperation grew by the day; Betty even reports of a veritable breakdown: 'I spoke to Werner yesterday. It's heartbreaking to see how the boy sits and cries. He wails like a child that he has heard nothing from his wife. *We* are supposed to find out where she is! Speaking of which, she could of course write – but she doesn't! The officials have said that her flight has greatly worsened Werner's case. There is no chance he'll be released

45 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 9 July 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 317.

46 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 1 August 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 317.

47 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 18 September 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 328.

48 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs, Emmy Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

49 Ibid.

*before* the trial. He's been sitting in prison for eleven months!<sup>50</sup> Emmy had deliberately kept her mother-in-law in the dark while planning her escape. It was not until late March that she sent a letter with some money hinting at her intentions, although Betty would learn of this only by coincidence.<sup>51</sup> Close relatives brazenly lied to Betty, including her sister Käthe Schiepan.<sup>52</sup> A combination of misunderstandings and the pressures imposed by the situation itself had fostered the notion among Emmy's circle of helpers that Betty was unreliable, and they largely excluded her from discussions.<sup>53</sup>

The weeks of uncertainty drove Werner further into despair. Standing alone with Betty in February 1934 and encountering increasing difficulty paying his lawyer's fees, Werner agreed to the sale of the entire Scholem family estate.<sup>54</sup> Werner later wrote that he 'was in a state in which I became increasingly indifferent to furniture or books'.<sup>55</sup> Werner Scholem was one of many Jews forced to liquidate their worldly possessions, selling off his meticulously assembled library at a significant loss as book prices had reached historic lows.<sup>56</sup> Betty, close to a nervous breakdown herself, organised the affair. She later received an earful of complaints in thanks for her help, for many family letters and other mementos were lost in the sale.<sup>57</sup> A further piece of Werner's life vanished.

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50 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 7 March 1934, Scholem 2002, p. 256.

51 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 20 March 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 354.

52 Emmy to Werner Scholem, 9 January 1935; Werner to Emmy Scholem, 21 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

53 Ibid.

54 The financial troubles stemmed from Werner's lawyer Braubach charging a fee but failing to do any work on Scholem's behalf. In addition, the owner of the firm Gewerka-AG, Dr Wurm, used the opportunity to bilk Emmy out of her shares in the company, which was only reversed after a court trial. See Emmy to Reinhold Scholem, 31 May 1934, as well as 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs Emmy Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

55 Werner to Reinhold Scholem, 2 July 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

56 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 6 March 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 352. Emmy later indicated that the apartment had been robbed. See 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs, Emmy Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

57 Only one photo album survived. Emmy also lost most of her household belongings and many mementos, later writing: 'If I had only had two days to prepare, I would have organised everything myself: apartment, furniture, Dr Wurm, etc., I wouldn't have lost a penny. But as it was I could not and did not want to contact you all, and was resigned to the aid of faithful but utterly incapable individuals, whose good intentions were in some ways made worse by the fact that Werner's mother granted them power of attorney', Emmy

When a letter from Emmy promising relief finally arrived in April 1934, the coroner was on vacation and Werner was not allowed to read it right away – which caused a commotion: ‘The secretaries had already read it; they told Werner the contents and assured him that she wanted to remain faithful to him (!). Then a wild scene broke out. He screamed at the officers and called them inhuman [...]. He ranted and raved to the point where he completely lost his voice. It was painful to watch.’<sup>58</sup> Werner eventually received the letter, but it was followed by another six months of silence during which the two were not permitted to correspond. Communication ran exclusively through Betty, as direct exchanges were out of the question. They continued to write because they had no choice, but Betty and Emmy developed a deep mistrust towards one another. The escape remained a wound that would not heal. It was not until the ban on writing letters was lifted around the turn of 1934–5 that Werner would slowly come to understand what had really happened in February.<sup>59</sup>

Emmy had been in Prague, and specifically arranged for Käthe Schiepan to visit, giving her a letter to take back as well – a letter which, however, was eventually destroyed, as it could only reach Werner through Betty. Emmy did not trust Werner’s mother, as explained: ‘On several occasions, your mother talked about me in a way (and I now understand that she did so because you were losing your mind [...]), that Käte was urgently advised not to appeal to her, as she would have to fear that your mother might notify the police.’<sup>60</sup> Betty made her anger at Emmy’s escape known, scornfully insulting her daughter-in-law and alienating her as a result. Emmy thus refrained from contacting Betty, and the liquidation of the family estate could not be prevented. An angry outburst at the wrong moment created a yawning chasm of mistrust between the two. The ever-present fear of arrest led to irrational reactions, the slightest occasions often sufficed to cause deep emotional scars. Emmy was equally disappointed that Werner had begun to lose faith in her: ‘I would have expected – fully aware of his situation which was surely far worse (than mine) – that Werner knows me well enough to trust me to do the right thing and to rest assured that I would never abandon him.’<sup>61</sup>

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to Reinhold Scholem, 31 May 1934, NLI Jerusalem. See also Emmy to Werner Scholem, 9 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

58 Betty Scholem to Gershom Scholem, 8 April 1934, Scholem 2002, p. 101.

59 An initial analysis of this correspondence was undertaken by Mirjam Zadoff (2013).

60 Emmy to Werner Scholem, 9 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

61 Emmy to Reinhold Scholem, 31 May 1934, NLI Jerusalem.

Emmy later explained that both her lawyer, Kaufmann, as well as Werner's friends had advised her not to make contact until she was safely in exile. The decision to escape had not been an easy one:

I hesitated because it meant that I would no longer be able to see my husband, but the lawyer and my friends were so adamant and the danger so great that I had to make a decision. Seeing as they [the police] had taken my passport and all other proof of identity, I had to dress in hiking gear, pack a rucksack and cross the border on foot on a Sunday in 1934. [...] It would have been too dangerous to take our youngest daughter, she came directly to England a few months later. Once we arrived in Czechoslovakia, we took a train to Prague. I had friends there, and we received a little support from the Central Federation of Employees [*Zentralverband der Angestellten*]. A few weeks later my daughter and I obtained a Czech refugee passport [...]. I was granted a British visa through a friend of ours, Dr Arthur Rosenberg, who at the time was working at the University of Liverpool, and subsequently arrived in England together with my daughter on 27 March. Initially, we went to Liverpool to stay with our friends, but later moved to London, where we eventually settled.<sup>62</sup>

Emmy was supported by a circle of insiders: Käte Schiepan, Hans Kaufmann, Arthur Rosenberg, and Anton Goldberg in Prague. Probably the most colourful character among Emmy's helpers, however, was a young man named Heinz Wiegel, who also called himself Heinz Hackebeil and later changed his name to Henry Newton. Heinz was an apprentice from Emmy's employer who had started as a trainee at the Gewerka-AG at age 19 in 1930, and moved up to become the head of the expeditionary department after completing his apprenticeship.<sup>63</sup> According to his own statements, Heinz cultivated 'friendly relations' with the Scholems, and had been a guest at their Klopstockstraße apartment on several occasions.<sup>64</sup> According to Edith's daughter Susanna Capon, however, there was 'no question' that Heinz was Emmy's lover. Edith, 14 years old at the time, would not be fooled, and is said to have not been particularly pleased

62 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs, Emmy Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351. See also Betty's complaint that Emmy did not trust her, and that her 'friends' regarded her as unreliable; Betty to Gershom Scholem, 8 April 1934 and 22 October 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 357, p. 406.

63 'Eidesstattliche Versicherung von Henry Newton, 4. März 1960', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

64 Ibid.

about the matter.<sup>65</sup> Edith once stated in an interview that Heinz had been deeply smitten with her mother, but she refrained from further comment, as she owed quite a bit to their affair.<sup>66</sup>

Heinz visited Emmy in prison on several occasions, bringing her clothes and other things from the apartment, and arranging accommodations for her daughters. According to Heinz, his visit requests at the Moabit Prison were approved because he was officially there to negotiate her shareholder status in the company.<sup>67</sup> Emmy, however, stated on record that he always had free access to the prison 'because he belonged to the SA and had his friends everywhere'.<sup>68</sup>

Who was this Heinz Hackebeil? Born under the name of Heinz Wiegel, he later grew up with his foster father Guido Hackebeil, whose name he would adopt. Together with his brother Eugen, Guido ran a publishing company the foster son planned to inherit. Heinz went to work for the Gewerka AG to 'thoroughly learn' the publishing business from Emmy Scholem.<sup>69</sup> This is essentially all we know. Susanna Capon, who would meet Heinz in the 1950s, knew him as a rather uninteresting personality, an accountant who would assist Edith with her taxes on Emmy's orders.<sup>70</sup>

The Scholems never denied that Heinz was a member of the SA. Edith once said that Heinz had inherited the Nazi ideology from his adopted father and defended it faithfully. He had made it to the rank of *Obertruppführer* in the SA, which corresponded to the rank of corporal.<sup>71</sup> Betty simply called him the 'Nazi sapling'.<sup>72</sup> Yet regardless of the fact that Heinz was not just a hanger-on, but an active, enthusiastic Nazi, he stood by Emmy without fail. Ultimately, he

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65 Susanna Capon indicates that her mother Edith found Emmy and Heinz's relationship rather alienating, considering it 'distasteful'. Susanna (born 1944) would also meet Heinz, but only learned the back story as an adult; see interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013.

66 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988.

67 'Eidesstattliche Versicherung von Henry Newton, 4. März 1960', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

68 'Halböffentliche Gerichtssitzung Landgericht Hannover, 16. Oktober 1964', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

69 'Eidesstattliche Versicherung von Henry Newton, 4. März 1960', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

70 Interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013.

71 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988; his rank is mentioned in a letter from Emmy Scholem to Supreme Court Coroner Dr Zimmer on 29 June 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

72 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988; Betty to Gershom Scholem, 12 August 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 367.

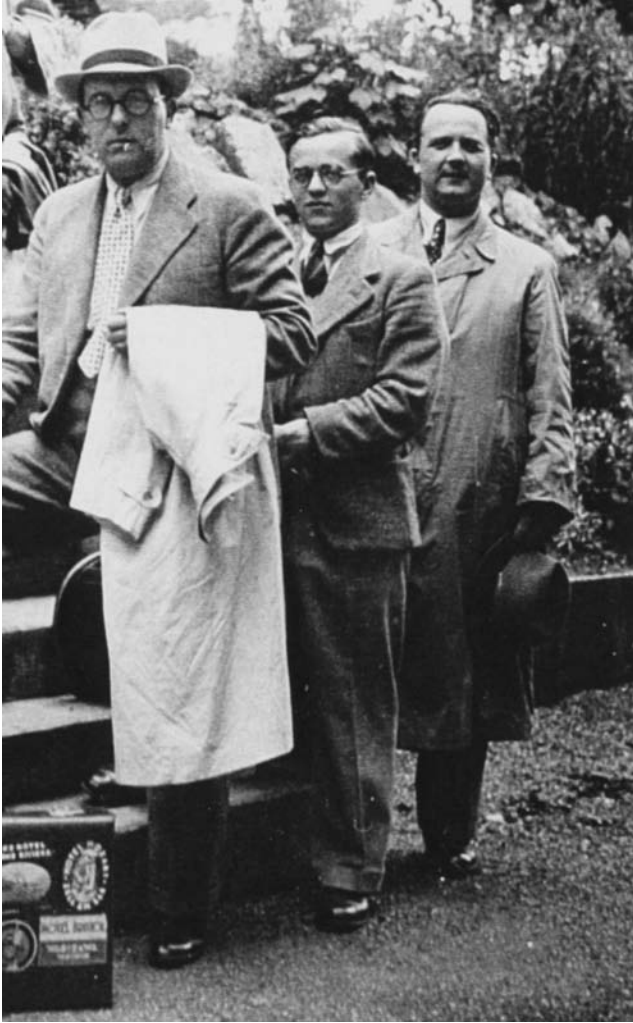


FIGURE 31 *Heinz Hackebell around 1935 (standing in the middle)*

would give up everything for her: forsaking his wealthy family, deserting from the SA and escaping to England together with Emmy. Heinz also assisted the daughters' escape.

It was later said that he had been a supporter of Ernst Röhm's wing of the SA, perhaps even Röhm's personal messenger, which would have meant that his life was also in peril.<sup>73</sup> Ernst Röhm, the highest-ranking SA leader with

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73 Emmy wrote in 1935 that Heinz had faced possible execution, but never mentioned a



an army of Nazi street thugs behind him, represented one of Hitler's biggest potential rivals. He was murdered on the Führer's orders on 1 July 1934, accused of plotting a coup d'état. Heinz, however, had escaped months before Hitler's unexpected strike, which came as a surprise even to most of the SA inner circle. Emmy Scholem provides a far more plausible explanation for his choice to desert: Heinz had gone to such lengths to support an incarcerated Communist that he fell out of favour with his own 'comrades'.<sup>74</sup>

Werner and Betty were unaware of these facts in February 1934. Betty saw only her son, crying and screaming, teetering on the brink of mental collapse. Werner had hoped his wife would walk free during their period of separate detention, but now that she had, he feared she could leave him.<sup>75</sup> Betty, for her part, was furious that Emmy would distrust her despite all she had done for the couple, choosing to confide in a circle of friends whom Betty described as 'cowardly and deceptive rabble' instead.<sup>76</sup> It would be another year before these waters calmed.

Although Emmy refused to speak of the incident in later years, Edith was also excluded from Emmy's plans during the improvised chaos of her escape.<sup>77</sup> After her mother disappeared, the fourteen-year-old Edith was arrested and detained at the Kaiserdamm police station in western Berlin for two days – a traumatising experience by all accounts. Edith knew that Gerhard Friedländer, Ruth Fischer's son who was roughly her age, had been tortured by police. His tormentors included a certain Dr Taubert, who would later cross Werner Scholem's path as well.<sup>78</sup> Edith feared similar treatment but got away mildly: although subjected to a series of exhausting interrogations, police did not touch her. The officers threatened her and called her a 'Jewish liar' for refusing to disclose her mother's whereabouts. It never crossed their minds that Edith

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connection to Röhm; see Betty Scholem to Gershom Scholem, 1 October 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 398. Hackebeil's alleged work for Röhm was mentioned by Renee Goddard (interview 29 May 2011), although Hackebeil never spoke about his time in the SA himself. Edith also mentioned Heinz's association with Röhm's current (interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988).

74 'Brief Emmy Scholem an Rechtsanwalt Heinrich Reinefeld vom 20. Januar 1935' and 'an den Untersuchungsrichter beim Reichsgericht Dr. Zimmer vom 29. Juni 1934', *Nachlass Emmy Scholem* IPW Hannover.

75 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 8 April 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 358.

76 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 357.

77 Emmy states in 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs' that she left the country together with Edith, *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

78 On Gerhard Friedländer's arrest, torture and escape see Keßler 2013a, pp. 312–18.

might not know such information, let alone had been left to fend for herself. She would remain silent about this shocking episode for decades to come, and only towards the end of her life did she relate the story of her escape in a recorded private interview. The dramatic tale subsequently served as the basis of a radio drama titled 'Edith's Story'.<sup>79</sup>

Edith herself recounts her odyssey as follows: upon paying a visit to Werner's lawyer, Dr Kaufmann, she learnt that Emmy was staying in Prague.<sup>80</sup> He instructed her how to escape across the 'green border' in the Krkonoše Mountains. Like Werner, Kaufmann knew the German-Czech border region well, as it was a popular mountain climbing destination.<sup>81</sup> Yet before Edith could follow through with the plan, she was again placed under arrest – this time, by the SA. The young girl was taken to a villa in Tempelhof that would turn out to be the residence of Heinz Hackebeil's foster parents, still devoted Nazis. Here, she was questioned about the whereabouts of Emmy and Heinz. His disappearance continued to be an embarrassing scandal for the family, not to mention the SA. Although subjected to threats and intimidation, Edith remained resolutely silent. Eventually, the brownshirts from the SA tried a different tactic: they began behaving friendlier towards her, taking her shopping in the market and later to the cinema. They did so in hopes that Edith would attempt to run away and lead them to Emmy, but she saw through their intent and stayed put, cold-bloodedly returning to her detention at the end of the day. Instead, she seized

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79 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem with Frith Banbury, audio recording, ca. 1988. The recording served as inspiration for a fictional drama, 'Edith's Story' (Afternoon Drama), directed by Eoin O'Callaghan, BBC 2010. Here the original interview, not the fictionalised broadcast, is cited. According to her daughter Susanna Capon, Edith had made the recording for private reasons. Following her death in February 1998, the recording began to circulate and was later edited into the fictional piece without the daughter's permission, interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013. By contrast, Edith Capon gives only scant descriptions of her escape in her 1954 compensation testimony. See 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs, ca. 1966', *Entschädigungsakte Edith Capon, geb. Scholem*, LABO Berlin, Entschädigungsamt, Akte Nr. 251.080.

80 Edith Capon does not mention this name in the interview, but rather speaks of a lawyer. Emmy however identified Werner's Alpine companion Dr Kaufmann as the individual who assisted her escape in later letters, see Emmy to Reinhard Scholem, 31 May 1934, NLI Jerusalem. Kaufmann was subsequently rejected as Scholem's lawyer by the 'People's Court', as he was suspected of helping Emmy; see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 12 August 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 366.

81 Saxon Switzerland is also located along the Czech border, and Werner's surviving private photographs were taken primarily in this region; see Werner Scholem's photo album, Renee Goddard, private collection.

an opportune moment to sneak out of the Tempelhof villa the next day.<sup>82</sup> Terrified she was being followed, the young fugitive spent the rest of the day on public transport, riding Berlin's buses and trains back and forth through the city. The fourteen-year-old knew this trick from Erich Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives*.<sup>83</sup> She waited until she was absolutely certain that no one had traced her before contacting friends of her parents. This did not always go well: Hanna Kosterlitz, a confidant of Karl Korsch's, was so terrified that she slammed the door in Edith's face.<sup>84</sup>

Luckily, she would find help elsewhere. In the interview, Edith gratefully speaks of an old friend of Werner's, an Austrian named 'Joko'. A riddle at first, a glimpse into the literature identifies this as a nickname for Joseph Kohn, a Left Communist and co-founder of the Lenin League.<sup>85</sup> He and his wife took her in, giving her new clothes and supplies and even a new haircut to blend in. Edith then travelled to the Czech border by train. She had been given the name of a local mayor who could issue one-day tourist visas for Czechoslovakia. Kohn accompanied her, as his Austrian passport protected him from persecution, at least for the time being.<sup>86</sup> Together they risked the escape and successfully crossed the border, arriving safely on foreign territory.

Edith spent the night at a family friend's house near Lidice and was eventually able to move on to Prague, where she was finally reunited with her mother after searching for her for some time.<sup>87</sup> The joy of reunion aside, their plight was not over. Edith soberly described their situation: 'No money, no passport, no nothing'.<sup>88</sup>

Emmy went a bit further into detail in a letter she wrote to Reinhold:

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82 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988.

83 Interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013.

84 Emmy to Werner Scholem, 9 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover. Emmy only mentioned first names, but was referring to Hanna Kosterlitz, Korsch's secretary of many years; see Korsch 2001 and Pozzoli 1973, p. 277.

85 See interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988; for his real name and biography see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 479.

86 According to another version of the story, Edith was accompanied by Gerhard Friedländer. This is not mentioned in the interview, however, and there is hardly any way two 15-year-olds could have rented an automobile by themselves. This version of the story is probably the result of confusion, as Friedländer and Edith did in fact escape to Paris together in a later phase.

87 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988.

88 Ibid.

At first, I was quite desperate. I had very little money [...] and, even worse, no passport for myself nor for Edith. Dr Kaufmann explicitly instructed me to only write once I had left Prague. And I had to comply with this, after all, he had promised to inform Werner. I thought that he would approve. And without a passport I was unable to leave Prague. Believe me, it was tremendously difficult for me and required all my energy and determination to obtain a passport for me and Edith from the Czech government in Prague without conducting any anti-German propaganda. I declared: I'm here with my daughter and can't go back. Neither do I possess any money nor can I exist here. But I am not asking to stay. I have friends in England who have invited me and I also have a prospect of making a living there. I require a passport in order to travel, otherwise I have to stay here. But I really want to go to England, and so on and so forth. What a bluff! At the time I certainly had no prospect of life in England whatsoever.<sup>89</sup>

The passport finally arrived several weeks later on 21 March. Throughout this ordeal, Werner remained completely in the dark as to his wife's movements. Only when the passports were safely in hand would Emmy and Edith travel to Paris via Zurich. Heinz Hackebeil accompanied them on the journey, yet pretended not to know them as a precaution.<sup>90</sup> In Paris, they rendezvoused with Ruth Fischer and Maslow – and, according to Edith, Leon Trotsky, who was currently staying in a Paris suburb illegally.<sup>91</sup> From there they travelled to England, where they were welcomed by Arthur Rosenberg. He managed to obtain a residence permit for Emmy. Only now would Werner be informed of his wife's fate and relieved from his anguish.

Renate, however, remained blissfully unaware of her mother's predicament. She lived quietly in Hanover, attending school under the name of Reni Wiechelt to avoid suspicion.<sup>92</sup> The girl was intentionally left in the dark about her family's situation. She had been present during the arrest, but unlike her elder sister, the ten-year-old had no idea why her father was detained in the first place. She returned to the Wiecheltes and to her old life. When the Nazis consolidated their hold over Linden and distributed free brown jackets to the local children, Renate helped herself to one without giving it much thought, thus becoming a member of the League of German Girls [*Bund Deutscher Mädel*], the girls' division of the Hitler Youth. Her grandparents would hold their tongues when Reni

89 Emmy to Reinhold Scholem, 31 May 1934, NLI Jerusalem.

90 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988.

91 Ibid.

92 Interview with Renee Goddard, 29 May 2011, Hanover.



FIGURE 32 Czech refugee passport for Emmy Scholem, 1934

sang the new songs with the group's choir, the lyrics to which she could repeat even decades later: 'Forward blare the bright fanfares, Germany, you shall stand radiant, even if we shall fall'.<sup>93</sup> These nihilistic verses foreshadowed the swiftly approaching disaster – yet as with so many prophecies, mere knowledge thereof was not enough to avert the devastation.<sup>94</sup>

Emma and August considered little Reni's enthusiasm for the fascist '*Jungmädelchar*' a convenient cover to avoid awkward questions. When Renate's gorgeous blond braids got her appointed to a guard of honour later that year, her grandmother sewed her a white dress especially for the big day – and so it happened that Adolf Hitler was greeted by the daughter of a Jewish Communist when visiting Hanover for a national leadership meeting of the *Stahlhelm* paramilitary group in September 1933.<sup>95</sup>

93 Ibid.

94 Paton 2000.

95 Ibid. The leadership meeting on 24 September 1933 celebrated the incorporation of the NDVP-leaning *Stahlhelm* into the SA. See Mlynek and Röhrbein 1994, p. 498.

To Renate, these events were mostly a big adventure. She suppressed the traumatic experience of her father's arrest and attempted to lead a 'normal' child's life in her familiar surroundings. As an adult, she admitted feeling 'a bit happy, actually' when she was allowed to return to her grandparents in April 1933. After all, she said, Emma 'was actually my mother'.<sup>96</sup> A return to simple everyday routines, however, could not undo the radical rupture in all of the Scholems' lives. One day, Renate came home a bit later than usual and overheard her grandparents say, 'she won't be our responsibility any more'. Renate was taken aback by this rejection.<sup>97</sup> After all, her grandparents were her real family, were they not?

Back in his cell, Werner seemed to sense how little time remained until his family's final disintegration. During visiting hours one day in May 1934, he made 'an awful hue and cry, demanding to see Renate immediately before Emmy has her picked up'.<sup>98</sup> But Betty was not permitted to bring his daughter along until the summer holidays had started in July: 'It made Werner happy to see the child, and she was delighted too. She didn't even cry. Nor did she get any idea of how monstrous the situation is'.<sup>99</sup> Renee remembered this meeting even in old age, her father asking 'will she forget German?' at one point.<sup>100</sup> Her father's question lingers in the back of her mind to this day. It would be the last time she saw him.

The young Renate would receive unsolicited outside assistance in August 1934. One day, SA trooper Heinz Hackebeil – 'in his magnificent uniform', as Renee recalls today – showed up unexpectedly to pick up the young girl from school.<sup>101</sup> Although he had openly opposed the regime by aiding Emmy's escape, he dared to return to Germany nonetheless. In retrospect, Renee relates the story as if Heinz had kidnapped her from her classroom, resembling Carl Zuckmayer's Captain of Köpenick robbing the city treasury. His appearance

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96 Interview with Renee Goddard, 29 May 2011, Hanover.

97 'I wouldn't come in from playing outside one day, and I was a bit upset when I overheard my grandmother saying, "she won't be our responsibility any more"'; see Paton 2000.

98 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 14 May 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 360.

99 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 17 July 1934, Scholem 2002, p. 258. The visiting hour was held in the coroner's office – this 'leftover from liberalist times' as Werner described it was done away with two weeks later; see Werner to Betty Scholem, 27 July 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

100 Goddard 2008.

101 Interview with Renee Goddard, 29 May 2011, Hanover. The SA was deprived of its power within the party following the 'Röhm Putsch', but remained part of the Nazi apparatus. An SA uniform was thus still enough to avoid suspicion in August 1934.



FIGURE 33 *Edith Scholem, Emma Wiechelt, Heinz Hackebeil, Renate Scholem, Isle of Man 1934*

came as an utter surprise. Behind the scenes, however, her emigration had been planned by her parents and approved by the authorities; Werner even gave his authorising signature.<sup>102</sup> Betty was involved in the family conspiracy this time, while grandmother Emma Wiechelt accompanied the two.<sup>103</sup> Only Renate herself was unaware of what was happening, told she was to visit her mother in England. It was not until they had boarded the ferry across the channel that Heinz told Reni to take off the brown jacket. A new life was about to begin.<sup>104</sup>

Werner did not learn of Heinz, this peculiar confederate of the Scholem family, for quite some time. He knew him as Emmy's colleague, but nothing more. Emmy could not write her husband directly, but rather had to communicate with him through letters to Betty who would then read them aloud during visiting hours. Under these circumstances, she avoided telling him about Heinz's exact role. In August 1934 a first hint emerged, as Betty reports: 'Emmy mentioned for the first time that Heinz – the Nazi sapling, you know – is over there and said "he is very useful and diligent and reliable for the business". When I

102 Werner to Betty Scholem, 13 July 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

103 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 12 August 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 367.

104 Goddard 2008.

read this aloud, Werner almost fell off his chair and asked me to immediately ask Emmy more details in this regard.<sup>105</sup>

In his next letter, Werner inquired about the matter himself: ‘I am nonetheless surprised by the presence of H., which I only learned of now! How is Saul among the prophets and the “bastardised” prophets? I have nothing against the boy, by all means, and even more so as I hardly know him, but this constellation troubles me tremendously!! [...] Romantic, very romantic!! A father isolated from the world may be forgiven for remarking that I hope it is not the kind of romanticism in which even Edith plays a certain magnetic role?’<sup>106</sup> Werner was deeply perturbed. Heinz’s conversion from an SA thug to the ‘foster son’ of a Jewish family demanded explanation. Werner was provided with one and immediately calmed down: ‘The things I hear about Heinz do relieve me to an extent, particularly my daughter Edith’s empathic denials! [...] His character, as history portrays it, seems to be shrouded, at least Emmy considers him worthy enough to adopt him as a foster son [...] Therefore, I can’t comment on the matter as long as I haven’t met him. But I would like to ask Emmy to adopt no more foster sons for the time being, as four children and a husband in prison is surely enough for one mother’s heart!’<sup>107</sup>

Apart from her own children and Heinz, Emmy also temporarily housed Gerhard Friedländer, Ruth Fischer’s son. Werner suppressed his jealousy by categorising Heinz as a ‘foster son’ as well. When the young man was later introduced as Emmy’s business partner and assistant, this calmed him somewhat. In November, Werner again asked about the ‘boy Heinz’, but otherwise avoided the topic.<sup>108</sup> Real communication was impossible through their censored and indirect correspondence. Only after Werner received a new lawyer prior to trial in 1935 was Emmy able to send a personal message to Werner through him: ‘With regard to Heinz, please tell my husband that he needn’t worry. As a matter of fact, it simply wasn’t in our power to choose a path. Once Heinz had stood up for us, because he knew we were innocent, things took their course and one thing led to another. We didn’t have a choice whether to leave or not. It surely didn’t come easy to Heinz to abandon his party, for which he fought for many years, and whose ideals he is still faithful to today, but it wasn’t him who left, he was rather separated. All those consequences arose out of the simple fact that he stood up for the truth and thereby for us as well [...] Of course, we are

105 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 12 August 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 367.

106 Werner to Betty Scholem, 11 August 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

107 Werner to Betty Scholem, 24 August 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

108 Werner to Betty Scholem, 17 November 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.



tied to him through fate, and we regard him as a member of the family'.<sup>109</sup> This indicates, then, that Heinz left the SA more or less involuntarily. It was not his alleged involvement in the Night of the Long Knives and the Röhm Putsch, but rather his numerous inquiries into the Scholem case that triggered his fall from grace. His precise motivations, however, remain unclear.

By October 1935, Betty was finally able to gain a first-hand impression of the family's situation when she visited Emmy in London. At last, they had an opportunity to speak in person. The two women, who had only cooperated after their falling out due to the constraints imposed by the situation, managed to recover a degree of mutual trust. On this occasion, Betty also spoke of Heinz warmly: 'So Emmy actually has the boy Heinz by her side and he is *remarkably* helpful. She runs two businesses. One that specialises in advertising, in which a friend from Prague [...] is her business partner. And the other sells soldering lubricant and other greases, the recipes of which she got from a German specialist. The boy Heinz cooks the greases himself in a little adjacent shed, after which they are delivered in stone pots. He has completed a regular 4-year training in the Berlin business and is proficient in office work, he takes care of all bookkeeping and correspondence, works tirelessly, and has developed a much more amicable character. He used to be such an awful windbag, but now he's calmed down. Emmy by all means needs an aide to cope with all her responsibilities, and he seems to be quite resourceful. [...] Not even remotely do I take delight in all that sniffing out of "affairs", and I find it rather appalling to always see this behind things – but in this case I wasn't able to detect anything of the kind as much as I would have liked to'.<sup>110</sup> This impression was almost certainly conveyed to Werner as well, who no longer mentioned the subject in his letters.

Instead, he inquired repeatedly about his daughters' well-being and their progress at school over the following years, seeking to participate in family life to any extent possible. Emmy regularly informed Werner of Edith and Renate's development as they began to learn English and rebuild their lives. Here, for once, the news was largely positive, although the parents still worried about Edith from time to time. Thrown off track by her family's breakup, she grew into an obstinate young girl and did not always develop as her parents would have liked. As early as August 1933, while staying with Erich Scholem and Heinz Hackebeil, she ran away and went missing for a while.<sup>111</sup> Although

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109 Emmy Scholem to Lawyer Heinrich Reinefeld, 20 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

110 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 1 October 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 399.

111 Betty to Emmy and Werner Scholem, 24 August 1933, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

Edith returned home safely, her parents were deeply worried and would hint at the incident whenever concerns about Edith arose in the future, albeit without ever naming specifics.<sup>112</sup> In his letters, Werner regularly asked about Edith's school performance and her career aspirations, for these were also not without highs and lows, and the question of higher education was gradually appearing on the horizon. Werner empathised deeply with his family throughout this period. Like her father, Edith's talents were fairly one-sided, and she had a difficult time with the natural sciences and mathematics.<sup>113</sup> Arthur Rosenberg nonetheless managed to secure her a place in a renowned boarding school as well as a tuition exemption.<sup>114</sup> Here, Edith mastered mathematics to a fair degree, and through regular contact with classmates developed a grasp of the new language. She would live at the school during the week and stay with Emmy only on weekends.<sup>115</sup> The school lent her life a degree of structure, but Edith missed her father dearly and moreover was isolated from her mother by the school's daily routine most of the time. She found no space in which to work through and reflect upon the trauma of her lonely plight. Edith began exhibiting behavioural problems in school and eventually attempted suicide. She checked herself into a psychological clinic shortly thereafter. Only after marrying her fiancée, Eric Capon, would she finally be able to find peace within her own family.<sup>116</sup>

Renate, by contrast, fared much better in the new situation. Her escape had been significantly less trying, nor had she been particularly close to her parents even before the family's collapse. Furthermore, the girl, eleven years old by now, managed to find a new home for herself by sheer coincidence: during a

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112 Emmy wrote Gershom that Edith had engaged in 'foolish mischief' in Berlin, which is why the family was angry with her. Elsewhere, Edith reports of a week-long trip to Switzerland to smuggle funds for Emmy. This trip probably occurred shortly after Werner's arrest, however, and was explicitly kept secret from 'the Scholems'. This imposed conspiratorial behaviour may explain the tensions between Edith and Werner's family; see Emmy to Gershom Scholem, 16 August 1934, NLI Jerusalem; Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988.

113 Werner Scholem to Betty Scholem, 13 December 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

114 Emmy to Reinhold Scholem, 31 May 1934, NLI Jerusalem.

115 Emmy to Gershom Scholem, 16 August 1934, NLI Jerusalem. According to the letter, she attended the 'Kingsley School', while Susanna Capon identifies it as 'Bunce Court' (interview with Susanna Capon, 14 January 2014). She had probably switched schools.

116 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs, ca. 1966'; as well as numerous medical and psychological evaluations, *Entschädigungsakte Edith Capon, geb. Scholem*, LABO Berlin, Entschädigungsamt, Akte Nr. 251.080.

Jewish bible study, Naomi Birnberg paid a visit to class. Naomi was the sister of Norman Bentwich, the former Attorney General for the British Mandate of Palestine. The name Scholem sounded familiar to her, prompting her to inquire about a professor Gershom Scholem from Jerusalem. Reni promptly responded that he was her uncle.<sup>117</sup> She was immediately invited to the family home and, after getting along so well with the family's children, taken in. Naomi Birnberg arranged for Renate to be educated in a boarding school she once directed for six years, covering all of her school fees.<sup>118</sup>

This was a great help to Emmy, whose company 'Adservices and Utilities Ltd.' selling advertising and grease was not performing as hoped, despite initial success. Although Werner repeatedly asked for news on the business, Emmy never sent him her balances or income.<sup>119</sup> Eventually, the Jewish Refugee Committee in London sent Gershom a confidential notification in November 1937 that Emmy's business had 'gone to rack and ruins', leaving her utterly destitute.<sup>120</sup> Only in 1938 would Emmy be issued a work permit and return to her old trade as a clerk at a furniture factory. However, she lost this position when the war broke out. She found permanent employment in 1941, but was repeatedly interrupted by health problems.<sup>121</sup>

These numerous uncertainties aside, Emmy was relieved to have made it to England. As much as she regretted the circumstances and the chaos of February and March 1934, Emmy always stood by her decision, including when discussing it with Werner. She wrote to him: 'It was the most difficult thing to do for me, but I had to get out of Germany. [...] I couldn't risk leaving both children in the hands of relatives (for who knows how long) should I have been arrested once again, I had no other choice, I had to leave. And I have no regrets

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117 Goddard 2008. The usefulness of Gershom's celebrity status is also mentioned by Betty. She considered the Birnbergs to be 'impractical dreamers and vegetarians', but otherwise 'extraordinarily friendly people'; see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 14 October 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 405.

