

# **Als der Holocaust noch keinen Namen hatte**

Zur frühen Aufarbeitung des NS-Massenmordes an den Juden

# **Before the Holocaust Had Its Name**

Early Confrontations of the Nazi Mass Murder of the Jews

Herausgegeben von  
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Lars Fischer

## A Tale of Two Books

### Benedikt Kautsky's *Teufel und Verdammte* and Gustav Mayer's *Erinnerungen*

Benedikt Kautsky's account of the concentration camp system, *Teufel und Verdammte* (1946), and Gustav Mayer's memoirs (published in 1949) are two very different texts and would hardly be obvious candidates for a joint discussion were it not for the fact that Kautsky was closely involved, not least as copy editor, in the publication of Mayer's memoirs. This is a story worth telling insofar as the priorities and emphases informing Kautsky's role throw an intriguing additional light on those informing his own account in *Teufel und Verdammte*. Not that Mayer's memoirs deal with the camps. He fled to the UK in time to be spared this particular personal experience. Yet when he began writing his memoirs, it was clear to him that the relationship between German Jews and non-Jews in Imperial and Weimar Germany leading to the escalation that had forced him to flee, would be the red thread (though by no means the predominant content) running through his recollections. Kautsky, who was himself of Jewish extraction and lost his mother in Auschwitz, has only very little to say about Jews in *Teufel und Verdammte* and what little he does have to say is critical of the Jews. In his collaboration with Mayer, in turn, we see him (albeit in full agreement with the publisher and one of Mayer's oldest friends) putting quite forceful pressure on Gustav Mayer to cut back substantially on references to matters Jewish in his memoirs. Arguably, this is all the more remarkable insofar as Mayer was precisely not offering an account of the camp experience: the question was not whether readers should and could usefully be confronted with accounts of the horrors of the camps, gore and all, but whether they might be willing and able to draw connections between the state of Jewish/non-Jewish relations prior to the Nazi period, on the one hand, and Nazi antisemitism and the Shoah, on the other. In any case, both Kautsky and Mayer belonged to those who felt the urgent need to speak out in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi period in ways relevant to the Shoah and their relationship offers an intriguing case study showing how different the agendas could be when it came to speaking out and inferring what would interest and affect German-language readers.

Since Kautsky and Mayer are hardly household names, let me begin with a few words on the protagonists. Benedikt Kautsky (1894–1960) was the youngest son of Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), the leading theoretician of the Second Socialist International after Engels' death in 1895, and his second wife, Luise Kautsky (1864–1944), née Ronsperger, who, as mentioned, died in Auschwitz. Having lived with his parents in Berlin until 1917, he served in, and deserted from, the Austro-Hungarian army towards the end of the First World War before completing a PhD in Economics in Berlin in 1920 and moving to Vienna (his mother's home town) where he worked as a Trade Union official and journalist. From 1921, he was married to the teacher, Social Democratic activist and translator, Gerda Kautsky, née Brünn, with whom he had two daughters. Arrested on 27 May 1938, he was imprisoned in Dachau from May to September 1938, in Buchenwald from September 1938 until October 1942, in Auschwitz from October 1942 until January 1945, and then in Buchenwald again until its liberation on 11 April 1945. In Auschwitz he was assigned to the Buna/Monowitz slave labour camp, which presumably helps explain why he survived. It is not least Kautsky's absolutely impeccable anti-fascist credentials, then, that make his response to, and interpretation of, the camp experience so intriguing and disturbing.

Gustav Mayer (1871–1948), born into a largely acculturated and well-respected Jewish merchant family in the provincial Brandenburg town of Prenzlau where the family had resided since the sixteenth century, is now mostly remembered (if at all) for his two-volume Engels biography (1920 and 1934). He completed his studies of History and Economics in Basel in 1893 with a PhD on Lassalle's economic theories. Posted as a correspondent for the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* to The Netherlands and Belgium between 1896 and 1904, he was subsequently able to exist as an independent scholar thanks to his marriage to Flora Mayer, née Wolff (1882–1963), whose family had made a serious fortune in oil.

As a historian of Socialism (though never actually a Social Democrat himself) he stood no chance of obtaining an official academic position prior to the Weimar period and even then received not an established but only a supernumerary chair. Among his many publications are a comprehensive biography of Johann-Baptist Schweitzer, Lassalle's successor at the helm of the non-Marxist indigenous strand of German Socialism (1909), and a standard work on the separation of the German Socialist and Liberal movements (1911). He also edited a six-volume collection of Lassalle's papers (1919–1925) that he had managed to wheedle out of the descendants of Lassalle's companion, Countess Hatzfeldt. Stripped of his chair in 1933, he eventually fled with his family to the UK. Already in his mid-sixties, Mayer never really settled in England and his years in exile were increasingly dogged by loneliness, poverty and ill health. Even so, he was adamant he would not return to Germany. None too surprisingly, his memoirs, which he began writing during the last year of the war, became a major focus of his final years and meant

a great deal to him. Not least, this was work he could undertake more or less independently without needing access to decent libraries.<sup>1</sup> Mayer died in London on 21 February 1948.<sup>2</sup>

## Kautsky's *Teufel und Verdammte*

We might note in passing that there is a large graphic of a cross made of barbed wire on the cover of the 1946 edition of *Teufel und Verdammte* (published by the Büchergilde Gutenberg), surely an odd symbol given that Kautsky was no more a Christian than he considered himself a Jew and yet had, for at least part of his time in the camps, been imprisoned as a Jew. *Teufel und Verdammte*, while widely noted at the time, is now a rarely discussed book.<sup>3</sup> Rather depressingly, and certainly through no fault of Kautsky's, it is cited most frequently – “with the appropriate bibliographical references including the correct page number” – by Holocaust deniers, beginning with David L. Hoggan's *The Myth of the Six Million* (1969).<sup>4</sup> None too surprisingly, this is now all over the Internet. Here is what Kautsky in fact wrote in *Teufel und Verdammte*:

