

Jewish life in Germany, where, according to the federal police, the “vast majority” of anti-Semitic crimes—around 84%—are committed by the German far right. If this is an attempt to atone for German history, its effect is to risk repeating it.

Dissent is a requirement of any free and democratic society. Freedom, wrote Rosa Luxemburg, “is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently.” As our Arab and Muslim neighbors are beaten and silenced, we fear the atmosphere in Germany has become more dangerous—for Jews and Muslims alike—than at any time in the nation’s recent history. We condemn these acts committed in our names.

We further call on Germany to adhere to its own commitments to free expression and the right to assembly as enshrined in its Basic Law, which begins:

Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.

This Open Letter is signed by 122 Jewish artists, writers, teachers, scholars, professors, film makers, photojournalists, sociologists, musicians, composers, curators, scientists, philosophers, and others living in Germany.

First Leaflet of the White Rose

Munich, 1942

Beginning June 27, 1942, a group known as White Rose, led by five students and a professor at the University of Munich, conducted an anonymous leaflet and graffiti campaign calling for active, but non-violent opposition to the Nazi government. On Feb. 18, 1943, their activities ended when the Gestapo arrested its core members, as well as other members and supporters. Many were imprisoned and executed. In total, White Rose authored six leaflets, 15,000 copies of which were distributed, mostly in southern Germany.

The following is the full text of its first leaflet. Its content remains incredibly relevant for today:

Nothing is more dishonorable for a civilized people



Jürgen Wittenstein

Sophie Scholl, a leader of the White Rose, with two other members, her brother Hans (left) and Christoph Probst. She was beheaded for treason, Feb. 22, 1943, seven months after this photo was taken, when she was 21.

than to let itself be “governed” without resistance by an irresponsible clique of rulers devoted to dark instincts. Is it not true that every honest German today is ashamed of his government? And who among us can sense the dimensions of the dishonor that will lie upon us and our children once the veil has fallen from our eyes and the most horrid and extravagant crimes come to light? If German people are already so corrupted and spiritually crushed that they do not raise a hand, frivolously trusting in a questionable faith in the lawful order of history; if they surrender man’s highest principle, that which raises him above all other of God’s creatures, his free will; if they abandon the determination to take decisive action and to turn the wheel of history, and thus subject it to their own rational decision; if they are so devoid of all individuality, have already gone so far along the road to turning into a spiritless and cowardly mass—then they clearly deserve their downfall.

Goethe speaks of the Germans as a tragic people, similar to the Jews or the Greeks, but today it would appear rather as a shallow, spineless herd of followers, robbed of their core with the marrow sucked out of them, who are now just waiting to be hounded to their destruction. So it seems—but it is not so. Through gradual, treacherous, systematic violation, every single person has rather been put into a prison of the mind, which he only realizes after finding himself already in chains. Only a few have recognized the impending doom and their heroic warnings have been rewarded with death. The fate of these persons will be spoken of later.

If everyone waits for his neighbor to take the first

step, the messengers of the vengeful nemesis will come ever closer, and the very last victim will senselessly be thrown into the throat of the insatiable demon. Therefore, every individual must be aware of his responsibility as a member of western culture and put up as fierce a fight as possible, he must work against the scourges of mankind, against fascism and any similar system of totalitarianism. Offer resistance—resistance—wherever you may be, stop this atheistic war machine from running on and on, before it is too late; before the last city, like Cologne, lies in ruins; and before the nation’s last young man has bled to death somewhere on the battlefields for the hubris of a subhuman. Don’t forget that every people deserves the regime it is willing to endure!

**Excerpt from Friedrich Schiller’s
“The Legislation of Lycurgus and Solon”:**

“... Viewed in relation to its purpose, the legal code of Lycurgus [of Sparta] is a masterpiece of political science and knowledge of human nature. He desired a powerful, indestructible state, firmly established on its own principles. His goal was to achieve political power and permanence, and he attained this goal to the fullest extent possible under the circumstances. But if one compares Lycurgus’ purpose with those of mankind, then a deep disapproval must take the place of the admiration which we felt at first glance. Anything may be sacrificed for the good of the State except that end for which the State itself only serves as a means.

“The State is never an end in itself; it is important only as a condition under which the purpose of mankind can be attained, and this purpose is no less than the development of all human resources, progress. If a political constitution prevents the development of the capabilities which reside in man, if it interferes with the progress of the human spirit, then it is reprehensible and injurious, no matter how excellently devised, how perfect in its own way. Its very permanence in that case amounts more to a reproach than to a basis for fame; it becomes a prolonged evil, and the longer it endures, the more harmful it is....

“At the cost of all moral feeling a political merit was achieved, and the resources of the State were mobilized to that end. In Sparta there was no conjugal love, no mother love, no filial love, no friendship; all men were citizens only, and all virtue was civic....

“It was the Spartans’ duty by law to be inhumane to their slaves; with these unhappy victims of war humanity itself was insulted and mistreated. In the Spartan code of law the dangerous principle was promulgated that men were to be looked upon as means and not as ends—thus the foundation of natural law and of morality was legally demolished....

“What an admirable spectacle is given, by contrast, by the rough warrior Gaius Marcius [Coriolanus —ed.] in his camp before Rome, when he sacrifices vengeance and victory because he cannot bear the sight of a mother’s tears!...

“The State [of Lycurgus] could endure only under one condition: if the spirit of the people became quiescent. Hence it could be maintained only if it failed to achieve the highest, the sole purpose of a State.”

**From Goethe’s “The Awakening of Epimenides,”
Act II, Scene 4:**

SPIRITS

Though he who has boldly risen from the abyss
Through an iron will and cunning
May conquer half the world,
Yet to the abyss he must return.
Already a terrible fear has seized him;
In vain will he resist!
And all who still hung onto him
Must perish in his fall.

HOPE

Now I meet my good men
Who have gathered in the night,
To wait in silence, not to sleep.
And the glorious word of liberty
They lisp and stammer,
Till in unaccustomed newness,
On the steps of our temple

Once again in delight we cry:

(with conviction, loudly:)

Freedom!

(more moderately:)

Freedom!

(echo from all sides and ends:)

Freedom!

Please make as many copies as you can of this leaflet and distribute it!