118 Naomi Birnberg explained that Renate had come to her in 1934: 'I was responsible for her upbringing and tuition until she was 17 when she left my care in 1940', see 'Erklärung Naomi Birnberg vom 3. Juli 1958', *Entschädigungsakte Renate Hood, geb. Scholem*, LABO Berlin, Entschädigungsamt, Akte Nr. 260.929.

119 A 'business letter' without personal information would have been delivered separately, as they were exempted from the two letters per month limit; see Werner to Emmy Scholem, 7 September 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

120 Jewish Refugees Committee to Gershom Scholem, 19 November 1937, NLI Jerusalem.

121 'Schilderung des Verfolgungsvorgangs Emmy Scholem, 7. April 1954', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA NDS, NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

in this matter, for I acted by my own best judgement and adhered to the advice of people who were more your friends than they were mine'.<sup>122</sup>

Future developments would prove her right. The persecution of German Jews intensified by the month, soon escalating to the point of open murder. In retrospect, Emmy's escape saved both of her daughters' lives. Although they could not have known this in 1934, life for prominent Communists had already become impossible in Germany a year prior. Karl Korsch, Arthur Rosenberg, Arkadi Maslow and Ruth Fischer: every one of Werner's former comrades who could flee the country did so, regardless of whether the police had already threatened them with arrest.

Although Emmy also faced persecution as a Communist, she now left politics behind, at least in her mind. She wrote from England: 'I don't pay any attention to politics for several reasons: my interest had always been rather minor, and I'm a foreigner and hardly keen on being deported, as my existence is based here now [...]. What is more, I have really endured enough to be in need of some peace, and I am interested in nothing else but creating a secure existence for Werner, the children and myself'.<sup>123</sup> She did, however, maintain close contact with their old Berlin comrades, including, apart from Rosenberg, Karl and Hedda Korsch, and also befriended Rosa Meyer-Leviné, the widow of Werner's former adversary Ernst Meyer. The old quarrels had diminished in importance, the shared defeat of exile reuniting the factions as comrades once again. Only Werner was absent: 'Everyone wishes you could join us and we could all together bear down on a goose like we did in old times'.<sup>124</sup> Whatever Emmy wrote about in her letters – be it friends, her business or the children – she was careful to reassure Werner that there would always be a space for him in her life. 'Everything I am building over here I am building for us both and the children. Anything I may hopefully achieve I of course achieve for you'.<sup>125</sup> For years, Werner's family would fight for his release – Emmy from London, Gershom from Jerusalem and Betty in Berlin. But Werner never came.

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122 Emmy to Werner Scholem, 9 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

123 Emmy to Reinhold Scholem, 31 May 1934 NLI Jerusalem.

124 Emmy to Werner Scholem, 9 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover. The friendship with Meyer-Leviné is mentioned in a letter to Gershom Scholem, 16 August 1934, NLI Jerusalem.

125 Emmy to Werner Scholem, 9 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

### Espionage and Intrigue: Werner Scholem as a Literary Figure

Werner Scholem's value to the Nazis as a prisoner would suffice to derail his release forever. It remains somewhat unclear, however, why exactly the regime was so interested in a man who had long abandoned his political career. Officially, Emmy and Werner were charged with conducting subversive activities against the army as members of a certain 'Hansa Cell'.<sup>126</sup> But what exactly was this cell? Did it even exist, or was it merely a fabrication by police and the fascist 'People's Court' responsible for his case? The question went unanswered for a long time, and the 'Mystery of the Hansa Cell', as a writer for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* once described it, would fuel literary speculation for decades to come.<sup>127</sup> Incidentally, a total of four novels and narratives deal with Scholem's alleged role as a KPD spy, which in turn have influenced Werner Scholem's public reception more than any historical research.<sup>128</sup> Thus, before the next section attempts a reconstruction of the 'Scholem case' based on actual court files, this section illuminates Scholem's literary afterlife.

The story of his second, fictional life begins in Paris in 1934, where Emmy and Edith stopped over on their way to London. Upon arrival, they met up with some old friends who took them to Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow's residence.<sup>129</sup> Maslow must have been impressed by the encounter, particularly by Emmy and Edith's peculiar connection to their incognito fellow traveller, SA *Obertruppführer* Hackebeil, and, moreover, the mysteries surrounding Werner Scholem's arrest. Arkadi Maslow was a man of many talents. A gifted scientist who studied under Albert Einstein at one point as well as an accomplished concert pianist, his interests lay in both the artistic as well as the political

126 *Anklageschrift und Urteil des Volksgerichtshof gegen Hüffner, Scholem und andere*, BArch 13 J 195/33.

127 Jäger 2000. The article was inspired by Buckmiller and Nafe 2000. On the historical background of the Hansa Cell see the next section of this volume.

128 The novels and short stories are Maslow 2011 [Original manuscript 1935], Jung 1997, Kluge 2003, Enzensberger 2008. They all deal with Werner Scholem and the leitmotif of his alleged role as a soviet secret agent. However, the list would not be complete without the play *Now This Is Not the End* by Rose Lewenstein, the great granddaughter of Werner and Emmy Scholem. The play bypasses the traditional spy story, leaves out Werner entirely and instead explores the legacy of belonging, exile and emigration as it was passed on and re-interpreted by three generations of women, see Lewenstein 2015. In addition, there are two radio dramas dealing with the experience of Werner's daughters: 'Edith's Story' (Glendinning 2010) and 'Reni and the Brownshirts' (Glendinning 2002), both based on oral history but fictionalised.

129 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988.

sides of life. Now, he sought to dabble in literature. Drawing on the mysteries surrounding his imprisoned comrade, Maslow conceived an entirely new life story for Scholem.

Completed in 1935, the novel was titled *Die Tochter des Generals* [‘The General’s Daughter’] and revolved around the exploits of the aforementioned ‘Gerhard Alkan’, an allusion to Werner Scholem. Although the novel went unpublished for decades, Maslow’s manuscript circulated in literary circles and was revisited and adapted several times, making its author the originator of Werner Scholem’s bizarre duplication as a fictional character. Unlike Schiller’s *Wallenstein*, however, this transformation did not wait for the verdict of later generations. Scholem’s literary reputation detached itself from Werner while he was imprisoned in Plötzensee. Denied freedom himself, Scholem’s doppelgänger wandered the world freely, and would find a renewed literary life following the real Scholem’s early death.

Maslow skips Scholem’s political career in the novel, assigning his Gerhard Alkan the role of a tragic lover. The author returns to a university lecture by the boring ‘privy councillor’ Triepel from Scholem’s legal studies in the year 1927, whom Alkan hopes to talk into helping him cheat his law clerk exam: ‘Experienced as he was, he said to himself that he, the former Communist deputy, would surely be able to arrange something with nationalist Professor Triepel far more easily than with one of those republican cronies.’<sup>130</sup> But Alkan must first wait for the lecture to conclude, and decides to chat with the woman next to him in the meantime: ‘Well, Fräulein, how diligently you’ve been taking notes’. This is how Maslow introduces his main female character, Marieluise von Bimmelburg, the ‘General’s Daughter’ – a malapropism of Marie Luise von Hammerstein.<sup>131</sup> Whether Bimmel or Hammer, Marie proved to be much more than just another daughter of noble upbringing, both in the novel as well as in real life. Her father was the head of the so-called ‘Troop Office’, a covert name for the German general staff, and thus the highest-ranking military officer in the Weimar Republic. Yet her chatty classmate is unaware of her father’s identity at first, known in real life as Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord. Maslow resumes: ‘Marieluise had indeed taken studious notes in her large, angular-shaped writing that she hoped would appear trenchant. Her letters actually tipped over leftward: it was the handwriting of the young girls of the

130 Maslow 2011, p. 32.

131 For Marie Luise von Hammerstein’s actual biography see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 346 f. Maslow spells her name ‘Marieluise’, a change that is retained here to differentiate between the fictional character and the actual person.

rightward-leaning splendid republic'.<sup>132</sup> Scholem's alter ego informs her that the contents of Triepel's lecture have long been published, thereby freeing her from note-taking and successfully distracting her. Ultimately, however, it is Marieluise who is taken in by the older man's exciting life. The young woman is keen to break free from the constraints of her family background and virtually forces Alkan into an affair, whose cinema tickets purchased at the student price of 80 pfennigs exhibit neither generosity nor cosmopolitanism. Although he reluctantly yields to her advances, he continues to look down on his new lover, which in turn drives her to several rather unusual acts of devotion. Marieluise seeks to demonstrate that even an aristocrat can serve the revolution.

Sometime in early 1933, the General's Daughter of Maslow's tale, dressed in black silk pyjamas and carrying an electric torch, sneaks into her father's study and steals a file titled 'THE PLAN'. She hastily delivers it to Alkan that same night, but is crestfallen when they discover that the envelope was in fact a red herring, containing 'recycled memories of the civil war in Moscow and of 1905, a silly treatment of the uprising in Canton; carelessly scribbled down, just a few stale phrases on the necessity of being prepared'.<sup>133</sup> Alkan is correspondingly unimpressed: 'You wake me up in the middle of the night with this NONSENSE? A little game of Indians, huh? No, now listen to me; this is ridiculous. Just stay away from such stupidity, for you haven't got a clue about these things, and it certainly isn't any of my business either, I can't stand these silly Indian games'.<sup>134</sup> Marieluise's amateurish theft, however, brings Alkan and his lover into the Nazis' sights, and thereby pulls Scholem's doppelgänger into a plot to oust the General. The military officer of noble lineage, who looks down on Hitler's regime with aristocratic conceit, is to be replaced with a more pliant candidate. It is a crucial manoeuvre, the success of which would signify nothing less than the final consolidation of Hitler's rule.

The response of the officials is accordingly swift. Marieluise is subpoenaed, intimidated, and soon wilts under pressure. Unaware that she had only stolen planted, irrelevant documents, the young woman fears execution for her supposedly highly treacherous espionage. She signs a confession at the hands of a clever coroner and thereby becomes an involuntary accomplice in her father's ouster.<sup>135</sup> Alkan is arrested shortly afterwards. To prevent the scheme from

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132 Maslow 2011, p. 32.

133 Maslow 2011, p. 58.

134 Ibid.

135 Maslow 2011, p. 62, p. 114.

becoming public knowledge and risking its success, he is presented with a fabricated charge. Alkan is kept in pre-trial detention, only to subsequently disappear in a concentration camp. He would remain unaware of why he was being held until the very end; his many appeals and requests went unheard.<sup>136</sup> While Alkan is caught in an unending limbo of indecision and uncertainty, his lover's end is definitive: the General's Daughter is beheaded at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin.

Maslow's plot mixes fiction with historical reality. The real Marie Luise von Hammerstein was spared decapitation. She would outlive Maslow by decades, dying in 1999 at the age of 91. In the novel, her fate is mixed with that of Renate von Natzmer, an employee at the Reich Ministry of Defence who was executed on charges of espionage in 1935. The unusual verdict of decapitation for a young woman attracted a great deal of attention, despite a ban on reporting the story.<sup>137</sup>

Maslow took even more liberty in devising his characters than he did with regard to his plot. His main character Gerhard Alkan combines details from Scholem's own biography with unverified anecdotes from his alleged love life, as well as elements of a clearly fictional nature. In Maslow's novel, Alkan and other characters created with this amalgamation technique vacillate between caricature and tragedy, supplemented with a pinch of Boudoir-esque eroticism. The latter is almost exclusively to the detriment of the main female characters throughout, whom Maslow models as naïve and seducible victims of their own desires.

The actual Marie Luise von Hammerstein, a Communist, relinquished the privileges of her noble family background, risked her life for her beliefs and faced significant political persecution during the Nazi era.<sup>138</sup> In the novel, she becomes the unremarkable Marieluise von Bimmelburg, whose political acts depend entirely on her current love affair. Maslow's male characters, by contrast, appear as active protagonists in spite of their general pettiness and malice. Although they are not necessarily likeable, they are at least passionate. That said, Maslow's exaggerated characters do in fact reveal a degree of truth about the Weimar Republic's demise: namely, the powerlessness and cowardice of its social and political elite. Despite their obvious political and organisa-

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136 Maslow 2011, p. 268.

137 Renate von Natzmer had forwarded German deployment plans to the Polish intelligence services. On the historical background see Berit Balzer's afterword in Maslow 2011, p. 421 ff. Natzmer's case was also developed into a fictional story posthumously, see von Handel-Mazzetti 1951; multiple films have been made on the subject as well.

138 See Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 346 and the following section of this volume.



tional mediocrity, the Nazis never encountered any serious resistance to their rise. The author is accordingly conciliatory towards his hero at the novel's end. All cynicism aside, the figure of the imprisoned Communist stands for the steadfastness of political conviction throughout the novel.

The other characters in the book lack this grandeur, dwelling in farce and pettiness void of higher motivations. Maslow explores what Hannah Arendt would later call the 'Banality of Evil'. In 1935, obviously unaware of the coming horrors, Maslow is unwilling to demonise the Nazis, let alone depict Hitler as an irresistibly charismatic persona. In Maslow's view, the 'Führer' is well below mediocrity, only able to take power because the crumbling republic lacks both political vision and the necessary leaders to stop him. Maslow's novel abstains from heroics and offers no great narrative of the anti-fascist struggle, which is likely why it was denied literary success. While German emigrants such as Ernst Lubitsch and Fritz Lang would revolutionise Hollywood and American cinema, such a breakthrough eluded Maslow.<sup>139</sup> Neither he nor his life partner Ruth Fischer ever found a publisher for the novel, nor could they interest anyone in the movie rights. For decades, the manuscript gathered dust in an archive at Harvard University, before being published in an annotated edition in 2011. Nevertheless, it was Maslow who created Werner Scholem's literary doppelgänger.

The story remained confined to the circle of the exiled Scholem family initially, and tragically would never be known to the real Werner Scholem. Through Maslow and Ruth Fischer, the motif was then passed on to exiled writer Franz Jung.<sup>140</sup> Fischer and Jung had known each other since 1919 and remained friends after Ruth Fischer distanced herself from Stalinist Communism.<sup>141</sup> Jung, after all, was anything but a man of the apparatus. He had deserted from the German army in 1914, languished in fortress detention and a psychiatric ward, and later established himself as a writer by balancing stock market journalism and literature – one for money, the other for the cause. Although he had been a Spartacus fighter in 1919, Jung was expelled from the KPD as a left deviationist in the following year. He nevertheless travelled to the Soviet Union on a hijacked fishing steamer, first as a delegate before moving to Novgorod to set up a match factory. Jung later returned to Germany under a false name

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139 As well as Ruth Fischer's brother Hanns Eisler, who became a successful composer of film music.

140 See Enzensberger 2009, p. 433.

141 She blamed Stalin for the 1940 death of her lover Arkadi Maslow and became a passionate anti-Communist, a decision she would only take back towards the end of her life. See Keßler 2013a, p. 393 ff. and p. 525 ff.

and continued as before, one foot in the stock market and the other in the publishing world, until being forced to flee after the Nazis seized power.<sup>142</sup> Jung's remittances also kept Maslow and Fischer afloat after their own escape. After leaving Europe, Ruth Fischer returned the favour and arranged for a US entry visa for their friend.<sup>143</sup> Fischer introduced Jung to Maslow's literary legacy after the latter's death in 1941.<sup>144</sup> Jung recognised the material's potential and wanted to take it, if not to Hollywood, then at least to the southern German radio broadcaster, Süddeutscher Rundfunk.<sup>145</sup> He worked on a 'radio novella' from the mid-1950s onward, and later on a TV movie about Scholem,<sup>146</sup> but his impressive manuscript would ultimately fail to bear fruit. Jung died in Stuttgart in 1963, his manuscript, *Betr. Die Hammersteins – Der Kampf um die Eroberung der Befehlsgewalt im deutschen Heer 1932–1937* ['Re. the Hammersteins – The Fight for the Seizure of Command over the German Army 1932–7'], was only published posthumously in 1997.<sup>147</sup>

Jung's narration is essentially a condensed and politicised version of Maslow's novel. He reduces the private dramas and anecdotes, guided by the structure of classical drama, whose characters inescapably head towards catastrophe against their own better judgement. Furthermore, he refrained from using pseudonyms: his main characters were not Alkan and von Bimmelburg, but Scholem and von Hammerstein. Here, the General appears not as a helpless victim of conspiracy, but as a political actor in his own right, pursuing long-term plans behind the scenes of the constantly shifting Weimar government. The story bases itself on German-Soviet military cooperation promoted by von Hammerstein after the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo. This cooperation really occurred: the German army gained alternate sites for its illegal military exercises and armaments projects, while the Red Army received urgently needed technical upgrades.<sup>148</sup> Jung was more interested in the long-term plans behind

142 See Jung's autobiography (Jung 1961), new editions of which were published in 1988 and 2000.

143 See Kefßler 2013a, p. 386; as well as Enzensberger 2009, pp. 431–3.

144 Ruth Fischer to Franz Jung, 18 August 1960, Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 335.

145 Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 344.

146 He developed plans for the TV movie in 1960 together with Ruth Fischer, although the ideas for a radio novella had been around since the 1950s. See Enzensberger 2009, pp. 433–4. Jung was also friends with Maslow, as he notes in a document accompanying one version of his manuscript. Here he also writes that Fischer had 'delegated full responsibility for the matter to me, as it were'; see accompanying note to the *Betr. Die Hammersteins* manuscript, undated, Artur Müller, private collection, copy owned by Michael Buckmiller.

147 Jung 1997.

148 This information was well-known in the 1920s. The Left Communist Schwarz had de-

the cooperation. In Jung's account, General von Hammerstein seeks an alliance between two distinct military dictatorships: Germany, where democracy was nearing its end, and Soviet Russia, where the revolution had degenerated into a novel form of rule by a new elite. The social base of Hammerstein's vision would be 'those young officers graduating from the war schools, who have also attended several courses on tactics and organisation as given by German guest-officers'.<sup>149</sup> His sympathies for a German military dictatorship aside, von Hammerstein has no respect for Hitler whatsoever, whom he considers to be of the 'soapbox orator type'. This is the point at which the familiar plot resumes: in Jung's version, there are similar attempts to compromise the General through his daughter's Communist involvement.

Werner Scholem appears not as a victim, but as a willing protagonist. His appearance is of fascinating ambivalence: 'Scholem was not exactly attractive outwardly, of stocky physique, strongly protruding ears, thick eyeglass lenses, turgid lips. This image changed, however, once an object or topic grasped his interest – he virtually became another person, a fascinating one. Everything he uttered seemed to emanate by precise clockwork, a functional and dynamic mechanism, very clear, very subtle, without slipping into cynicism'.<sup>150</sup> In this way, he seconded his professor Triepel, who was becoming 'more of a devoted listener' thanks to Scholem's intelligent comments. Marie Luise, who Jung refers to only as 'the daughter', is impressed and seeks to get to know Scholem better, but is received coolly: 'Scholem had already made an ironic joke of this. He talked about his family, wife and children, his understanding of family cohesion, his view on marital and extra-marital relationships, the overratedness of sexual intercourse, the glandular functions and secretions, all in a style resembling the interpretation of an article in a legal brief'. But nevertheless, 'the tragedy ensues and takes its course'.<sup>151</sup> The two begin an affair, and Marie Luise once again forces documents from her father into Scholem's hands, although this time the material is not irrelevant, but quite explosive indeed: contingency plans for war with the Soviet Union. Scholem's actual arrest is nevertheless a mishap, as the Gestapo originally intended to allow him and Marie Luise to remain free and feed Moscow false information for a while.<sup>152</sup> A coincidental

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nounced the military cooperation in parliament in 1927 to expose Stalin's unprincipled stance. Werner Scholem took the denunciation as an opportunity to distance himself from Schwarz; *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*, 253. Sitzung, 17. Dezember 1927, StB p. 8639A.

149 Jung 1997, p. 213.

150 Jung 1997, p. 218.

151 Jung 1997, p. 219.

152 Jung 1997, p. 222.

denunciation would derail the plan. Scholem is thus treated rather mildly, the coroner even promising him imminent release.<sup>153</sup> Marie Luise, however, is subjected to harsh intimidation. Unlike in Maslow's telling of the story, in Jung's version she shows backbone and defends her lover vigorously without giving away any secrets. The Gestapo thus attempts to approach the duo from the other side, but the literary Scholem behaves just like the real one, remaining resolutely and stubbornly silent. Their machinations falter, and the Gestapo is forced to pursue other strategies. Scholem grows useless to them and is soon taken to a concentration camp: filed under the 'typical reference number': 'Return undesired'.<sup>154</sup> What Maslow presents as a tragic comedy about human cowardice, Jung turns into a drama in which the harshness of reality overwhelms the individuals involved. Despite his private affairs, Jung's Werner Scholem is a thoroughly political person, experienced and perceptive, yet also powerless against the conspiracies closing in on him.

Scholem's colourful literary phantasm frees itself from the biographical limitations of the real Werner Scholem even further in the work of a third author, the narrative *Lebendigkeit von 1931* ['Vitality of 1931'] by Alexander Kluge, published in 2003.<sup>155</sup> This tale did not draw from Maslow's novel, but instead from Franz Jung's text,<sup>156</sup> rounded out with observations from contemporary witness Renee Goddard. Kluge had managed to convince Scholem's daughter to conduct a film interview with him. Its appropriate title, *Manche Toten sind nicht tot* ['Some Dead are Not Dead'] hinted at the life of its own Scholem's character had taken on through the literary interpretations of later generations.<sup>157</sup>

This was even more true for Kluge's account, which disguised itself as a historical feature in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), specifically, an interview with the fictional professor Hong Tze-Fei from Beijing University, author of an almost 5,000-page Marxist biography of Werner Scholem. The extent of this fictional treatment represents an allegory for the complexity of

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153 This episode is also real: Scholem was promised release in June 1933, and was even permitted to call his family and tell them the news – only to then be transferred to another prison for an indefinite period of time; see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 7 and 11 June 1933, Scholem 2002, pp. 236–7.

154 Jung 1997, p. 225.

155 Kluge 2003. An abridged version of the collection was published in English as *The Devil's Blind Spot* in 2004, but Scholem's story is omitted.

156 He also was able to base himself on a historiographic essay, see Buckmiller and Nafe 2000.

157 Goddard 2008.

Werner's life, which continues to challenge historians in both Beijing as well as Berlin. The conversation with Hong Tze-Fei reveals new insights into Scholem's life:

**faz:** So, to begin with, this Scholem lived like a roué, a bourgeois. Five love affairs in the spring of 1931, two of them in the opera house, one with a general's daughter. He is always a well-dressed seducer.

**tze-fei:** A gourmet, too. Able to distinguish between 200 types of wine. Never short of a witty phrase.

**faz:** And still, in the very next instant, in different attire, as he roams, say, the bars in Moabit, doing so in the service of the world revolution.

**tze-fei:** Yes, in its service. Secret service, if you will. And neither does he let himself be tied to the KPD's, or rather the 'Hansa Cell's' scheme, i.e. to his designated place within the military-political apparatus. His idea, evidently, is to bring together those proletarian forces that have gone astray and joined the NSDAP, the non-organised Left in the factories and the professional revolutionaries.<sup>158</sup>

In Alexander Kluge's story, Werner Scholem joins the KPD's military-political apparatus in 1929: 'His task is to subvert the army, to obtain illegal state secrets'. To Kluge and Hong Tze-Fei, however, the matter at hand is more than just a spy thriller. Instead, the motif of a 'secret life' becomes a metaphor for the contradictions of the human psyche as such. The fictional biographer from Beijing describes the secret life as 'an abyss next to life, a second life and next to it another abyss, so to speak. [...] When a man leads 99 lives simultaneously, and all others do so as well, then that is the revolution'.<sup>159</sup>

Here, Kluge hints at the dilemmas of biographical writing, which entails constantly searching for a 'red thread' to unite the narrative, despite the fact that real people never actually follow a single path in life. Coherence remains the exception, while turning points and contradictions are the rule. Following death, these discontinuities grow into irretrievable gaps, hidden between the lines of surviving source documents. Once the living person is gone, nothing holds these fragments together – Kluge's gaze is directed towards the gaps in transmission cited in his narration. This task requires a living narrator to interpret the biography of the deceased. What happened in those abysses and

158 Kluge 2003, p. 26f.

159 Kluge 2003, p. 27.

gaps? They point to the forgotten and suppressed, the private and secret, to things that are simply not important enough – or, as it were, too important – to be written down. Kluge's anthology is titled *The Devil's Blind Spot*, yet the origins of these blind spots are only too human. They are filled with shortcomings and mistakes people are unprepared to admit to others or to themselves: sexual desires, affairs un-befitting of one's social status, or simply the boredom of everyday life. One of these gaps is the peculiar triangle between the Scholems and SA *Obertruppführer* Heinz Hackebeil. Kluge fills this gap with a desperate political strategy, namely Scholem's alleged attempt to convert the Nazi rank and file to socialism. As we have seen, however, the historical Werner Scholem indicated that he hardly knew the 'boy Heinz' and was confused by his role, rather than actively approaching the SA member. Moreover, Scholem would never have dreamed of trying to convince the Nazis, whom he derided as 'calf faces', of anything whatsoever.<sup>160</sup> The gap is thus filled inaccurately, although that is not really the point. Kluge, who sticks to the actual facts the least, nevertheless addresses a core problem of biographical work: namely, its uncertainty principle, that is, that every reconstruction represents an interpretation mediated by the present.

A fourth and final author boils the matter down to an essence: Hans Magnus Enzensberger writes about Kluge's method: 'Even someone who scrapes past the facts can, as Kluge shows, certainly come to correct insights. Factography is not the only useful procedure'.<sup>161</sup> Enzensberger nevertheless relied on similar 'factography' for his own treatment of the topic, and closely tied his 2008 account (2009 in English), *The Silences of Hammerstein*, to its historical foundation. He more or less adheres to the famous dictum of the 'sources' right to veto', thereby granting the deceased a degree of influence over the re-narration of their own biographies. As it were, Enzensberger treated the dead with more respect than Maslow had treated the living 70 years prior, for although Maslow received his information directly from Emmy Scholem, he never asked her permission to use it as the basis of a novel and only weakly disguised her name in the final manuscript. Only the decades locked away in the archives would separate Maslow's depictions from real events in Berlin, congealing into fiction after their protagonists' deaths made verifying the facts

160 In his 1920s Landtag speeches, Scholem always spoke of the far right in the context of counter-revolution, militarism and World War. He denounced the Nazis in the Reichstag as 'calf faces' who 'postured as officers' (*Deutscher Reichstag*, 9. Sitzung am 6. Juni 1924, StB, Vol. 381, p. 218D). There are no known statements of his portraying Nazis as misled socialists.

161 Enzensberger 2009, p. 436.

impossible. What had been rumours and indiscretion at a certain point in time were by now a historical novel.

Enzensberger never claimed this form for himself, and titled the postscript of his narration 'Why this book is not a novel'. Ultimately, what emerged from his collaboration with historian Reinhard Müller is a hybrid, a non-fiction novel which interprets history and fills in the gaps with anecdotes and fictional elements. Despite the great temporal distance that had since developed, Enzensberger's version also bases itself on oral accounts, which he first encountered in 1955 during his time at the Süddeutscher Rundfunk: 'One day there appeared in the Stuttgart office [...] an elderly man, in poor health, from San Francisco, small and shabbily dressed but with a pugnacious temperament. At the time, Franz Jung was one of the forgotten men of this generation. [...] The visitor made suggestions, and I still remember that Hammerstein and his daughters were also mentioned. I was fascinated by what Jung told us and scented an exemplary story. In my naivety, I also took everything I was told at face value and overlooked the cheap novel elements of Jung's hints and suggestions'.<sup>162</sup> Enzensberger moved closer to the source a few years later when, after reading and being impressed by her book *Stalin and German Communism*, he visited Ruth Fischer in Paris in 1961, the year of her death. The Hammersteins once more became the subject of their conversation, and Enzensberger learnt of Maslow's novel. That said, it took him more than forty years to process the material and publish his own version.

Here, Werner and Marie Luise again play prominent roles. Her classmate's political background impresses the General's Daughter, and their liaison initially takes the path familiar from previous accounts. Her father was aware of the relationship, but 'passed over [it] in silence'. In Enzensberger's narration, Marie Luise fulfils KPD 'Party duties' independently of Werner from 1930 onward, and the General, although increasingly suspicious, protects her from repression. This does not stop her from sending further documents to far off Moscow. In Enzensberger's story, however, they are neither plans for a coup d'état nor trivialities, but rather confidential documents relating to German foreign policy. First, she smuggles out a transcript of Hitler's inaugural speech to army generals on 3 February 1933, delivered after a formal banquet at Hammerstein's official residence.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Enzensberger 2009, pp. 423–5.

<sup>163</sup> Various versions of these minutes exist. Enzensberger cites a version found in Moscow, the most complete record of the speech known to exist; see Wirsching 2001 and Müller 2000. Lieutenant General Curt Liebmann also recorded his own minutes, which were published in 1954; see Vogelsang 1954.

This meeting did in fact occur, and was tremendously important to Hitler's consolidation of power. His aim was to commit the leaders of the military to the new regime.<sup>164</sup> Apart from Marie Luise, her sister Helga is also said to have overheard Hitler elaborate his agenda to the officials present. Hitler's words have been recorded in various versions and transcripts. He praised the military form of social organisation as perfectly attuned to his new state: 'Everyone knows that democracy is impossible in the army. It is also harmful in business. Works councils are the same nonsense as soldiers' councils. So why is democracy deemed possible at the state level?'<sup>165</sup> Hitler sought to abolish Weimar democracy. His plan was to 'utterly suppress any subversive opinion and morally educate the people. Any treasonous attempts must be mercilessly punished by death. My goal is the total defeat of Marxism by any means necessary'.<sup>166</sup>

But this was only the beginning. In order to truly exterminate Bolshevism, unemployment had to be eliminated as well. In this regard, Hitler presented his vision of expanded *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe, calling for Germanisation of conquered territories and the expulsion of native populations. The Führer was straightforward and frank with the generals, promising rearmament and a new war.<sup>167</sup> His adversaries soon had knowledge of the impending danger, for a transcript of Hitler's remarks would reach the Comintern in Moscow only three days later.<sup>168</sup>

Who was behind this masterpiece of KPD intelligence? Had Marie Luise been the leak, and Scholem her contact? Enzensberger for his part believes 'this

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164 On this event's role in the broader context of the Nazi rise to power, see Winkler 2006, p. 10. On the Nazi regime's consolidation of the military see Müller 1969. Enzensberger's reconstruction of this 'dinner with Hitler' can be found in Enzensberger 2009, p. 113f.

165 Quoted in Wirsching 2001, p. 546.

166 Wirsching 2001, p. 547.

167 Despite controversy whether Hitler's foreign policy was programmatic or the result of power political improvisations, the concept of war for expanded *Lebensraum* was a core motivation behind his actions; see Kershaw 2015, p. 117.

168 Many historians suspected that one of the two daughters had intercepted the transcript. Enzensberger discusses this in his novel, see Enzensberger 2009, p. 136f. On the historical debate see the footnote above. The secret bill of indictment against Georgi Dimitrov, published in the *Brown Book of the Reichstag and Hitler Terror*, was allegedly also stolen from von Hammerstein's office. The pamphlet was first published in Paris as *Livre Brun sur l'incendie du Reichstag et la terreur hitlerienne* (1933, Paris: Edition Carrefour). The international solidarity campaign it sparked freed Dimitrov. Enzensberger cites the recollections of a veteran KPD spy, according to whom the indictment had been taken from von Hammerstein's desk and photographed; see Enzensberger 2009, p. 137, p. 148.



can with good reason be doubted.<sup>169</sup> Instead, he brings up Marie Luise's sister Helga's relationship with a Communist – Leo Roth, an agent of the KPD's 'N apparatus' who intercepted all sorts of crucial information for the party. Roth's biography exhibits intriguing parallels to that of Werner Scholem.<sup>170</sup> Born in Russia but raised in Berlin, he joined the Left-Zionist group Poale Zion as a teenager before switching to the Communist youth organisation in 1926. Although Leo Roth, born in 1911, did not belong to the war generation, his youthful radicalisation very much resembled Werner's. A supporter of Karl Korsch, Roth was driven out of the ranks of the KPD, joined the Lenin League and became involved with Ruth Fischer, Maslow and Urbahns. But because Roth was not a leading member of the group, he was re-admitted to the KPD in 1929. Operating under the codename 'Viktor', he built a career in the party's intelligence service, serving as a leading functionary by 1933 at the uncommonly young age of 22.<sup>171</sup> In his novel, Enzensberger initially leaves the question as to whether Roth and Scholem knew each other unanswered. The same applies to Scholem's alleged espionage activity for the Soviet Union. Instead, he avails himself of the 'venerable literary form of the conversation with the dead' and conducts a 'posthumous conversation with Werner Scholem'.<sup>172</sup>

Resurrected by Enzensberger in this way, Scholem proves remarkably cooperative. He does not object when Enzensberger mistakenly describes him as a 'founder member of the KPD' or as having fought in the March Uprising of 1921. On the contrary, the literary Werner feels terribly flattered, gets carried away and elaborately relates stories of his youth, his famous brother Gershom, Walter Benjamin and Ernst Jünger. Asked about Marie Luise and their involvement with the KPD's intelligence sections, Scholem tersely responds: 'What kind of nonsense is this? Are you trying to provoke me?'. Only when Enzensberger quotes a letter from Emmy in which she admits to Werner's relationship with Marie Luise von Hammerstein does Scholem concede.

The letter is real – Emmy Scholem wrote to the coroner in 1934, insisting that Werner may have known Marie Luise at one time, but had nothing to do with Frau von Hammerstein since 1931.<sup>173</sup> Delighted about this rescue attempt,

169 Enzensberger 2009, p. 172.

170 On Leo Roth see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 749 f.; as well as Müller 2000.

171 Ibid.

172 Enzensberger 2009, p. 439 f., p. 161.

173 Emmy wrote the letter in defence of Werner on 29 June 1934 to the coroner of the Supreme Court [*Reichsgericht*], and gave a second deposition on 9 July 1934. Transcripts in Emmy's handwriting are located in *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover. For an interpretation of these events see the following section of this volume.