“At this point I want to weave in a short account of the *gas chambers*. Though I never saw them myself they were credibly described to me by so many parties that I have no qualms about relaying this account here.”<sup>5</sup>

In the hands of the Holocaust deniers this then becomes:

“The Austrian Jew and left-wing socialist Benedikt Kautsky survived Dachau, Buchenwald, Auschwitz and again Buchenwald between 1938 and 1945. After the war, he wrote his book *Teufel und Verdammte*, in which he said he never saw a gas chamber at Auschwitz.”<sup>6</sup>

Kautsky does point out that *Teufel und Verdammte*, “is the book of a German or, to be more precise, an Austrian Social Democrat. Members of other categories, especially Communists, but also non-Germans as well as conscious Jews will doubtless see and judge many things differently” (more on “conscious” Jews or rather, the lack thereof,

1 Mayer to Gertrud Mayer-Jaspers, 11 June 1945, in: Deutsches Literaturarchiv (DLA) Marbach, HS002034652.

2 The scholar most closely acquainted with Mayer is Gottfried Niedhart, who has published a number of important papers on Mayer. For his most recent general overview, see his introduction in the documentary volume Gottfried Niedhart (Hg.), *Gustav Mayer. Als deutsch-jüdischer Historiker in Krieg und Revolution, 1914–1920*, München 2009, 17–82.

3 Rather remarkably, an excerpt is included in the documentary collection *Deutsche Geschichte in Dokumenten und Bildern* compiled by the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.: [german.historydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1512](http://german.historydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1512) (14.3.2015).

4 Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *Lies About the Holocaust*, in: *Commentary* (1980) 70, 6, 31–37, here 34.

5 Benedikt Kautsky, *Teufel und Verdammte. Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse aus sieben Jahren in deutschen Konzentrationslagern*, Zürich 1946, 272–273.

6 Jürgen Graf, *Holocaust or Hoax? The Arguments*. [www.vho.org/GB/Books/hoh/chap14.html](http://www.vho.org/GB/Books/hoh/chap14.html) (14.3.1025).

later).<sup>7</sup> Yet the remit of the book in fact goes far beyond the scope of Kautsky's own experiences and is fundamentally apodictic rather than reflective in tone and was, above all, praised for its "objectivity". I would suggest that Kautsky's "objectivity" and his emphases and omissions as far as the content is concerned offer an obvious explanation for the book's general popularity at the time. To put it more bluntly, it was because Kautsky's account was emotionally detached in the extreme, because he dismissed the significance of ideology for what had gone on in the camps, and because what little he had to say about Jews in the camps was negative, that his account had such wide appeal.<sup>8</sup>

On Kautsky's account, "not sadism but cowardice, fear of one's superiors, of the loss of one's job [...] of the future [...] was the main motivation for the brutalities" in the camps.<sup>9</sup> Correspondingly, the section headings in his chapter on "The main characteristics of the SS man" are "laziness",<sup>10</sup> "stupidity",<sup>11</sup> "crudeness",<sup>12</sup> "cowardice",<sup>13</sup> "lack of discipline"<sup>14</sup> and "corruption".<sup>15</sup> Ideology, by contrast, played no significant role. "How superficial the entire antisemitic swindle was," Kautsky argued, "is evident from the fact that aryanised Jews were ordinarily not only viewed as entirely equal but also preferably entrusted with high functions."<sup>16</sup> By "aryanised Jews" Kautsky meant prisoners first classified as Jews but later re-classified. This had apparently happened to Kautsky himself three months after his arrival in Auschwitz. "I [...] was presumably only rescued," he explained, "by the circumstance that in January 1943, to my greatest surprise, I was 'aryanised', i.e. I was no longer registered as a Jew but as an Aryan, more specifically, as a Reichs-German political prisoner."<sup>17</sup> Kautsky persistently claimed that this was by no means a rare phenomenon:

"aryanisations and de-aryanisations were not at all rare. Mostly these occurred without any outward occasion, sometimes for punitive purposes [...]. My own

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7 Kautsky, *Teufel und Verdammte*, 128. Perhaps more importantly, he might have added, that Monowitz, though part of the Auschwitz camp system, was, in Primo Levi's words, "not typical of the complex of camps that was Auschwitz [...] While I thought I was writing the authentic story of the concentration camp experience, I was telling the story of my camp, of just one". Marco Belpoliti/Robert Gordon (eds.), *The Voice of Memory. Primo Levi. Interviews, 1961–1987*, New York 2001, 5.

8 On 17 September 1946, Gerda Kautsky reported in a letter to Friedrich Adler that "Bendel's book has nearly sold out and the second edition is being printed" (International Institute of Social History (IISH), Friedrich Adler 249). On 23 August 1948, Kautsky wrote to his brother Felix that 400-500 copies of his book were being sold each quarter and that a Norwegian edition was planned for the autumn (IISH, Benedikt Kautsky 136.1).

9 Kautsky, *Teufel und Verdammte*, 8.

10 *Ibid.*, 71.

11 *Ibid.*, 72.

12 *Ibid.*, 78.

13 *Ibid.*, 87.

14 *Ibid.*, 90.

15 *Ibid.*, 91.

16 *Ibid.*, 195.

