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The Anti-German Boycott

A Statement of the Position of the American Jewish Committee

[For the confidential information of Sustaining
Members of the Committee. Not for publication.]

IN THE immediate crisis presented by the situation in Germany, the object of the American Jewish Committee is:

- (1) To relieve the pressure upon the Jews and to have their human and civil rights restored to them. Our paramount motive is that of helping the German Jews.
- (2) With equal constancy and concern, the Committee seeks to guard the civil and religious rights of the Jews all over the world.

How will an official boycott, that is, a boycott against Germany, endorsed and promoted by responsible Jewish organizations, affect the carrying out of these aims? The movement in favor of the boycott is a natural expression of indignation at the persecutions in Germany. The impulse to strike back is understandable. But the Committee, conscious of the need for unassailable and most effective steps, has taken a position against an official Jewish boycott, guided by the following considerations:

(1) *An official boycott against Germany will immediately provide the pretext for further excesses against the Jews in Germany.*

It will lead to retaliatory measures. The statement is frequently made that the Jews in Germany can not be injured more than they have been. This is far from true. If it is the opinion of the responsible Jewish leaders that nothing can help the Jews in Germany, then they have in fact been deceiving the Jewish and the general community by participating in all the work of counter propaganda, public enlightenment, and appeals to the German conscience, of the past six months. It is not true that the Jews in Germany can meet with no severer treatment. Those who make that statement shut out the nightmares of pogroming, the possibilities of wholesale concentration in prison camps, deprivation of the citizenship of native Jews, the denial of the right to employment of those Jews who are still employed, etc. Reinhold Niebuhr, a distinguished and influential Christian leader, in an article in the "Christian Century" has said:

"The total situation is such a dismal one that one wonders whether anything can be done to prevent one of the darkest pages in modern history from becoming even more tragic. The Jewish boycott will probably do more harm than good, at least from the perspective of the Jews who are still in Germany and who must suffer from the increased ferocity which the boycott instills in the Nazis. This boycott is like waging a war against a nation which holds over a million of your own hostages and which may be sufficiently angered by hostilities practically to exterminate the hostages. The fact is that all Jewish actions, whether boycotts or protests, are insignificant in their effect compared to what Christian pressure might be able to accomplish."

(2) *By entering on a boycott we may forfeit the friendship of Christians in many countries, including our own, and their help in our efforts to restore to the Jews in Germany their status as an integral part of the country.*

These Christians whose friendship for the Jews cannot be questioned, among them a number of leading world figures, have urged against violent demonstrations and "punitive measures" of all kinds. There is even the possibility that some Christian groups, for practical or ethical reasons, will publicly disavow the boycott and thus further confuse the public mind.

(3) *An official Jewish boycott of Germany would immediately crystallize a cleavage between German Christians abroad who number many millions, and Jews outside of Germany.*

The numbers, the wealth, the influence, and the importance of these German Christians, cannot be underestimated. Out of a sense of injured patriotism, these Germans, many of whom are opposed to Hitler, will be drawn into an alignment with the Hitler regime, and against their Jewish fellow citizens in the various countries. Whatever we do, we must convince our non-Jewish German neighbors and friends that the Jews are not hostile to Germany and the German people, that we sincerely believe that the present situation is only a tragic

interlude, and that it is to the interest of Germany herself and to people of German origin everywhere to work together for a restoration of the fundamental rights of the Jews in Germany and a return to a rational and friendly relation between them and the population at large.

(4) *The boycott will lead to a general retaliation against Jewish business.*

Here it must not be overlooked, despite specious appeals to chauvinism and inflamed (although justified) Jewish resentment, that this means a battle of approximately 15,000,000 Jews all over the world against at least 100,000,000 Germans all over the world. The world is too well integrated economically not to have the boycott affect the wielders of it at least as much as those against whom it is being employed. We have already had instances of this link. Jews in Mexico who joined in a boycott on German goods are now being boycotted largely through the instrumentality of Germans and pro-Germans. The Jews in Mexico have appealed to the Jewish organizations in the United States to protect them against this counter boycott and the anti-Jewish agitation which has resulted from it. The Latvian Jews joined the boycott of Germany; Germany retaliated by an embargo on Latvian butter. Latvian Jews, desperate at the loss of an important market, then turned to the Joint Foreign Committee of England for aid in finding a substitute market. In passing, we cannot forego pointing out that the groups now sponsoring a boycott will be utterly unable to meet the subsequent Jewish problems that will arise as a result of their actions.