Werner then delivers his version of the story: 'But that's quite simple. They wanted to protect General von Hammerstein for political reasons. It's true he had lost backing in the Reichswehr, but there were still enough influential officers who supported him. At that point in time, Hitler could not afford any conflict with the senior commanders. Originally, the Nazis put me in a concentration camp as a hostage, in order to be able to blackmail the general should he risk breaking cover. Later, such justification was no longer necessary'.<sup>174</sup>

Scholem's connection to KPD espionage strikes Enzensberger as rather implausible. He declines to investigate the matter further, as Kurt von Hammerstein and his family are the main subjects of the story. In 1935, Maslow depicted his 'Franz von Bimmelburg' as part of the camarilla surrounding the ageing Hindenburg. He portrays the senile President of the Reich hovering around the intellectual level of a vending machine, accepting anything Schleicher and von Hammerstein suggest as long as it contains the words 'for the sake of the Fatherland'.<sup>175</sup> Enzensberger differentiates the General from this shady company to some extent. Unlike Maslow, Enzensberger depicts von Hammerstein against the backdrop of World War and Holocaust, allowing him to appear as a possible alternative to the coming horror which, although existing in embryonic form, could not have been foreseen in 1935. The General almost appears as a resistance fighter, although Enzensberger also makes reference to Hammerstein's initially positive view of the Nazis. 'We want to move more slowly. Aside from that, we're really in agreement', he is purported to have said to Hitler in 1931.<sup>176</sup> Nevertheless, Hammerstein did attempt to appeal directly to Hindenburg in the final days of January 1933 and prevent Hitler's appointment as Chancellor.<sup>177</sup> Hindenburg, however, ignored his advice, and Hammerstein quietly resigned as chief of command in September 1933. Although he is said to have participated in various failed conspiracies against the Nazis in subsequent years, open resistance would come neither from him nor from any of the other generals over the next decade. All leading army generals had been made aware of the extent of Hitler's plans that February evening at Hammerstein's residence in 1933, and most of them evidently did not object. As Hammerstein openly admitted in 1931, the military elite shared

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174 Enzensberger 2009, p. 170 f.

175 Maslow 2011, pp. 11–18.

176 Enzensberger 2009, p. 4. The quote was originally taken from one of the General's sons; von Hammerstein 1963, p. 20.

177 For Enzensberger's description see Enzensberger 2009, p. 101 ff. The main source is a report by Kurt von Hammerstein placed in storage in England in 1935. This letter was later published by his son after the war, see von Hammerstein 1956.

Hitler's goals. They built successful careers for themselves and supported the dictator in implementing his plans, up to and including the annihilation of European Jewry. It was not until the defeat at Stalingrad that a handful of officers dared to strike a blow against the Führer, whose uniform they had worn loyally for over a decade, in the summer of 1944. Two of von Hammerstein's sons were among these 'men of 20 July'. The General himself, however, was not, as Kurt von Hammerstein died in the summer of 1943.

Werner lived to see only the first year of this new war, detained in the Buchenwald concentration camp and unable to perform more than symbolic acts of resistance. Hitler intended to 'extirpate' Marxism, and Werner Scholem's suffering in the camps would be the result. The once intimidating Communist agitator had been cut down by history once and for all.

His literary *doppelgänger*, however, which had taken on a life of its own by 1935, began to re-live, in an almost compulsive manner, these last years of freedom over and over. Resembling a haunted phantasm, the fictional Scholem returned to university and met the same young woman who would lead to his downfall over and over in a variety of alternating literary versions. The facts were re-combined, untangled and entangled, speculated upon and embellished, subtly refashioning Scholem's life into a crime novel. Even the more careful reconstructions shed at least some vital aspects of his personality. Werner Scholem the young socialist, the reluctant soldier, the street fighter from Halle, the journalist and polemicist, the member of parliament, orator and politician – all of these dissolve into thin air. Scholem's biography as a political protagonist serves as a mere backdrop to impress the young Marie Luise. Although the more tactful reconstructions refrain from gossip and eroticism, even these pale in comparison to Werner Scholem the actual historical figure. Franz Jung openly admits as much in the description of his manuscript: 'It is not a documentation, but instead reaches into the realm of literature, meaning that all the historical sources, the abundance of historical treatments are only used insofar as they serve to substantiate the hypotheses outlined above'.<sup>178</sup>

In the trajectory of Scholem's life, the events of 1933 cannot be separated from what came before them – fighting inside and outside of the KPD, his political utopia, and its ultimate failure in his own personal life. Marie Luise was also part of this life, although she entered Scholem's experience-rich time on earth at a relatively late point. Whether or not this encounter was really as significant as it is made out to be in the literature shall be discussed in the following section.

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178 Jung 1997, p. 216.

### The Hammerstein Case: Fiction and Reality

After reading the novels and stories about Scholem's a life, a glimpse at his police and court files is actually rather sobering.<sup>179</sup> One finds no mention whatsoever of Marie Luise or her father, nor of stolen military documents or secret telegrams to Moscow. Instead, the main points of concern are some remarks made during a quite trivial conversation over drinks at a bar. Some military men were indeed present, although they were not generals but rather a horde of drunken infantrymen. Neither were the Scholems ever charged with espionage. Rather, Werner and Emmy supposedly attempted to 'incite discontent among Reichswehr soldiers and provoke their insubordination towards their superiors, thereby subverting army discipline and the will to serve'.<sup>180</sup>

Werner Scholem as subverter of German army discipline? The strange prose referred to an incident in early 1932 when Werner and Emmy were said to have met with former KPD parliamentarian Wilhelm Koenen in a bar in Stromstraße 62 in Berlin's Moabit district. The establishment was run by Paul Schlüter and called 'Zum Bernhardiner', named after the famous St Bernhard dog breed. Its patrons, however, fondly referred to it as the 'Dirty Apron'. The indictment brought against Scholem recounts what allegedly conspired: 'The three culprits mentioned sat at a table in the tavern together with four Reichswehr soldiers [...] All three tried to convince the soldiers they ought to bring together the Communist-oriented soldiers in special cells so as to further infiltrate the Reichswehr. Furthermore, they insisted that the soldiers of the Reichswehr should not, under any circumstances, shoot at workers if they were to be deployed against them. During their conversation they passed newspapers and hand-written or hectographed leaflets titled "Reichswehr Soldiers – Comrades" to the soldiers'.<sup>181</sup>

The matter seems laughably trivial compared to its dramatic literary counterparts. Nonetheless, urging German soldiers not to fire on civilians in the case of an uprising did in fact constitute high treason. The corresponding law, dating from the Kaiserreich, remained in effect during the Weimar Republic and was

179 Specifically, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 1–15 and BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 1–10; as well as *Anklageschrift und Urteil des Volksgerichtshof gegen Hüffner, Scholem und andere*, BArch R 3017, 13 J 195/33.

180 *Anklageschrift des Oberreichsanwalts gegen Hüffner und Genossen vom 18. Oktober 1934*, BArch, R 3017, Akte 13 J 195/33, Bl. 23.

181 *Ibid.*, Bl. 68f.

attached to more severe punishments after 1933.<sup>182</sup> Scholem thus saw himself confronted with the same charges as in 1921 and 1924: 'The highly treacherous endeavour to alter the Constitution of the German Reich by force'.<sup>183</sup> The investigation was conducted by a familiar party: not the Gestapo but Section IA of the Berlin police, although Scholem was not their prime target, at least not initially.

Detectives had actually been watching a waitress named Frieda Hüffner since 6 December 1932, suspecting her of participating in a Communist cell tasked with political agitation among German soldiers. Frieda Hüffner was placed under surveillance, arrested and interrogated. Her life story is one of hardship: born to a single mother in destitute conditions in 1911, she was sent to live in an orphanage at the age of seven, where she would spend five years before her mother felt able to care for her again after remarrying. The young Frieda watched a total of three stepfathers enter and exit her life. As a young adult, she at last managed to escape into her own marriage which, however, ended before she turned 21. She worked as a waitress in order to make ends meet, accommodating the wishes of others and dreaming of the better world she had learned of when one of her stepfathers introduced her to Communism at age 17.<sup>184</sup>

For this, she now sat in solitary confinement and faced repeated interrogations, caught without warning at the centre of an elaborate police investigation. The case of 'Frieda Hüffner and comrades' comprised 25 separate folders containing documents on 23 defendants, and an even higher number of witnesses and additional suspects. Section IA hoped to uncover a major Communist conspiracy, perhaps even penetrate and disable the KPD's operations against the military. But the results of their efforts would prove rather modest: Hüffner

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182 The Reichstag Fire Decree and a further emergency decree passed in February 1933 introduced the death penalty for the first time, including – in violation of the Constitution – its retroactive application. Fortress detention was replaced by penal servitude, as well as preventative 'protective custody'. The legal definition of high treason, however, remained the same. This definition would only change in April 1934 with the establishment of the 'People's Court', and entailed further limitations to proving 'extenuating circumstances'. Historian Isabel Richter, however, emphasises that 'substantive conceptions concerning high treason from the perspective of National Socialist statecraft [...] were not formally adopted into the text of the law', Richter 2001, pp. 38–41.

183 *Anklageschrift des Oberreichsanwalts gegen Frieda Hüffner und Genossen vom 18. Oktober 1934*, BArch, R 3017, 13 J 195/33. The indictment only targeted Werner, as Emmy's exile made her untouchable.

184 'Vernehmung Frieda Hüffner vom 28. März 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 2.

admitted to sporadic conversations with infantrymen that touched on politics, but denied any involvement in political agitation. The only crime she had committed was, in her words: ‘It is correct that I participated in this once last year. Together with my friend at the time, concierge Otto Lohmann, [...] I provided cover for those *Kampfbund* members who were painting Soviet stars on the houses. Lohmann’s task was to warn the subversive painters in case of approaching danger’.<sup>185</sup>

The *Kampfbund* referred to the Fighting League Against Fascism [*Kampfbund gegen den Faschismus*], a KPD front group, but Soviet stars scribbled on barracks walls was not quite the conspiracy police officers had hoped to reveal. The suspect remained in custody and kept in solitary confinement to increase the pressure. Frieda Hüffner was not accustomed to being alone with her thoughts for such long periods of time. Alone and captive between the bare prison walls, she neared collapse, begging to ‘receive a human being in her cell’. On several occasions she requested medical treatment, citing nervous breakdown, but the prison doctor tersely diagnosed: ‘She is an utter troublemaker and faker, who will likely face disciplinary punishment rather than a medical specialist the next time’.<sup>186</sup> Accordingly, prison wardens confiscated and forbade further written correspondence between Hüffner and her mother, further intensifying her psychological strain. To this day, court files contain an entire folder of undelivered letters, the tone of which grows increasingly desperate. In the end, the police broke Frieda’s will – through proper channels and in full compliance with the law. Nevertheless, there was little information to be obtained from her. Quite simply, she had absolutely no knowledge of the KPD’s secret plans.

Suspecting as much, police questioned other individuals as well, and would stumble across Paul Schlüter, owner of the same ‘Dirty Apron’ that Frieda occasionally frequented, in April 1933. Through him, the police acquired fresh clues and conducted further interrogations.<sup>187</sup> On 18 April 1933, they questioned a worker named Willi Walter, another regular in Schlüter’s establishment. He would be the one to incriminate the Scholems: ‘Furthermore, I know for a fact that [...] former deputy Scholem and his wife, who also used to frequent

185 See ‘Vernehmung Frieda Hüffner vom 17. August 1933’, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 5.

186 ‘Gutachten Medizinalrat Schlegel, Leiter Staatl. Krankenhaus im Untersuchungsgefängnis vom 20. November 1933’, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 5.

187 *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 1.

the “Dirty Apron” in Stromstraße, were among those conducting individual subversion of the Reichswehr as well. All three belonged to the Hansa cell in Moabit, the so-called intellectual cell.<sup>188</sup> This mention of such prominent figures convinced police they had discovered the masterminds behind the conspiracy. Authorities launched an arrest wave over the following days, with the stated goal of ‘conclusively tying together those individual loose strands which at the beginning of the investigation appeared mysterious and incoherent’.<sup>189</sup> The ensuing investigation now targeted Werner and Emmy as well. Two police reports from the day of arrest report a search of their apartment as part of the ‘concluding inquiry into the subversive activities in Moabit’.<sup>190</sup> In reviewing the file, the reader is presented with a rather sober picture of the Scholem case: it had little to do with espionage or secret agents, but rather began with an informal conversation at the wrong place and time. Neither was the case particularly related to the Nazi rise to power: the trial represented an ‘absolutely normal’ case of anti-Communist persecution by Weimar police and judiciary, a common occurrence in the struggling republic. Investigations were opened in December 1932 and continued through 1933 without interruption; no specifically Nazi institutions were involved at any point.

The Scholems’ implication in the case appears to have been the result of a chain of unfortunate coincidences, as police were searching Moabit and the surrounding neighbourhoods for purely geographic reasons: ‘A tremendous facilitator of subversive activities is the presence of large Reichswehr barracks in the district of Moabit, which, firstly, accounts for the frequenting of surrounding inns and taverns by Reichswehr soldiers and, secondly, provides subversive forces with favourable opportunities to distribute leaflets across the perimeter walls on many streets’.<sup>191</sup> The police suspected a local hotbed of Communist subversion due to the increased number of Soviet stars and agitational leaflets reported in the area, only discovering Frieda Hüffner and the bar in Stromstraße in the process. From here, it was a small step to involving the Scholems as well, for anyone who stumbled out of the ‘Dirty Apron’ after their

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188 ‘Vernehmung Willi Walter, 18. April 1933’, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch R 3018, NJ 13903 Vol. 1.

189 ‘Schlussbericht der Polizei vom 24. April 1933’, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch R 3018, NJ 13903, Band 1.

190 Ibid. Scholem’s prison intake certificate mentions a hunt for subversive literature as the reason for the search, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1.

191 ‘Schlussbericht 24. April 1933’, *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 1.

evening beer, followed the street a bit southward, crossed the Spree and turned right on the other side of the river would find themselves standing directly in front of Werner and Emmy's residence. The distance from the Communist-frequented proletarian watering hole to the bourgeois Hansa district was less than two kilometres. This fact solves the 'mystery of the Hansa Cell'. The mysterious organisation, which had stimulated the imagination of journalists, historians and novelists and which seemed to become increasingly enigmatic with every re-interpretation of Scholem's story, was simply the local KPD chapter in Berlin's Hansa district, which held its meetings a few streets further down in Moabit.<sup>192</sup>

Emmy Scholem, who remained a KPD member, was assigned to this cell, as she lived in the Hansa district. She openly admitted as much in her interrogation: 'I was affiliated to the Hansa Cell in the years 1929–1930, maybe also 1931. At the time I occasionally frequented the "Dirty Apron" in Stromstraße, which was where the Hansa Cell would meet'.<sup>193</sup> According to Emmy's testimony, the Hansa cell was a party cell like any other. Beyond that, she denied ever having actively worked for the group.

In July 1933, police confronted Emmy and Werner with Willi Walter's testimony in separate interrogations. Both denied having ever spoken with uniformed soldiers. At first, Emmy even denied frequenting the 'Dirty Apron' with Werner altogether. Werner, however, stated that he had been there 'on a few occasions [...] to pick up my wife who was still a member of the party and affiliated to the Hansa cell'. He was cautious when describing the content of his conversations: 'Having said that, I hereby state that I certainly did not thoroughly weigh every word that came across my lips, as I trusted I was speaking to former party members; what exactly I talked about I cannot recall in detail today. All I can remember is making snide remarks about politics and the KPD party leadership. Given that I was quite well-known in party circles due to my previous role as a member of parliament, it would have been virtually impossible for me to engage in any sort of subversive activities'.<sup>194</sup>

The police's strategy to trick the two into contradicting each other through separate interrogations and confrontations had failed. On the contrary, the res-

192 These directions were formulated by Lorenz Jäger (2000). Historical literature also speaks of 'a Hansa cell' or 'a certain Hansa cell'; see Müller 2001, p. 85; Buckmiller and Nafe 2000, p. 75.

193 'Vernehmungprotokoll Emmy Scholem, 16. Mai 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen. 1933*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1.

194 'Vernehmungprotokoll Werner Scholem, 16. Mai 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen. 1933*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 1.



ulting testimony proved remarkably consistent: on his way home from court, hard-working civil servant Werner Scholem had stopped in to pick up his Communist wife from the party's local hangout, perhaps drank a beer, but ridiculed the KPD far more than he did the German military. Werner of course conveyed a much more conservative version of his personality than in parliament, but his testimony appeared rock-solid compared to the police's wild speculation. After all, the investigators suspected a major conspiracy, fuelled in equal parts by Communist fervour and erotic lust. A police file states what officials expected to find in the bars of Moabit: 'The women and girls in question are tasked with establishing friendships in those locales known to be frequented by members of the Reichswehr and uniformed police and turning these friendships into relationships of dependency, or rather into intimate relationships on an erotic basis, so as to manipulate the soldier or police officer concerned in a Communist sense by paying him the utmost patient and persistent attention, to win him over as an informant and thereby establish the first red cell.'<sup>195</sup>

The men of Section 1A deemed Frieda Hüffner incapable of pulling off such a complex operation by herself, and it was not until they found Willi Walter that the puzzle appeared complete: a known agitator like Scholem was certainly behind such perfidious attempts at subversion, as his previous criminal record confirmed. Investigators were certain the dangerous Communist had only managed to stay out of prison so long through a mix of amnesties and clever alibis, and did not believe a word of Werner's statement: 'The interrogation of former deputy Werner Scholem proved rather difficult; given his prior work as a legal clerk, he is of course extremely cautious in his statements and anxiously avoids making any kind of incriminating remark. He skilfully invokes his expulsion from the KPD and his "standing outside" over recent years, as well as his prominence as a member of parliament, as counter-evidence against the suspicion of participating in subversive activities.'<sup>196</sup>

Moreover, the police's case was not particularly convincing to begin with. It rested on a single witness, who in turn had only overheard one isolated conversation. The decisive search of the Scholems' house had failed to produce any compelling evidence, nor had any of the more than two dozen KPD members detained in Moabit identified Werner or Emmy as masterminds of anything. They either remained silent altogether, or stated that others from the arrested group had played a more active role, such as Oskar Wischeropp or Theodor

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195 'Schlussbericht vom 24. April 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 1.

196 'Schlussbericht vom 2. Juni 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 1.

Pfeiffer. Scholem had known Wischeropp since his time as a young supporter of the Left in the Berlin Opposition.<sup>197</sup> He was one of the old acquaintances whom Werner Scholem would have been most likely to meet and discuss old times with at the 'Dirty Apron'.<sup>198</sup> Oskar provided more details than the Scholems, even drawing police an organisational chart of the KPD's anti-military apparatus, the so-called 'AM-Apparat'.<sup>199</sup> This brought new life to the investigation, and police thought the breakthrough was finally near. Wischeropp, however, failed to betray Scholem, and in fact exonerated him instead. He claimed that both the Berlin-Brandenburg KPD district as well as respective sub-districts had their own 'AM leaders' for subversive activities, who operated exclusively under false names. Though there were various 'actives' in the cells as well, these were only responsible for distributing subversive literature.<sup>200</sup> Police were thus nowhere close to penetrating the KPD's anti-military apparatus, while the investigation continued to circle around a few streets and blocks in Moabit.

Eventually, they were at least able to arrest the political head of the Hansa cell, Kurt Oppenkowski. He was also willing to speak openly, stating that he had 'not got on very well' with his cell because 'a number of intellectuals, who were indeed present there, thought themselves too good for the actual work of the cell'.<sup>201</sup> Bright minds like Werner Scholem therefore were not among the ringleaders of the KPD's subversive activities – quite the contrary. Oppenkowski was on the whole less than impressed with the scheme of politicising soldiers with anti-militaristic leaflets, describing it as 'very dangerous and not especially promising'. Considering the harsh punishments should one be caught by police, he preferred to tacitly avoid anti-military activities: 'Larger amounts of illegal

197 See 'Aussage Kurt Oppenkowski am 14. Juli 1933' and 'Günter Quandt vom 19. Dezember 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 7 and Vol. 2.

198 Wischeropp refused to abandon his Left Communist convictions, was expelled in 1926 and only re-joined after the party's left turn in 1929; see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 1035.

199 'Aussage Oskar Wischeropp vom 31. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 6.

200 Franz Feuchtwanger's memoirs report that the KPD's M-Apparat was cut off from the KPD itself in the late phase of the Weimar Republic. He blames conspiracies and a bureaucratisation of the party as a whole linked to Stalinisation. The same was true for the anti-military (AM) work, which according to Feuchtwanger was tied to the M-Apparat. See Feuchtwanger 1981, p. 530.

201 'Vernehmung Kurt Oppenkowski vor dem Untersuchungsrichter des Reichsgerichts, 14. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 7.

material [...] were usually disposed of in Schlüter's establishment – such as in 3 cases – in that I hid it under the sofa'.<sup>202</sup> The leaflets, then, landed under Schlüter's couch rather than in soldiers' hands – a fact that hardly corresponded to the police's expectations.

Only in March 1934 would investigators succeed in tracking down and arresting one of the bigger fish in the operation, a certain Hans Blum. Blum was the 'Head of Reichswehr Subversion in the AM-Apparat of the Berlin-Brandenburg BL [district leadership]' and corroborated Wischeropp's testimony on the organisational structure of subversive activities. That said, little actual subversion had taken place in Moabit in 1932. The neighbourhood did not have its own leader, and 'Reichswehr subversion in this sub-district had reached a low point'.<sup>203</sup> Blum did at least admit to a plan to subvert the army with the erotic appeal of young Communist women, although he added that 'we gave up after the first attempt'. The seduced soldier penned a series of devoted love letters, but failed to provide the KPD with any useful information.<sup>204</sup>

This testimony was of course motivated by a desire to appear as innocent as possible in the eyes of the police, but contains a degree of truth as well: namely, that the severe punishments for seeking to influence soldiers were a well-known fact, and it was common for party members to refuse such undesirable party orders.<sup>205</sup> As far as Werner and Emmy Scholem were concerned, no evidence of any KPD activity whatsoever could be found, even after a solid year of thorough investigations. Still unresolved were the charges related to Scholem's remarks during that lone conversation in the 'Dirty Apron'. Werner himself repeatedly expressed how absurd the charges were, his tone growing more decisive over time: 'Moreover, I would like to remark that it would have been downright madness for me to conduct such a dangerous activity, which at the time was already a harshly punishable offence, at the official party

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202 Ibid.

203 'Vernehmung Hans Blum, 12. März 34', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 2.

204 Ibid.

205 Historian Klaus Michael Mallmann argues in his *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik* that members regularly ignored party orders they disagreed with. Work overloads and a lack of sufficient information also facilitated a 'relative autonomy of the base', see Mallmann 1986, pp. 154–64. Franz Feuchtwanger describes the subversion work as popular, but shares the analysis that the severe punishments associated with it undermined its efficiency: 'Should one have had the curious idea at the time to write up a profit and loss account in which the number of those sentenced for subversive activity was contrasted to the number of soldiers and police officers won to the Communist cause, then this section of the apparatus never would have gotten out of the red', Feuchtwanger 1981, p. 498.

tavern, by my real name, with my unmistakable face which, by the way, was surely of little help in approaching Reichswehr soldiers in an amicable manner'.<sup>206</sup> Here, Scholem alluded to the fact that his high forehead, glasses and protruding ears made him the epitome of the Jewish intellectual in the eyes of many of Germany's more small-minded citizens. Unlike Thälmann, he was not the 'authentic proletarian' type who could simply blend into a bar crowd. At the heart of the case, however, was a blatant contradiction between the professionalism of the operation as claimed by police, and the amateurish nature of the deeds of which Scholem was accused.

In order to resolve this contradiction, we must turn to the prosecution's main witness, Willi Walter. According to police files, he was an unemployed toolmaker and 27 years old when his statement was taken down. Walter had once belonged to the KPD, but distanced himself from his former party decisively during the interrogation: 'I realised at the time that the agenda pursued by the KPD did not represent workers' interests, and I had already tried even then to affiliate myself to the NSDAP'.<sup>207</sup> Walter had seen which way the wind was blowing, claiming that he had 'tried' to change sides from Communism to the Nazi Party even before 1933. His crucial testimony began with the police showing him a number of photographs of suspects, of whom Walter identified thirteen.<sup>208</sup> Walter issued the following advice to another witness, Ernst Wernicke, who had initially incriminated but later exonerated Scholem: 'That he shouldn't waste second thoughts on having to incriminate other people, for after all, the main goal was to exonerate himself and be freed'.<sup>209</sup> Willi Walter sought to save his own skin at all costs. It is therefore quite possible that Scholem's photograph remained in the criminal register, left over from previous arrests, and Walter selected his picture by coincidence for the sake of providing some potentially useful information – Scholem's 'unmistakeable face' may have

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206 'Aussage Werner Scholem vom 8. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 8.

207 'Aussage Willi Walter vor dem Untersuchungsrichter des Reichsgerichts, 20. Juni 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 4.

208 'Aussage Willi Walter vor dem Untersuchungsrichter des Reichsgerichts, 20. Juni 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 3253, Vol. 1.

209 Walter repeated this testimony in an interrogation that later found its way into the archives, see 'Vernehmung Willi Walter vor dem Untersuchungsrichter des Reichsgerichts am 19. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 4.

contributed to his choice.<sup>210</sup> Walter subsequently stuck to his story in order to retain his credibility. Interpreting the court files from this angle, Emmy and Werner Scholem appear as victims of a sequence of coincidences. Their colourful past, the wrong bar, and a panicked informant would be enough to seal their fate.

That said, there is a second possibility which appears just as likely: Willi Walter was specifically instructed as part of a plot to quietly take Werner Scholem off the streets. Although one finds no evidence for this in the corresponding interrogations or statements, such manipulation would have most likely left no traces. A subtle hint at the right photograph or a threat uttered off the record would have sufficed to put the machinery of the judiciary on Scholem's trail.

All of this would be little more than speculation had Emmy Scholem not written two letters hinting at some secret, buried factors surrounding the investigation. On 29 June 1934, Emmy wrote the following to the coroner of the Supreme Court, Herr *Landgerichtsdirektor* Dr Zimmer:

Following my discharge I was finally able to find out why I was arrested, and why my husband was arrested, too. I was not interrogated for 25 days of detention because there was no evidence brought against me and my husband beyond a statement made by Reichswehr General Freiherr von Hammerstein-Equord's daughter, Marie Luise, indicating that she came into contact with the Communist Party through me and my husband. This statement [...] was presented neither to me nor to my husband [...] As it appears to have been the intention to keep us in custody without informing us of this testimony, so as not to embarrass General von Hammerstein and his daughter, my initial statement was then scrutinised for poten-

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210 The interrogation with photographs was well suited to procure useful statements. Confronted with Walter's testimony and the photographs of Scholem and Koenen, Ernst Wernicke knew exactly what was expected of him. He first corroborated, but later withdrew his testimony in July 1933: 'As I was repeatedly told during my initial interrogation the previous day that I must know more about the "subversive work", and because I was made to understand that my testimony was rather incredulous, I answered the question whether I had seen the 4 Reichswehr soldiers sitting with the two civilians in Schlüter's establishment in the affirmative, although this is not correct [...]. Truthfully, the entire statement was fabricated. I do not know deputy Koenen at all, nor do I know the Scholem couple. [...] I had originally intended to correct my false testimony during the main trial. Should I be blamed if Scholem has by then sat in pre-trial detention for so long while being innocent, then I respond that my situation is no different', 'Vernehmung Ernst Wernicke vom 11. Juli 1933', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903, Vol. 4.

tial weaknesses and witnesses were found whose statements were then presented to me during my second interrogation [...].<sup>211</sup>

Here she was again: the General's Daughter. Literary embellishments aside, Emmy's letter is the only written source confirming a connection between Werner Scholem and Marie Luise.<sup>212</sup> What Emmy could not know, however, was that Willi Walter had already made this statement on 18 April, a few days prior to her arrest. She was not informed of this fact until July 1933. On the other hand, if Scholem were simply to be removed from the scene, it would have been just as elegant, not to mention simple, to implicate his name in the Moabit investigations the previous April.

Emmy vehemently maintained Werner's innocence. According to her, Werner had indeed made Marie Luise's acquaintance at university in 1927, but broke off contact as early as 1928,<sup>213</sup> at which point Werner had already long departed the KPD. Despite this fact, Marie Luise approached the Scholems expressing her wish to join the party, after previously attending both Communist and Left-Socialist meetings. Edith Scholem would later corroborate this version of events, adding that fellow students had advised Marie Luise to talk to Werner Scholem during a lecture, telling her that she would not have to walk very far to learn more about Communism, as the man in front of her was quite knowledgeable in this regard.<sup>214</sup> Emmy met Marie Luise as well and advised her against entering politics.<sup>215</sup> Unable to change the young student's mind, she subsequently cautioned her to at least keep a low profile. According to Emmy, none of General von Hammerstein's 'work-related' matters were ever mentioned in their conversations. Towards the end of her letter, Emmy

211 Emmy Scholem to the *Untersuchungsrichter beim Reichsgericht*, 29 June 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

212 Betty Scholem also reports the acquaintance in her letter on 11 May 1935, but only via second-hand information from Emmy; see Scholem 2002, p. 267. A further oral account comes from Edith Scholem, see interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988. Marie Luise would later admit to contact with Werner but deny an affair, see below.

213 'Brief Emmy Scholem an den Untersuchungsrichter beim Reichsgerichts, 29. Juni 1934', *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

214 Edith even identified the lecturer – not Triepel, but Martin Wolff, one of Werner's academic teachers; see interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1998. Marie Luise always maintained initiating contact with the KPD for her own purposes, see von Münchhausen 1964 as well as 'Marie Luise von Münchhausen an Peter Lübke vom 15. Juli 1985', BStU, MfS HA XX, Nr. 21218.

215 'Emmy Scholem an den Untersuchungsrichter beim Reichsgericht, 9. Juli 1934', *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.



FIGURE 34 *Marie Luise von Hammerstein, around 1928*

declares: 'My husband and I were utterly surprised to learn of the known publications of General von Hammerstein's documents. Should there be a proper investigation into this document theft it will turn out very quickly that we having nothing to do with it'.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

Emmy immediately named ten separate witnesses to corroborate her story that a covert plot had been behind the whole investigation. The names included police investigators and the responsible Public Prosecution Councillor [*Staatsanwaltschaftsrat*] Dr Mittelbach, followed by SA *Obertruppführer* Heinz Hackebeil and SA *Gruppenführer* Karl Ernst, 'who knows the matter because he was personally in charge of the investigations that were launched against *Obertruppführer* Hackebeil for supporting our requests'.<sup>217</sup>

The picture gradually becomes clearer: following her conditional release from prison, Emmy tasked her colleague Heinz with pursuing the matter further. As an SA man, he could exert pressure on government bureaucrats, or at least obtain information 'among colleagues' in the party and police dual state. However, activity on behalf of a Jewish Communist also raised suspicion. More importantly, Hackebeil's efforts interfered with the plans of his superiors, and police eventually began investigating him as well. A records request from 16 February 1934 confirms that investigations against him were underway shortly before his escape to England.<sup>218</sup> Aiding the Scholems made Heinz just as guilty in the eyes of the prosecution, and he opted to escape with Emmy rather than join Werner in prison.

In her letter to the coroner, Emmy does not comment on the content of the 'known publications of the general's documents'. As Hitler's February 1933 speech was only available to the intelligence services, Emmy can hardly have meant this document. Widely known at the time, however, was a much older series of articles published in the *Rote Fahne* in September 1929 detailing evidence of General von Hammerstein's links to coup plotters from the National Rural League [*Reichslandbund*].<sup>219</sup> The General's daughter was immediately suspected of the leak, for she had access to her father's office in the so-called

217 Further witnesses were an unnamed lawyer and Marie Luise von Hammerstein herself; see 'Brief Emmy Scholem an den Untersuchungsrichter beim Reichsgerichts, 29. Juni 1934', *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

218 'Polizeipräsident in Berlin an Staatsanwaltschaft Moabit – 16. Februar 1934', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BAArch, R 3018, NJ 3253 Vol. 6.

219 The National Rural League was the main interest group of large German landowners. General von Hammerstein's possession of several business cards from the anti-republican group revealed his connection; see 'Reichswehr an den Pranger – Dokumentarische Beweise für die Verbindung zwischen Bombenattentätern und Reichswehrkreisen', *Rote Fahne*, 18 September 1929; 'Verschwörung der Bombenleger', *Rote Fahne*, 19 September 1929; 'Der Reichswehrgeneral als Vertrauensmann der Putschisten', *Rote Fahne*, 20 September 1929. Special thanks to my colleague Andreas Herbst for pointing me towards these articles.



*Bendlerblock*, the Berlin headquarters of the Ministry of the Reichswehr. These articles were a hot topic of discussion at the time, suggesting Werner must have been aware that any connection to Marie Luise would make him a suspect as early as 1929. It is difficult to imagine that he could have worked as a spy over the subsequent four years.

Moreover, the General's daughters had contact to other Communist circles as well, as historian Reinhard Müller has shown.<sup>220</sup> Based on documents from recently opened Russian archives, Müller was able to corroborate the connection between Marie Luise's younger sister Helga and KPD agent Leo Roth. Leo and Helga had met and fallen in love on a hiking trip organised by the Socialist Pupils' League [*Sozialistischer Schülerbund*] in May of 1929. Helga joined the party under a false name and was known as Leo's wife in KPD circles.<sup>221</sup> Several documents composed by Roth, some handwritten, prove that it was not Scholem but he who intercepted Hitler's February 1933 speech on Moscow's behalf. Roth even names the General's daughters as his source.<sup>222</sup> When rumours about the speech's content began circulating among journalists shortly afterwards, Roth grew increasingly alarmed about the endangerment of his contacts, as 'really only 2 individuals come into question'.<sup>223</sup> These individuals were Helga and Marie Luise. Roth blamed a lack of secrecy within KPD ranks for Marie Luise's August 1935 Gestapo interrogation.<sup>224</sup> He did not, however, mention the air of suspicion that had followed her since 1929.

Marie Luise for her part was well aware that she was known to police, as two curricula vitae she wrote later in life confirm. Employed as a lawyer in East Germany after World War II, she would comment on her educational background and criminal record for the first time in 1951, claiming to have been arrested at a May Day demonstration in 1929. Furthermore, as far as 1932 was concerned, Marie Luise reports of a police investigation: 'This was quashed by influential friends of the father. However, the files fell into the hands of the Gestapo after 1933.' Having resigned from the army, her father

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<sup>220</sup> Müller 2000.

<sup>221</sup> Roth also smuggled Georgi Dimitrov's indictment to Paris and instigated an international media campaign through his contacts in the English and French embassies; see Müller 2000, p. 82 and Kaufmann 1993, p. 299.

<sup>222</sup> Müller 2000, p. 87.

<sup>223</sup> Müller 2000, p. 88.

<sup>224</sup> In this version, the interrogation took place after Werner's trial before the 'People's Court' had concluded, whereas Emmy assumes that an interrogation occurred as early as April 1933.

could no longer protect her. Marie Luise's home was searched in 1934, followed by her arrest and a twelve-hour interrogation by the ss (or Gestapo) at Berlin's Prinz-Albrecht-Straße: 'I was threatened over and over that I would face a line-up of comrades who were already in the concentration camp, but this never happened'.<sup>225</sup> Proceedings against Werner and Marie Luise took place simultaneously, but while Marie Luise was charged by the Gestapo, conventional police conducted Werner's investigation. Both investigations were deliberately kept separate. Emmy's testimony, which sought to link the two cases and thereby hopefully protect Werner, was ignored. Following the failed Reichstag fire trial, the Gestapo was hardly inclined to cede a case against the KPD's intelligence service to a public court outside of their control. Moreover, even in retirement General Kurt von Hammerstein continued to represent a political threat to the *Gleichschaltung*, that is, the subordination of the armed forces to Nazi rule. Pressuring his daughter seemed like an adequate means to silence him.