17 *Ibid.*, 46 footnote 1.

aryanisation, rejected twice in Buchenwald, happened with surprising ease in Auschwitz.”<sup>18</sup>

This phenomenon of ‘aryanisation’ may well merit further inquiry but there can obviously be little doubt that it was never more than an exceptional occurrence as the millions duly put to death as Jews more than amply demonstrate. In any case, it is worth considering Kautsky’s reasoning here somewhat more closely. Surely the, as he described it, rather arbitrary re-classification of Jews as non-Jews itself was much more suited to demonstrate the supposed lack of ideological seriousness than the fact that such prisoners, no longer considered Jewish, were not subject to any special discrimination. With his line of reasoning, Kautsky was clearly still moving within the emancipation paradigm, i.e., in his account the primary goal of antisemitism was the curtailment of the functions Jews could take on after their emancipation. Hence, for Kautsky the inconsistency lay in allowing former Jews to play important roles, not in re-classifying them and thus allowing them to live (at least for the time being) when in fact they should have been killed. One can only conclude from this that Kautsky had fundamentally failed to grasp what the Shoah was about.

What, then, of the actual Jewish prisoners? Kautsky’s comments on this issue need to be quoted at some length. “Among the prisoners the Jew held the lowest position”, Kautsky explained.

“He was despised and tormented not only by the SS but also by his fellow prisoners, some of whom shamelessly exploited his utter defencelessness. The widespread antisemitism in the camp was of a complicated nature, though, and, among the many political prisoners, for example, connected to social concerns. For among the Jewish inmates, alongside the surprisingly numerous criminal elements, there were especially representatives of the bourgeoisie and the free professions with whom the political prisoners [...] found it hard to develop a good relationship since the class antagonism at play outside the camp was also experienced as a separating factor within. One should not conceal in this context that the behaviour of many Jews, especially the attempt to improve their situation through bribery, could not but increase the contempt especially among the political prisoners. It would be wrong, of course, to equate this class antagonism [...] with the proper antisemitism of the criminals or the antisocial elements, let alone the SS man,”

Kautsky suggested. “Proper antisemitism” – so perhaps ideology comes into it after all? No, Kautsky hastily clarified, for “the criminals or the antisocial elements, let alone the SS man [...] all [...] had nothing better to do than torment and abuse the Jews under the pretext of a ‘Weltanschauung’.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

Clearly, then, the Jews had only themselves to blame if they were treated particularly badly in the camps. Yet this was not all. Kautsky went on to state that

“while it went without saying for the political prisoners of all parties that, as fighters for the cause, they faced up to the camp with all its consequences and met this obligation with decency and dignity [...] the Jews viewed the fate to which they were subjected merely as a misfortune. The thought that their blood sacrifice might be in the interest of the Jewish cause never entered their mind. To be absolutely clear: over seven years in which I spoke about this issue with literally thousands of Jews, I found perhaps half a dozen who reacted like the simplest proletarian activist of the labour movement. Most of them simply did not understand the question. The thought that the imprisonment might serve a political purpose and thus also has a positive meaning, provided those prisoners who could find their way to it with a strong moral power; this source of power remained unavailable to the Jews who only experienced the negative side of their imprisonment.”<sup>20</sup>

This, then, is what Kautsky had to say about the situation of the Jewish prisoners in the camps in his book so widely praised for its “objectivity”.

A few examples will give an indication of the sorts of responses the book precipitated at the time. In the summer of 1946, Julius Braunthal (1891–1972), the exiled Austrian Socialist and subsequent historian of the Socialist International, wrote to the British left-wing publisher, Victor Gollancz, to convince him of the need for an English edition of *Teufel und Verdammte*. “For the first time, as far as I know,” he explained,

“this whole institution [i.e. the camp system], its history, its place in the structure of the Nazi system, its organisation and machinery, and the psychology of its inmates – the SS as well as the prisoners – is fully described and analysed with the same scientific urge for truth as, say, a historian of the Roman Empire would describe the condition of the slave workers in the Sicilian silver mines at the time of Augustus.”<sup>21</sup>

Friedrich Adler (on whom more at the end), wrote on 26 August 1946 to his former assistant at the Labour and Socialist International, Adolf Sturmthal (1903–1986), who emigrated to the US in 1938 where he became a Political Studies academic, and was teaching at Bard at the time, that *Teufel und Verdammte* was “extraordinarily good” and praised especially its “sobriety”.<sup>22</sup> Gertrud Danneberg, the widow of Robert Danneberg

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20 Ibid., 155.

21 Copy with Braunthal’s letter to Kautsky of 20 September 1946, IISH, Benedikt Kautsky 1B. Note that Braunthal subsumes both the prisoners and the SS among the “inmates”. This may have simply been an infelicity but would in some ways be well in keeping with the thrust of Kautsky’s account, which effectively portrays the SS men on the ground in the camps as victims of the same horrific system of domination as the prisoners.

