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Jews in Leipzig:

Nationality and Community in the 20th Century

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several songs in Hebrew. Searching out these lyric sheets, or the lessons in Hebrew offered elsewhere in the magazine, did not mean that the readers were die-hard Zionists, but it is clear that a complicated relationship to Jewishness, Germanness and Zionism was very much a part of the mainstream of Jewish life in Leipzig during the Weimar republic.

A sketch of the community

The high point of Jewish life in Leipzig—in numbers, influence and freedom—was the Weimar period, when Jews comprised 1.8% of the total population of the city, or 12,594 souls. Of those who were in the work force, 41.3% described themselves as “*Kaufmann*”, a vague category that encompasses everything from street peddlers to haute bourgeoisie; 35.5% described themselves as “*Angestellte und Beamte*” [employees and officials]; 10.2% claimed status as members of “*Freie und akademische Berufe*” [professionals]; 9.8% were artisans, and only 3.2% of Leipzig’s Jews described themselves as workers, with over a third of those working in the fur district on the Brühl avenue, and the bulk of those of Eastern European descent.³⁹ Only 4.2% of Leipzigers as a whole worked in the fur industry, but 8.7% of Jewish Leipzigers did. The Brühl was an emblem of Jewish economic activity in Leipzig, and of the city as a whole (later, in the early 1950s, newspapers would hail the return of Leipzig’s status as a “fur city”, albeit without any reference to the former leaders of that industry).

Compared with the general population of the city, the Jewish population was much less represented in heavy industry, with 23% of the working population, versus 47.6% of the city as a whole [with 45,591 in machine manufacture alone], and a slightly

³⁹ Kerstin Plowinski, “Die jüdische *Gemeinde* Leipzigs auf dem Höhepunkt ihrer Existenz. Zur Berufs- und Sozialstruktur um das Jahr 1925”, in Manfred Unger, ed., *Judaica Lipsiensia: zur Geschichte der Juden in Leipzig*. Leipzig: 1994. 80-81.

representative that the community would have to close down and merge some synagogues in the coming year. He followed up by writing letters to his opposite numbers in Berlin and Frankfurt, and concluded from their responses that Leipzig had too many synagogues for a Jewish community of its size.⁹⁴

Even before he had heard back from Frankfurt and Berlin, the Police President asked his political section to compile reports on the existing synagogues in the city, their numbers of visitors and conditions. In the first precinct the Tiktiner-Synagogue, in the possibly wheremy f Brühl fur-trading district downtown, was 12 meters long, 8 across. It had 93 seats for men, and 62 for women, with one altar (the word used by the policeman, probably referring to the ark) and one podium. It had been standing since 1878, and its condition was “worthy”.⁹⁵

The second precinct sent in a chart, with listings for nine places of worship, ranging from the “clean” Ohel-Jakob-Synagoge in Keilstraße, with 300 visitors, to the “unworthy” Jassyer-Synagog, which shared a building with another “dirty” hall, that of Bochnia-Synagoge, in the Gerberstraße. Both had about 50 visitors.⁹⁶ A temple in the Eisenbahnstraße, and a theater used for high holidays in the Tachauer Straße received higher marks from their police reviewer, who noted that the full congregations in both (100 in one, about 400 in the other) went all but unnoticed by the non-Jewish population, “because the visitors to these temples did not hang around in front of them.”⁹⁷ This comment begins to give the lie to the announced purpose of the crackdown on religious

⁹⁴ Ibid., 8, 17, 30 September, 1936.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 10 September, 1936.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 26 September, 1936.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 27 September, 1936.