Scholem had little role to play in this operation and thus remained in the hands of regular police forces. The Gestapo's lack of interest in him is yet another indication that he was not involved with the KPD's intelligence service. Reinhard Müller, by contrast, assumes that Scholem actually recruited Marie Luise to the KPD's secret service. He bases this claim on Emmy's letter to the Supreme Court.<sup>226</sup> Another letter written by Betty Scholem in May 1935 has also been read as proof of Werner's spying activity. She wrote: 'The Hammerstein story goes something like this: Werner, in his profound cleverness, persuaded General von Hammerstein's daughter to join the Communist party. When they arrested her in April 1933, she of course changed sides and did her best to wash herself clean through accusation – more specifically, by claiming that Werner

225 Marie Luise stated that the interrogations took place at the Reich Main Security Office [*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*] in Prinz-Albrecht-Straße in 1934, which would have been an ss institution. However, this office was not founded until 1939, while in 1934 Prinz-Albrecht-Straße 9 was the seat of Heinrich Himmler, the *Reichsführer* of the ss. At the same time, Prinz-Albrecht-Straße 8 was the seat of the Gestapa, forerunner to the Gestapo. Marie Luise must have been interrogated by ss or Gestapo in 1934 – the Gestapo/Gestapa was more likely the institution in charge, given its role as political police. See 'Lebenslauf Marie Luise Münchhausen, geb. von Hammerstein vom 12. Januar 1973', LArch Berlin, C Rep. 118–01 Nr. 2755; see also 'Lebenslauf Marie Luise Münchhausen vom 2. März 1951', *Personallbogen des Magistrats von Groß-Berlin*, LArch C Rep 301 Nr. 258. I thank Andreas Herbst from the German Resistance Memorial Center for this hint.

226 Müller 2000. A vague clue can be found in Franz Feuchtwanger's memoirs. He mentions 'the almost legendary daughters of General von Hammerstein, one of whom had a liaison with a Communist student', see Feuchtwanger 1981, p. 503.

had seduced her (hopefully only to Communism!). I heard about this girl only once, when Werner bragged that an aristocrat had gone over to their side. He really is a jackass of historic proportions!’<sup>227</sup>

Betty received her information second-hand from Emmy, who was firmly convinced that Marie Luise had incriminated Werner. There is, however, no evidence for this, nor does it seem particularly likely given that essentially any fellow student enrolled during the summer semester of 1927 could have observed and reported their contact.<sup>228</sup> Neither is there any indication of espionage activities on Werner’s part anywhere in the Scholems’ testimony – Emmy denies them, Betty does not mention them at all, and no evidence can be found in the archives. After taking all available facts into account, a different story appears far more plausible: Werner may have already been alienated from the ‘Stalin Communists’ for years, but he remained faithful to the Communist idea, and it would have come naturally to him to discuss politics when meeting an interested young woman, demonstrating his extensive knowledge on the topic in the process. Marie Luise’s interest had been piqued by Werner’s knowledge and experience in political work; the intelligence services had little to do with their contact, to which Marie Luise von Hammerstein herself ultimately testified.

Despite maintaining a steadfast public silence throughout her life, a government questionnaire from 1973 sheds more light on her involvement. The document in question is Marie Luise’s application to be recognised as a ‘Persecutee of the Nazi Regime’ under East German law. Here, Marie Luise admits for the first time that she worked as a member of the KPD’s intelligence service from 1929 onward. Her duties were strictly conspiratorial: ‘At the same time, I was instructed to cease all public party activities. Neither was I allowed to carry my party book with me any longer [...] I was urged to mingle in my father’s social milieu. My task was to immediately pass on the content of any conversation I overheard. It was then forwarded to my closest colleague, Com-

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227 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 11 May 1935, Scholem 2002, p. 267. Betty wrote the letter from Riva in Italy to avoid censors, two months after Werner’s trial at the ‘People’s Court’ had ended. She received her information from Emmy, who described ‘the unfortunate Hammerstein story’ as a ‘strictly personal matter between Werner and the daughter of H[ammerstein]’ in another letter; see letter from Emmy to Betty Scholem, 30 April 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

228 Marie Luise denied implicating Werner until her death, as her long-time friend Eva Nickel reported on 9 May 2013. She made similar statements to Edith Scholem as well as her daughter Susanna Capon, see Interview with Edith Capon 1988 and Interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013.

rade Leo Roth. There were frequent meetings at brief intervals with him [...] I also sought the aid of my sister who is five years younger than me [...] My tasks furthermore included monitoring my father's written correspondence. For this purpose I received a duplicate key to the desk in the private residence. Any letters of concern were then photocopied at night and returned immediately'.<sup>229</sup>

Leo Roth, thus, was her KPD go-between – Werner Scholem is not mentioned at all.<sup>230</sup> In a letter intercepted by the East German Stasi in 1985, Marie Luise explicitly denies the notion that Werner recruited her: 'I was already a Communist when I met Werner at university [...] Through his wife, Emmy Scholem, I came into contact with the locally responsible neighbourhood group. There can be no question of my "recruitment" to the party by either Werner or Emmy Scholem'.<sup>231</sup> Werner and Emmy supplied contacts and perhaps even ideas to a young student whose political engagement was nevertheless self-motivated. Marie Luise had previously been active in the 'unpolitical youth movement', but was left unsatisfied with the generational rebellion and sought out socialist theory: 'I found the answer in Marx and Engels', she wrote in 1964 when recounting her adolescent politicisation.<sup>232</sup> Both Marx and Engels, as well as Werner Scholem, had a certain influence on Marie Luise. Werner must have seen something of himself in her when they met: a young woman, alienated from her family, involved in the youth movement and in search of deeper meaning in life. She struggled with her transition to adulthood, hammered out her

229 She cited the publication of her father's documents in the *Rote Fahne* in September 1929 as proof; see 'Lebenslauf Marie Luise Münchhausen, geb. von Hammerstein vom 12. Januar 1973, beigelegt einem Fragebogen zum Antrag auf Anerkennung als Verfolgte des Naziregimes', LArch Berlin, c Rep. 118–01, Nr. 2755. I thank Andreas Herbst for pointing out this document.

230 She also named Nathan Steinberger, Leo Roth, Gertrud Classen and a comrade named 'Albert' whose real name she did not know as accomplices; see *ibid.* According to Franz Feuchtwanger, the Hammerstein daughters belonged to the contacts that KPD parliamentary deputy Hans Kippenberger personally cultivated as leader of the *M-Apparat*; see Feuchtwanger 1981, p. 503. Scholem is not mentioned here either, however, and the connection to Kippenberger does not rule out the possibility of Roth serving as an intermediary.

231 Marie Luise Münchhausen [née von Hammerstein] to Peter Lübbe, 15 July 1985, BStU, MfS HA XX Nr. 21218.

232 *Ibid.* She mentions the *Wandervogel* movement in her 1951 CV (LArch Berlin c Rep. 301, Nr. 258). She credits her politicisation to 'reading the Marxist classics' in the Prussian State Library, see von Münchhausen (née Hammerstein) 1964. I thank Andreas Herbst for making me aware of this article.

own worldview and searched for her path to a new society – in short, Marie Luise found herself at the same point in life in 1927 as Werner Scholem in 1912. The two travelled this path together for a brief period, full of enthusiasm and evidently somewhat in love with each other.<sup>233</sup> But Werner's cynicism vis-à-vis the 'Stalin Communists' was anything but compatible with Marie Luise's youthful optimism, and although Werner left the Lenin League around this time, he remained a renegade in the eyes of his former comrades, while Marie Luise quickly ascended into the inner circle of the KPD intelligence gathering service.

From then on their lives would follow different paths, as not only Emmy, but also her daughter Edith Scholem confirms. She states that Marie Luise was ordered by the KPD to end all contact with Werner, with which the young Communist complied.<sup>234</sup> This statement is supported by the aforementioned party order that she was only to move within her father's social circles: public knowledge of Marie Luise and Werner's connection was not an advantage, but rather a burden for the party. It aroused suspicion and endangered the connection between Leo Roth and the Hammerstein daughters. In this sense, the KPD's intelligence service marked not the beginning but the end of Werner and Marie Luise's relationship.

Their connection posed a burden not only for the KPD, but also for Emmy. Edith Scholem reports that her mother did not approve of Marie Luise visiting Werner at Klopstockstraße in the least, although this was evidently not the case with other affairs. According to Edith, Emmy was moved not by jealousy, but by the high social status of Marie Luise's father.<sup>235</sup> In fact, this disagreement may in fact appear in the first letters Emmy and Werner were able to exchange directly in late 1934. Finally allowed to correspond once again, both were keen to exchange their thoughts on a previously unspecified 'point of difference'. This point was rather significant, as can be observed in Emmy's letter: 'Our current misfortune can essentially be fully blamed on such affairs. But regardless of this specific incident, which was simply bad luck, I blame myself for not seriously resisting these goings-on before. Now that I was in prison I have come to realise how deeply this has bothered me, even though I often predicted to you that this would happen.'<sup>236</sup>

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233 Ruth Fischer described the relationship as a 'love affair', Ruth Fischer to Franz Jung, 18 August 1960, Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 335.

234 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, ca. 1988.

235 Ibid.

236 Werner had previously written that the 'point of difference' had been resolved: '[...] and from my end, I can't tell you what to do given my years of absence. Who knows how long I

Did these 'goings-on' refer to extra-marital affairs and Marie Luise – or to the KPD, as Betty suggests? She writes that Werner had forced Emmy 'to remain a member of the party, to go to the meetings and to keep up all this disgusting Communist small talk. I absolutely believe her that she was unable to put up with his tormenting!'<sup>237</sup> Werner sought to maintain contact with the KPD, at least indirectly, through Emmy – he himself was no longer welcome in its ranks, let alone a fitting candidate for the party's intelligence services. Yet regardless of whether this 'point of difference' pertained to the General's daughter or the KPD, both would ultimately seal Werner's fate.

Tragically, the same was true for Leo Roth. The Nazis were never able to trace him, and he managed to stay in Germany under a false name until being recalled to Moscow in 1935. Despite his service to the Soviet Union, he quickly became a target of Stalin's secret police, the NKVD,<sup>238</sup> who were suspicious of his contacts to foreign embassies and the Germany army, amplified by his links to Karl Korsch and other 'renegades'. Roth's name was placed on an NKVD list of 'Trotskyists and other hostile elements' even prior to the first show trials in Moscow. Arrested on 22 November 1936, Roth was sentenced to death on charges of 'espionage' by a military tribunal after a year of imprisonment, and executed by firing squad on 10 November 1937. He was 26 years old.<sup>239</sup>

The intelligence Roth provided was ignored and left to collect dust in an archive. Stalin would conclude a pact with Hitler partitioning Eastern Europe in 1939, even though, thanks to Roth, he knew of Hitler's plans for conquest and extermination in the eastern territories first hand. Stalin's characteristic paranoia when it came to imagined domestic threats found no equivalent in foreign policy, where the logic of the balance of forces had long superseded the revolutionary idea. That the Nazis might strike a different balance between reasons of state and ideological fervour seems not to have occurred to the Soviet leader.

Werner Scholem no longer had any influence over these developments, cut off from the outside world and languishing in his cell in Berlin's Plötzensee Prison before trial. Werner appears to have been unaware of what exactly was happening to the very end, for Emmy's information on the circumstances of his arrest never reached him. He could only hope for the slim chance that the

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will be gone or if they will ever let me go'; see Werner to Emmy Scholem, 10 December 1935 and Emmy to Werner Scholem, 9 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

237 Emmy had told her this herself; see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 22 October 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 406.

238 On the following see Müller 2000, p. 89.

239 See Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 749 f., as well as Müller 2000.

prosecution would drop his charges,<sup>240</sup> which Emmy's intervention sought to encourage. Writing to the judge, she promised strict confidentiality and agreed to refrain from conducting anti-German propaganda while abroad. Perhaps she hoped that the matter would be resolved by General von Hammerstein's resignation in October 1933. Werner, on the other hand, considered hopes of the case being abandoned to be 'more than naïve'. He wrote: 'Do you actually believe that they've kept me in prison for one and a half years only to one day declare, "we beg your pardon, it was all a big mistake"?'<sup>241</sup> His pessimism would initially be proven correct. His trial was soon moved to Berlin after the Supreme Court in Leipzig ceded jurisdiction over cases of high treason to the newly established 'People's Court' [*Volksgerichtshof*], the result of a law passed in April 1934.<sup>242</sup> On 18 October 1934, Werner was finally presented with his indictment, in which the allegations backed by Willi Walter's testimony were repeated unchanged.<sup>243</sup>

### From the Supreme Court to the 'People's Court': Scholem's Last Trial

As the trial approached in March 1935, Werner's latest lawyer, Heinrich Reinefeld, still hoped to somehow convince the court to dismiss the charges.<sup>244</sup> Werner, however, was sceptical of the idea, noting: 'Reinefeld has been in a rather optimistic mood lately, but I assume it's just a popular trick among these criminal attorneys to boost their clients' morale prior to trial. Unfortunately, I remember how the lawyer whom I worked for during my legal clerkship once taught me this golden rule of the profession.'<sup>245</sup> Scholem greeted his predicament with a characteristically morbid sense of humour, encouraged by a hint from the prison library: 'There must be a clown somewhere in this library who

240 A civil servant notified Betty that indictment would not necessarily follow a preliminary investigation – this was formally also was the case for Werner, although it may say more about the nature of the investigation itself; see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 3 October 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 332.

241 Werner to Betty Scholem, 6 September 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

242 On the establishment of the 'People's Court' see Wagner 2011, p. 17.

243 *Anklageschrift und Urteil des Volksgerichtshof gegen Hüffner, Scholem und andere*, BArch 13 J 195/33.

244 Heinrich Reinefeld had taken on the case after the court began suspecting Hans Kaufmann of involvement in Emmy's escape.

245 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 2 March 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

is informed about our case, for the last book I received before the trial date was a shiny, illustrated work on “Our Reichswehr”. I was therefore all the more able to adequately prepare myself for next week’s topic.’<sup>246</sup>

Werner anticipated a guilty verdict and conviction, writing in January 1935 that he planned to ‘prepare for gluing bags or sewing sacks in Brandenburg, or for earthworks in the moor camp’.<sup>247</sup> Still, Werner hoped the trial would at least move his life forward again. Any verdict seemed better than the maddening uncertainty of pre-trial detention, irrespective of the outcome.

Upon learning that the newly established ‘People’s Court’, now the highest court in the Nazi state, had established its headquarters in the Prussian Landtag of all places, Werner took the opportunity to look back on the course of his life: ‘The trial will take place in room 8, on the first floor of the former Landtag building. This is really quite an irony of fate, for I know this hall from several occasions. In 1922 and 1923 this was where the Landtag’s school committee convened, of which I was a member. The hall was at the same time our parliamentary group’s chamber, where I participated in a meeting, chaired by Ten-Commandments-Hoffmann, for the first time in March 1921.’<sup>248</sup> Just next to it is where our parliamentary group’s offices were located for years. I presume that is where they have now set up the judge’s room where our verdict will be decided!! In October 1925, when the national conference was held because of our spiffing “Open Letter”, the decision to kick me out of the KPD’s Central Committee was taken in room 8 as well. In 1927, we would hold our regular opposition meetings there, too. Really, what would surely suffice for my acquittal is if the walls of this room could suddenly talk and recount to the “People’s Court” all they have heard about the name Scholem over the past 10 years.’<sup>249</sup>

Ten years after his dramatic fall from the KPD’s leading ranks, Werner Scholem found himself on trial in the very same room in which he had once been deposed. In an ironic historical twist, the 1935 ‘People’s Court’ proceedings would turn out much more in Werner’s favour than those conducted by Thälmann’s Central Committee in 1925.

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246 Ibid.

247 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 21 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover. He had mentioned the ‘Bourtanger Moor’ in the Emsland region the year prior; see Werner to Emmy Scholem, 11 August 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover. On the Emsland camps see Korsthorst and Walter 1985.

248 Adolph Hoffmann was famous for his *Die Zehn Gebote und die besitzenden Klassen* [‘The Ten Commandments and the Propertied Classes’], a pamphlet that strongly influenced both Werner and his brother; see Scholem 2012, p. 41.

249 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 15 February 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.



The trial began on 4 March and lasted five days. Scholem's case was dealt with on 5 and 7 March.<sup>250</sup> Quite surprisingly, the 'People's Court' seemed unimpressed by the allegations against Scholem, particularly thanks to testimony by his former lawyer and hiking companion Hans Kaufmann, as the transcript of proceedings notes: 'The defendant Scholem has proven to the court by testimony of lawyer Dr Kaufmann that he left Berlin in order to set forth on a vacation on 29 or 30 June 1932'.<sup>251</sup> Werner had been in the Zillertal Alps, attending the Friesenberghaus opening ceremony held on 3 July 1932, the first Alpine chalet run by the liberal German Alpine Club of Berlin. When placed next to Willi Walter's testimony, this trip became a surprisingly solid alibi: 'Walter himself has stated that he (Walter) was in prison from March to 26 June 1932 and had not yet paid a visit to Schlüter's locale. Accordingly, the incident must have taken place on 27, 28, or even 29 June. Although that cannot be ruled out entirely, it is nevertheless quite unlikely'.<sup>252</sup> Moreover, the court doubted the political police's methods of investigation: 'Adding to this was the fact that at the time neither the defendant Scholem nor the deputy Schoenen were actually known to the witness Walter nor the defendant Wernicke. Instead, both only identified Scholem and Koenen as the culprits after being presented different photographs over the course of the investigation. A mistaken identity can at the very least not be ruled out under these circumstances, even more so if one considers that the defendant Scholem has supposedly, at least according to his own uncontested claim, been at enmity with deputy Koenen for years and has never met with him. Be that as it may, the testimonies of the witness Walter and the defendant Wernicke were insufficient, under the given circumstances, to definitively prove that the defendant Scholem had in fact committed the alleged offence'.<sup>253</sup> Surprisingly, Werner was declared innocent 'in the name of the people'.

As had been the case in 1921, his acquittal was based on 'actual facts' – a lack of evidence. Ruth Fischer later described the prosecution's blunder: 'The court's error was to overlook that the prosecution's main witness had coincidentally been in prison at the time he claimed to have witnessed the "subversion"'.<sup>254</sup> Others, however, were less fortunate and found guilty: Frieda Hüffner and six

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250 The minutes can be found in *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BArch, R 3018, NJ 13903 Vol. 3; for a report from Betty Scholem see letter to Gershom, 12 March 1935, Scholem 2002, pp. 264–5.

251 *Urteil des Volksgerichtshofs vom 9. März 1935*, p. 31, BArch 13 J 195/33.

252 Ibid.

253 Ibid.

254 Ruth Fischer to Philips Price, 20 January 1937, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

additional defendants were sentenced to one to three years in prison after judges accepted evidence of their involvement in the 'subversive' manipulation of soldiers, or because house searches had turned up subversive literature in their possession. Theodor Pfeiffer was identified as the leader of the cell and convicted.

Three other defendants were acquitted alongside Scholem after no evidence of their alleged crime could be produced. Legal proceedings against Oskar Wischeropp and eleven other defendants were put to rest. Here, the court took into consideration an impunity law passed on 30 December 1932 granting a nationwide amnesty for political crimes.<sup>255</sup> In other cases, the charges had already passed statutes of limitation. Overall, the trial was anything but a success for the chief prosecutor. Given that subversive activity could only be proven in individual cases, rather than on a systematic scale, the majority of the accused were not convicted.

Particularly striking when reading the files of a court explicitly established by the Nazi regime to persecute enemies of the state and the 'Volk' is the institution's formally and legally correct conduct throughout the trial, right down to the very last detail. There can be no doubt that the 'People's Court' practised a highly political form of law, but it did so – at least in its first year of existence – fully in the tradition of the Supreme Court and former Imperial Court in Leipzig. Criminal allegations had to be precisely defined and the criminal act itself unequivocally proven – a defendant's political beliefs were not enough to secure a conviction. Only in one individual case did the court mention the 'dishonourable disposition' of an army veteran who had defected to the KPD. The rest of the defendants, however, were granted their political honour: 'The Senate was unable to detect such dishonourable conduct on the part of the remaining defendants, as they have apparently committed their actions motivated by their Communist beliefs, and did so during a time of particularly strong political manipulation and confusion'.<sup>256</sup>

In this case, the defendants' political disposition actually had a *mitigating* effect. The 'People's Court' judges adhered to a notion of honour inherited from Imperial Germany that regarded deeds of conviction more sympathetically than, and distinct from, 'petty' crime. Scholem's acquittal and the court's justification thereof also demonstrates how smoothly the Weimar Republic morphed into the National Socialist Führer state. The Nazi leadership had

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<sup>255</sup> The amnesty had been ordered by Chancellor of the Reich Kurt von Schleicher, and was part of a failed attempt to incorporate the labour movement into a new kind of authoritarian state (the so-called *Querfront*, or Third Position strategy).

<sup>256</sup> *Urteil des Volksgerichtshofs vom 9. März 1935*, p. 32, in: BAArch 13 J 195/33.

expressed its distrust of the ranks of traditional professional judges by creating the 'People's Court' after the Reichstag Fire trial. Lay judges were now to ensure a *völkisch* justice through political trials; accordingly, an SS *Oberführer* named Breithaupt and an air force commander named Stutzer were among the judges drafting both Frieda Hüffner's and Werner Scholem's verdicts.<sup>257</sup> In addition, one of the assessors in the trial was Dr Eberhard Taubert, an avowed Nazi and expert on anti-Bolshevism.<sup>258</sup> Incidentally, this was the same Taubert involved in the arrest and torture of Ruth Fischer's son Gerhard two years prior.<sup>259</sup> Despite Taubert's ideological reinforcement, the court continued to practice the kind of political justice Werner encountered in the 1920s: reasons of state were prioritised over democracy and freedom of speech while the army was treated as the backbone of the state, but convictions were nevertheless tied to the burden of proof.<sup>260</sup>

The terroristic (il)legality that the 'People's Court' is known for today would not be established until a later stage. The share of death sentences rose over the course of the war from under 10 percent to almost 70 percent by June 1942, mainly the result of 'expedited proceedings' against resistance fighters from the German-occupied territories.<sup>261</sup> Only the civilisational rupture of the Second World War would allow the Nazi regime to realise its particularly horrific vision of ideological justice. In early 1935, by contrast, the country's new leadership was still under the watchful gaze of the international community,

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257 According to the text of the verdict, the following members of the First Senate of the 'People's Court' were involved in Scholem's trial: 'State Court Director Lämmle as Chair, District Court Councillor Dr Zieger, ss *Oberführer* Breithaupt, Pilot Commander Stutzer, LLD Taubert as an official of the Reich Attorney, also as an official of the Reich Attorney Dr Freiherr Schenk zu Schweinsberg'. This list of professional jurists referred to Dr Hermann Karl Maximilian Ferdinand Reinhold Schenk zu Schweinsberg (1900–74), Paul Lämmle (1892–1945), Dr Georg Zieger (1897–1966), and Dr Eberhard Taubert (1907–76). The names and dates of birth are reconstructed in Koch 1978 beginning on p. 523, as well as in Richter 2011 (Schweinsberg, p. 228), Eichmüller 2012 (Lämmle, p. 278), and Wieland 1989 (Zieger, p. 218); on Taubert see the following footnote.

258 Taubert had joined the NSDAP and the SA. After 1945, he began a career as one of West Germany's experts in anti-Communism, employed by various intelligence services and serving as an advisor to conservative politician and Federal Minister of Defence Franz Josef Strauß beginning in 1958; see Körner 1994, as well as the entry on Taubert in Klee 2003.

259 Keßler 2013a, p. 313.

260 On this, see the chapter 'Journalism and Judiciary' in this volume, on legal practice under the Kaiserreich more generally see Wilhelm 2010.

261 Marxen 1994, p. 88; see also Marxen and Schlüter 2004, Schlüter 1995.

and retaining a rudimentary state of law was advantageous in this situation. Moreover, adhering to a traditional interpretation of the law with regard to high treason was not particularly bothersome for the Nazis, given that it had served as a reliable instrument for persecuting Communists and socialists since 1871. Acquittals such as Scholem's were therefore not the acts of resistance or isolated pockets of legality that many Nazi judges would later claim.<sup>262</sup> On the contrary: although the majority of defendants were released following acquittal or their charges being dropped – their certificates of release list their families' places of residence in Perleberger Straße, Turmstraße, and Beusselstraße in the north of Berlin, within walking distance of Schlüter's locale – this did not apply to Werner Scholem. His certificate of release, issued at Berlin's Plötzensee Prison, reads: 'Remand prisoner Werner Scholem has been released to the Berlin office of the *Geheime Staatspolizei* [Gestapo] today'.<sup>263</sup> The same was true of fellow defendants Oskar Wischeropp and Karl Heinz Leonhardt: they all faced renewed, or rather continued, detention. Werner Scholem was transferred to the Columbiahaus concentration camp in Berlin's Tempelhof district, the first in a series of prison camps that would hold him for the rest of his life.<sup>264</sup>

The jurists in the First Senate of the 'People's Court' may not have abandoned the long-established traditions of civil legality overnight, but all of them turned a blind eye to the violent parallel world emerging in symbiotic coexistence with the old legal system from the Nazi regime's outset. The term 'dual state' was coined by Social Democratic lawyer Ernst Fraenkel in a secret essay as early as 1937, and refers to this coexistence and cooperation between state forms during the first years of the Nazi regime.<sup>265</sup> According to Fraenkel, the old

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262 The fact that Nazi judges had acted 'in line with prevailing laws' made their retroactive punishment more difficult. Referring to newer legal concepts such as 'crimes against humanity' would have violated bans on ex post facto convictions. Moreover, the American occupation at first prohibited German courts from using this supra-national legal concept; see Koch 1988, p. 506, p. 511; Wagner 2011, p. 844 f.; see also Eichmüller 2012.

263 'Entlassungsbescheid Gefängnis Berlin Plötzensee für Werner Scholem vom 10. März 1935', *Akten des Oberreichsanwalts in der Strafsache gegen Hüffner und Genossen*, BAArch, R 3018, NJ 13903 Vol. 3.

264 According to Emmy, Scholem was transferred to the Columbiahaus concentration camp on 16 March 1935. Whether he was imprisoned somewhere else from 10–16 March or this is an error remains unclear; see 'Nachweis der Haftzeiten und Berechnung der Haftentschädigung', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

265 The essay was originally published under a pseudonym as 'Das Dritte Reich als Doppelstaat' in a magazine for political exiles called *Sozialistische Warte* in 1937, and was republished in 1999. Fraenkel expanded the essay into a book in American exile, publishing it as *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* in 1941. It was not trans-

normative judicial state was complemented by a National Socialist 'prerogative state', that is, a state of terror and political state of emergency. This violence initially focused its ire on its political enemies – Social Democrats, Communists – but soon included Jews, Roma and other groups regarded as 'anti-social' as well. All of these groups had similarly been denied full recognition as legal subjects under the old imperial judiciary. Moreover, imperial jurists observed and implemented the Nazi state's orders, as the republic had produced very few loyal civil servants of its own. Legal scholars such as Scholem's professor Martin Wolff were removed from their posts without a hint of protest from their colleagues. Although the majority of Scholem's judges attended university in the Weimar Republic, they had been educated in a world of monarchist norms: to them, the rule of law and democracy were two entirely unrelated concepts.<sup>266</sup> These judges were experienced in differentiating between formal laws and political prerogatives. This habit, along with the many spaces of social normality deceptively allowed to persist in the Nazi's prerogative state, made it easier for the judiciary to turn a blind eye to events unfolding in Germany.<sup>267</sup> Like Pontius Pilate long before them, the judges washed their hands of all responsibility while a secret state police operated behind the scenes. Their division of labour functioned rather smoothly: a simple release certificate sufficed to transfer a human being from the state of law to one of utterly arbitrary lawlessness.

### A Stolen Life: Plötzensee, Lichtenburg, Dachau

Soon after his acquittal in March 1935, the Gestapo transferred Werner to the Columbiahaus concentration camp, an old military detention facility on the edge of the Tempelhofer Feld airfield in Berlin.<sup>268</sup> This signified a shift away

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lated back into German until 1974. Fraenkel's thesis is based on the experience of the Nazi regime until 1939. In light of the Nazi regime's further radicalisation in the early 1940s, Franz Neumann posited the thesis of the Third Reich as an *Unstaat*, or non-state, which he labelled 'Behemoth' in contrast to Hobbes's 'Leviathan'; see Neumann 1942.

266 Scholem's judges were born between 1892 and 1907, thus belonging to his generation.

267 Fraenkel stressed as 'normal' the retention of civil law under Nazism, particularly contract law and the sanctity of private property. Legal historian Klaus Marxen, however, emphasises that the 'People's Court', as the highest instance of political justice, 'certainly ought to be included in discussions of aspects of normality under Nazi law', see Fraenkel 2006, pp. 107–32; Marxen 1988, p. 80, fn. 18.

268 The exact date is unclear, but is mentioned in a letter from Werner to Emmy, 1 May

from an already political judiciary towards sheer institutional arbitrariness, yet the shift was not as clear to Scholem himself: firstly, because authorities' use of the term 'protective custody' lent the affair a certain legal pretence, and secondly because he had already perceived himself to be at the mercy of an unpredictable judiciary during pre-trial detention. After all, arbitrariness had accompanied his incarceration from the outset. In April 1933, Scholem was kept uninformed of the charges against him for weeks, and was even told he would be discharged on 4 June. Werner jubilantly informed his family, only to then be transferred from one prison to another.<sup>269</sup> Betty regarded this move as a cruel bluff by the authorities, nor would it be the last of its kind. Werner's letters from this period are accordingly pessimistic and helpless, overlaid with boredom and longing for his lost family life. These themes would resurface in his later letters from the concentration camps, which are also discussed in this section. Werner Scholem's life was fading away, trapped in a system of penal facilities which themselves slowly transformed (much slower than is commonly assumed by later observers) from instruments of mere political repression to outright genocidal dictatorship.

Following brief stints in Spandau Prison and police custody at Alexanderplatz police headquarters, Werner was incarcerated in Moabit Prison as prisoner 1660 from June 1933 onward.<sup>270</sup> He was transferred to Berlin-Plötzensee in mid-August 1934, where he was held until 10 March 1935.<sup>271</sup> Life in a penal facility was nothing new for Werner. He knew Spandau and Moabit from previous arrests, and Plötzensee was hardly any different: 'The internal operations are of course similar in all prisons', Werner wrote. The food was particularly bad in Plötzensee – 'always millet, cabbage, carrots, in a way that vividly reminds me of Spandau 1917'.<sup>272</sup> The supply of literature was as inadequate as it was familiar: 'The library is scary, but that was the case in Moabit as well'.<sup>273</sup> Werner conten-

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1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover; as well as 'Nachweis der Haftzeiten und Berechnung der Haftentschädigung', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDS. 110 w Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351. On the concentration camp itself see Schilde and Tuchel 1990. The Tempelhofer Feld refers to a section of Berlin's Tempelhof Airport which once served as a parade grounds for Prussian soldiers and was later used for the construction of hangars. Today, the entire airfield is a public park following the airport's closure in 2008.

269 Betty to Gershom Scholem 7 and 11 June 1933, Scholem 2002, pp. 236–8.

270 Betty to Gershom Scholem 12 June 1933, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 308; Erich or Reinhold Scholem to Werner Scholem, 20 June 1933, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

271 *Häftlingskartei des Zuchthauses Plötzensee*, SAPMO-BArch, DY 55/ V 278/5/46, Band 6.

272 Werner to Betty Scholem, 24 August 1917, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

273 Ibid.

ted himself with Edward Bulwer Lytton's 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*. He took little interest in the book's apocalyptic theme, even considered it 'terribly boring'. Instead, he found himself drawn to the language itself, translating a passage from English into German every day.<sup>274</sup> This would be his main pastime during his pre-trial detention, practising several hours a day with the aid of a dictionary.<sup>275</sup> Werner had largely forgotten his English since his time as a tutor in the field hospital in 1916, and re-learning it would now come to signify his hopes of reuniting with Emmy and his family in England. Despite his studiousness, however, these exercises were not enough to occupy his time: 'The boredom is beginning to make me stupid lately. I'm sick and tired of novels and crosswords, and newspapers mostly just infuriate me.'<sup>276</sup>

Werner escaped his cell by retreating into his thoughts, regularly perusing the Alpine Club's newsletters and dreaming of rock climbing in England, although solitary confinement had weakened him to a point where even a single visit left him exhausted.<sup>277</sup> Still, he clung to hope, writing his brother Reinhold: 'But at least I may hope to become a human being again one day.'<sup>278</sup> Werner experienced imprisonment as a deprivation of his humanity, just as during the war, a critique which he sometimes detailed melancholically, and other times with scathing humour: 'It's getting more dull here by the day. [...] There is, however, exciting distraction during hunting season, namely the fly chase, which is constantly necessary here, as masses of these germ carriers descend on the cells. My statistic for the last week [...] features 81 slain flies, a satisfactory result, which reminds me vividly of the prison at Kirchtor in Halle where I engaged in the same sport in 1917.'<sup>279</sup>

Werner was nevertheless rarely pleased to receive company in his cell, even on the dullest of days: 'Anyway, I'm glad to still be in my cell by myself, because the company you get here is hardly recommendable, just thieves and impostors.'<sup>280</sup> When prison congestion brought him company after all in 1935, he was

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274 Ibid.