22 IISH, Fritz Adler 249.

(1885–1942), one of Austrian Social Democracy’s most prominent leaders murdered in Auschwitz, who lived as an émigré in London, wrote to Kautsky on 16 January 1947, praising the book’s “extremely matter-of-fact” and “objective”<sup>23</sup> character. On 18 January 1947, Karl Weigl, a prominent trade unionist and émigré who had returned to Austria, wrote to Kautsky, praising the success of his “intention to refrain from any sensationalist reporting”.<sup>24</sup> Karl Kautsky’s former secretary, Paul Olberg, who had emigrated to Sweden, published a review of Kautsky’s book in the leading Social Democratic paper there in which he too praises the “strictly matter-of-fact” approach of the author who “tries, as far as possible, not to emphasize his outrage at the brutalities in the camps” and instead engages in “calm reflexion, that occasionally resembles a historian’s research or the mere summing up of a judge”.<sup>25</sup> Karl Dall, an official working for the labour exchange, wrote to Kautsky on 21 October 1948, after the Austrian edition of *Teufel und Verdammte* had finally appeared, commenting that it was “by far the best” of all the accounts of the camps “because it analyses its object in so matter-of-fact, indeed, one might say scientific a way”.<sup>26</sup> Academic scholars too noted and praised the book for being “admirably objective, scholarly and responsible” and “sober and judicious”.<sup>27</sup>

Now, it is obviously not my intention to deny that an account like Kautsky’s requires the author to distance himself to some extent from the experiences he is describing. On the other hand, this is little more than a truism and the fact that so many commentators emphasized the “matter-of-fact” and “objective” nature of the account is surely remarkable (and it certainly resonates with my own impression of the book itself). The risks involved in this approach were in some ways illustrated by a particularly curious report from Peter Bennink Bolt (presumably the son of the Kautskys’ solicitor in Amsterdam), writing to Kautsky on 13 February 1949. He proudly reported that he was on a skiing holiday in Austria where he had a skiing instructor “who had been a National Socialist since 1929. He was an idealist and is a very honest person and, more importantly, particularly critical. My mother,” he continued, “gave me your book [...] to take along so he could read it. He has now read it and we have debated it intensely. Since he himself was in a French camp after the war,” he continued, “where exactly the same transpired as in the German camps, he is in total agreement with your book.”<sup>28</sup>

Alois Piperger, responsible for editorials and the reporting of domestic affairs in the party’s principal daily, the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, wrote to Kautsky on 29 August 1947, “I find

23 IISH, Benedikt Kautsky 14D.

24 *Ibid.*, 126/3.

25 *Ibid.*, 20O.

26 *Ibid.*, 14D.

27 Arnold Brecht, *The Concentration Camp*, in: *Columbia Law Review* 50 (1950) 6, 761-782, here 776; Robert Gale Woolbert, *Recent Books on International Relations*, in: *Foreign Affairs* 28 (1950) 3, 502-519, here 511.

28 IISH, Benedikt Kautsky 13B.

it unimaginable that a human being who, like you, suffered in this hell for many years, can write in so distanced and objective a way.”<sup>29</sup> He meant this as a compliment. Others were not quite so sure and there were a few exceptions to the general praise of the book’s “matter-of-fact” and “objective” character. Take for instance Erika Heymann-Geck (1895–1950), the daughter of the veteran Social Democratic journalist and *Reichstag* deputy, Adolf Geck (1854–1942), and wife of the (Jewish) Communist activist and later GDR diplomat, Stefan Heymann (1896–1967), who was imprisoned throughout the Nazi period (like Kautsky, first in Dachau, then in Buchenwald, in Auschwitz, and again in Buchenwald). She herself, having fled to the Netherlands in 1933, spent a year in Kamp Vught.<sup>30</sup> On 16 August 1946, she wrote to Kautsky, suggesting that “your book, Bendel, is almost too objective.”<sup>31</sup>

More specifically, George Deutsch, a physician now living in Cleveland, Ohio who had known Kautsky’s brother, Karl Kautsky, Jr., since they met in Vienna, wrote on 4 February 1948 to praise Kautsky’s *Teufel und Verdammte* but added that he also had some concerns. His final question concerned “the Jewish camp inmates in their entirety”. Before raising his question he hastened to add that he was just as critical of Zionism as Kautsky and by no means thought of himself as a “conscious Jew” (not in the specific sense in which Kautsky used the term in his book but in the sense of somebody to whom his or her Jewishness was of any great importance). “Even so,” he continued, “I have to admit quite frankly that I too would be unable to say what the positive meanings of the camp experience for Jewish people could have been. [...] Why was ‘their blood sacrifice in the interest of the Jewish cause’? I neither could nor can find that it has benefited the Jew as such.”<sup>32</sup>

None too surprisingly, the art historian and journalist Alfred Werner (orig. Alfred Siegfried, 1911–1979), who had been in incarcerated in Dachau after the November Pogrom and later interned as an enemy alien in the UK upon emigration there, reviewing *Teufel und Verdammte* in *Commentary*, also felt that “Kautsky’s remarks on the Jews ... form the least convincing chapter in his book. Himself a Jew (according to the Nuremberg Laws)”, Werner continued,

“he seems affected by Jewish self-hatred. Not only does he condemn both Zionism and Jewish Orthodoxy, he also complains that the Jews created anti-Semitism among the leftist workers by resorting to bribery and by failing to see the ‘positive’ aspect of their imprisonment. [...] Why should an ordinary non-political man, imprisoned simply because he had been born a Jew, find any but

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29 *Ibid.*, 21P-Q.

30 Having allowed Jews to stay illegally in her guesthouse in Amsterdam, Erika Heymann-Geck was made a *Righteous among the Nations* in 2011.

31 IISH NL Benedikt Kautsky 16H.

32 *Ibid.*, 14D.

negative aspects in his captivity? How could he see it as anything other than an unhappy accident?”<sup>33</sup>

The point is obviously well made and it goes without saying that Kautsky himself would not in fact have been able to answer this question even if he had wanted to. What did he have in mind, when he spoke of “the Jewish cause”? As already indicated, Zionism was certainly no contender for Kautsky was a rabid anti-Zionist. Ironically, it was only when trying to establish his justification in viciously denouncing Zionism that Kautsky shifted, at least in later years, from insisting that he had really been a political prisoner to noting that he had (also) been imprisoned as a Jew.