(5) *There are special unfortunate consequences of this boycott likely to develop in individual countries.*

Countries which are political and economic rivals of Germany may, for purposes of their own economy, have a benevolent attitude toward this boycott, but in the United States, for example, an effective boycott of German goods is likely to have an unfavorable reaction. The United States has for a number of years been exporting very much more than it has been importing from Germany. Should trade from Germany be curtailed as a result of retaliatory measures to such a degree that it will affect American merchants, they may point to the Jew as the cause of the already complicated economic situation. Furthermore, the United States has at least a billion dollars worth of investments in Germany. The collapse of German economic life would mean that these investments would, for a time at least, be valueless. Among the investors there are Jews who may be willing to make the sacrifice; but the non-Jews cannot be expected to accept their loss without complaint. The hard-hit American investor may look for a scapegoat in the Jew.

(6) *As a method of practical politics, the boycott is unwise.*

So long as responsible organizations like the American Jewish Committee, the Joint Foreign Committee, and the Alliance Israelite have publicly confirmed their disapproval of a boycott and other warlike measures, the door will not have been closed to an understanding between the Nazi authorities and the Jewish population of Germany.

The efforts we are making to enlist the intercession of governments and the League of Nations can be made only more difficult by punitive measures on the part of Jews.

(7) *The boycott is likely to stimulate anti-Semitic activity.*

(a) Whether successful or not it will strengthen the hands of the anti-Semites, who make use of the myth that the Jews exert a so-called "world economic influence."

(b) Even if it should be successful, and that is highly doubtful, it will mean that concessions from the present regime will have been obtained for the Jews under the great pressure of a boycott (which means a war). But the world's experience with Germany as a result of the World War has shown that such a forced victory will result in a vicious counter-reaction. German Jews have asked that no organized boycott be put into effect for fear that the hostilities between Jew and non-Jew will become more deep-seated and that it would only be a matter of time before a more violent outbreak would occur. In the face of limited immigration possibilities the majority of Jews must continue to live in Germany, which they still love as their Fatherland.

(c) Should the boycott bring about a collapse, in any way leading to communism or strengthening communism in Germany, the Jews will have to bear the charge of encouragement to communism in addition to the present widespread, although baseless charge of Jewish activity in Russian communism.

(8) *The boycott is open to an ethical objection.*

We must keep our fight for the restoration of the rights of the German Jews on the plane of moral rectitude. The theory of the Jews has been that the group must not be punished for the misbehavior of individual members within it. They should carry that theory to the point, hard as it is today, of applying it to all of Germany as against its present Nazi rulers.

(9) *The Jews must be concerned for the likely effects of the boycott in the future.*

Heretofore, when Jews have been attacked by the boycott method, they have had a legitimate right to appeal to public authority and to the conscience of the world at large. They will endanger that right if they themselves engage this weapon at the present time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the frenzied chauvinism in Germany and elsewhere throughout the world, we will not, indeed we dare not, admit that the elemental rights to life and liberty have been permanently laid low. The civilized world, which is overwhelmed at this time by an unprecedented depression, which has produced political issues of the gravest kind, may not be in the position to defend or even assert these principles in a formal way. But we Jews must not accept the situation in Germany as a permanent disaster, or believe that the civilized world will be willing to accept that situation as normal and unchangeable. Just as the American union could not exist half-slave, half-free, so Europe cannot exist with so large and important a country as Germany, in its very centre, conducting itself as a nation of the dark ages. To accept the defeat as permanent would be a repudiation of the ideals of peace and justice proclaimed by our prophets, for which the Jews have suffered for twenty or more centuries. Because these ideals are the foundation of Christian civilization we must believe that Christendom will itself before long protect them from destruction.