275 Werner to Reinhold Scholem, 2 July 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

276 Ibid.

277 On rock climbing and Scholem's physical exhaustion see *ibid*; the Alpine Club newsletter is mentioned in a letter to Betty Scholem, 27 July 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

278 Werner Scholem to Reinhold Scholem, 2 July 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

279 'Am Kirchtor' was the address of JVA Halle I, the prison Werner inhabited in 1917. Werner to Betty Scholem, 4 October 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

280 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 13 December 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

noticeably distraught: 'Unfortunately, something has happened here that is quite unpleasant for me and is making my time here much more difficult [...] They've put a young thief into my cell with me, a bandit whose profession was breaking into jewellers' shop windows!! Though the young man doesn't really give the impression of a gangster. He is very polite, and has even left the bed to me and sleeps on the floor'.<sup>281</sup> In his judges' eyes, Werner the Communist was probably just as much an anti-social element as the jewellery thief, for both failed to respect the sanctity of private property. But Werner took being housed together with a 'bandit' as an insult. Troubling him more than the difference in social distinction was the psychological torment: Werner could not stand the presence of a roommate night and day, not to mention the constant supervision it entailed. He successfully requested to be returned to solitary confinement, 'to which I am accustomed and which allows time to pass a lot quicker for me'.<sup>282</sup> But life in a cell alone was of course not much better. Werner had trouble sleeping, and beyond the all-encompassing boredom, his looming trial caused him much anxiety and uncertainty.<sup>283</sup> He reacted by stubbornly clinging to daily routines and 'statistics' such as his fly count. Werner found interruptions to this routine extremely annoying, if not dangerous – be it a cell-mate or the thought of leaving his cell in Plötzensee to face trial. He could not sleep in a strange bed, Werner announced – well aware of the bitter irony in this: 'You can see that there are indeed situations in which even Plötzensee appears as a comfortable home'.<sup>284</sup> Underlying all of this was Werner's hope that the trial would finally bring a degree of 'clarity' to his existence,<sup>285</sup> but this hope would prove to be an illusion as well. The transition from pre-trial to protective custody meant that his state of submission and uncertainty was prolonged indefinitely. A permanent tension between his hopes for release and his powerlessness vis-à-vis the daily routine of incarceration characterised the final years of Werner's life. The first stop on this path between hope and disappointment was the Columbiahaus concentration camp, a facility infamous for abusing inmates, from which none of Werner's letters or reports have survived.

He would write regularly from Lichtenburg concentration camp, located in Prettin, Saxony, beginning in May 1935. This 'camp' was actually a castle, built

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281 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 7 February 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

282 Ibid.

283 Werner to Betty Scholem, 13 July 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

284 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 13 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

285 Ibid.



in 1580 as the Saxon Electress's residence, and used as a prison from 1812 to 1928. The Nazis reactivated the facility to house the new regime's fresh crop of political prisoners.<sup>286</sup> Conditions in the overcrowded castle hardly resembled those of the old 'fortress detention', once considered an honourable form of punishment for political and other crimes of conviction. Today, historians regard it as a key institution in the development of the Nazi system of concentration camps, marking the transition from improvised, 'wild' concentration camps to a network of prisons and camps spanning the European continent whose victims would number in the millions.<sup>287</sup>

Werner's letters from Lichtenburg and other camps, however, reveal little to nothing about the humiliation, torture, violence and death generally associated with the term 'concentration camp' today. Violence is absent from his accounts: 'I'm doing very well here. You needn't worry about my personal well-being. I've fully settled in', Werner wrote in the first of his letters from camp on 1 May 1935.<sup>288</sup> Sentences like these give the impression of a degree of normality, as boredom seemingly continued to represent Werner's most pressing concern during imprisonment. But meticulous censorship of written correspondence was not the only factor erasing and swallowing any depictions of violence: indeed, it corresponds to Werner's own personal suppression. He himself described his letters about camp life as 'colourless', referring to both his omissions and the monotony of life in prison.<sup>289</sup> Thus, Werner would escape across the English Channel to be with Emmy and his daughters in his thoughts, demanding the latest pictures of them, news about their apartment, accounts from Emmy's lubricant business or the daughters' marks in school again and again. He even urged Emmy to maintain a diary in hopes that he could one day relive the lost time together vicariously.<sup>290</sup> He repeated his requests in each letter, leaving a most desperate impression on the reader at times. That said, his constant demands for news of and access to Emmy's life illustrate how the absence of any depictions of torture and humiliation expresses another element of the violence of camp existence: the stolen life.

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286 On the Lichtenburg concentration camp see Hördler and Jacobeit 2009.

287 Hördler and Jacobeit 2009, p. 14.

288 Werner Scholem to 'Meine Lieben', 1 May 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

289 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 5 November 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

290 He requested such a diary twice, see Werner Scholem to Betty Scholem, 27 July 1934 and 4 October 1934. He asked Emmy for a sketch of the family's apartment on 17 November 1934, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

The trivialities of daily life, such as moving house or the children's school marks, winter fat and grey hair, a new coat or a thriving business in a new city, enjoying a Christmas goose together with old friends – Werner was permanently deprived of all of this on 24 April 1933. He no longer controlled his fate, but instead lived a non-life tied to a receding and increasingly distant outside world. Werner did not dwell on the reality of the present in his letters, but rather passively revelled in his own memories, hopes for an uncertain future and the actions of others outside the camp walls. It may indeed have been this denial of his own everyday life that kept him alive through seven years of prisons and camps.

After all, the violence absent from his letters was certainly a part of his life. A few accounts from contemporary witnesses have survived that tell not only of a stolen life, but of humiliation, forced labour and abuse. One of the most important witnesses was a Jewish lawyer named Ludwig Bendix, whom Werner Scholem met in the Lichtenburg concentration camp in 1935.<sup>291</sup> At the time of his arrest, Bendix was already in his late fifties, an elderly man who made a name for himself through his publications on legal questions, arrested for a letter of complaint concerning anti-Jewish riots to his local police station in 1935.<sup>292</sup> Owed to his very poor eyesight and utter lack of experience with physical labour, Bendix was regarded as feeble and helpless. He was assigned to a gang of sock darners whose overseer would 'turn a blind eye' to his performance: 'The foreman was Werner Scholem, of whom I knew nothing at the time, apart from his name and previous affiliation with the Communist Party'. Werner took it upon himself to instruct Bendix on work activities in the camp: 'With an eagerness that hardly sprang from the matter itself, at least so it seemed to me, he introduced me, being the absolute beginner that I was, to the basic rules of darning socks, without me remotely grasping this work, and without him being remotely interested in me grasping it. It was obvious that he was trying to assume an air of importance and give a performance for potential spectators, an aspect tremendously important for survival in camp, which I never quite got the hang of [...] Yet I received the usual hint from all sides that it wasn't even important, and that it would fully suffice if I just sat there and fiddled about with some socks. No one was bothered about the outcome of my work. Scholem, who was responsible for the whole gang and overheard this conversation, added that the main thing was that the allotted

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291 Bendix 1937–8. The manuscript is divided into multiple 'books' according to concentration camp. The fourth book on Lichtenburg and the fifth on the Dachau concentration camp are cited here. I thank Siegrid Dominik for referring me to these sources.

292 Bendix 1937–8, p. 17. On Ludwig Bendix's biography see his son's memoirs, Bendix 1986.

work was managed on time and that this never posed any problem as he had some splendid workers in his gang'.<sup>293</sup>

Although Scholem was willing to protect his fellow inmate from reprisals, Ludwig Bendix was rather taken aback by this 'pretending to work', which coloured his perception of Scholem more generally: 'His behaviour reminded me of bad actors on stage who are unable to sufficiently separate their private personality from that of their role's ideal reality. [...] And Scholem always acted the way he wanted to be seen by the guards when they were watching; and while doing so, ostensibly ignored these same superiors he considered omnipresent. At any rate, his constant bustle had an affected, artificial touch to it'.<sup>294</sup>

Werner for his part accepted his new position quite nonchalantly, writing to Emmy in August 1935: 'I'm doing very well now with regard to my work here. I'm the foreman of a gang of sock darners, a job I'm very good at. Once I return to you I will gladly artistically mend all the family's socks. As you can tell, I'm learning things now that are far more valuable than my entire law studies which were senseless and are worth absolutely nothing today'.<sup>295</sup>

This letter, regardless of how innocent it may appear, had disastrous consequences for Werner. Company commander Bräuning seized the opportunity to make an example of him. Ludwig Bendix recalls: 'He had all inmates step out of their cells and delivered a speech on the equality of all forms of labour, particularly those inside the camp. The high point of his talk was when he cited a passage from a letter, in which work in the sock gang was described as outstandingly pleasant and praised as preferable to other work outside. [...] At the end Bräuning then named the author of these lines, Scholem, who was immediately subjected to a wave of outrage by the other inmates, but was pacified when Bräuning announced that he would offer Scholem the chance to test his assessment by working in the sullage gang'.<sup>296</sup>

Although Scholem protested and was even able to prove that he had not urged intellectuals to abstain from physical labour by showing a copy of the letter in question, the transfer remained in effect. Company commander Bräuning, once a small-time salesman clerk, generally treated inmates with a higher level of education than his own quite patronisingly and almost as equals, so as to elevate himself. Whenever he sought to impress his camp superiors, however,

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293 Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, p. 19 f.

294 Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, p. 20.

295 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 21 August 1935. Werner had still worked in the camp laundry in June of that same year, see Werner to Emmy Scholem, 20 June 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

296 Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, p. 22.

he would not hesitate to exploit the camp's pervasive anti-intellectualism.<sup>297</sup> Werner fell victim to Bräuning's attempt to distinguish himself in the eyes of the camp.

Bendix was also transferred to the so-called 'sullage gang' [*Jauchekolonne*], and later recounted the details of this assignment.<sup>298</sup> His task consisted of 'emptying the cesspit, which was about 10 square metres in size and at the time filled up to its edges with the camp's raw sewage, and to deliver its contents to the horticultural or agricultural patches in and around the camp'. This was conducted 'in the most primitive imaginable way by using scoops', initially 'a rusty, leaking tin bucket without handles, fastened to a long wooden pole'. These were used to fill the excrement into a wheeled cart, which in turn was pulled by four inmates by hand, dragging two ropes tied to the cart's tongue. The payload was then either used in the camp's own garden or sold as manure to local farmers at the camp gate.

The work was considered punitive and was reserved exclusively for Jewish inmates. Bendix wrote: 'During the first days we returned to the company in our filthy clothes smelling of the vapour picked up at the workplace, until we were soon afterwards allowed to take a shower after work, even receiving fresh towels and fresh underwear. [...] This measure wasn't approved in consideration of the – as they were often referred to – "filthy Jews", but out of consideration for the other inmates in "protective custody" and guard squads, who could not be expected to breathe the stench of sewage.'<sup>299</sup> This was also why the buckets were later replaced with a sewage pump.

Werner Scholem mentions not a single word of this in his letters. If he reported very little about his everyday life in camp before, he ceased to do so altogether after his punitive transfer. Instead, he urged Emmy to tell him about her life all the more. Once again he asked for new photos of her and their daughters and for a 'business report' on Emmy's small company. The requests grew repetitive and Emmy seems to have been at a loss of what to do about them at times. The lives of the couple were worlds apart: that which appeared trivial to Emmy represented life itself to Werner. Meanwhile, she was puzzled as to why he failed to talk about his own everyday life: 'You never

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297 Bendix wrote of Bräuning: 'Once a small-time clerk, he had now risen to a relatively powerful position, in which the welfare and woe of 150–200 persons was in his hands. He understandably commanded the company of politicals, because he was the most educated of all the company commanders, some of whom did not speak proper German', Bendix 1937–8, fourth book p. 21.

298 Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, p. 26 f.

299 Ibid.

write anything about your life there. I hope that – in spite of everything – you are coping. But you were a soldier during all those war years, these times will surely come to an end one day as well.<sup>300</sup> Werner tried to convey to Emmy that he was not free in his choice of words: ‘You never respond to many of my questions, surely because you are so busy. But I wait for your answers nonetheless, as I have no other connection to life anymore. [...] It makes writing letters, as colourless as they may often be, easier for me, too. The impulses for our letters would have to come from you though, because each letter I write to you is a rather difficult task in several respects, which you can by no means compare to your prison stay in summer 33.’<sup>301</sup> This was as far as Werner dared to go.

Censorship of their correspondence widened the gulf between them even further. For years, their exchange would be distorted. Werner repeatedly demanded more attention, while Emmy was unsure how to comfort him. The camp permitted Werner to write and receive two letters per month, and enforced the rule strictly: a letter written in London at the end of the month often arrived in Lichtenburg or Dachau only the following month, in which case the camp authorities would count the letter in the new month, rather than the one in which it was sent.<sup>302</sup> This pedantic restriction of his correspondence constituted intentional harassment, and often enraged Werner. In camp, he counted the days of his detention, so as to be able to provide the dates of his arrest and trial instantaneously, recounting the precise dates of every letter he had sent.<sup>303</sup> This stubbornness was vital to confronting the bureaucratic cage of camp rules and regulations, helping him to adjust and thus survive. He could not comprehend how life in the outside world, where his family members organised their time as they pleased, failed to reciprocate his efforts.<sup>304</sup> Werner had long since lost control of the rhythms of his own life. For over two years now, he had been told when to wake up, when to work, when to eat lunch, when the lights would be switched off and when to sleep.

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300 Emmy to Werner Scholem, 2 June 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

301 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 5 November 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

302 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 8 January 1936, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

303 ‘I celebrate an anniversary on 17 January, the 1000th day of my imprisonment. I’m consoled by the feeling that I will not see the 10,000th! One must simply have a long view of things, then it’s not so bad’, Werner to Emmy Scholem, 8 January 1936, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

304 For example, he complained to Emmy in March 1936 that she had written letters on 8 and 19 February, instead of 1 and 13. See Werner to Emmy Scholem, 5 March 1936, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

Living in radically different worlds led to multiple severe crises for the couple. A rather significant setback for Werner occurred when Emmy announced plans to emigrate to Canada. She believed she was no longer safe in Europe and submitted a request to the immigration authorities in Ottawa. Werner was initially delighted by the plans, ordering a book about British Columbia and dreaming of distant Canadian mountains.<sup>305</sup> Yet while Werner daydreamed, Emmy's request had already been denied. A married woman could not obtain citizenship without her husband, at least not until the marriage had been dissolved.<sup>306</sup> This unpleasant news sat in Emmy's desk drawer for more than half a year. After much hesitation, Emmy approached Werner regarding the issue in January 1936: would he agree to a divorce?

Although Werner understood the purely legalistic motivations behind her request, he was deeply hurt nevertheless: 'I know you and am aware that you only proposed this to me because you have such great external difficulties that would be made easier by a divorce. I have explained to you in detail why I cannot accept it,<sup>307</sup> and yet the matter relentlessly haunts me, as you surely expected a different response. But after all these other terrible and entirely senseless sacrifices I've been forced to make over the past three years, I can't now, on top of it all, relinquish our written correspondence too! I hope you can understand my point of view, which of course is motivated by purely objective facts. Perhaps we can return to this question again in a few years' time. I might be able to accept the consequences and take the appropriate steps if even after five years I still haven't been able to return to you. But until then let us at least cultivate the illusion that there still is hope!'<sup>308</sup>

Werner reacted to the request markedly 'objectively'. But as a divorcee, he would no longer be permitted to receive Emmy's letters – an unbearable thought, as they were all he had left. Werner suffered greatly on the inside, as his subsequent letter indicated: 'Well, one day everything will be over, for everything must pass, even a lifelong sentence. After all, wouldn't it be better

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305 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 20 July 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

306 The official reply explained: 'As requested over the telephone I beg to inform you that a married woman living in London, England, whose husband is interned in Germany cannot as a married woman make an application for naturalization independently of her husband. The law in England is the same as in Canada, that is, that unless the marriage is dissolved, she will have to wait until her husband is first naturalized', Oscar Coderre, for the Under-Secretary of State, Naturalization Branch, Ottawa to Emmy Scholem, 15 April 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

307 A letter on the subject hinted at here has not survived.

308 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 5 February 1936, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

for you anyway if all this were to finally end, so that you can start a new life. Unalterable facts are surely easier to stomach than endless uncertainties. But what can I do?'<sup>309</sup> Werner had a hard time accepting his fate and was terrified of becoming a burden to Emmy. As in 1934, he again felt abandoned, time passed 'endlessly' and he no longer waited for the pictures Emmy had promised to send.

That said, he would be far from abandoned. Emmy never repeated the divorce proposal, and while he penned his sorrowful letter, Emmy and Gershom were busy leaving no stone unturned to arrange for Werner's emigration to Palestine. Furthermore, Werner received cash remittances in addition to the letters, allowing him to supplement the camp's meagre diet with a bit more food. These remittances were paid for with Emmy's shares in the *Gewerka AG*, her former employer in Berlin where she had advanced to being a partner in the company.<sup>310</sup>

Werner depended on this outside assistance, for he faced a difficult existence inside the camp. As a Jew, he was considered especially despicable by camp guards, and was regularly punished as a prominent former Communist in order to intimidate other inmates. His transfer to the sullage gang illustrated a basic law of camp life Bendix referred to in his notes: inmates strove to blend in with the crowd as much as possible in order to avoid falling prey to the sadism of their overseers.<sup>311</sup> Scholem was unable to do so.

His predicament was made even worse by the lack of solidarity he received from other inmates, something Bendix emphasised repeatedly: 'Scholem complained, with a certain resigned contempt, that his old party friends acted in camp as if they did not know him and continued to treat him as enemy and wrecker of the party, and, especially, that they had side-lined him during the "distribution of posts" depicted above'.<sup>312</sup> KPD-affiliated inmates claimed that Scholem had not truly resigned from politics in 1928 but, far from it, actually promoted 'a position in the Trotskyist sense' in the press, thereby attacking the party.<sup>313</sup> Bendix disapproved of the arguments and the breach of solidarity they constituted, but was unable to do much about it. As Scholem was assigned to the toilets, where political debates raged out of the guards' earshot, the conflicts continued. Ludwig Bendix reports of a particularly heated scene involving

309 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 5 March 1936, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, 1PW Hannover.

310 See also chapter 6 in this volume.

311 Bendix 1937–8, fifth book, p. 25f.

312 Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, p. 56; Scholem's continued isolation in Dachau is briefly mentioned by Bendix in the fifth book, p. 71 and more extensively on p. 6.

313 Ibid.

a Communist named Schulz: “This occurred in quite a harsh manner at times, [...] Scholem, who was applaudably capable of remaining calm, approached Schulz in wild, but controlled excitement and hissed at him, stating: “I have been finished with politics since the late 1920s and will never go back! But I tell you one thing, should I ever change my mind and return, I will write a book titled *In the Claws of National Socialists and Stalinists*”.”<sup>314</sup>

Scholem’s ostracisation by KPD inmates was not confined to Lichtenburg; in fact, it characterised his entire time in detention. Prisoner functionaries, that is, those who had managed to acquire a ‘post’ within the camp apparatus, gave Scholem a particularly hard time, as can be seen from reports of his time in Dachau.

In February 1937, all Jewish inmates in the Lichtenburg camp were transferred to a special ‘Jew Company’ in the Dachau concentration camp near Munich. Here, Scholem’s position was made clear on the very first day. Bendix reports: ‘After the guards had disappeared, the fellow inmates, surrounding and anxiously questioning us, accepted us with open arms and made an effort to introduce us to the first secrets of the house rules, [...] but to my dismay, one exception was made’, Bendix reported. Responsible for this was prisoner functionary Hans Eschen: ‘As soon as he heard the name Scholem, of which he had probably been made aware by the 300% Communist party strategists, [...] he leapt out at Scholem and yelled at him in a commanding tone: “You won’t get a chance to confuse people and forge your old schemes here!! You better watch it, I tell you! You are done, and we won’t give you the opportunity to play a role here! I will demand from you what I demand from everybody! But from you I will demand it twice as precisely. You just hope I don’t catch you with any kind of irregularity! Now make yourself scarce!”’<sup>315</sup> Werner did not dare to object: ‘Scholem [...] remained crouched and silent. He may well have been reminded of his book title, *In the Claws of National Socialists and Stalinists*, as I certainly was.’<sup>316</sup> Bendix was shocked by the incident and later complained to Eschen, even though he had already fallen out with Scholem by then.

The cause for this falling out had been an incident in Lichtenburg, where they had not only worked together in the sullage gang, but had temporarily been cellmates as well.<sup>317</sup> Bendix described living with Scholem as difficult: ‘In the six weeks we lived together he turned out to be a man of overly excessive

<sup>314</sup> Schulz’s first name is not recorded; see Bendix 1937–8, p. 56.

<sup>315</sup> Bendix 1937–8, fifth book, p. 6. Hans Eschen was later transferred to Buchenwald, where he became block elder and was murdered while in this position; see Carlebach 1995, p. 117.

<sup>316</sup> Bendix 1937–8, fifth book, p. 6.

<sup>317</sup> On the following see Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, pp. 75–80.



pedantry with regard to the outward appearance of things. He greeted me [...] with a corresponding speech when I moved in, well argued, referring to the lack of space which demanded an exact order, as it would become unbearable otherwise. He acted a bit like a head teacher, emphasising in particular that he insisted on being able to read in silence inside the cell after lunch. Given that six people had to share the room, this was quite a request, and did in fact provoke contradiction from one cell mate or another, as they were unwilling to have this order [...] imposed on them'.<sup>318</sup> Cellmate Ignaz Manasse in particular ignored Scholem's request. Bendix, on the other hand, did not really care, as his short-sightedness made him unable to read in the cell anyway.

Despite these tensions, Bendix also described Scholem's spirit of solidarity: Bendix, Scholem and Hans Litten, a lawyer for the Communist prisoners' support organisation International Red Aid and famous from various prominent trials, advised fellow inmates on legal matters despite prohibitions on doing so by the camp's commanding officer.<sup>319</sup> The three also drafted letters and petitions, an essential service for many inmates as normal legal counsel was not on offer. The inmates in 'protective custody' faced both political trials as well as other legal matters, ranging from criminal charges to divorce proceedings, which they were ill-prepared to deal with on their own. The group's counsel was thus very much appreciated, although Scholem was clearly the junior partner in the operation: he had barely completed his legal clerkship, while Bendix and Litten were experienced lawyers with national reputations.

Their fruitful cooperation in the legal counsel aside, Bendix and Scholem nevertheless fell out with each other. Tensions escalated during a cell 'revision' ordered by camp command in which all 'superfluous' items were to be removed from prisoner's cells. Bendix kept a tin can in the room to store food in: '[...] the can caught Scholem's attention. He thought it superfluous and that it had to be removed from the cell. He nagged me a few times about taking it out'. Bendix refused – not so much out of necessity, but because 'this fanatic compulsory orderliness on Scholem's part provoked my contradiction'. Bendix was not impressed by the order, which seemed like just another one of Scholem's many pedertries – but it had 'struck an irritable chord' in Scholem. An argument ensued, and at one point the can simply disappeared. No actual theft was involved, for the food was found carefully stowed between Bendix's remaining belongings. Scholem 'denied having anything to do with the matter', initially

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, p. 80. On Hans Litten see Bergbauer, Fröhlich and Schüler-Springorum 2008.

directing suspicion towards Ignaz Manasse. After a few days, Manasse had had enough and confided to Bendix that he in fact witnessed Scholem remove the can.

Only now did Werner admit to the deed. This high-handedness coupled with Scholem's callous denials infuriated Ludwig Bendix. He was unable to let the matter go and arguments continued for days; at one point, a physical altercation broke out between Bendix and a supporter of Scholem's, prompting the cellmates to discuss the matter again. Reflecting the legal background of the two antagonists, the debate between Bendix and Scholem took the form of a legal-philosophical dispute over questions of principle. Bendix represented the liberal-democratic standpoint in defence of individual liberties, but his argument fell on deaf ears: 'Scholem did not in the least empathise with this individualist perspective, he practically lacked the sensory organ for it. He passionately and with deep conviction argued on behalf of absolute order in our community'. The debate was conducted in whispers, although the interlocutors were unable to control them as they grew increasingly excited. The judge therefore unexpectedly turned out to be a camp guard, who passed the following verdict from outside the cell: 'Will you finally stop bickering about your silly tin can! I can't stand this foolishness!'<sup>320</sup>

The issue had thus been resolved, although Bendix and Scholem no longer spoke. The episode again serves to illustrate the abyss between freedom and the deprivation thereof. Even the guard, deeply familiar with camp life, was unable to comprehend how, in a context of constant harassment, any rudimentary freedoms – be it a quiet minute to read or the ownership of a tin can – became cultural assets to inmates. Scholem responded to the complete loss of his privacy in the camp with increasingly compulsive behaviour, reawakening his old cantankerous traits. This utterly alienated a liberal idealist such as Bendix, who believed in accommodating individual needs and fair negotiation, even in a concentration camp. His perplexity may at times have matched Emmy's when reading her husband's letters. She could hardly have comprehended under what enormous emotional pressure Werner was and how important her bi-weekly letters were to him.

His reaction was accordingly severe when letters failed to arrive for several months from March 1937 onward.<sup>321</sup> It felt 'much worse than 1934', and his fears of abandonment resurfaced: 'Should I really just accept that from now on I

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320 Bendix 1937–8, p. 78.

321 The gap in correspondence partially overlapped with a camp 'isolation' punishment, most likely a letter-writing ban; see Gerhard Pinthus to Gerhard Scholem sent via Emmy Scholem, 25 August 1939, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

simply won't hear from her again?'; he asked his mother in July 1937.<sup>322</sup> He urgently needed money to pay for a dental operation, lest he risk losing several teeth, but the remittances stalled together with the letters.<sup>323</sup> Werner's pleas grew increasingly emphatic. Betty forwarded them on to Emmy and Heinz, and even demanded an explanation from Edith at one point.<sup>324</sup> Betty finally received a brief letter from Emmy in August in mentioning a business trip and promising to send money for Werner's dental needs.<sup>325</sup>

Betty suspected Emmy to be in Spain, where the struggle against a fascist coup d'état in July 1936 seemed to be unfolding into the revolution Emmy and Werner had fought for in vain in Germany. The European left viewed Spain as the decisive battlefield to decide whether Europe's future would be socialist or fascist. Emmy did indeed re-establish contact with the movement, but very little is known about the episode, as she never spoke about it after her return. Emmy's granddaughter Susanna Capon reports that Emmy found the topic embarrassing, and that it had something to do with a man named 'Esi'.<sup>326</sup> A photograph is located in Emmy's estate of a Spanish volunteer named Isidor Aufseher, as well as several love letters from 'Isi' beginning in 1946 containing vague allusions to the past decade.<sup>327</sup> Several unconfirmed reports claim that Emmy temporarily joined the Left Communist POUM militia. According to other accounts, she travelled to Barcelona as an English correspondent and lived with Aufseher there.<sup>328</sup>

322 Werner to Betty Scholem, 11 and 18 July 1937, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

323 Werner to Betty Scholem, 4 July 1937, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

324 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 16 July 1937, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 430.

325 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 4 August 1937, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 434.

326 Written correspondence with Susanna Capon, 28 April 2013. Mementos such as a Spanish mantilla and a coincidental meeting with another Spanish veteran in Susanna's presence confirm that Emmy spent time in the Republican part of Spain, although she never provided her grandchildren with further details.

327 Isidor Aufseher to Emmy Scholem, 7 November 1946. This and later letters from 1947 are found in *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover. A portrait of Left Communist and Spanish volunteer Isak Aufseher (1905–77) is found in Portmann and Wolf 2006, pp. 27–70.

328 POUM stood for *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*, a party that united left-wing socialists and Trotskyists and opposed the Stalinist *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE). In May 1937, armed PCE militates attacked the POUM, and banned the party in June. Its members fell to a series of purges, while its leader Andreu Nin was murdered by the Soviet intelligence services. Emmy's activities in the POUM are mentioned by Renee Goddard in an interview with her from 2009, as well as in Goddard 2008. Susanna Capon corroborated the claim in a discussion with the author on 28 April 2013. On Aufseher and Barcelona see Portmann and Wolf 2006, p. 47, p. 68, fn. 174. Emmy Scholem and Isidor Aufseher evidently knew each other from the Lenin League in Berlin.

Neither Werner nor Betty was informed of any of this, and not only out of Emmy's private considerations. The Spanish putschists were allied with Nazi Germany, which meant that writing any information about the Republican front in letters to Berlin or Dachau was out of the question. Nevertheless, Emmy seems to have been unaware of the great anguish her decision brought Werner. The sudden and unexplained interruption of their written correspondence convinced him that Emmy had left him for good, and he would remain deeply distraught until September of that year. He announced his joy in a postcard: 'Received a letter from Emmy dated 2.8., delighted!'<sup>329</sup>

It seems to have taken Emmy quite a while to understand the importance of her letters to Werner, as she only gradually learned details of his true living conditions through former camp inmates. In July 1935, for instance, a freed homosexual prisoner using the alias 'Schulz' paid Betty Scholem a visit. She was somewhat taken aback by his presence, as people like him were not exactly common among her usual circle of friends. Werner, by contrast, had no time for such prejudices. He had sent Schulz, and Betty was ultimately quite pleased to receive the message that he was generally faring as well as possible under the circumstances. Nevertheless, Schulz 'nearly died of fear that someone would say he talked.'<sup>330</sup> Every freed convict was obligated to sign a confidentiality agreement, pledging to remain silent about conditions in the camps, and many felt intimidated enough to do so. Emmy never learned about most of what Werner's life had become, or if so then only years later. Visits, which Werner had still received sporadically in Lichtenburg, were almost impossible in Dachau, even more so given its distance from Berlin.<sup>331</sup>

A clear record of Werner's further detention is only available for 1939 onward. Emmy received it from Werner's cellmate Gerhard Pinthus, via Gershom.<sup>332</sup> Pinthus had been imprisoned with Werner in several camps over a period stretching from August 1936 to April 1939, and had witnessed the deterioration of conditions first hand. He wrote about Lichtenburg: 'Even though there were six of us in a one-man cell, we at least had our peace. It was not until Dachau,

329 Werner Scholem to 'Meine Lieben', 5 September 1937, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

330 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 14 October 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 405.

331 Werner even resisted his mother's visits at first, as he felt that the few brief minutes of conversation allowed were not enough to facilitate a real exchange and simply caused him further emotional trauma; see Werner to Emmy Scholem, 21 August 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

332 Report by Gerhard Pinthus to Gerhard Scholem, sent via Emmy Scholem, 25 August 1939, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

where we were brought on 5 February 1937, that we really found out what concentration camp meant. The Jews had to work a lot harder than Aryan inmates, often exceeding 12 hours per day, up to April 1938 even on Sundays, and moreover were permanently harassed'. While Werner was forced to perform degrading, as opposed to exhausting, work in Lichtenburg, Dachau pushed its inmates to the limits of their physical and emotional endurance. Pinthus wrote: 'We were in a labour detail together there, transporting cement, rocks, sand, etc. on a cart, had to work extremely hard, and were only able to retain our health and sanity if we had money of our own to buy additional food. The toughest strain was on the nerves, of course, as you never knew what kind of chicanery the SS would come up with the next day, our life was essentially in peril every day'.<sup>333</sup> Only now did Emmy learn of Werner being seriously ill twice in Dachau – he suffered from diphtheria around Christmas 1937, and later dealt with a serious septic infection in one of his hands in April 1938.<sup>334</sup> Neither were Pinthus's warnings of mortal danger an exaggeration: Scholem's Lichtenburg cellmate Ignaz Manasse had already been murdered by camp guards in late 1936.

He died from heart failure during a 'sports exercise' imposed on him as punishment. Guards were aware of Manasse's condition, for he had already suffered a fairly severe heart attack during a previous drill. They nevertheless ordered him to appear for exercises the next morning for their own amusement, forcing him to 'exercise' until he dropped to the ground, dead. Bendix describes such murders as rather uncommon at the time, and claims that it shocked not only inmates but some guards as well.<sup>335</sup> That said, it would not be long before arbitrary murder became daily routine in Dachau and Buchenwald.<sup>336</sup>

Jewish inmates held in 'protective custody' were particularly ill-treated and considered fair game for arbitrary reprisals by many guards. The Nazi regime

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333 Ibid.

334 See *ibid.* Betty mentions a notification of Werner's illness in a letter to Gershom from late 1938; this report also came from a fellow prisoner who tracked Gershom down in Palestine: 'I am deeply concerned by your message, I of course had no idea of his illness, about which he certainly could not have informed me, even if I asked about his health in the very letter, and of course never receive an answer!', Betty to Gershom Scholem, 13 November 1938, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 247.

335 Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, p. 108 ff.

336 An escaped Communist named Hans Beimler had already reported on torture practices in Dachau in his report *Im Mörderlager Dachau*, published in August 1933, not to mention a whole series of murders disguised as 'suicide' or 'shot while attempting to escape'. This was the first report from inside a concentration camp that reached the international public. See Beimler 2012, particularly p. 70.

had firmly consolidated its rule by 1937, smashing the KPD and the labour movement entirely, and ‘the Jews’ increasingly took the place of Communists and Social Democrats as Germany’s ‘enemy within’. Both Werner and his relatives on the outside soon realised this. The sacking of Jewish civil servants in 1933, the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935, the systematic removal of Jewish doctors from the medical profession – all this aimed, together with increased public harassment, to drive the Jewish community out of the German *Volksgemeinschaft*, a propaganda term evoking the ‘national’ community of ethnic Germans in which Jews had no place.<sup>337</sup> As a consequence, all of the steps towards emancipation taken since the nineteenth century were successively rolled back. The Scholems reacted to these developments by returning to their family’s cultural roots. Long-neglected rituals once again became important ceremonies: Werner’s brothers, who had passed their Bar Mitzvah using cheat sheets, now sought to observe Hebrew prayers at the table. Not without contradictions, however, as Betty recounts: ‘During our last Friday evening, when Erich was able to say the *Broche* with a bit less of a stutter, we discovered an engraving on the Kiddush goblet, beneath the Hebrew inscription, reading “Christmas 1921”. Roderich had given the goblet to Reinhold at the time without anyone objecting to this dedication. Impossible today!’<sup>338</sup> Yet setbacks would not stop them, and even Reinhold with his German nationalist leanings was enthusiastic about the family’s rediscovery of Judaism: ‘We are celebrating Chanukah with all the bells and whistles. On Saturday we will be at Reinhold’s, with candlelight and prayers, and then at ours on Sunday, while the boys are struggling with the difficult Hebrew language, the girls are already able to sing the song. [...] It is good to see how the children once again become the bearers of Jewishness.’<sup>339</sup>

Interestingly, it was Werner who initially proved suspicious of this development. He immediately, and distrustfully, began asking questions from his Plötzensee cell when he spotted Bible instruction on Renate’s school report card: ‘Is this religious education in the Anglican sense? I don’t object, but allow me go to hell as I please.’<sup>340</sup> Upon learning more, Werner exploded into a ver-

337 A list of anti-Jewish prohibitions and other legal measures can be found in Walk 1996. A more specific list of measures passed in Berlin can be found in Gruner 1996. The term ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*’ recently was the subject of renewed controversy among researchers, see Bajohr and Wildt 2009.

338 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 4 December 1934, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 375. *Broche* is a Yiddish word for the *Bracha*, blessings. Various forms of blessings are spoken at meals, as well as at the beginning of the Sabbath on Friday evening.

339 Ibid.

340 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 13 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

itable rant: 'But I was rather astonished to learn that Reni goes to a Jewish religious school on Sundays, too. Why, exactly, is that necessary? My sympathies for the Jewish religion are no higher than for any other superstitious belief. On the contrary, if I were religious I'd be Catholic, because they have at least 1,000 saints from which you can choose one for each situation in life. The Jewish religion isn't even a real religion, for it lacks the belief in the hereafter, and as such is no more than a *völkisch* rite.<sup>341</sup> If I had to choose between Christmas and Chanukah I would select the former, because we are Germans, despite all those who say otherwise.'<sup>342</sup> Their roles almost appear reversed. Werner, who had once rebelled against his patriotic father as a young Zionist, now insisted on his place within the German-speaking world. Correspondingly, he was opposed to letting his daughter 'shuttle between peoples and religions', strictly rejecting the thought 'that Reni is also learning Hebrew' – instead, he recommended she improve her French.<sup>343</sup> Ironically, Werner had grown isolated from the ubiquitous anti-Semitism bearing down on his family over the course of his two years of pre-trial detention. As any atheist would, he criticised his own ex-religion the most, and failed to understand how Jewish religiosity could become a form of cultural resistance in times of persecution. In camp, however, he was subjected to a radicalised form of anti-Semitism with full force. While the harassment in Lichtenburg had appeared somewhat disorganised and random, it followed a detailed system in Dachau. The camp contained a 'Jew Company', and all Jewish inmates were forced to wear a yellow badge.<sup>344</sup> Werner was a Jew in the Dachau camp, whether he wanted to be or not.