In April 1957, the *Neue Zeit* (Graz) passed on to Kautsky a letter to the editor submitted by the returned émigré and Jewish community official, Harald Salzmann, who criticised Kautsky for singling out an Israeli memorandum as a threat to world peace. “To the best of my knowledge”, Salzmann had written, “as yet world wars have only ever been unleashed by non-Jewish states.” Kautsky responded on 27 April 1957 that “I consider myself above the cheap accusation of antisemitism: somebody who himself wore the Star of David for years in Hitler’s concentration camps is surely above such reproach. It is precisely because I can judge the consequences of antisemitism better than others”, Kautsky continued, “that I consider it my duty to speak out against a policy that conjures up this danger yet again and exposes the Jewish people to the risk of suffering a possibly even more terrible fate.”<sup>34</sup>

In 1956, on 9 November (of all days!), Kautsky had responded similarly to a critical letter to the editor of the *Neue Zeit* by Alfred Weiss (presumably the historian of mining), retorting that “in Buchenwald and Auschwitz I wore the Star of David on my chest for years without being ashamed of it. Now that it is being appropriated as the symbol of the State of Israel – I am not sure I would wear it again.”<sup>35</sup> Note that he now claims to have worn the yellow star in Auschwitz despite everything he had to say in *Teufel und Verdammte* about his having been “aryanised” soon after this arrival there.

## Gustav Mayer’s Erinnerungen

Mayer was keen to get in touch with his former student Kautsky as soon as possible after the end of the war, not least to express his condolences on the death of Luise Kautsky whom he had known and who had been on friendly terms with Mayer’s brother Heinrich and his wife Jenny in Amsterdam before they were deported to Bergen-Belsen (and then came free with the 222 Transport to the *Yishuv*). “At some point in the none too

<sup>33</sup> Commentary 5 (1948) 3, 284-286.

<sup>34</sup> IISH Benedikt Kautsky 52L.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

distant future you will presumably see or at least have the opportunity to write to Benedikt Kautsky. I am an old friend of his parents and he was in my seminar in Berlin”, Mayer wrote to an (unidentified) joint acquaintance on 17 June 1945. “Would you please let him know how very happy I am about his miraculous survival?”<sup>36</sup> The letter was promptly passed on to Kautsky who then contacted Mayer directly.

Writing to his sister Gertrud Mayer-Jaspers on 11 June,<sup>37</sup> Mayer stressed: “*I am working*” (the words are underlined in the original.)

“I am writing the story of my life. I want to take it up to the point when we fled to Basle for the first time and poor Karl came to the station with you in the early hours of the morning to say farewell and looked so tired and frail.”

The memoirs would not touch on his purely personal highs and lows. Instead, he would “portray my intellectual development and my experiences in the world in so far as they are connected to contemporary historical events. And the red thread” throughout would be “the desire I was imbued with to merge completely into the German community. Perhaps this endeavour to tear down the draw bridge that then flew back up will also give the book its name.”

The chapters he had completed so far took the story up to January 1918. Thus “another 16 years lie ahead of me”. Still waiting for an opportunity to have the letter taken to Heidelberg, he later added in the margin: “End of August: I have now reached Nov. 1918.” He had been able to write these chapters “mainly thanks to your dear mother who kept all the correspondence of my youth in an old hatbox”. As he explained, he also had at his disposal his complete correspondence with their sister Ida (who had died in 1917 after a long period of mental illness) and two other deceased female friends and, for the later years, the letters he had written on various occasions to “my lifetime companion who surpasses all positive attributes I could possibly ascribe to her” (i.e., his wife). While missing his letters to her (i.e., Gertrud), Gustav Mayer went on to explain to his sister, he did have hers to him.

It was not just his relatives, though, that Mayer informed of the fact that he was writing his memoirs, nor did he make any secret of the fact that they would have a very clear red thread. I will document the following examples in slightly more detail than might otherwise be necessary in order to demonstrate that anybody with whom Mayer had conversed about the memoirs, indeed presumably anyone who had been in contact with him, could hardly claim to be surprised by the fact that Jewish/non-Jewish relations played a prominent role in the memoirs.

Take the letter he wrote to the Swiss composer and critic, Bob Oboussier (1900–1957), on 4 November 1945. A long-standing family friend, Oboussier had provided crucial support to Mayer’s brother Ernst and his family while they were in hiding in the Nether-

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6M.

<sup>37</sup> DLA Marbach HS002034652.

lands and relayed information between the different branches of the family that were now living in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, the Yishuv, and the US. Mayer eventually gave this long and generally rather bleak letter to Oboussier an optimistic turn. “Without my having approached the *Europa Verlag* myself, Dr Oprecht [the owner of the *Europa Verlag*] wrote to say that ... he might want to publish my memoirs.” Mayer then went on to explain that he had initially “wanted to give the book the title: ‘The draw bridge. Recollections of a German Jew’ because I have used as a *leitmotif* the image that the draw bridge kept shooting back up before the Jew who wanted to feel entirely like a German had been able to cross it for good.”

