



## “Death to the Jews”—and the Federal Commission Against Racism Remains Silent

by Alfred Bodenheimer

“Free Palestine—Death to Zionism” is the slogan of the (apparently still unregistered) demonstration scheduled to take place this coming Saturday on Theaterplatz in Basel. Literally a stone’s throw away from there, the Zionist Congress convened by Theodor Herzl was held 129 years ago. According to the organizers, the time has come to initiate the end of this movement (and, above all, of the State of Israel that emerged from it) at the very same location. The fact that what amounts to a call for annihilation has become the official slogan of a demonstration is unprecedented and can only be understood as a calculated transgression of boundaries.

The Federal Commission against Racism (FCR) has declined to comment on this demonstration. The situation is too complex to identify and denounce anti-Semitism in such a call for a demonstration, the commission told Tamedia. For the Jewish communities in Basel and Switzerland, this turning a blind eye is devastating. For, of course, it is not the State of Israel that is primarily threatened in this call—which bears the Hamas triangle—but rather the Jewish population of the region. They are being told in increasingly drastic terms that, as long as they support the very existence of this state, they will be accused of collaborating in crimes against humanity and, consequently—if one follows the call to its logical conclusion—deserve to die.

For quite some time now, the slur “Zio” has been the ultimate term of social exclusion in circles that are not at all limited. The fact that more and more Jewish people in Switzerland are doing everything they can to avoid being identified as Jewish is largely ignored by society at large or, worse, shrugged off as just part of everyday life, which, after all, proceeds practically without a hitch.

If you were to ask the demonstrators at Theaterplatz what actually prompted some two hundred Jewish people from all over Europe to found the World Zionist Organization in 1897, you would likely receive far-fetched answers about colonialism, expansionism, and genocidal intentions. The fact is that the reasons were entirely different. This was especially true after the Dreyfus Affair in France in 1894, when the slander, demotion, and exile of a Jewish officer in the most liberal country in Europe had unleashed a storm of anti-Semitism, Herzl and others realized that Jewish life in the Diaspora was not safe, despite all the civil rights they had been granted.



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Even if radically anti-Zionist left-wing Jewish groups such as Doykait declare as categorically as they do that Zionism and Judaism are “two diametrically opposed things,” Zionism arose from nothing other than the Jews’ realization that even nominal civil emancipation does not protect them from the dangers to which they have been exposed for centuries—and that only the reestablishment of their own state can effectively protect them from exclusion and persecution. The Shoah has taught us that Jewish people, even in Europe, must fundamentally expect anything—including their actual extermination by the millions, practically out of nowhere. The only thing that can give the Jewish community here a sense of confidence is a clear and resolute commitment by civil society to the self-evident right of Jewish life (regardless of worldview) in Switzerland.

Currently, Jews here are experiencing the opposite. And if even the EKR—which is supposed to represent the most committed elements of civil society—considers calls for the “death of Zionism” to be a situation “too complex” to even raise an objection, it is taking it upon itself to sacrifice a minority’s sense of security to political maneuvering. Western European Jews in the early years of Zionism likely felt much the same way as Jews in Switzerland do today: Although they had all their rights, in the end they could not truly rely on anyone.

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Alfred Bodenheimer is a professor of the history of religion and Jewish literature at the University of Basel.

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