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341 The term *völkisch* is used in an ironic sense here by Scholem, applying the German term to Judaism. It refers to an ethnically charged nationalism. The term *Volk* means people, or rather 'a people' (hence the English word folk or folks), with *völkisch* being the (linguistically non-existent) adjective. In the Revolution of 1848, the term *Volk* was mostly used as the antipode to monarchy and tyranny, similar to the famous 'We, the people' in the American Declaration of Independence. The term was narrowed towards an ethnic connotation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Following this redefinition, the adjective *völkisch* in the 1880s and 1890s became an umbrella term for a variety of organisations propagating German superiority as well as ethnic 'purity' and thus excluding Germans of Polish or Jewish origin from the German *Volk*. Owing to the fact that any English-only translation would fail to convey the full meaning, the German word *völkisch* is retained throughout this volume.

342 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 29 January 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

343 Ibid.

344 Bendix 1937–8, fifth book, p. 9. The division into various prisoner groups also served to undermine solidarity between inmates. Jews were at the very bottom of the camp hierarchy. See Zámečník in Benz and Distel 2005, p. 251.

Moreover, his fellow inmate Bendix relates how ‘the guards, always thrilled by a chase, were mainly after those wearing glasses, as they suspected them, quite rightfully so, to be the detested intellectuals.’<sup>345</sup> Scholem, a Jewish intellectual with Communist sympathies, embodied not one but multiple Nazi stereotypes, and he suffered particularly severely as a result. Another fellow inmate, Ernst Federn, reports that Werner nevertheless refused to back down: ‘He had shown bravery against the ss guards on several occasions. One story about him was that he had been ordered by ss guards to sing. These guards were very young lads, recruits in fact, who were overworked themselves and then took their frustration out on the inmates. One song in particular was especially popular among them, it started off with “I am a dirty Jew with a big nose”. The guard saw Werner and ordered him to sing this song. Werner started to sing at a low voice. “Louder!”, came the order. “I am a dirty Jew”, Werner sang again. “Louder!”, the guards yelled in return. This is said to have provoked Werner to start screaming at the top of his loud voice, for which he was famous, “I am a dirty Jew” – and it echoed across the parade square, which was ringed by the ss people’s living quarters. All the windows flew open, women’s faces staring out. “Silence!”, the guards shouted, and Werner was able to triumph, and the other inmates together with him.’<sup>346</sup>

Werner was unable to mention small victories like this one in his letters, nor discuss his views on Jewishness and Judaism as openly as he had done in Plötzensee. The family received only vague impressions of conditions in the concentration camp. Still, they undertook renewed attempts to secure his release every year from 1935 on.<sup>347</sup> Given that not even an acquittal by the ‘People’s Court’ was enough to be released from the camp, attempts to free him took the form of appeals for clemency, putting Werner at the mercy of the absolute authority of the Nazi state. The Scholems placed their hopes in the state’s desire to drive out all of its Jewish citizens. Emigration had been accepted, at times even supported administratively, as a solution to the ‘Jewish question’ until the outbreak of the war in 1939,<sup>348</sup> but it was unclear who exactly was in charge of these sorts of decisions in the impenetrable web of police departments, Gestapo and concentration camp bureaucracy. An initial attempt

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345 Bendix 1937–8, fifth book, p. 36 f.

346 See Kuschev 2003, Vol. 2, p. 362.

347 An international media campaign for Werner in 1934 is mentioned in Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 822. A note from the German Embassy from the same year reports of a ‘press campaign’ organised by Ruth Fischer, see Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 578.

348 On controversies and the state of research concerning the trajectory of the Holocaust see Kershaw 2015, pp. 109–86.



by Betty Scholem in October 1935 thus foundered from the very beginning. She personally intervened by approaching a friend of Werner's sister-in-law, Edith, who was said to have contacts 'at the very top': 'I had to compose a whole exposé on Werner's career and Edith took it there. When the lady saw Communist Landtag deputy of 1919, she returned my piece of art and said that, of course, nothing could be done in this regard! I get convulsions when people tell me to write to Goering or to the League of Nations! I hear a lot of nonsense and sometimes find it hard to stomach'.<sup>349</sup> It took some time before they established that the Berlin Gestapo was responsible for Werner's case. Emmy, Betty and Gershom launched a concerted attempt to free Werner in the autumn of 1935: he would have to emigrate to Palestine.<sup>350</sup> Asked whether he was prepared to do so, he signalled his whole-hearted approval: 'I am even willing to travel to Honolulu should it be requested and should it bring me back to you and the children'.<sup>351</sup> Gershom intervened accordingly. Their request would take months to process, but was ultimately successful: in March 1936, Werner received a visa from the British authorities in Palestine. Next came an approval of his emigration from the German side, and in early April 1936 Werner was even vaccinated against tropical diseases.<sup>352</sup> In May 1936, however, the approval was suddenly revoked without further explanation.

Deeply disappointed by the failure and also worried about his brother's reaction, Gershom vented his anger in a letter to Walter Benjamin: 'Goebbels needs to keep a couple of Jews on hand in order to demonstrate that he has stamped out bolshevism, and my brother is apparently among those selected to play the part. [...] The brutes had already told my brother he would be released, and he had already been allowed to send a letter with the news to his wife. So now the reaction will be horrible, since that represented his last shred of hope'.<sup>353</sup> Benjamin read the news 'with horror' – his brother Georg was also being held by the Nazis. Benjamin inquired about Werner several times, although he and Benjamin hardly knew each other.<sup>354</sup> Walter Benjamin wrote

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349 This Edith Scholem was not Werner's daughter, but rather the wife of his brother Erich. The date is a mistake, as Werner was elected to the Prussian Landtag in 1921; see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 14 October 1935, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 405.

350 See Gershom Scholem to Walter Benjamin, 18 December 1935, Scholem 1992, p. 172.

351 Werner to Emmy Scholem, 20 October 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

352 Letters from Werner to Emmy Scholem, 24 March 1936, 5 and 10 April 1936, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

353 Scholem 1992, p. 177.

354 Benjamin asked on 5 August 1937 after Gershom was invited to New York if Gershom would be able to do more for his brother from there; see Scholem 1992, p. 161, p. 176, p. 179, p. 203.

to Gershom on 20 May 1935: 'How very dreadful that your brother's predicament is so desperate. But whose field of vision is not crowded with such images!' On 29 March 1936, he asked: 'What results did your efforts on your brother's behalf have? Mine is still in Germany, unscathed for the time being'. After hearing about the withdrawal of Werner's exit visa, he wrote on 3 May 1936: 'I read the account of your brother's fate with horror. I don't know him, but the mere fact of having to connect a name to that kind of existence is dreadful'. Gershom later concluded that Werner was on a 'list' of inmates whose release required Goebbels's personal approval.<sup>355</sup>

There is indeed a list of 'leading men of the *Systemzeit*', a Nazi term for the Weimar period. It includes Werner Scholem and is contained in the archives of the Reich Main Security Office, run by the SS.<sup>356</sup> It was not composed until 1939, however, and was intended not for Joseph Goebbels but SS leader Heinrich Himmler. Gershom knew from another source that the 'Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda' was aware of his brother, for Goebbels in fact referred to Werner while expounding his worldview at the annual Nazi party rally on 13 September 1935 in Nuremberg, claiming: 'The press of the KPD in Berlin was controlled by the Jews Thalheimer, Meyer, Scholem, Friedländer and others'.<sup>357</sup> The speech even filtered down to Werner in the Lichtenburg camp, as Betty noted: 'On our last visit to him, Werner asked right away if I'd heard the radio broadcast. The prison camp listened to the proceedings of the entire Party Congress in Nuremberg, and when Werner's name was mentioned, everyone who knew him turned and looked at him. What a fabulous sort of fame!'<sup>358</sup> Joseph Goebbels had already come across Werner during the Nazi 'time of struggle' in the 1920s. Including him in a list alongside Marx himself in his diary, Goebbels wrote: 'The internationals in the Communist movement are

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Scholem's responses are also found in Scholem 1992. Benjamin and Werner had met in Berlin in 1923: 'W.B. had met my brother once, at a Seder in the house of my friend Moses Marx in 1923, but he had forgotten about it', see Scholem 1992, p. 179, fn. 1.

355 Scholem 1992, p. 177, fn. 2.

356 'Erfassung führender Männer der Systemzeit', BArch, *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, R 58/3566a, Bl. 190. The list includes former and current positions and activities. For Werner Scholem, 'currently in protective custody' is all that is listed for the period after 1933. Werner's inclusion in the total of 192 entries on the largest oppositional group of 'Marxists' (SPD and KPD) shows that the Nazis saw Scholem as a prominent political adversary. Beyond members of the labour movement, the list also included 'liberalists', 'pacifists', artists and academics.

357 Ernst Meyer was raised Protestant and married a Jewish woman, see Wilde 2013.

358 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 1 October 1935, Scholem 2002, p. 270.



FIGURE 35 *Exhibition 'The Eternal Jew' featuring a bust of Werner Scholem (right), Munich 1937*



FIGURE 36 *View of the exhibition, 'The Eternal Jew'. In this shot, Scholem's bust is placed in the left window.*

those Marx, Liebnecht, Radek, Scholem etc, in other words, the Jews. The true workers, however, are in fact brimming over with national sentiment. [...] It makes them *kaput* that the Jews are so superior to them intellectually and crush them with their phrase-mongering'.<sup>359</sup> The extent to which Werner Scholem

359 See Fröhlich 2004, Vol. 1/1, diary entry 14 July 1924, p. 168f. Goebbels was in the midst of a

fit the Nazis' malicious stereotypes became clear on a later occasion, as well, in the exhibition *Der ewige Jude* ['The Eternal Jew'] held at Munich's German Museum. The exhibition featured a prominently displayed bust of Werner's face in a section on 'outward features', alongside two grotesquely exaggerated depictions of 'Jew noses'.<sup>360</sup> It was most likely produced in Dachau, as the camp was very close to Munich and even contained its own 'anthropological museum'.<sup>361</sup> It appears that Werner was forced to provide a wax impression of his face there.

The Munich exhibition was the largest display of anti-Semitic propaganda prior to the outbreak of World War II, designed to justify the increasingly draconian anti-Jewish laws and denounce Jews as agents of the 'Bolshevik world conspiracy' – the exhibition's poster featured a grotesquely caricatured Jewish man holding a map of Germany overlaid with a hammer and sickle. Werner Scholem seemed ideal to illustrate this image of the enemy. The Nazi narrative glossed over the fact that only a minority of the German Jews had been active in the KPD – Werner Scholem had been quite isolated politically within his large extended family, after all – yet propaganda aimed for effect, not truth.

Among the architects of this propaganda campaign was Dr Eberhard Taubert, a division chief within Goebbels's propaganda ministry in charge of 'anti-Comintern' work. Taubert laboured with fanatical fervour to disseminate the legend of 'Jewish Bolshevism' among the population.<sup>362</sup> He was later permitted to continue his anti-Communist work in the Federal Republic of Germany, and even went on to become an adviser to Bavarian Minister-President Franz-Joseph Strauß in 1958.<sup>363</sup> Taubert also participated as a lay judge in Scholem's trial and subsequent verdict at the 'People's Court' in 1935.<sup>364</sup> It is possible that Taubert was involved in Scholem's arrest, as well. Ultimately, then, although no actual 'blacklist' can be proven, Werner Scholem was known to the highest representatives of the Nazi regime, and it was not his Hammerstein connection

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radicalisation at the time of writing that would ultimately lead him to join the Nazi party; see Richter 2010.

360 See picture on the following page.

361 See Zámečník in Benz and Distel 2005, Vol. 2, pp. 233–74, here p. 246.

362 A critical-historical treatment of this anti-Semitic stereotype is conducted in Gerrits 2009.

363 The appointment occurred despite Taubert's Nazi activities being widely known; see Körner 1994, as well as the entry on Eberhard Taubert in Klee 2003.

364 *Anklageschrift und Urteil des Volksgerichtshof gegen Hüffner, Scholem und Genossen*, BArch R 3017, Akte 13 J 195/33.



FIGURE 37 Cover of the exhibition catalogue, 'The Eternal Jew', edited by Hans Diebow, Munich 1937. The motif was also widely circulated as a postcard (depicted here).

but rather his prominence together with his dual persecution as both Jew and Communist that stood in the way of his release.<sup>365</sup> This is further demonstrated by a comparison with Scholem's camp companions: in Lichtenburg, Werner encountered his old comrade and co-defendant Oskar Wischeropp, frequently

<sup>365</sup> In Franz Jung's narrative, Scholem disappears with the brief note: 'Return undesired'; see Jung 1997, p. 225.

buying him tobacco with his own pocket money.<sup>366</sup> Wischeropp was released from protective custody in September 1935. Ludwig Bendix was also released under the condition that he emigrate in 1937. Werner, however, remained incarcerated. Wischeropp was a Communist, Bendix a Jew – Scholem was both. He was known among his fellow inmates as ‘one of the National Socialists’ most prominent prisoners’.<sup>367</sup>

His friends and family nevertheless refused to give up. In January 1937, on Emmy’s urging, Ruth Fischer intervened on Werner’s behalf, addressing the British government.<sup>368</sup> She emphasised his political isolation. As an opponent of both Hitler and Stalin, Scholem was ‘not even mentioned by any political organisation, let alone by those close to the KPD (Red Aid etc.) [...] He thus sits in prison, like a dead man in a grave, without meaning, without the awareness that anyone cares about him, with the feeling that the whole world has abandoned him’.<sup>369</sup> That said, even the Communist dissidents had their networks. In November 1938, Karl Korsch and Arthur Rosenberg contemplated Werner’s possible emigration to the USA. Both had relocated to New York by then and discussed the case with friends, although they ultimately would reluctantly accept that the Nazis would never authorise their friend’s emigration there: ‘It is rather unlikely that the Nazis will let a man with Werner’s political past, who has been imprisoned for 5 years, come to New York at this stage, where he would go to rallies and act as living proof of the horrors reported from Germany’, Rosenberg

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366 Wischeropp is mentioned in letters from Werner to Emmy Scholem, 21 August 1935 and 22 September 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover. He was arrested a second time after Georg Elser’s attempted assassination of Hitler, but released six weeks later. He began working at the Society for German-Soviet Friendship in East Berlin in 1949 and died in 1956; see Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 1035.

367 Ernst Federn once said of Werner Scholem: ‘He was one of the National Socialists’ most prominent prisoners. As the most well-known member of the most furthest left in the German Reichstag of the Weimar Republic, he was known internationally. [...] Werner was of a small stature, had a large nose, large, protruding ears and wore glasses, yet possessed what is known as a stentorian voice’. Stentor was a hero from Homer’s *Ilias*, whose voice was as loud as that of 50 men. Scholem, who conducted his Landtag agitation without a microphone, retained this talent in Dachau; see Kuschey 2003, p. 361.

368 She had already tried to publish articles on his case in the press in 1934. According to the German Embassy in Paris, ‘Ruth Fischer is considering starting a press campaign for a certain Werner Sch[ole]m currently under arrest in Germany, although the letter shows that the lowest means are to be deployed’, 16 August 1934, Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 578.

369 Ruth Fischer to Philips Price, 20 January 1937, copy contained in *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

wrote to Emmy.<sup>370</sup> Werner's sister-in-law Edith attempted to obtain an American visa for him in January 1939 nonetheless, albeit unsuccessfully.<sup>371</sup> The task had fallen to her as the Scholems were leaving their home country one by one, driven out by the rise in anti-Semitic terror. Erich and Reinhold had already emigrated to Australia, and Edith would follow soon afterwards. In March 1939, Betty left as well: 'They are intent on causing us the most horrific problems until the very last minute. What kind of times are we living in! They won't let us take either silver or jewellery with us. What can one say about this! One should just thank God to be able to get out of here naked as a jaybird'.<sup>372</sup>

Aunt Sophie Scholem was now left in charge of correspondence with Werner, who feared he might be the last member of the family to remain in Germany. He was transferred to Buchenwald concentration camp in September 1938. Here, as well, he vacillated between hope and despair, just as he had done over the preceding years. The baseless assurances and subsequent rejections demoralised him, although they also fuelled his hopes to the very end. The family would make one last attempt in 1939: Betty, Sophie Scholem and Betty's brother Hans Hirsch set out to acquire an entry visa for Shanghai, which they applied for at the Chinese Consulate General in Paris.<sup>373</sup> Australia had already closed its gates, as Betty noted with bitterness: 'they don't even issue permits for an entry fee of 200£ anymore, reject everything and from now on only wish to accept those with large assets in order to build up new industries'.<sup>374</sup> A similar situation was found in the US and British Palestine.<sup>375</sup> For many German Jews, Shanghai thus became the last window to freedom, and things even appeared

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370 Arthur Rosenberg to Emmy Scholem, 18 November 1938; see also Emmy Scholem to Karl Korsch, 4 November 1938, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

371 It is unclear whether Werner's release faltered because of his lack of an American visa or rejection by the German authorities; see Edith Scholem to the US Consulate General, Berlin, 9 January 1939, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

372 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 23 February 1939, Scholem 2002, p. 294.

373 Hans Hirsch to Emmy Scholem, 5 March 1939, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover. Betty was involved until her departure for Australia, see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 16 July 1939, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 475. Various details from Betty and Sophie Scholem on this attempt are contained in the database of the International Tracing Service, see ITS Archives Doc. No. 7052275#1, No. 7052278#1, No. 7052279#1 and No. 7052280#1.

374 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 24 May 1939, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 472.

375 The 1924 'Immigration Act' regulated immigration into the US according to national quotas based on the 1890 census, and was intended to maintain the ethnic 'status quo' in the country by, for example, banning immigration from Asian countries. The system remained in place until 1965 and was not revised to aid Jewish refugees after 1933. See Lemay 1999.

to be working out for Werner. The Buchenwald camp commander cooperated, as did the so-called 'Central Office for Jewish Emigration' in Berlin, an institution created by the Nazis to facilitate the forced emigration of the Jewish population.<sup>376</sup> The back and forth between German and foreign authorities as well as the camp administration proved to be a very elaborate undertaking. Sophie organised a certificate of good conduct, three security clearance certificates from the revenue office, district mayor and Jewish community, a police order to receive a passport, as well as a ticket for his passage to Shanghai paid in full.<sup>377</sup> As endless as this bureaucratic battle seemed, each successful step reinvigorated both Werner's and his family's hopes. Scholem was also informed of these developments, and his sea voyage was finally arranged for 16 August.<sup>378</sup> In the summer of 1939, it seemed as if Werner would actually be freed – into an uncertain future, but released from camp nevertheless.

Eventually, however, Hans Hirsch had no choice but to transmit the following message to Emmy on 24 June 1939: 'Werner's release has been denied without any further explanation, and we have been told to return the passage. This means we have exhausted all of our options.'<sup>379</sup> Werner was doomed to remain in Buchenwald concentration camp.

### Murder in the Quarry

Werner was transferred to Buchenwald concentration camp on 17 September 1938.<sup>380</sup> Located on the Ettersberg in the Thuringian Basin near Weimar, the camp was nestled in the heartland of German cultural heritage. Renowned poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had once wandered these same woods for creative inspiration, and a so-called 'Goethe Oak' even stood on the camp's premises,

376 This authority oversaw local centres for Jewish emigration in Prague, Vienna, and Amsterdam. See Anderl, Rupnow and Wenck 2004.

377 Sophie Scholem to Weimar-Buchenwald concentration camp, 5 April 1939, copy in *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover; Betty to Gershom Scholem, 15 February 1939, Scholem 2002, p. 294.

378 Werner to Sophie Scholem, 21 May 1939, as well as Sophie to Emmy Scholem, 9 June 1939, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

379 Hans Hirsch to Emmy Scholem, 24 June 1939, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

380 The date can be found on an index card in the ITS Bad Arolsen database. A Buchenwald 'camp office card' lists his date of arrival as 16 September, but his list of personal effects as well as other index cards list the date as 17 September 1938; see ITS Archives, Doc. No. 10748285#1, Doc. No. 7052274#1 and Doc. No. 7052276#1.



Schutz		häftling		Werner Sch o l e m		Saft-Nr.		1980					
Beruf:		Refrendar		geboren am:		29.12.95		in: Berlin					
Anschrifts-Ort:		Mutter: Betty Scholem, Berlin, Alexandrinenstr. 134											
Eingel. am:		17.9.38 / 6		Uhr von		Berlin		Entf. am: 17.7.40 /		Uhr nach		GESTORBEN	
<b>Bei Einlieferung abgegeben:</b>													
✓ Hut/Wäpfe		Kragen		✓ Brieftasche/Papiere		Kamm		Spiegel					
✓ P. Schuhe/Stiefel		2 Binder		Bücher		Rasiermesser							
✓ P. Strümpfe		Vorhemd		Inv.-Verf.-Karte									
✓ P. Gamaschen		Leibriemen		Drehbleistift									
✓ Mantel <sup>Frühling/Herbst</sup>		P. Sockenhalter		✓ Füllfederhalter		Koffer/Attentajsche							
✓ Rock		Rittel		Mansch.-Knöpfe		Messer		Schere		Pakete			
✓ Hose		Kragentknöpfe		Geldbörse		Wertfächer:							
✓ Weste		Pullover		Schlüssel		✓ Uhr mit Kette		W					
✓ Hemd		Taschentuch		Feuerzeug/hölzer		Armbanduhr							
✓ Unterhose		P. Sandschuhe		Tabak		Pfeife		Ringe					
Anerkannt:				I. T. S. FOTO No. 13 + 8r				Offizienverwalter:					
Werner Scholem								[Signature]					

FIGURE 38 Personal effects card of Werner Scholem, Buchenwald concentration camp

conserved between the barbed wire and the barracks, until being chopped up for firewood in 1944.<sup>381</sup> The Nazis found this close association between German classicism and the concentration camp rather embarrassing. When building the camp, essentially overnight, in 1937, authorities intentionally avoided the name 'Camp Ettersberg', citing concerns that the name could damage the city's literary reputation.<sup>382</sup> Weimar and Buchenwald would nevertheless become inseparably linked in the minds of future generations. Former inmate Eugen Kogon described how a combination of 'sentimentally cherished culture' and 'unrestrained brutality' characterised Weimar – both pinnacle and yawning abyss of German history at once.<sup>383</sup>

Werner found himself in the abyss. He was given the prisoner number 1980 upon arrival, the last in a long sequence of such numbers. From the prisoner's register number 1660 he was assigned in Moabit and 1873 in Plötzensee, to the '2nd Company of the 3rd Platoon' in Lichtenburg, these cold numbers had

381 The tree was damaged in an airstrike in 1944 and disposed of as firewood afterwards, see Stein 1999, p. 209.

382 Stein 1999, p. 29.

383 Kogon 1998, p. 49.

replaced Werner's address since April 1933. When his name was sporadically spoken, it became 'protective custody prisoner Werner Israel Scholem'.<sup>384</sup> The new middle name, inserted in compliance with Nazi law, was a declaration of war on Arthur Scholem's generation, who had intentionally given their children German first names.<sup>385</sup> The promises of emancipation made in the nineteenth century were cancelled, as Germany's Jews were stripped of every last vestige of their rights as citizens and human beings. The conditions in the camps soon reflected this change: Werner's fellow inmate Pinthus depicted Buchenwald as the utter abandonment of any and all social norms and standards: 'The worst we experienced in this regard was in Buchenwald. Just about everything can happen there. Working hours there are now from 5 to 12, from 12.30 to 15.40 and from 17 to 20. The supply of extra food is extremely bad, the kitchen's food is almost inedible, treatment is utterly unpredictable. Werner works as a carrier at the SS barracks construction site and lives in Block 23 with the other (Jewish) long-termers, who of course treat each other quite comradely. That is essentially the only thing that keeps a human being who has been locked up for so long alive'.<sup>386</sup> Pinthus emphasised the importance of cash remittances, 'because you starve to death if you rely on only the camp's meagre diet'. Although Werner was frugal and required only the barest of necessities, Pinthus claims he nevertheless urgently needed regular remittances.<sup>387</sup>

Pinthus wrote hopefully of a wave of releases, even he would regain his freedom after many years.<sup>388</sup> However, the German Reich would unleash a new war with its invasion of Poland only a few days after he mailed his letter. Germany's downward spiral was now irreversible. All escape routes were blocked, and Jews still in the country were trapped.

Not even letters penetrated the fog of war, compelling us to rely on reports from fellow inmates to reconstruct Werner's last few months. One of these

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384 Such as in Sophie Scholem's letter to the Weimar-Buchenwald concentration camp, 5 April 1939, copy in *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

385 That is, unless they already had 'typically Jewish' first names. The middle name 'Sara' was usually given to Jewish women. This rule formally went into effect on 1 January 1939, see Walk 1996, p. 237, p. 258, p. 390.

386 Gerhard Pinthus to Gershom Scholem, sent via Emmy Scholem, 25 August 1939, *Nachlass Emmy und Werner Scholem*, IPW Hannover. On conditions for Jewish prisoners in Buchenwald see also Stein 1992.

387 Gerhard Pinthus to Gershom Scholem, *Nachlass Emmy und Werner Scholem*, IPW Hannover.

388 A general amnesty for political prisoners to commemorate Adolf Hitler's 50th birthday was announced in April 1939. Ernst Federn claims that many Communists imprisoned at Buchenwald benefited from this amnesty, see Kuschey 2003, p. 458.

inmates was Ernst Federn, whom Werner Scholem first met in Dachau. Federn later became a famous psychoanalyst, but was brought to the camp in 1938 as a young Marxist and follower of Leon Trotsky. The young man's admiration of Werner became the foundation of a close friendship between the two. Federn recounts their first encounter in Dachau: 'Another friend whom I met right at the beginning was Werner Scholem [...] a leader of the Left Opposition within the Communist Party of Germany. [...] To me this encounter was quite something, as it likely was for him, too, for he suffered greatly from his isolation. Incidentally, we were friends from the outset; though Scholem was unable to help me, in fact the opposite later turned out to be the case.'<sup>389</sup> Federn continues: 'Werner was respected among inmates, but far from popular, he was rather known for his deeply gloomy pessimism. It was often said: "The superlative of pessimism is Scholemism"'. Werner had abandoned any last hopes for his future by this point: "No one will survive, everything will perish", he would constantly say.'<sup>390</sup> Scholem expected the worst from his fellow inmates as well. Federn speaks of Werner's veritable 'misanthropy', and Bendix also once described how he 'despised human beings'.<sup>391</sup> And yet, ultimately, he came to admit that Werner had been right all along – it was every man for himself in the extreme scarcity of the concentration camp; solidarity became a rare occurrence. From his outsider's perspective, Werner saw this all too clearly. As had been the case during World War I, Werner adopted pessimism as a coping strategy to deal with the moral abysses of humanity: quite simply, by abandoning all expectations, he could not be disappointed again.

Yet his fatalism aside, Federn and Scholem would debate current political affairs, the resistance, and the revolution. Only now did Werner learn that various prominent Left Communists had long since been converted to the united front policy. This proved somewhat disconcerting for Werner: 'His political position was that of the Communist Left Opposition which pledged allegiance to Trotsky, but a Trotsky before the proclamation [of the 4th International], and, more importantly, before the call for unity of all workers' parties. When I reported of this development Scholem was clearly upset. He was a good 20 years

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389 Kuschey 2003, Vol. 2, p. 357.

390 Kuschey 2003, p. 361, fn. 71. Fellow prisoner Benedikt Kautsky also described Scholem as 'one of the wisest and at the same time most pessimistic members of the Communist Opposition', Kautsky 1960, p. 98.

391 Werner had warned him against thinking that he could expect solidarity from fellow prisoners in exchange for sharing his remittances with them – friendship and comradeship could not be purchased; Bendix 1937–8, fourth book, p. 68; Kuschey 2003, p. 357.

older than me, and obviously very happy to meet a follower of Trotsky. But he certainly wasn't too enthralled by the fact that my opinion differed from his own.<sup>392</sup>

While his friends Korsch, Rosenberg, Fischer and even their role model Leon Trotsky searched for new strategies in the face of fascism's overwhelming might, Werner, trapped in the concentration camp, clung to his old views. This may seem paradoxical given that he suffered the most under the Nazi regime, but this stubbornness in fact served as a protective shield. What mattered more than anything else in the moral abyss of the concentration camp was the notion that past struggles had been justified and, more importantly, not in vain.<sup>393</sup> Scholem thus repeatedly derided his law studies as a complete waste of time, while refusing to question even a single element of his political trajectory.<sup>394</sup>

Over five years in Nazi captivity had left Werner spiritually and psychologically scarred. A stubborn man even before he was robbed of his freedom, he became virtually compulsive in camp. This applied not only to his politics but to his everyday life as well, as Federn writes: 'I soon realised that Werner was quite obsessive. Everything had to occur according to a scheduled plan. Sudden interruptions or changes made him nervous, even ill. Correspondingly, when there was a collection for fellow inmate Herbert Mindus one day, he refused to donate a mark. He always had a weekly allowance and this mark was simply already budgeted otherwise. His refusal was perceived as stinginess, which was subsequently held against him accordingly. [...] Rudi Arndt, whom I once asked for a favour on Werner's behalf, declined with reference to the latter's bad character. When I tried to explain that it might be related to some kind of obsessive-compulsive disorder he responded, devastatingly: "Ernst, you may indeed be right, but this is not a psychiatric hospital"'.<sup>395</sup>

Despite Werner Scholem's isolation, his friendship provided Ernst Federn with a modicum of protection in the camp. Werner was 'the great Trotskyist'

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392 Kuschey 2003, p. 361.

393 This was true of the majority of Communist detainees, according to Benedikt Kautsky: 'If some Communist crossed over to the SS without realising it, there were others who could only keep going by adhering rigidly to the belief for which they had been detained. They refused to concede any change since 1933 [...] They hated Social Democracy almost as much as they hated the Nazis, for they blamed the Social Democrats for the collapse in 1933, and many of them got on better with non-political prisoners than with Social Democrats', Kautsky 1960, pp. 110–11.

394 On his studies see Werner to Gershom Scholem, 5 October 1933, NLI Jerusalem.

395 Kuschey 2003, p. 362. Herbert Mindus was a fellow prisoner.

and young Ernst Federn was considered his loyal sidekick, hardly taken seriously next to such a storied veteran Communist. Federn in turn took advantage of this privilege to relieve at least some of Werner's isolation, although he was not always successful: 'Werner was neither a diplomat nor did he show any sense of humour [...] He was unable to react to snappy remarks other than by tartly retaliating. One day a prominent Communist joined us when Werner and I were talking. "Trotskyist faction, ey?", he said. Scholem barked back: "That's none of your business, why are you following me", and so forth. Not the best way to make friends – but without friends, survival was almost impossible'.<sup>396</sup> That said, not all KPD functionaries treated Werner with contempt and derision. Theodor Neubauer, a former Reichstag colleague and KPD member, sided with Werner for a year before being released in September 1939. Neubauer and Scholem were not only former colleagues, but had gone hiking together in the 1920s as well – a friendship which the two would revive in camp.<sup>397</sup>

Werner's strong will allowed him to endure despite his relative vulnerability in Buchenwald. Although fellow inmates found his pessimism and stubbornness off-putting, both traits served to protect Werner from the grim realities of Buchenwald. This appears to not only have preserved his mental sanity, as Federn reports, but his physical constitution as well: 'At the time I arrived in camp, Scholem worked on the "Moor Express" and kept this work in Buchenwald, too. The Moor Express was a device which originated in the Esterwegen concentration camp'. Esterwegen was located in the northern German Emsland region close to the Dutch border, where inmates were deployed draining the bogs. 'Moor' refers to the German word for bog or fen, which is how the Moor Express got its name. Federn further explains: 'It was a large wagon running on discarded automobile tyres, pulled by 14 inmates. Two pulled at the shaft, and on each side of the wagon two inmates pulled on each of the three axes. [...] Finally, two inmates pushed from the back. This work detail had its advantages,

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396 Ibid.

397 Federn remarks: 'Deputy Neubauer, former budgetary speaker of the KPD who mostly supported Werner Scholem, was an exception', see Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes 1992, p. 100 f. His hiking relationship with Werner and Emmy is also proven by Neubauer's correspondence. Both had been members of the KPD left in 1925–6 and opposed Thälmann. Neubauer switched over to the majority in mid-1926, however, and had already distanced himself from Scholem and Rosenberg in February. See Theodor Neubauer to Elisabeth, 17 June 1925, 10 February and 31 March 1926, *Nachlass Theodor Neubauer*, BArch NY 4041. I thank Stefan Hock for granting me permission to view these documents. On Neubauer see also Weber and Herbst 2008, p. 630. Dr Harry Stein is currently working on an extensive biography of Theodor Neubauer.

although you did have to be in great shape, by all means [...] Werner felt safest when working on the Moor Express. He had remarkably powerful legs. When the gang once had to jump as punishment, he still kept going after the others had all collapsed'.<sup>398</sup>

The 'Moor Express' was a vehicle used to transport materials for the many construction projects surrounding the Buchenwald camp, far from complete in 1939. Inmates laboured under some of the most appalling and inhumane conditions imaginable. The summer of 1938 was particularly infamous, marking the beginning of the construction of an access road, a task that involved expanding a small forest trail into a proper road eight metres wide. The construction gang included 200 inmates, while many others worked as suppliers or had to break down material in the camp quarry. After finally being completed, the access road was given the name 'Road of Blood' by the camp inmates, as many had not survived its construction.<sup>399</sup> The combination of malnourishment and forced labour killed more and more inmates through sheer exhaustion. Provisions from outside the camp or a 'post' within the prisoner functionary hierarchy signified two ways of preserving one's energies and enduring camp life for at least a bit longer.

From 1939 onward, Communist political prisoners began a systematic attempt to gain appointments to such posts, the so-called 'Kapo' positions. These entailed administrative tasks so menial – including everything from kitchen helper, nurse or work gang overseer to bookkeeping and minor commanding posts – that they could be assigned to inmates. Although KPD networks had also existed in Dachau, Buchenwald was the only camp in which a full-fledged Communist underground organisation emerged that used these posts to build a power base. The Communist network sought to counter the 'divide and conquer' tactics of the SS, which pitted different groups of inmates against one another, relying in particular on the 'habitual offenders' whose uniforms bore a green triangle. The SS had installed two 'camp elders' upon the camp's opening, who, although classified as habitual offenders due to various prior convictions, had also led SA street fighting squads in Berlin.<sup>400</sup> The SS expected these prisoners to impose a 'harsh crackdown' and keep their fellow inmates under strict control. But this 'Green rule' was done away with already prior to 1938, due to

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398 Kuschey 2003, p. 363. The 'Moor Express' was considered a relatively safe job, despite the physical exertion involved. Teams formed tight collectives and were generally not split up, as this would have hindered their work. See Neurath 2016, pp. 173–86.