Likewise, writing to Julius Braunthal on 2 January 1946, he explained that his memoirs were directed predominantly at a readership of Germans [*Reichsdeutsche*] and Jews (i.e. German non-Jews and Jews). “The dialectics of the relationship between them in the period from 1890 to 1933 forms the *leitmotif*, though not the only content, of my memoirs.”<sup>38</sup> Mayer’s first post-war contact with Benedikt Kautsky was no exception. “I am currently in the advanced stages of writing an autobiography,” he wrote to Kautsky on 29 August 1945, adding that “the problem German and Jew in my life is the central *leitmotif*.”<sup>39</sup>

It was only towards the end of February 1946 that Mayer became aware of the fact that what struck him as the self-evident red thread going through his memoirs might prove contentious. Obviously in response to a remark on this issue, he wrote to Kautsky on 27 February 1946:

“That he [Oprecht] is taken aback by ‘the preponderance of the Jewish issue’ is something I find all the more astonishing since I already drew his attention to this point in the letter in which I first described the book to him. It has, after all, become the decisive factor in my biography that I was a German and a German Jew! Hence this theme [...] surely had to reverberate as a *leitmotif* throughout my account. Indeed, as a historian, as a German historian, I consider this to constitute its originality.”<sup>40</sup>

Writing to Kautsky again a week later, Mayer let his increasing exasperation at what he considered to be Oprecht’s dithering shine through. He hoped that Oprecht would finally agree to acceptable terms which, as he went on to explain, meant “above all” that he would “not demand changes that alter the character of the book”. Even so, Mayer does not in fact seem to have been overly concerned at this stage. Indeed, when Oprecht, apparently on his way to a meeting with Oxford University Press, dropped in on Mayer for quarter of an hour or so on 23 April 1946, Oprecht’s main concern seems to have been that Mayer’s manuscript was “too pro-German [*deutschfreundlich*]”.<sup>41</sup>

38 IISH, Julius Braunthal 69.

39 IISH, Benedikt Kautsky 6M.

40 Ibid.

41 Mayer to Gertrud Mayer-Jaspers, 24 April 1946, DLA Marbach HS002034652.

Oprecht eventually showed up on Mayer's doorstep again on 27 November 1946 and the two men finally got down to some serious business. Mayer remained highly apprehensive and with hindsight it is clear that he had every reason to. It would still take more than two years to bring the memoirs to publication by which time Mayer had already been dead for a year. Even so, the two men did in fact come to an agreement in principle at this meeting even though the project evidently was not one of Oprecht's top priorities.

Obviously more or less immediately after Oprecht's departure on 27 November, Mayer sat down and wrote to Kautsky, explaining that Oprecht had made the condition at the meeting,

“that I make some cuts and [...] remarked that you were in full agreement with him on this issue. Since I remarked that it wasn't clear to me what he actually wanted to see changed, he referred me to you and suggested I ask your opinion.”<sup>42</sup>

It was now agreed that Kautsky would edit the manuscript and make detailed suggestions for its revision. Welcoming Kautsky's involvement, Mayer wrote on 19 December: “of course I'd much rather you make the cuts<sup>43</sup> than some stranger.” He acknowledged that this was hardly a desirable task and promised not to be touchy about Kautsky's suggestions for possible cuts and revisions, not least because he would consider them just that: suggestions.<sup>44</sup> Writing again on 11 January 1947, he reiterated that he would hardly have gone along with anybody else overseeing the cuts and revisions.<sup>45</sup> In a similar vein he wrote to his sister on 6 February 1947 that Kautsky was, “of course, only making suggestions”.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps in an attempt to show good will, he offered, on 24 January 1947, to cut one of the most interesting parts of the narrative, namely that reporting (and documenting) the difficulties that had arisen in the Mayer family as a result of his sister, Gertrud, marrying the non-Jewish philosopher Karl Jaspers, i.e., marrying out.<sup>47</sup> Given that Jewish/non-Jewish relations was the red thread going through his memoirs one might have expected Mayer to consider this an important episode but having initially included it he now presumably considered it too “private”. Ironically, when Mayer consulted his sister on the matter,<sup>48</sup> she emphatically instructed him not to include it, both because she felt it reflected badly on her father (portraying him as too stubbornly orthodox) and because

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42 IISH Benedikt Kautsky 6M.

43 Mayer used the term “*Beschneidung*” (in inverted commas) which is also the term for circumcision. Kautsky likewise referred to himself as the “Beschneider of Gustav Mayer's memoirs” – albeit without inverted commas (Kautsky to Felix Kautsky, 5 February 1947, IISH Benedikt Kautsky 136).

44 IISH Benedikt Kautsky 6M.

45 Ibid.

46 DLA Marbach HS002034652.

47 IISH Benedikt Kautsky 19M.

48 Letter of 30 January 1947, DLA Marbach HS002034652.

she felt it was her (and her husband's) prerogative to tell this story should they proceed to publish memoirs at some point.<sup>49</sup>

It should be noted that Oprecht and Kautsky were also in agreement with Mayer's old friend, Adolf Grabowsky (1880–1969), the former editor of the *Zeitschrift für Politik*, whose help had been enlisted too. Grabowsky wrote to Kautsky on 23 December 1946 that,

“to my mind, there's not just too much about the family and the Wilhelminian period in the book, matters Jewish [*das Jüdische*] are also treated rather too extensively. The Jewish problem pops up time and again which is tedious for a readership that simply does not consider this so crucial an issue.”

