

Section B: Topic 2 – The Holocaust: Document 32

What can you learn from this extract about the interpretation and approach of the historian who wrote it? Use the extract and your knowledge of the Holocaust to explain your answer.

The extract specifically points out that it was the unique “German anti-Semitism” that cajoled the ordinary Germans into committing such heinous crimes, rather than Hitler’s involvement (though he is mentioned briefly) or the governmental personnel. The historian explicitly mentions that had there not be such intense Anti-Semitism, the Nazis would have had an arduous time at the extermination of the Jewry. Throughout the extract, his approach to analyze the Holocaust does not deviate from the argument mentioned above, but rather sticks to the ideology that changed the course of history.

The first paragraph introduces the reader to his belief, that the German anti-Semitism was a “necessary cause” for the German involvement. It highlights the “ever-intensifying assault” that the Jews had to endure, and states that this hatred was the core of people’s willingness to participate. One can say that this part implicitly draws out the effects of World War I, and how people blamed it on the Jewry due to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the German Revolution of 1918. People thought that the Jews stabbed the Germans in the back by fomenting a revolution to undermine the power of Germany during the Great War (Walter Rathenau, a Jewish, future foreign minister of the post-war Weimar Republic was claimed to have caused the revolution). On the other hand, one can also say that Christianity also had perverted the ordinary Germans because of the allusion to the time when the public opposed the “government’s attacks on Christianity”. It is an indubitable fact that Christianity encapsulated anti-Semitism, and, as an effect, Jews were called Christ-killers and murderers of children (Beilis case highlighted this notion as he was a Jew accused of murdering a child to obtain Christian blood). Overall, this paragraph establishes the historian’s outlook on the holocaust, which is that without the outbreak of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust would not have happened.

As the writer goes on, one can sense that though anti-Semitism was a huge factor in the development of the Final Solution, there were other factors as well, such as the “criminal” government, and Hitler, who propelled the spread of racism and united the German body with the purpose to exterminate. This adds an ostensible Intentionalist (without Hitler, the annihilation of the Jewry would not have occurred) and Structuralist (the government system controlled and intensified the crescendo of the Holocaust) flavor to his argument. Ultimately, at the end of the second paragraph, the writer still emphasizes and calls anti-Semitism a “motivation source” for the advancement of the events leading up to the Final Solution.

In the final paragraph, the historian acknowledges other countries’ anti-Semitism but at the same time disregards them to highlight German’s anti-Semitism as one that is “unique” and powerful enough to obliterate six million Jews. The historian goes on to demonstrate this by mentioning that only the Germans elected someone so anti-Semitic who was able to push this “state-organized genocidal slaughter”. One can clearly see that other countries, indeed, were not as thoroughly anti-Semitic as Germany was. Italy, though was led by a fascist, did not follow Mussolini’s ideology, and thus never attempted to co-operate with the Nazis in the implementation of the Final Solution. The writer further characterizes Germany’s stance on anti-Semitism by bringing up the Sonderweg thesis, whereby Germany diverged from the western nations in terms of ideology (Nazism). Thus, one can infer that the author in the third paragraph further differentiates Germany from other nations and that overall, anti-Semitism prevailed in Germany and became a “social-norm”, which was unprecedented.

In conclusion, this interpreter of the Holocaust focuses on the anti-Semitic aspect of the Holocaust because he/she firmly believes that although Hitler and the government both catalyzed the implementation of the anti-Jewish policies, it was anti-Semitism that tarnished the nation and the people who consequently took part in this egregious crime against humanity.