399 Stein 1999, p. 32.

400 Stein 1999, p. 31.

the questionable reliability of the criminals, their inefficiency in the administration of the camp's increasingly important economic projects, and their utter lack of authority among the inmates themselves.<sup>401</sup> The 'Reds', by contrast, were completely different in these respects. They were better educated, disciplined, able to execute administrative tasks, and enjoyed the inmates' general respect and trust. A surviving Communist later recounted: 'Without us [the ss] would have hardly been able to cope with this complex machinery of ten or twenty thousand people [...] We fought for providing this aid in order to reverse the orders, to make them depend on us [...] Naturally, each of the lower ranking ss men wanted to impress their camp superiors [...] and due to our disciplined conduct they really believed and were convinced that we had forgotten that we had opposed fascism at one point'.<sup>402</sup> Sheer pragmatism prompted the ss to assign their political enemies certain posts, and thus a modicum of space in which to manoeuvre.

The Communists eagerly took advantage of this space. While the 'Greens' had reduced the camp to starvation rations for their own benefit, the 'Red Kapos' ensured that everybody received a fair share – a question of life and death for some inmates. Benedikt Kautsky wrote that under the Red Kapos' supervision in Buchenwald, 'in the main, prisoners received the amount due to them when Buchenwald was under the hegemony of the politicals. The Greens stole without scruple at both Buchenwald and Auschwitz'.<sup>403</sup> Although they also organised additional rations for prominent KPD comrades, this was done through connections to the camp's kitchen and other tricks. However, 'only those who were either staunch Communists true to the party line or who were considered to follow the Communist Party's orders without hesitation' were considered 'comrades'.<sup>404</sup> This was reported by Benedikt Kautsky, son of the famous Karl Kautsky and a fellow Buchenwald prisoner. As a socialist, he was able to understand the Red Kapos' calculus, but stood outside their organisation. He would later portray them rather ambivalently in his observations published in 1946: on the one hand, they represented an invaluable source of resistance in the camp, but at the same time were prone to limit their community of survivors to one political current. Particularly during periods when the ss tightened the camp's internal regime and fatalities and murders

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401 Ibid.

402 Former prisoner and chairperson of the Lagerarbeitsgemeinschaft Buchenwald-Dora Kurt Köhler, 1989, quoted in Niethammer 1994, p. 35.

403 Kautsky 1960, p. 112. On the distribution of rations see also Stein 1999, p. 213.

404 Quoted in Stein 1999, p. 213.

increased, Communist resistance would tend towards such 'group egotism'.<sup>405</sup> After all, KPD prisoner functionaries could be replaced at any time. Conflicts broke out between 'Red' and 'Green' inmates on multiple occasions, escalating to the point of open war in 1942. The 'Red Kapos' defeated the 'Greens', but victory came at a price.

For some to survive, others had to die. The KPD inmates felt compelled to forge an alliance with infamous camp doctor Waldemar Hoven,<sup>406</sup> about whom Kautsky wrote: "To tell the truth, I never really fathomed him. On the one hand, he used to participate freely in all the injection killings and in the experiments with spotted fever, and such like, which claimed thousands of victims. On the other hand, he allied himself quite openly with the political prisoners in charge in sick bay, introduced medical improvements and raised standards of hygiene in camp, looked after ill-treated prisoners and played a decisive role in the camp's internal policy. In the camp intrigues he came out definitely on the side of the politicals and helped them in their struggle against the criminals whenever he could. He even went so far as to carry out sentences passed on criminals by the "secret tribunal". Many a stool pigeon and informer, many a torturer and racketeer who had plied his trade at the expense of his fellow prisoners met his death at Hoven's hand, or through his intervention'.<sup>407</sup>

The 'secret tribunal' [*Lagerfeme*] was the Red Kapos' last resort for getting rid of camp informants and SS accomplices, and meant arranging the deaths of inmates found guilty of collaborating with the SS to the detriment of others. Kautsky himself had mixed opinions on these tribunals: "Thus a few people, answerable to nobody, wielded enormous power over the life and death of their fellow prisoners. It is true that they never passed the death sentence lightly. They had at their disposal an excellent information service. But I should not like to be in the skin of the members of this secret tribunal today when they search their consciences for the justification of every sentence. Was the death sentence justified in every case?"<sup>408</sup> His final verdict read as follows: "The Red

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405 See Niethammer 1994, p. 41f. Other reports indicate that political prisoners from other currents also pulled closer together in response, increasing pressure in the camp.

406 Kautsky 1960, p. 98, p. 172. On Hoven and medical experiments see also Stein 1999, p. 57, pp. 200–3.

407 Kautsky 1960, p. 98.

408 Kautsky 1960, p. 172. Jewish Communist and Buchenwald barrack leader Emil Carlebach would later justify the courts: 'Certain gentlemen, including some who call themselves historians, feign shock at what they call "the *Lagerfeme* [secret tribunals]". But who else would have executed murderers and criminals like Wolf? The honourable State



camp administration did everything in its power to minimise the pressure applied by the ss. It kept in check many a *Kapo's* desire to make full use of his authority, made it clear to them that productivity was of no interest to their fellow prisoners, and when times were especially bad, managed to clamp down on the ill treatment of one prisoner by another. It also fought anti-Semitism among the Aryan prisoners, with limited success, it is true, but not for want of trying'.<sup>409</sup>

Despite their apparent power, the Red Kapos' positions were always insecure, contested, and, above all, dependent on outside forces. They were able to wrest concessions from the ss, but stood no chance of toppling camp command. Many of them died as prisoners in the concentration camp, murdered by the guards or the 'Greens', or simply collapsed from exhaustion. Beyond a few small privileges and bureaucratic tricks, then, there were far from enough relatively bearable work assignments for most in this system, geared towards physical extermination as it was.

In Buchenwald specifically, the camp quarry occupied a major role in the extermination process.<sup>410</sup> Not only was work here the most difficult, but the ss officer in charge Johannes Blank (sometimes spelled 'Planck') and his lieutenant Hinkelmann's predilection for sadistic murder was widely known throughout the camp.<sup>411</sup> Contemporary witness Eugen Kogon wrote about the two: 'Two of the most notorious murderers in Buchenwald were *Hauptscharführers* Hinkelmann and Planck. The latter was a Bavarian lumberjack and poacher, who committed suicide by hanging in 1944 after his involvement in a matter concerning Dr Hoven (assassination of witnesses) was revealed. He literally committed hundreds of murders'.<sup>412</sup> With regard to Blank's accomplice, Kogon writes: 'He was matched by Hinkelmann. This one was almost always drunk,

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Attorneys and judges of the time wore the swastika and functioned as subcontractors for the concentration camps. They were our arch enemies, no less so than the ss. There was only one form of protection: self-help, self-defence', Carlebach 1995, p. 109.

409 Kautsky 1960, pp. 112–13. Kogon's evaluation of the Communists in the camp was more positive, albeit with reservations: 'The positive achievement of the Communists on behalf of the concentration-camp prisoners can hardly be overrated. In many cases the whole camp literally owed them its life, even though their motives seldom sprang from pure altruism but rather from the collective instinct for self-preservation in which the whole camp joined because of its positive results', Kogon 1998, p. 259.

410 Stein 1999, p. 118.

411 See Hackett 1997.

412 Kogon 1988 [1946], pp. 119–20 (translated from the original German, as the passage is not part of the abbreviated English edition published in 1998).



FIGURE 39 *ss guard Johannes Blank, Werner Scholem's murderer, around 1939*

one of his favourite harassments was to mockingly call out to the exhausted and bloodied-up inmates: "Run faster, then you can rest sooner!" He was extremely creative in devising new tortures. He forced older inmates to climb trees, which he then had shaken – to his satanic glee – until the poor wretches fell off and broke their necks or were mortally injured, to die miserably in the infirmary'.<sup>413</sup> Blank's speciality was instead killings 'while attempting to escape'. In the spring

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413 Ibid.

and summer of 1940 alone, at least according to Benedikt Kautsky, he was responsible for dozens of murders in the quarry.<sup>414</sup>

This wave of murders in 1940 marked a particular excess, but was nevertheless part of an ongoing process of degeneration and dehumanisation in the camp.<sup>415</sup> While the 1936 murder of Scholem's cellmate Ignaz Manasse in Lichtenburg concentration camp represented a rare occurrence at the time, by now death was part of Buchenwald's daily routine. This was fuelled not only by the Nazis' consolidation of power, but also by the outbreak of war. Masses of prisoners now poured into the concentration camp system. Buchenwald was overcrowded and had far more workers than were required in the camp's workshops. In a macabre process similar to monetary inflation, the relative value of human life began to plummet, while the state of war meant camp authorities no longer had to worry about the opinion of foreign journalists.<sup>416</sup>

It was precisely at this moment that Werner Scholem was transferred to quarry duty, after being denounced by a fellow inmate. Ernst Federn relates the exact circumstances: 'One day an inmate complained to a Kapo that he was not pulling hard enough. Of course, Werner Scholem was a very cunning and experienced prisoner who knew how to make work a little easier. The denunciation was pure malice and Werner immediately reacted, remarking to the Kapo: "I see, someone has denounced me to you then". Incidentally, this Kapo was a political – a Communist – but most likely unaware of who Scholem was, so he enquired among the leading Communists what Werner Scholem might have referred to. What is certain is that Werner Scholem was transferred to the quarry after he fell apart with his Kapo.'<sup>417</sup>

By 'falling apart', the Austrian Federn meant an argument between the two. Federn reports that Scholem remained calm, despite the life-threatening nature of his new orders: 'The detail overseer responsible for the quarry was the dreaded Master Sergeant Hinkelmann. [...] On the other hand, Hinkelmann knew Scholem from the Sachsenhausen camp and had always been con-

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414 Kautsky 1960, p. 98.

415 Stein also mentions a marked increase in murders in spring and early summer of 1940, see Stein 1992, p. 74.

416 This was expressed in the construction of a special camp cynically labelled the 'Rose Garden' by the SS, in which 2,000 Polish and Jewish prisoners were tortured with a daily ration of 150g of bread on a surface measuring 100 by 200 metres. On one day, 67 people died. Responsible officers were Blank and Hinkelmann; see Stein 1999, p. 115; Carlebach 1995, p. 105.

417 Kuschey 2003, p. 361.

siderate towards him, at least that was Scholem's impression, and he talked to me about Hinkelmann. The truth is that Scholem told me, prior to being commandeered to the quarry, that Hinkelmann would surely arrange for him to receive a decent task in the quarry'.<sup>418</sup> Scholem was never imprisoned in Sachsenhausen.<sup>419</sup> Did he perhaps know Hinkelmann from Dachau or Lichtenburg?<sup>420</sup> But even so, how could Scholem, otherwise known for being acrimonious and uncommunicative, befriend this infamous murderer, let alone expect any kind of leniency from him? We do not know. That said, Scholem's hopes to receive a tolerable position in the quarry at first seemed fulfilled: 'Scholem was not assigned to carrying heavy rocks, but rather to some other labour'.<sup>421</sup>

Nevertheless, on 17 July 1940, only a few days after his transfer, Werner Scholem was called on by *Hauptscharführer* Blank. Eugen Kogon describes what happened next: 'Blank walked with Scholem for about ten minutes, chatting amicably with him, then took his revolver and shot him down from the side'.<sup>422</sup>

Werner Scholem died at the age of 44. Although camp command covered up the true circumstances of this death, they did not remain a secret to his family. Betty learned the sad news about her son's death in September 1940 and passed it on to Gershom: 'I am numb and totally beside myself, I had always believed that he would walk free in the end, and now this is the end, after 7½ years of unspeakable hardship, I just can't calm down! These monsters have most certainly murdered him, and we will never learn what actually happened. [...]

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418 Ibid.

419 Emmy Scholem mentions an unspecified period of detention in Oranienburg, an early concentration camp that is often confused with Sachsenhausen due to their geographic proximity. However, the Oranienburg camp was already closed by the time Scholem was released from police custody in March 1935. Sachsenhausen, on the other hand, was not opened until the summer of 1936, when Scholem was already a prisoner in Lichtenburg. See 'Nachweis der Haftzeiten und Berechnung der Haftentschädigung', *Entschädigungssakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.

420 According to the testimony of an inmate, Hinkelmann had been a company commander in the Lichtenburg concentration camp, see 'Bericht Kurt Vogel', Archiv Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, BwA 31/434.

421 Kuschey 2003, p. 361.

422 This passage has been removed from the English edition (Kogon 1998) and thus translated from the original German (Kogon 1988, p. 119). Emil Carlebach, on the other hand, writes that Blank's accomplice Hinkelmann shot Scholem on a 'walk'. Benedikt Kautsky however names Blank as the murderer, as does as the report issued by the International Buchenwald Committee in 1945; see Hackett 1997, Kautsky 1960, p. 98; Carlebach 1995, p. 121.

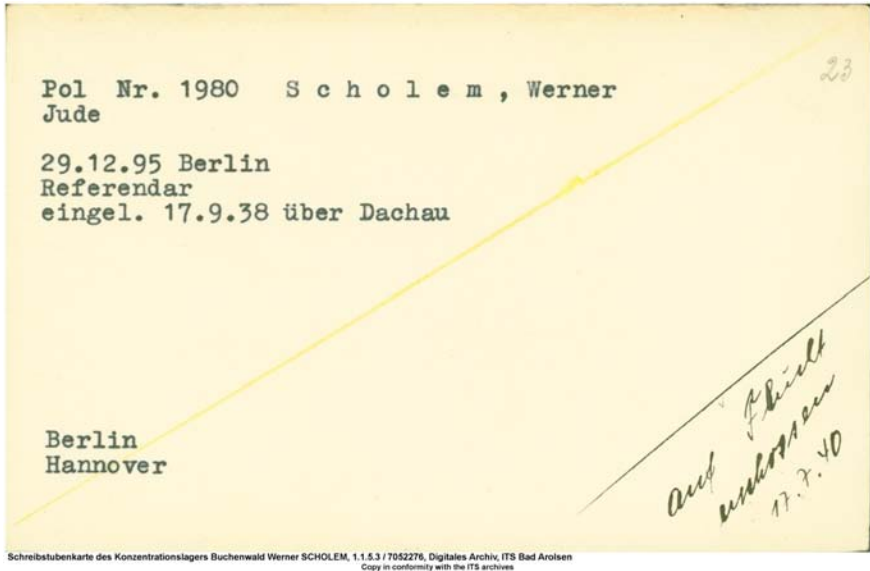


FIGURE 40 Werner Scholem's 'camp office card' from the Buchenwald concentration camp, including the handwritten annotation, 'shot while attempting to escape', 1940

For 30 years, the conflict with Werner has run through my life like a black thread and I have always stood by him, and now it ends like this!<sup>423</sup>

Although there were several eye witnesses to Werner's death, none was able to provide a first-hand report, for only a few of the prisoners working in the quarry would live to see the camp's liberation five years later. All cited testimonies are thus necessarily second-hand reconstructions. Ernst Federn, who bases his account on statements made by an inmate named Müller, wrote the most elaborately on the case: 'A few days later, Hinkelmann and Planck approached him and told him they needed someone for a job outside the cordon of guards and they would accompany him. Now Scholem, of course, was experienced enough to refuse, but he apparently failed to grasp that it was just a trick. Hinkelmann and Planck walked him through the cordon of guards, where they then shot him. This was observed by Müller who later related it to me. It is no great mystery, after all we know as to who made Hinkelmann and

423 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 27 September 1940, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 491f. According to the death registry, Werner had been 'shot while attempting to escape', although his relatives would only learn this much later. Betty's sons had told her a milder version of the incident. Reinhold wrote to Gershom on 10 November 1947: 'It was certainly a good decision to tell mother that he died naturally of illness'. Betty's response nevertheless suggests that she suspected otherwise, see NLI Jerusalem.

Planck aware of who this Werner Scholem had been at one point, even though it cannot be proven. Officially, Scholem was shot outside the cordon of guards, and was correspondingly recorded as shot while attempting to escape.<sup>424</sup>

Federn was firmly convinced that Scholem had been denounced by Stalinist inmates and murdered as a result – a victim of the camp's secret tribunals, which in this case had not targeted a camp informant, but Scholem, a 'Trotskyist'. Federn reported that although Scholem may have been ostracised in Dachau, he was not 'directly persecuted'. The Soviet policy of 'eliminating Trotskyism' first launched in Moscow would not filter down to the German concentration camps until a later stage.<sup>425</sup>

Did Werner Scholem really die 'in the claws of National Socialists and Stalinists'? His murder in the summer of 1940 coincides with Hitler and Stalin's non-aggression pact. The pact caught the defeated KPD completely off guard and generated severe confusion among Buchenwald Communists, before it was eventually justified as a pact of non-aggression to protect the interests of the Soviet Union.<sup>426</sup> The consolidation of the 'Red Kapos' system would also take place around the same time.<sup>427</sup> At first, one could think that Scholem became the victim of two totalitarian systems.

A closer inspection, however, begins to poke holes in this picture. Not only were the Communists in Buchenwald cut off from the party and thus its current political line, but also from news about the outside world. KPD members in the camp functioned totally independently of Moscow's directives, rudimentarily in compliance with the ideological party line, if at all.<sup>428</sup> Moreover, the Red Kapos' organisation was far from stabilised in 1940, as historian Lutz Niethammer has demonstrated: 'Neither can we speak of a thoroughly organised illegal party organisation during this period [...]. Rather, there were regionally specific groups of friends, who would stay close and amongst themselves out of

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424 Kuschey 2003, p. 361.

425 Kuschey 2003, p. 361. Federn first mentions the possibility of a KPD conspiracy against Scholem in Federn 1981. In a confidential message to the Fourth International written under the pseudonym 'Pensé' on 19 June 1945, he blamed the 'ruling CP-clique' in Buchenwald for Scholem's death. See Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes 1992, p. 94 ff.

426 On the discussions among Communist prisoners see Carlebach 1995, p. 102 ff.

427 Niethammer 1994, p. 37.

428 Ernst Busse, KPD member and camp elder for a period, stated before a Soviet military tribunal in 1951: 'Throughout the entire existence of our organisation, we never had connections to anti-fascist Communist movements outside the camp', see Niethammer 1994, p. 85.

fear of informants, and between whom some of the more prominent inmates were able to mediate, as they had many personal contacts'.<sup>429</sup> 'This initial phase cannot be imagined as systematic action, but rather as a process of growing into ambivalent functions marked by many coincidences'.<sup>430</sup> It was not the ideological line, but practical successes in the struggle for survival that allowed the Buchenwald Communists to opt for the balancing act of resistance on the one hand and co-administration of camp terror on the other. As Niethammer emphasises, there is 'no substantial evidence of any kind of Red-Brown camaraderie in the Third Reich's defining question, the race ideology'.<sup>431</sup>

Red Kapos and the SS guards remained political enemies, and the latitude permitted by the SS could be revoked at any time. Attempts to re-establish the system of 'Green' inmates as SS lackeys would continue until 1942.<sup>432</sup> The summer of 1940 witnessed a particularly severe struggle for hegemony among the prisoner functionaries, threatening the KPD's position in the camp: inmate Fritz Wolf, awarded the title of 'Honorary Aryan' by the SS, had ordered the assassination of a Communist in the quarry. KPD inmates responded by denouncing his actions and arranging for him to be transferred to Peenemünde in May 1940, where he died in an airstrike.<sup>433</sup>

Werner Scholem was murdered shortly afterwards, although his was no obvious case of revenge killing. He was unpopular among KPD members who derided him as a 'Trotskyist', nor did he pose a threat to the prisoner functionaries. Moreover, they had other concerns for the time being, namely the challenge posed by the 'habitual offenders' and their own bid for power. Adding to this was the fact that, despite the undeniable existence of secret tribunals in the camp, SS guards were nevertheless free to kill whomever they pleased. Once the commandment 'Thou shall not kill' had lost its validity, arbitrary murder

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429 Niethammer 1994, p. 37.

430 Ibid.

431 KPD prisoners also used classifications such as 'habitual offender' and 'anti-social' and were thus also not free of 'everyday social racism', but both Communist and non-Communist Jews were protected by Red Kapos – which, in the Third Reich, was 'truly not taken for granted', see Niethammer 1994, p. 52.

432 A veritable 'prisoner war' between 'Red' and 'Green' prisoners broke out in 1942. A stabilisation of the role of prisoner functionaries can only be determined after this period. See Niethammer 1994, p. 39 f.

433 Wolf was denounced for forcing a 'young Polish prisoner into homosexual intercourse'. He had also sought to erode the SS's authority. Emil Carlebach writes: 'A careless remark sufficed. Wolf was relieved of his function as camp elder within minutes and placed on a transport to the Peenemünde rocket base. There he was killed by an aerial bombing of the armaments factory', Carlebach 1995, p. 109.

became the norm. This inversion of ethical norms was the camp's defining characteristic. Designation as a Jew, an enemy of the people, sufficed to justify murder – no further personal motive was required. Inmates' personalities, condemned to a group excluded from humanity, were systematically denied and erased. That said, it is nonetheless tempting to insinuate rational or personal motives behind an individual's death. Motive imputes a sort of meaning to the death, attenuating the abyss of incomprehension that separates both survivors and later-born generations from this act of mass killing.

But everyday life in Buchenwald consisted of arbitrary murder. The successes of the Blitzkrieg strategy in the first months of the war made the SS particularly uninhibited. Fully convinced that the world would soon be theirs, they celebrated their triumph by inflicting terror on Jewish prisoners. The outcome was the murder wave of summer 1940 witnessed by Kautsky. Two main perpetrators were Blank and Hinkelmann; the majority of those murdered were Jews.<sup>434</sup> The Red Kapos were unable to put a stop to the terror: Rudi Arndt, a leading figure of the Jewish Communists in Buchenwald, was also killed in the quarry on 2 May 1940. Contemporary witness Emil Carlebach reports that camp elder Ernst Frommhold risked his life to protect Jewish inmates, but was released on 1 May 1940. His successor, Ernst Busse, lacked both the courage and strength to intervene during the killing spree.<sup>435</sup> The killings continued, and by summer a number of well-known Jewish inmates of all political shades were dead; apart from the Trotskyist Scholem and the orthodox Communist Rudi Arndt, the list also included Social Democrat Ernst Heilmann and Robert Winterstein, former Minister of Justice in the Austrofascist *Ständestaat*.<sup>436</sup>

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434 Kautsky 1960, p. 98.

435 Carlebach blames the change in leadership for Rudi Arndt's death in the quarry on 3 May 1940, quoting Busse as saying 'I can't intervene on behalf of a Jew', and writing: 'He was certainly not an anti-Semite, but he did not have the energy to openly oppose the camp command'. Carlebach mistakenly lists 3 April as his date of death; however, Arndt died on 3 May 1940. See Carlebach 1995, pp. 110–14, esp. pp. 113–14. Ernst Busse became Interior Minister of Thuringia after the war, but was later denounced for his collaboration with the Buchenwald camp regime, irrespective of his intentions. He was sentenced as a war criminal by a Soviet tribunal in 1951 and died in a prison camp in Vorkuta. See Niethammer 1994.

436 Eugen Kogon identifies Arndt, Winterstein and Scholem as Blank's victims (he calls him 'Planck'). Though he indicates 'fanatical Communist obstructionism' as the reason for Winterstein's transfer to the quarry, he names Blank as the exclusive culprit in the murder, pointing out his known arbitrariness (Kogon 1988, p. 199). On Robert Winterstein see also Winterstein 2008.



The murder of Werner Scholem cannot be seamlessly reconstructed today. A closer look at the situation in mid-1940, however, reveals that we require no secret tribunal to account for his death – indeed, the hypothesis is rather unlikely. Even among surviving inmates, the tribunal hypothesis concerning Scholem's death remains an isolated opinion. While Federn, Carlebach, Kogon and Kautsky all mention the names of the murderers Blank and Hinkelmann, Ernst Federn, who died in 2007, is the only witness to the second version. Gershom Scholem was therefore sceptical when he heard this version of his brother's death in 1981.<sup>437</sup>

Federn spent five years longer than Scholem in camp, in constant fear for his life and fully aware that the Red Kapos did not recognise him as a 'comrade'. This certainly influenced his interpretation of events, and it seems likely that he overestimated the KPD camp organisation's leverage in retrospect.<sup>438</sup> In historical reconstruction, the network appears to have been relatively powerless at this time. Pressured by the 'Greens' and stripped of some of its key posts, it now was confronted with the death of one of its most prominent leaders, Rudi Arndt.

Arndt, born in 1909, was a Communist of the younger generation. A more familiar figure among those murdered in the spring of 1940 was Ernst Heilmann, whom Scholem knew from the Prussian Landtag. Scholem was not particularly close to the Social Democrat, but they did share a bitter experience:

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437 Gershom Scholem learned of Federn's version for the first time in 1981 and commented sceptically: 'So far as I can tell, whatever is new in the article – that is, where it goes beyond Kogon – is exceptionally doubtful and is in great need of proof. The claim that my brother's true murderers were members of the German Communist party in Buchenwald contradicts everything I know about the subject. Emmy told me that Werner stood on rather good terms with the people in the concentration camp who had remained in the party – indeed, he was on good terms with them particularly in the concentration camp. She received a good deal of information about this from a trustworthy source. It's difficult to test the veracity of suspicions, such as those very often and very bitterly traded between Stalinists and Trotskyites after the war. I'll try to look into these things in Germany', Gershom Scholem to Dina Waschitz, 2 August 1981, Scholem 2002, pp. 490–1. Gershom was referring to Federn 1981.

438 Benedikt Kautsky had already reported how dissident Communists over-estimated the Stalinists' power out of fear in 1946: '[...] some unfortunate victims of this vendetta showed regular signs of persecution mania [...]' (Kautsky 1960, p. 115). The KPD's organisation stabilised only after the 'prisoner war' of 1942–3 and could only constitute itself as an illegal 'International Camp Committee' through foreign Communist confidants. The SS more or less depended on the 'Reds', as German inmates constituted a minority and served as a link to the foreign prisoners; see Niethammer 1994, as well as Stein 1999, p. 213.

from the early 1920s onwards, both endured countless anti-Semitic insults in the halls of a freely elected parliament, on the record and yet ignored.<sup>439</sup> This brings us to Werner Scholem's true murderers: all witnesses' testimonies, and even the camp command's cynical death notice, agree on the fact that Scholem was shot by an SS officer. As every day, Scholem had worn the badge of his prisoner group: a combination of yellow and red triangles, overlaid so as to resemble the Star of David.<sup>440</sup> He died as a Jew and a Communist – the National Socialist worldview denied his right to exist. Scholem had fought this barbaric ideology since 1922, and its triumph would be his downfall.

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439 See also Rolke 1998.

440 This was the standard identifying mark for Jewish Communists. On identifying prisoner categories see Kautsky 1960, p. 104 ff. as well as Stein 1999, p. 62. On the specific role of Jewish prisoners in the camp regime see Stein 1992.

## Remembering Werner Scholem

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>1</sup>

Walter Benjamin wrote these lines in 1940 as the ninth of his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. His life would end soon afterwards on 26 September in the French-Spanish border town of Portbou while fleeing Nazi invasion. Confronted with Hitler's European conquest, Benjamin chose suicide. He left the Paul Klee painting in Paris, and it eventually made its way to Gershom Scholem after a long and winding journey. Within a matter of months, Gershom had lost both his brother and his best friend. Only memories of the two remained, destroyed by Stalinism and fascism. Uniting the family, companions, friends and comrades of Werner Scholem was the experience of utter powerlessness in the face of the storm of history. Gershom in Jerusalem, Emmy and her daughters in England, Arthur Rosenberg and Ruth Fischer in the US, his mother Betty in Sydney – the people with whom Werner had once lived and fought together found themselves scattered across the globe.

After Werner was murdered on 17 July 1940, his mortal remains were incinerated in the newly built Buchenwald crematorium.<sup>2</sup> His ashes were placed in an urn, labelled with his name and readied for collection – but no one arrived to collect. The urn was one of many that would remain stored in the camp for five years as a silent accusation in the midst of the ongoing slaughter. When Buch-

1 Benjamin 2007, pp. 257–8.

2 The camp used Weimar's municipal crematorium until mid-1940, see Stein 1999, p. 30, p. 93.

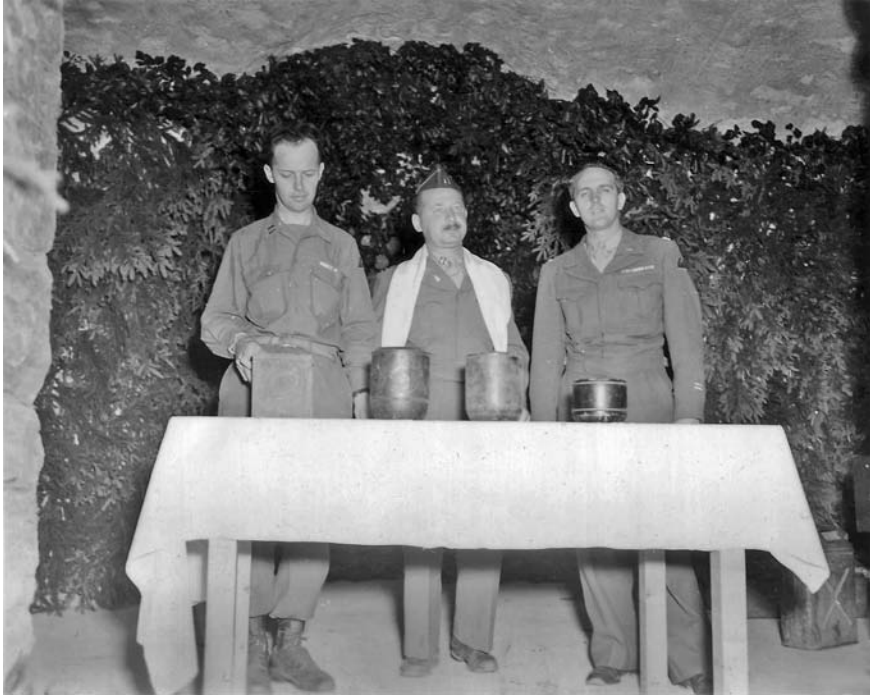


FIGURE 41 *Funeral service for the urns of murdered inmates found in Buchenwald, 20 June 1945. One of the 1,286 urns marked with names contained the remains of Werner Scholem. The ceremony was performed by a Catholic, a Jewish, and a Protestant military chaplain from the US army.*

enwald was liberated in early 1945, American troops discovered more than a thousand urns walled in into the vault of a nearby monument to Bismarck.<sup>3</sup> The discovered urns containing the ashes of some 1,286 inmates were interred in an ecumenical service on 20 June 1945. The ceremony, organised by camp survivors and conducted by a rabbi and two Christian priests from the US Army, would be Werner's funeral. His urn is listed as no. 1020 in a burial list from the year 1945.<sup>4</sup>

3 On the following see Stein 1996. Individual urns labelled with names would only be used during the initial years. The 1,286 names on the burial list thus constitute only a fraction of the estimated 56,000 inmates killed at Camp Buchenwald between 1937 and 1945.

4 *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN) Warszawa*, GK 127/49 (notebook) and GK 127/50 (list). Films of these files from the archive of the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Warsaw) are located in the archives of the Buchenwald memorial: *BwA*, Mikrofilmsammlung, Filme der Hauptkommission Warschau, Film 32. I thank Dr Harry Stein for this information.



FIGURE 42 *Funeral on 20 June 1945 at the foot of the Bismarck tower where the urns were found. As was the case for the exiled and dispersed families of many victims, Werner Scholem's relatives were not informed of the ceremony.*

None of his friends or companions were present, nor were his relatives ever informed that the grave existed. The burial list was lost soon after and only rediscovered in a Polish archive in the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> The tomb decayed and was rearranged as part of a grove of honour with remains from nearby graves in 1949. Their names, however, were lost, making it a grove of anonymous, abstract victims. The names of Buchenwald's dead have only been on display at the burial site of the urns since 1996, when a plaque was installed, rendering Werner's final resting place visible once again.

His brothers, both of whom visited Germany multiple times after 1945, unfortunately did not live to see it. In their own personal act of remembrance, the two inscribed Werner's name on their father's tomb in the Jewish cemetery in Weißensee. The names of Betty, Erich and even Gerhard were later added as well, although only Arthur was actually buried in his hometown of Berlin.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



FIGURE 43 *The Scholem family grave in the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weißensee. The only family member actually buried here is Arthur Scholem. Werner's date of death is mistakenly given as 1942.*

Remembrance of Werner Scholem after 1945 was of an exclusively private nature. Only since 1990 has his memory become public once again – not only in Buchenwald, but also in Berlin, where Werner's name is featured in a memorial

in front of the Reichstag building commemorating parliamentarians murdered by the Nazis.<sup>6</sup> At the site of his old house in Klopstockstraße, long since disappeared, a brass *Stolperstein*<sup>7</sup> was installed in the pavement in Werner's honour in 2004.<sup>8</sup> Yet such popular acknowledgement of Scholem's life and work came very late. Banished from public memory for decades, Scholem would be mourned only by family and close friends for decades.

Those who did hardly found time to mourn in peace. Werner's friends lived in extremely difficult circumstances, having only barely escaped death themselves, although many had not even managed that. Ruth Fischer wrote to her fellow former party comrade, Hugo Urbahns, from New York on 18 July 1945: 'Hardly any of our close friends made it to the United States, more than 20 from our inner circle stayed behind in France, many of whom have of course perished'.<sup>9</sup> Apart from Werner Scholem, Fischer listed the names of many others who had disappeared, been murdered, or were missing. Her most painful loss was that of her partner Maslow, who died a year after Werner while exiled in Cuba – only one day after he was to receive his entry visa for the US. Fischer was convinced that Stalin's agents had assassinated him, and more recently available sources suggest that he was in fact most likely murdered, although the precise culprits are unknown.<sup>10</sup> In her despair, she turned to her erstwhile opponent Heinrich Brandler, who also found himself exiled to Havana. Their seem-

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6 The memorial is part of a larger installation inside the Reichstag consisting of three books listing the murdered parliamentarian's biographical data, and a 'photo-painting' by Katharina Sieverding. The memorial was initiated by the Berlin city government in 1985. As not all names were known at the time, the Bundestag presidium first issued a research assignment to the Commission for the History of Parliamentarism and Political Parties, the results of which were published in 1991 (Schumacher 1994). The memorial site inside the Reichstag building was opened in February 1992, the installation in front of the building in September of that same year.

7 *Stolpersteine* ['stumbling stone'] are brass plates roughly the size of cobblestones bearing the names and biographical data of individual Nazi victims. German artist Gunter Demnig began laying these plates in streets and public squares across Europe in 1995 as a decentralised project to commemorate the victims of Nazism.