Apparently unaware of the role already assigned to Kautsky, he suggested that the latter should “perhaps [...] write to Mayer in this vein, very carefully, of course, so he's not offended. You can refer to my opinion as backup. Presumably we can make minor cuts without his consent”, he added, “but not more radical ones.”<sup>50</sup>

On 26 January 1947, Kautsky finally stopped pussyfooting around and set out a clear agenda: “Oprecht wants – and justly so, I think – cuts particularly where the text contains too much that is local in focus or Jewish or, if I might put it like this, Bismarck-German.”<sup>51</sup> Apparently only now did Mayer catch on that the revision of the manuscript could lead to genuine conflict yet he did his best to remain conciliatory. “So,” he wrote in his response to Kautsky on 28 January 1947, “the ‘local, Jewish, and Bismarck-German’ aspects are to be cut down to a minimum! Thus saith Oprecht. This will be easiest with the local aspects and we will reach some sort of agreement on the Bismarck-German ones. Yet,” he then went on, “when it comes to the Jewish aspects we might come to a point where I would have to say: in that case let's not do this at all. For the time being, though, I give in in this respect too.”<sup>52</sup>

Kautsky subsequently worked his way through the manuscript, sending Mayer his suggestions. For the most part, the process was fairly unproblematic. Mayer was more receptive to some suggestions than others, a few he rejected out of hand. The process was tedious and occasionally a little tense but on the whole they were making good progress. By mid-February 1947, Kautsky had reached the point where he needed to tackle the thorny issue of the seventeenth and final chapter under the title *German and Jew* in which Mayer had summed up his reflections on this topic. “My idea would be,” Kautsky wrote on 19 February 1947, “that you give the chapter a different title and that you treat the problem German and Jew much more concisely and succinctly since you have already alluded to it several times before in the book.” Instead, he suggested,

49 Letter of 7 February 1947, IISH Gustav Mayer 65.

50 IISH, Benedikt Kautsky 3G.

51 *Ibid.*, 19M.

52 *Ibid.*

“you should offer a résumé of your contribution to research on the labour movement. Or do you think that Hitlerism has irrevocably destroyed your entire life’s work? This is not really the impression I have won. Hence, as already indicated, it seems to me that you are not doing yourself justice if you allow the book’s conclusion to focus exclusively on the conflict between Germanness [*Deutschtum*] and Jewishness.”

Kautsky concluded these remarks as follows:

“I hope you will agree to my suggestion regarding the revision of the last chapter. I would like to emphasise yet again that I am making this suggestion not only because I am convinced that Oprecht will resist the current version but also because your memoirs deserve a different conclusion.”<sup>53</sup>

Mayer was quite literally in the process of responding to Kautsky’s earlier comments on Friedrich Meinecke’s antisemitism (on which more later) when he received Kautsky’s suggestions for the final chapter. “I had got this far,” he wrote on 21 February 1947, “when your letter of 19 February arrived this morning. It forces me [...] to explain myself to you in a more substantive manner than I have done so far.” Just how strongly Mayer felt about the matter is demonstrated not least by the fact that Mayer’s wife now had to get out the typewriter to take down his “more substantive” remarks. He began on a fairly light note by explaining that he was, firstly, still alive and would, secondly, consider it in bad taste to sing the praises of his own scholarly achievements. The place for this was not in his memoirs but in his obituary, should somebody choose to write one.

Indeed, he felt that the legitimacy of his decision to write his memoirs “despite being no more than a simple professor” was by no means self-evident. What justified his decision to do so was the fact that

“I had lost my fatherland in which my ancestors had lived for centuries. And I had lost it, not as a historian of the labour movement but *because I am a Jew*. So it was surely perfectly natural, that I made this most crucial development in my biography, the expulsion from the fatherland, my point of departure and considered it the *leitmotif* of my account. *What, I keep asking myself,*”

he then added in obvious exasperation, “*should the final chapter, to your mind, contain?* if not a résumé of what has been, *malgré moi*, the outcome of my life. *This outcome*” he went on, “is a tragic one and I am not pretending otherwise. Can the Swiss reader only stomach a happy ending?” At the end of this letter Mayer then finally lost his cool. “It sounds almost like a threat,” he suggested, “when you write that you are convinced of Oprecht’s resistance against the current form. He has suggested nothing of the kind to me.”<sup>54</sup>

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53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

Now it was Kautsky's turn to be offended. "There is no suggestion of your suppressing the problem German and Jew or not portraying it as tragic", he began and then continued, "I was somewhat taken aback that I should be insisting on a happy ending in the interest of the Swiss reader given that I basically do nothing else here than familiarize the Swiss with the tragedy unfolding around them. My point was merely that alongside the tragic aspects you should also give an indication of your legacy to the world as a scholar."

His concluding remark had by no means been meant as a threat but "you know that Oprecht is opposed to matters Jewish being emphasised all too strongly. Hence I feared that he would insist on substantial cuts to this chapter."<sup>55</sup>

Following this heated exchange between Mayer and Kautsky, their work on the manuscript sailed into steadier waters again. Both men were clearly determined to get the job done and the process was completed in March 1947. Both Mayer and his wife felt deeply beholden to Kautsky for his role in helping to bring about the, in the event posthumous, publication of the memoirs. It nevertheless seems evident from the correspondence between Mayer and Kautsky, though, that their relationship had taken a serious knock and never really recovered from this dispute. What ensued now was something akin to a game of cat and mouse in which the line between the light-hearted, the resigned, and the exasperated is not always easy to discern. "I believe I'm right in assuming that you will not give up chapter 17", Kautsky wrote on 9 March 1947. "I would at least request, though, that you reconsider the possibility of cuts, especially on the first pages of this chapter." Kautsky now seems to have been pursuing a different strategy. "I will admit," he went on, "that these lines of thought strike me as being more appropriate in this form and at this juncture than they are in their dispersed form throughout the earlier chapters."<sup>56</sup> Kautsky seems to have hoped, in other words, that if Mayer could not be brought to give up the emphasis on matters Jewish in the final chapter he might be persuaded to at least confine the issue more or less exclusively to this one chapter and allow it to be cut elsewhere. Mayer, in turn, did his best to give way as little as possible and as much as necessary. On 26 March 1947, for instance, he wrote: "on the first few pages of chapter 3 I have cut the two passages you indicated and made the following section more taut (because I cannot agree fully with your opinion that the same is said in only slightly different words in chapter 17.) Chapter 17 has also been carefully revised yet again and made more taut at various points."<sup>57</sup>