8 Klopstockstraße 7 was destroyed in World War II and the street numbers were later reassigned, which is why Scholem's *Stolperstein* is in front of Klopstockstraße 18. The stone was laid by the Catholic parish of St Laurentius, whose house of worship is located nearby, see *Pfarrbrief St. Laurentius*, issue 4/2004. The stone was placed in May 2004, see the database located at [www.stolpersteine-berlin.de](http://www.stolpersteine-berlin.de) (last accessed 18 April 2013) as well as Bürgerverein Luisenstadt e.V. 2004.

9 Ruth Fischer to Hugo Urbahns, 18 July 1945, Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 165.

10 Keßler 2013a, pp. 385–91.

ingly irreconcilable past differences meant little in this context, and Brandler and Maslow had met for lunch regularly in Havana's Chinese restaurants. Brandler conducted a thorough investigation of his old enemy and new friend's death, at least to the extent that his poor Spanish skills would allow.<sup>11</sup> Arthur Rosenberg also expressed his condolences to Ruth Fischer around this time, writing about the death of 'Max', as Maslow was known to his closest friends: 'Max's death has revived old memories of our "Left", which of course – apart from you and me – was embodied mostly by Max and Werner. Despite the many mistakes we may have committed, it is already clear today that we understood the situation in Germany and the workers' movement better than anyone else'.<sup>12</sup> His words were little comfort given the scale of their defeat. Scholem, Rosenberg and Fischer, as well as their opponents Brandler and Thalheimer, refused to surrender to Stalin, maintaining their integrity while others fell prey to their own opportunism. The former adversaries were reunited by their common defeat and scattered existence around the globe.

The same was true for Werner's family. His aunt Käthe Schiepan was deported to Theresienstadt in 1941 and murdered, although the majority of his relatives escaped the horrors of the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> Their new start in a foreign country was rarely an easy one. Erich Scholem was unable to find work due to the 'animosity of the Australian employees towards foreigners' and only managed to eke out an existence by taking over a small general store. Betty described his working conditions in a letter to Gershom: 'He works sixteen hours a day, from Monday morning to Sunday evening. No pauses, no breaks for food'.<sup>14</sup> But nevertheless: 'Erich is very happy with his corner store, it brings him joy [...] and he said to me that he can certainly protect his family from need with it, and for now that is all one can ask for'.<sup>15</sup>

Reinhold found himself in a similar situation, leasing a somewhat larger store near a 'pleasure ground' with a boat hire in the suburb of Como, about an hour from Sydney. Betty lived with him and helped out in the shop, as there was no one else there to do so. 'Sandwiches and [working as] shop assistant left me with no time to write', she wrote to Gershom in 1941, describing Reinhold's customers in an ironic manner: 'We have about 25 different kinds of sweets and

11 See correspondence of Ruth Fischer and Heinrich Brandler, Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 143 ff.; as well as Becker 2001, pp. 338–41.

12 Arthur Rosenberg to Ruth Fischer, 28 November 1941, Fischer and Maslow 1990, p. 145.

13 Käthe Schiepan sent a last letter to Betty Scholem on 17 June 1941. On her deportation see Betty to Gershom Scholem, 5 November 1944, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 513, p. 536.

14 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 9 May 1939, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 468 f.

15 Ibid.



a number of other children's snacks, which is very important in and around Sydney, for the brats are great consumers, incomprehensible where the money comes from, they walk bare-footed and with holes, unbelievable. And should the urchin not get "his" sort of lollies, he will walk straight out of the shop again'.<sup>16</sup> The contrast between war-torn Europe and Australian consumerism could hardly have been greater. Their new neighbours had no concept of the sort of persecution Betty and her sons had only narrowly escaped, and Reinhold's shop was even temporarily boycotted for being a German business.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the two brothers managed to build a new existence for themselves in Australia, and Betty would spend the last few years of her life with them there before her death in May 1946.

Other relatives landed in completely different parts of the world. For Werner's cousin Dina, daughter of Theobald and Hedwig Scholem, his arrest motivated a return to Zionism, which she had grown up with in her family home: 'Werner was captured and we were on the telephone for days to find out what had happened to him. For me, that was the beginning of the end of my life in Germany. As I was raised to not regard Germany as my homeland, but rather to learn some skills to take to Palestine, it was an easy decision for me to leave this country, knowing that my life was supposed to be lived here in this country'.<sup>18</sup> Dina followed Gershom to Palestine and joined a kibbutz. Other family members went to South America, while Emmy and her daughters continue to live in England. The Berlin Scholems became a global family in exile.

Like Reinhold and Erich, Werner's daughters also faced a difficult existence in the first years of their emigration. Renate Scholem was 17 when her father died. To her, he was a man almost out of reach, whom she had not seen in seven years. Her new surroundings allowed little space to mourn her father's passing, as she was detained as an 'enemy alien' in an internment camp on the Isle of Man when the news arrived.<sup>19</sup> From 1939 on, the British government arrested many native citizens as well as German immigrants as potential Nazi sympathisers or even spies. Authorities oftentimes allowed their zealotry to get the best of them: Renate, for example, was arrested in school while sitting for her final exam, the so-called 'matric'. She was initially taken to Holloway Prison in London before being transferred to the Isle of Man.<sup>20</sup> Although

16 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 26 April 1941, Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 497.

17 Scholem and Scholem 1989, p. 496. For a brief period, Australian authorities regarded Reinhold Scholem as an 'enemy alien'.

18 Dina Scholem-Vashitz to Gershom Scholem, 7 April 1978, NLI Jerusalem.

19 Howald 2009.

20 Interview with Renee Goddard, 29 Mai 2011.

provisions and treatment there were 'excellent' according to reports from other inmates, this did little to alleviate the humiliation of arrest and detention.<sup>21</sup>

Great Britain was alone in its fight against the German Reich in the summer of 1940, after the Blitzkrieg had secured its conquest of most of Western Europe. Hysterical fears of a fascist 'fifth column' ensured broad approval for the emergency laws that allowed the daughter of a Jewish Communist to be detained as an alleged Nazi sympathiser in England while her father was put to death in a German concentration camp. The situation calmed somewhat after the United States entered the war some months later, and Renate was released in 1941.

Her father's political legacy accompanied her throughout her life, albeit oftentimes more as obstacle than inspiration. In the 1920s, Communism had been more important to Werner than his family, and her parents' arrest would force her into exile in 1934. After arriving in England, her missing father did not go unnoticed: when asked to write an essay about her father's occupation at school, all she was able to write was, 'he is in a concentration camp' – a sentence met with utter disbelief until being confirmed by Emmy, whom her teacher had immediately called on the telephone.<sup>22</sup>

The young Renate was also repeatedly asked about her last name in the internment camp. Many Austrian and German Communists were housed here as well, and the name Werner Scholem was of course well known. The Stalinists could not believe that Scholem's own daughter did not share his 'Trotskyist' views, let alone that she knew so little about him in the first place. Renate was eyed with suspicion, and other inmates regarded her as cunning and deceitful.<sup>23</sup>

She married fellow emigrant Gebhard Goldschmidt after her release. Gebhard had changed his name to George Goddard after joining the British army in 1944. Renate Scholem followed suit and became Renee Goddard. The marriage soon ended in divorce, however, an ordeal in which the long shadow of politics may have again played a role. For George, like many of Renee's friends, joined the Communist Party of Great Britain soon after the war's end, an organisation

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21 Betty Scholem reports: 'In the same mail [...] came a letter from Hilde, dated 10 July, from the Internment Camp on the Isle of Man, where she was taken in May. She met Werner's youngest daughter there, 17-year-old Renate, who was initially evacuated with her school, but later interned, while her mother was still free [...] Hilde writes that conditions in the camp are very good, provisions and treatment are excellent, the English authorities are tremendously sympathetic and kind, "the interned" (!) not so much', Betty to Gershom Scholem, 27 September 1940, Scholem and Scholem, p. 491f.

22 Goddard 2008.

23 Goddard and Fry 2013.

firmly subordinated to Moscow. Stalin's prestige had risen considerably in light of the Soviet war effort against Hitler, particularly among émigrés, but the authoritarian structures of Stalinism had not changed whatsoever. On the contrary, encroachment upon party members' private lives knew virtually no bounds: George Goddard's party cell decided on his behalf that fathering children was not suitable during wartime, and successfully pressured Renee into having an abortion.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from various jobs, including working as a waitress, Renee was also active in the Free German League of Culture, a front organisation of the KPD-dominated Free German Youth [*Freie Deutsche Jugend*, FDJ]. These groups served as the basis for the East German state's eponymous mass youth organisation after the war.<sup>25</sup> Renee encountered the same mistrust she knew from the detention camp in these Communist cultural circles. The name Scholem was treated with suspicion, and she was only entrusted with minor responsibilities like leading the organisation's theatre troupe.<sup>26</sup>

That said, in this case the direction her father's tarnished name forced her to take turned out rather favourable. Renee trained to be an actress and had roles in Peter Zadek's first dramatic productions in 1947. After her first marriage collapsed, the two became a couple for a while, before she joined Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier on a tour of the USA in 1952.

Although a major breakthrough in the profession would elude her, she switched to working behind the scenes and became a successful screenplay agent. Even here, she could not escape her father's shadow. While regarded as a deviant by the Communists, the BBC in turn viewed Renee as an 'undercover communist', which led to an entry in her personnel file, a secret stamp issued by the M15 intelligence service. The few insiders who knew about the stamp referred to it as the 'Christmas tree' because of the green ink used.<sup>27</sup> Although

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24 Ibid.

25 The first exile groups of the Free German Youth emerged in Paris in 1936 and in Prague in 1938. The group moved its headquarters to London in 1939 after both of these cities were occupied by German forces, and ultimately had active groups in 23 British cities. The memoirs of Alfred Fleischhacker, who was active with Renee Goddard and Hanno Fry in the group, document the activities of these groups; see Fleischhacker 1996. See also Gräf 2009.

26 See Goddard and Fry 2013.

27 Hanno Fry also attests that Renee Goddard received the 'Christmas tree', see *ibid.* For further background information, see David Smith, 'BBC banned communists in purge – New documents reveal performers were kept off the air by M15 for their political links', *The Guardian*, 5 March 2006, online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/mar/05/broadcasting.bbc> (last accessed 18 April 2017).



FIGURE 44 *Renee Goddard in 1952*

Renee managed to establish herself in the industry nonetheless, this label was often tantamount to being blacklisted for many artists. Not until the end of the Cold War would the practice be made public and subsequently abolished.

Thinking back on all the suspicion harboured against her made her smile in later years. Although haunted by her father's political beliefs throughout her life, she had managed to move beyond her family's legacy and make her own way.

Edith Scholem, five years older, was less able to do so. She avoided internment by marrying her fiancée Eric Capon, the intendant of the Unity Theatre in London. Marriage entitled her to British citizenship and spared her the ordeal of renewed arrest. However, she struggled with the trauma of her escape and the loss of her father for the rest of her life. Werner had been a real parent to her with a strong impact on her adolescence. Their violent separation and his equally violent death saddened her deeply. Edith was unable to embrace life in England as easily as her sister. Following their arrival, she immediately encountered difficulties in school, developed a stutter, and attempted to commit suicide by inhaling coal gas for the first time at age 17.<sup>28</sup> She would remain in therapy for years to come, telling a doctor in 1967 that: 'She suffers from nightmares. She still has the feeling that she and her father are in grave danger. This is accompanied by disturbing feelings of guilt towards the father. She doesn't know how to attenuate them.'<sup>29</sup> Although she rationally understood otherwise, deep in her heart Edith always suffered from the feeling that she had abandoned Werner,<sup>30</sup> a fate she shared with many of those who escaped the Holocaust but were never again able to enjoy life after watching so many others die. The phenomenon is in fact known as 'survivor's guilt' in psychological literature.<sup>31</sup> Only privately did Edith find a source of strength: in contrast to Renee, who was married four times, Edith's marriage remained intact and sustained her for most of her life.

Only fifty years after Werner's imprisonment was Edith able, for the first time, to mourn the loss of her father. In a letter to Fania, Gershom's second wife, or rather widow, she expressed her feelings: '1983 brought a lot of memories sharply back for me and I have thought a great deal of my poor father and really grieved for him for the first time. I never could before because I thought it would kill me. I was very fond of him and had a relationship of sorts with him, although I did not agree with his views very often. Destinies are very strange and

28 'Fachärztlich tiefenpsychologisches Gutachten von Dr. med. Ernst F. Sievers vom 1. Juli 1967', *Entschädigungsakte Edith Capon*, LABO Berlin, Entschädigungsamt, Akte Nr. 251.080.

29 'Ärztliches Gutachten vom 25. Oktober 1967', *Entschädigungsakte Edith Capon*, LABO Berlin, Entschädigungsamt, Akte Nr. 251.080.

30 Interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013.

31 See Leys 2007.

I often wonder how much choice we have, if any!<sup>32</sup> Edith found the strength to talk about her escape for the first time in an interview shortly before her death in 1988. Her voice still quivered when confronted with those old memories of her father over forty years later.<sup>33</sup>

She had kept largely silent until then, and not only because of her own fears: Emmy always instructed her daughters not to speak of the past. As Edith's husband was temporarily a member of the British Communist Party and thus a 'Stalinist', he was not to learn a thing about the family's background.<sup>34</sup>

Even Renate was told to not 'reveal' anything, to which she could respond only with a shake of the head, for she knew nothing of Werner and Emmy's political life and had been kept in the dark from early childhood on.<sup>35</sup> However, this also meant that Renee was more open to talk about the past in later years, hoping to find answers about the long-lost and in many ways unknown father. When she learned that political scientist Michael Buckmiller from the University of Hanover was researching Werner Scholem's life in the mid-1990s, she supported him, telling him all she could remember and making the family photo album available to him.<sup>36</sup> In 1999, Renee even deposited Werner's prison and concentration camp letters in the archive of the University of Hanover.

Edith, who had enjoyed a closer relationship with Werner, refused to answer such questions, although she had met Buckmiller herself years before – in 1981 she told him that none of her father's letters had survived.<sup>37</sup> The trauma of Werner's death was still present, her father's desperate last letters a memory that threatened to 'kill her', as she wrote to Fania in 1983. Edith still felt guilt for having been emotionally overwhelmed and unable to answer Werner's letters when he was still alive. Adding to this were her mother's instructions to never reveal anything about Werner to outsiders. Edith had thoroughly internalised this advice and did not trust outsiders, especially from Germany.<sup>38</sup>

Emmy herself lived in constant fear of betrayal and conspiracy by Stalin's agents. These fears were not entirely unfounded: Werner's idol, Leon Trotsky, had been assassinated in Mexico at the hands of a Soviet agent in 1940, and Emmy knew from Ruth Fischer about the peculiar circumstances of Maslow's

32 In the original, '+' is used instead of 'and'. It has been changed here for legibility's sake. Edith Scholem to Fania Scholem, 1983, NLI Jerusalem (precise date unknown).

33 Interview with Edith Capon, née Scholem, 1988.

34 Goddard 2008.

35 Interview with Renee Goddard, 8 October 2009.

36 One result was the first biographical essay on Werner Scholem, see Buckmiller/Nafe 2000.

37 Information from Prof. Michael Buckmiller, email 22 July 2016.

38 Information from Susanna Capon, email 1 August 2016.

death. Moreover, Emmy must have also known that some of her old comrades had never returned from their supposedly safe exile in the Soviet Union,<sup>39</sup> and although she never spoke a word about it, she most likely witnessed the disbanding of the POUM militias and the arrest of their leaders in Spain in 1937. She had avoided setting foot in the Soviet sphere of influence ever since, and beseeched her daughters to do the same.

Nevertheless, both Renee and Edith took day trips to East Berlin when the family temporarily lived in West Berlin in 1958–9.<sup>40</sup> Renee visited Bertolt Brecht there in 1955, who would appear in London with his ensemble the following year.<sup>41</sup> Edith also became acquainted with the Brecht family, but only Werner's granddaughter Susanna Capon would visit Helene Weigel and the milieu around the Berliner Ensemble regularly. East Berlin remained foreign territory to Werner's daughters. Susanna reports that she and her mother were followed and observed during every visit.<sup>42</sup> Someone else in East Berlin, that is, apart from the police, security services and the party archive, remembered Werner as well: Marie Luise von Münchhausen, née von Hammerstein.

She left Berlin in 1937, but continued to be haunted by the ghosts of her past. The Gestapo raided her apartment and interrogated her in 1940, the year of Werner's death, and again in July 1944. The Gestapo officers always brought old files with them, conducting interrogations that could last a full twelve hours and included questions about her father, her party orders and contacts to the KPD, and thus also about Werner Scholem.<sup>43</sup> Despite this persecution, Marie Luise returned to her party after the Allied victory in Europe. After two unhappy marriages, she divorced, re-joined the KPD in 1945 and then the SED in 1946.

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39 Susanna Capon claims that her grandmother Emmy was personally acquainted with practically all of the East German political leadership (interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013). It is probable that she personally knew some victims of Stalin's purges as well.

40 Both Renee Goddard and Edith Capon as well as her daughter Susanna Capon lived in West Berlin for about a year. Emmy visited them there; see interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013, as well as written correspondence with the author on 28 April 2013.

41 Howald 2009.

42 Interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013, as well as written correspondence with the author, 28 April 2013. It is unclear whether this was standard surveillance of foreigners or specifically targeted the Scholem family.

43 Marie Luise Münchhausen, *Fragebogen zum Antrag auf Anerkennung als Verfolgter des Naziregimes*, 10 April 1973, LArch Berlin c Rep 118–01 Nr. 27555. In an older résumé, the interrogations are dated as 1942–3 and 1944. See 'Lebenslauf Marie Luise Münchhausen', *Personallbogen des Magistrats von Gross-Berlin*, 5 April 1951, LArch Berlin, c Rep. 301 Nr. 258.

She found someone willing to swap apartments, moved to the Soviet sector, completed her legal studies and worked as a lawyer in the German Democratic Republic. Marie Luise received a certain degree of recognition later in life, being awarded a 'Medal for Fighters Against Fascism' in 1973 for her work in the KPD's secret 'M' section.<sup>44</sup> Could she have known that her contact Leo Roth was executed by his own comrades in 1937 for the exact same work? It is in fact quite likely, for insiders spoke privately about such cases. Publicly, of course, Stalinist terror remained taboo in the GDR. Yet what Marie Luise could not forget, or was unwilling to forget, was Werner's fate. During a film festival in East Berlin she contacted first Renee, and later Edith. Marie Luise kept a picture of Werner in her apartment for years, and communicated feelings of guilt to Renee.<sup>45</sup> Many unanswered questions remained – why had Werner been arrested? Had she played a part in his death? She rejected these possibilities, but continued to be haunted by doubts, and felt a bit like Edith Scholem did. Both met for the first time in the late 1970s, and would subsequently share a close friendship for years to come.<sup>46</sup> In 1982, Marie Luise also met with Susanna Capon in a Mitropa restaurant near the Friedrichstraße station in the centre of East Berlin to speak face to face. Visibly agitated and upset, she repeatedly insisted that she was not responsible for Werner's death.<sup>47</sup> Marie Luise's voice grew so loud that Susanna feared they would be asked to leave the restaurant. The granddaughter, who never met Werner, found it easier to put the past behind her, and did not blame Marie Luise for anything.

Unlike Marie Luise and Edith, Emmy was able to make peace with her past. She returned to Germany as early as 1949 and initially lived with her mother Emma in Hanover. Upon returning to her country of birth, Emmy applied for a surviving dependent's pension as well as compensation for her own political persecution. She received regular payments from 1954 on, but court proceedings to determine the exact amount lasted well into the 1960s.<sup>48</sup> The claims process was a painful return to the past: arrest, persecution, Werner's murder,

44 A positive recommendation for honouring her past work can be found in *Fragebogen zum Antrag auf Anerkennung als Verfolgter des Naziregimes*, 10 April 1973, LArch Berlin C Rep 118–01 Nr. 27555.

45 Goddard 2008. Susanna Capon reported of her contacts with Edith in an interview with the author, 7 April 2013.

46 One of Marie Luise's brothers had put her in touch with Edith Scholem, and their friendship would last until Edith's death in 1988; see personal correspondence Susanne Capon with the author, 28 April 2013.

47 Interview with Susanna Capon, 7 April 2013.

48 *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDS. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351.



fleeing the country, all of which had to be described and substantiated in detail. The statements were then evaluated by a body of civil servants, many of whom had served under the Nazi regime. Quite a few survivors were deterred from submitting their claims by this fact alone. Edith, for instance, apparently encountered difficulties recounting her ordeal – only insistent pressure from Emmy compelled her to eventually submit a claim.<sup>49</sup> Both nevertheless received compensation. Helping Emmy was certainly the fact that she was no longer connected to the KPD whatsoever, unlike many active Communists who were denied compensation when the party was banned for a second time in 1956.<sup>50</sup>

Emmy moved to Bad Wimpfen on the Neckar river for health reasons in 1958, only returning to Hanover in 1963. She cultivated a rather distanced relationship to West Germany, as she described to Gershom: 'I suppose I needn't ask what you think about developments in West Germany. In today's Germany you can only live in a Jewish community.'<sup>51</sup> Even the city of her childhood had become a strange place to Emmy, owed to the undigested horrors of the past. She found a niche in Hanover's Jewish community, where memories of the past were not suppressed. It was 'not a typical Jewish community', Emmy wrote: 'The local Jewish community consists of a few Germans, a number of Israelis and probably about 70 % Jews of Polish origin. The atmosphere is quite lively.'<sup>52</sup> Emmy was extremely committed and put in quite a bit of work for the community, taking minutes at a national conference of Jewish congregations and the Central Council of Jews, and handling accounting for the Hanover Jewish community's retirement home for years. The Jewish lifeworld, which

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49 Backed up by testimony from multiple doctors, she eventually received a pension for psychological trauma. See *Akte Edith Capon*, LABO Berlin, Entschädigungsamt, Nr. 251.080. The information that Emmy compelled her to submit the claim is from Susanna Capon.

50 The German Bundestag decided not to revise this Cold War-era ruling on 8 May 2008. Vice-President Dr Otto Solms explained: 'According to § 6 of the Federal Law of Compensation, only two groups of victims of the NS [National Socialist] regime are excluded from compensation; [...] Those excluded are, firstly, those who have actively subverted the free and democratic order as according to the *Basic Law of the Federal Republic* [Germany's equivalent to a constitution] after 23 May 1949 and, secondly, those who have been convicted of a crime and sentenced to more than three years after 8 May 1945'; see *Protokolle des Deutschen Bundestags*, 160. Sitzung vom 8. Mai 2008. As being a member of an illegal party qualifies as opposing the 'free democratic basic order', and because many active KPD members were sentenced to prison, the 1956 KPD ban continues to serve as grounds for excluding Communists from compensation even today.

51 Emmy to Gershom Scholem, 7 February 1967, NLI Jerusalem.

52 Emmy to Gershom Scholem, 1 May 1966 and 7 February 1967, NLI Jerusalem.

Werner had brought her into contact with in the first place, became her new home. Emmy converted to Judaism in February 1968 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery of Hanover-Bothfeld after her death on 14 June 1970.

Nevertheless, she never distanced herself from her Communist past. In a letter to Gershom from December 1968, Emmy looks back not in anger, but with decidedly mixed feelings: 'I thought about your mother on her birthday and often think about times long gone. How faithfully and courageously we went forth to fight for our ideals, You for Yours, we for ours. It would be so much easier to get over the sacrifices had we been successful. Oh, there surely were great successes, but not the ones we had hoped for and expected. Those successes were already alien and unwelcome to us when Werner was still alive, when we were able to see the beginnings of these successes. A new generation of youth seems to be emerging. Maybe, one day, they will continue on the path we once travelled, and perhaps, then, our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will continue the struggle where we were defeated'.<sup>53</sup>

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53 Emmy to Gershom Scholem, 3 December 1968, NLI Jerusalem.



## Chronology of Werner Scholem's life

- 1895 Born in Berlin as the son of Arthur and Betty Scholem on 29 December.
- 1909 Sent to the Samson School, a boarding school in Wolfenbüttel, following a conflict with his father.
- 1911 Return to Berlin.
- 1912 Active in the Zionist youth group Jung Juda. Shortly thereafter, break with the group and membership in the socialist Workers' Youth.
- 1913 Sent to the Gildemeistersche Institut boarding school in Hanover following a renewed conflict with his father concerning his political activism. Joins the SPD on his 18th birthday.
- 1914 Outbreak of World War I, Werner adopts an anti-war stance in Hanover.
- 1915 Abitur in Berlin, begins studying history in Göttingen. Drafted for military service in June, participates in Balkan offensive.
- 1916 Wounded on the Eastern Front, recuperation in Berlin and Halle, active in the illegal anti-war movement there.
- 1917 Arrest at an anti-war demonstration on 27 January, ten-month imprisonment in Halle and Berlin on charges of lèse-majesté.  
USPD founded in April, Scholem sympathises with the anti-war party.  
Marriage to Emmy Weichelt on 31 December, final break with his father.
- 1918 Investigated on charges of treason, which are later withdrawn. Deployment to the Western Front, where Werner experiences the end of the war. Birth of daughter Edith on 27 September.
- 1919 Werner is elected to the Hanover-Linden city council for the USPD.
- 1920 Moves to Halle, participation in the struggle against the Kapp Putsch in March. Joins the KPD at the KPD-USPD unity conference in December.
- 1921 Return to Berlin, joins the editorial board of the *Rote Fahne*, elected to Prussian Landtag. Arrest in September, three months in pre-trial detention and charges of treason and high treason due to articles in the *Rote Fahne*; the charges are later rescinded.
- 1922 *Organisationsleiter* of the KPD district Berlin-Brandenburg, co-organiser of the emerging Left Opposition in the KPD.
- 1923 Second daughter Renate is born on 2 February.
- 1924 Elected to the Reichstag on 4 May, forced underground due to a further charge of treason following the dissolution of parliament in October, re-elected on 7 December.  
Scholem is elected to the KPD leadership at the April 1924 party conference. He

- assumes the position of *Organisationsleiter* on national level. Now in charge of the party apparatus, he pushes forward the 'Bolshevisation' of the party.
- 1925 Split within the left KPD leadership, Scholem is spokesperson of the Opposition at the 10th national conference against Thälmann, warns of dependency on Moscow. Removed from the Central Committee by a party conference in October 1925.
- 1926 Expelled from the KPD in November, but retains parliamentary mandate until fresh elections in 1928.
- 1927 Begins studying law at the University of Berlin.
- 1928 Scholem co-founds the Left-Communist Lenin League, yet quits shortly thereafter.
- 1931 Conclusion of studies, begins training as a legal clerk in preparation for the second state exam to be certified as a lawyer.
- 1933 First arrest on the night of the Reichstag fire, 28 February. Released on 5 March. The 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service' leads to Scholem's dismissal.
- Second arrest on 23 April together with Emmy Scholem.
- 1933–5 Investigative custody in various prisons (see list below).
- 1934 Emmy Scholem manages to escape to England via Prague while released on parole, the daughters emigrate as well.
- 1935 Tried for high treason by the Nazi-run People's Court [*Volksgerichtshof*], surprisingly cleared of all charges in March for lack of evidence, transferred to Lichtenburg concentration camp.
- 1937 Transferred to Dachau concentration camp.
- 1938 Transferred to Buchenwald concentration camp.
- 1939 Scholem's last application for release is denied, despite a valid entry visa for Shanghai.
- 1940 Werner Scholem is murdered by an SS guard on 17 July in the quarry of Buchenwald concentration camp.

## List of Werner Scholem's Places of Detention, 1917–40

### Prison Terms 1917–24

- 1917 Held in investigative custody in the Penal Facility 1 in Halle, convicted of lèse-majesté, transferred to Spandau Military Prison in late August, released on 10 December.<sup>1</sup>
- 1921 Fled to Czechoslovakia from 9 May to 23 September to avoid an arrest warrant for high treason, sat in Berlin-Moabit Prison from 23 September to 31 December.<sup>2</sup>
- 1924 Following the dissolution of the Reichstag on 11 October, Werner Scholem spends some weeks underground until fresh elections on 7 December, eluding renewed charges of high treason.<sup>3</sup>

### First Arrest in 1933

Detained at police headquarters on Alexanderplatz from 28 February–5 March 1933.<sup>4</sup>

### Second Arrest in 1933 and Investigative Custody, 1933–5

Police headquarters Berlin Alexanderplatz: from 24 April–roughly 25 May 1933.<sup>5</sup>  
Spandau Prison: roughly 25 May–roughly 10 June 1933<sup>6</sup>  
Investigative custody in Berlin-Moabit: 11 June 1933–August 1934 (prisoner file 1660)<sup>7</sup>  
Investigative custody in Berlin-Plötzensee: 11 August 1934–10 March 1938 (prisoner file 1873)<sup>8</sup>

1 Werner to Gerhard Scholem, 9 December 1917, GSA Jerusalem.

2 See chapter 3, section 'Journalism and Judiciary'.

3 See Werner Scholem, 'Zur Wahl in Potsdam I', *Rote Fahne* 168, 26 November 1924.

4 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 28 February and 5 March 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 219, p. 221 f.

5 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 1, 10, and 28 May 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 231, pp. 234–6.

6 Betty to Gershom Scholem 28 May 1933 and 7, 11–12 June, Scholem 2002, pp. 236–8.

7 Betty to Gershom Scholem, 12 June 1933, Scholem 2002, p. 238.

8 *Häftlingskartei des Zuchthauses Plötzensee*, SAPMO-BArch, DY 55/V278/5/46, Band 6.

### Imprisonment in Concentration Camps, 1935–40

Columbiahaus Berlin concentration camp: roughly March–April 1935<sup>9</sup>

Lichtenburg concentration camp (Prettin near Torgau): May 1935–early February 1937

Dachau concentration camp: 4 February 1937–September 1938<sup>10</sup>

Buchenwald concentration camp: 17 September 1938 until his murder on 17 July 1940 (prisoner no. 1980)<sup>11</sup>

*Chronological gaps are the result of missing documents or brief stopovers while being transferred to another detention site.*

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- 9     Mentioned in a letter from Werner to Emmy Scholem on 1 May 1935, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover; as well as in 'Nachweis der Haftzeiten und Berechnung der Haftentschädigung', *Entschädigungsakte Emmy Scholem*, HStA. Nds., NDs. 110 W Acc. 14/99 Nr. 107351. Emmy also mentions 'Oranienburg' as Werner's place of detention between Columbiahaus and Lichtenburg, however no other evidence of this stopover exists. The Oranienburg concentration camp was closed in 1934, and the Sachsenhausen camp first opened in 1936.
- 10    The arrival in Dachau is mentioned in a letter from Werner to Emmy Scholem on 6 February 1937, *Nachlass Emmy Scholem*, IPW Hannover.
- 11    A 'registration card' from Buchenwald concentration camp lists Scholem's date of admission as 16 September, while an 'effects card' listing relinquished property and a further card indicate a date of 17 September 1938. See ITS Archives, Doc. No. 10748285#1, Doc. No. 7052274#1, and Doc. No. 7052276#1.

## Selected Articles and Publications by Werner Scholem

*This list is incomplete, as authors in the labour movement press generally published anonymously. Articles are only listed where Werner's authorship is conclusive.*

- 'Der 20. April in Deutschland', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 52, 22 April 1922.
- 'Die deutsche Auslieferungsschmach', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 66, 13 May 1922.
- 'Die Berliner sozialistische Arbeiterschaft für das Moskauer Urteil', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 169, 24 August 1922.
- 'Die Wahlen in Thüringen', *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 181, 16 September 1922.
- 'Die widerrechtliche Verhaftung der Genossen Scholem, Sobottka und Rosi Wolfstein', *Rote Fahne* 102, 8 May 1923.
- 'Skizze über die Entwicklung der Opposition in der KPD', *Die Internationale*, 7, 2/3, 28 March 1924.
- 'Die Gefahrenzone der Opposition', *Der Funke* 3, 1 April 1924.
- 'Feinde Ringsum', *Der Funke* 16, 15 September 1924.
- 'Der zweite Reichskongreß des Verbandes der ausgeschlossenen Bauarbeiter', *Rote Fahne* 109, 19 September 1924, continued in issues 111 and 112, 21 and 23 September 1924.
- 'Die historische Lehre des 7. November: Die Rolle der Komm[unistischen] Partei', *Rote Fahne* 151, 7 November 1924.
- 'Zur Wahl in Potsdam', *Rote Fahne* 168, 26 November 1924.
- 'Die letzten Aufgaben der Betriebszellen im Wahlkampf', *Rote Fahne* 170, first insert, 20 November 1924.
- 'Auf dem richtigen Wege! Die organisatorischen Lehren der Wahlkampagne für die KPD', *Rote Fahne* 180, 12 December 1924.
- 'Einige Bemerkungen zu der Resolution der Exekutive über die Lage in der KPD', *Rote Fahne* 141, 5 July 1925 [with Arthur Rosenberg].
- 'Einige noch ungelöste organisatorische Fragen', *Die Internationale*, 8, special party conference issue, 12 July 1925.
- 'Für die Einheit der deutschen Linken', *Klassenkampf Halle*, 19 September 1925 [together with Arthur Rosenberg].
- 'Die Berliner Organisation wieder ein Damm gegen die Rechten!', *Die Internationale*, 8, 10, 15 October 1925.



*Die Wahrheit über die Verhandlungen mit der deutschen Opposition in Moskau: Bericht der Genossen Urbahns, Ruth Fischer, Scholem und Schwan*, pamphlet, Berlin, January 1927.

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'Maslow der Polizeispitzel', *Schacht und Hütte*, 3, 27 January 1928 and 5, 10 February 1928.

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<i>Fahne des Kommunismus – Zeitschrift der orthodoxen Marxisten-Leninisten</i>	Newspaper of the Lenin League, successor to Hugo Urbahns's <i>Mitteilungsblatt</i>
<i>Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz</i>	Also known as <i>InPreKorr</i> , KPD's international publication
<i>Mitteilungsblatt (Linke Opposition der KPD)</i>	Published by Hugo Urbahns
<i>Permanente Revolution</i>	Trotskyist newspaper
<i>Rote Fahne</i>	Central organ of the KPD
<i>Schacht und Hütte</i>	Newspaper of the Ruhr region Left Communists
<i>Volksblatt</i>	Newspaper of the Halle USPD
<i>Volksfreund</i>	USPD newspaper in Braunschweig
<i>Volkswille</i>	Regional Lenin League newspaper for Berlin and Suhl
<i>Vorwärts</i>	Central organ of the SPD

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Due to their frequent mention, in some chapters on almost every page, Betty Scholem, Emmy Scholem and Gershom (Gerhard) Scholem as well as Werner Scholem himself are not listed in the index. As a general orientation, the Scholem family (Betty, Arthur and the four brothers) is covered mostly in chapters 1, 2 and 8, and Emmy Scholem mainly in chapters 2 and 6–8.

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