It is worth adding that there is the occasional intriguing counterpoint to the general thrust of the communication between Kautsky and Mayer, for instance, when the former takes the latter to task for letting the doyen of German liberal historians, Friedrich Meinecke (1862–1954), off too lightly for the antisemitic remarks in his *Die deutsche*

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55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

*Katastrophe* of 1946, a volume of (supposedly) critical reflections upon the immediate past: Kautsky took these remarks rather more seriously, “even though my experiences of these seven years [i.e. in the camps] have done more to lead me away from Jewry while the opposite has happened to you [i.e. Mayer]”.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, Mayer assumed that Meinecke had included the antisemitic comments in order to guarantee the publication of the book, to which Kautsky responded by arguing that “if this antisemitic phraseology really was necessary to ensure the publication of his book”, Meinecke would have done better to pass and not have it printed.<sup>59</sup> In short, both of them considered this a viable explanation for Meinecke’s motivation.

In one instance, Kautsky also felt that Mayer should cut a remark, not because it said too much but because it said too little about antisemitism, namely a remark in which Mayer clarified that Bismarck had not pursued antisemitic policies. To be sure, Kautsky wrote, “Bismarck was doubtless no antisemite as such but he was temporarily pleased to see the Stöcker movement and moreover did nothing to oppose the social defamation of the Jews.”<sup>60</sup> When Mayer would not budge, Kautsky wrote back that “I cannot refrain from pointing out to you that you at no point in your memoirs discuss why antisemitism was able to assert itself so forcefully in Bismarckian and Wilhelmian Germany.” As Kautsky saw it, antisemitism was “principally – though by no means exclusively – the expression of feudal tendencies that Bismarck preserved so carefully that he was, [the influence of his Jewish banker] Gerson Bleichröder notwithstanding, one of the strongest pillars of German antisemitism. The antisemitism of the Nazis stemmed from the same sources.”<sup>61</sup> This is, of course, the sort of standard fare that had been prevalent throughout the Second International and still widely held sway: the condoning or even just the toleration of anti-Jewish notions became “antisemitism” when engaged in by one’s political opponents but was totally legitimate and by no means constituted antisemitism when undertaken by one’s own camp. This gives us another indication that Kautsky saw nothing novel in National Socialist antisemitism.

## Coda

Yet perhaps there is a perfectly innocent explanation for the pressure placed on Mayer to minimise his treatment of matters Jewish in his memoirs. Perhaps all this shows us no more than that Mayer had submitted a poor and repetitive manuscript with genuine redundancies, not least in the discussion of matters Jewish. We have one very telling

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58 Letter of 17 February 1947, IISH, Benedikt Kautsky 19M.

59 Letters of 21 and 26 February 1947, *ibid.*

60 Letter of 28 January 1947, *ibid.*

61 Letter of 19 February 1947, *ibid.*

document, though, that gives a clear indication of what really was at issue here, namely comments by Friedrich Adler (1879–1960) on Mayer’s memoirs. The son of the founder and long-standing leader of Austrian Social Democracy, Victor Adler (1852–1918), who was himself of Jewish descent, and both a Social Democratic activist and an academic physicist, Adler had spectacularly assassinated the Austrian Prime Minister, Karl von Stürgkh (1859–1916), in 1916 in protest against the ongoing war. His initial death sentence was commuted and he was pardoned in 1918. Increasingly involved with the Socialist International in the interwar period, he fled to the US in 1940 and returned to Switzerland in 1946 where he remained for the rest of his life.

Adler and Kautsky had not always got on before the war. In 1938, for instance, Adler had written to Ludwig Czech (1870–1942), the leader of the German Social Democrats in Czechoslovakia and former Czechoslovak minister who later died in Theresienstadt, that Kautsky was “all too accommodating and commercially oriented”.<sup>62</sup> In the post-war years, they initially both found themselves in a similar outsider position, though, and developed a much closer relationship. Adler had thus been privy to Kautsky’s involvement in the publication of Mayer’s memoirs.

On 24 November 1949, Adler wrote to Kautsky to explain that it was down to a mild flu that he had not been able to visit him as originally planned. Confined to his bed for a week he had used this opportunity to read Mayer’s *Erinnerungen*. “I was very pleasantly surprised,” he continued, “they gave me much more than I had expected. Your commitment to their publication really is to your credit [...] Only few people will be interested but I nevertheless think it is an important book that makes Mayer’s significance for the historiography of Socialism very clear indeed. I knew him personally and knew of many of his findings but even so, I gained a full picture of his personality for the first time from the book, both in terms of his extremely important achievements but also”, he concluded, “in terms of his limitations that resulted from his incomplete emancipation *vom Judentum*.”<sup>63</sup>

This final remark and its casual nature, not least against the backdrop of Adler’s knowledge of Kautsky’s involvement in the preparation of Mayer’s *Erinnerungen* for publication, clearly demonstrates that for Adler, and presumably for Kautsky too, rather more was at stake here than the erasure of genuine redundancies in a poorly edited, repetitive manuscript.

62 Letter of 3 February 1938 [copy], IISH, Paul Hertz, finding aid page 19, folder XV.

63 IISG NL Benedikt Kautsky, 122/3. Since the term *Judentum* can, depending on context and syntax, cover the concepts Judaism, Jewry, and Jewishness, it is rather difficult to know in instances such as this how best to translate it.

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