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## *My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936\**

by Karl Löwith

In 1936, during my stay in Rome, Heidegger gave a lecture on Hölderlin at the German-Italian Culture Institute. Afterwards, he accompanied me to our apartment and was visibly taken aback by the poverty of our furnishings. . . .

The next day, my wife and I made an excursion to Frascati and Tusculum with Heidegger, his wife, and his two small sons, whom I had often cared for when they were little. It was a radiant afternoon, and I was happy about this final get together, despite undeniable reservations. Even on this occasion, Heidegger did not remove the Party insignia from his lapel. He wore it during his entire stay in Rome, and it had obviously not occurred to him that the swastika was out of place while spending the day with me.

We talked about Italy, Freiburg, and Marburg, and also about philosophical topics. He was friendly and attentive, yet avoided every allusion to the situation in Germany and his views of it, as did his wife.

On the way back, I wanted to spur him to an unguarded opinion about the situation in Germany. I turned the conversation to the controversy in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* and explained that I agreed neither with Barth's political attack [on Heidegger] nor with Staiger's defense, insofar as I was of the opinion that his partisanship for National Socialism lay in the essence of his philosophy. Heidegger agreed with me without reservation, and added that his concept of "historicity" was the basis of his political "engagement." He also left no doubt about his belief in Hitler. He had underestimated only two things: the vitality of the Christian churches and the obstacles to the Anschluss with Austria. He was convinced now as before that National Socialism was the right

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\* Translated by Richard Wolin. Excerpted from Karl Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1986) 56-58.

course for Germany; one only had to “hold out” long enough. The only aspect that troubled him was the ceaseless “organization” at the expense of “vital forces.” He failed to notice the destructive radicalism of the whole movement and the petty bourgeois character of all its “Strength-through-joy” [*Kraft durch Freude*] institutions, because he himself was a radical petty bourgeois.

In response to my remark that there were many things I could understand about his attitude, except how he could sit at the same table (at the Academy of German Law) with someone like Julius Streicher,<sup>1</sup> he remained silent at first. Then, somewhat uncomfortably, the justification followed . . . things would have been “much worse” if at least a few intelligent persons [*Wissenden*] hadn’t become involved. And with bitter resentment against the intelligentsia, he concluded his explanation: “If these gentlemen hadn’t been too refined to get involved, then everything would be different; but, instead, I’m entirely alone now.” To my response that one didn’t have to be especially “refined” in order to renounce working with someone like Streicher, he answered: one need not waste words over Streicher, *Der Stürmer* was nothing more than pornography. He couldn’t understand why Hitler didn’t get rid of this guy — whom Heidegger feared.

These responses were typical, for nothing is easier for Germans than to be radical when it comes to ideas and indifferent in practical fact. They manage to ignore all *individual Fakta* in order to cling all the more decisively to their concept of the whole and to separate “matters of fact” from “persons.” In truth, the program of “pornography” [e.g., embodied in anti-Semitic publications such as *Der Stürmer* — trans.] was fulfilled and became a German reality in 1938;<sup>2</sup> and no one can deny that Streicher and Hitler were in agreement on this matter.

In 1938, Husserl died in Freiburg. Heidegger proved his “Admiration and Friendship” (the terms in which he dedicated his 1927 work [*Sein und Zeit*] to Husserl) by wasting no words of remembrance or sympathy, either public or private, spoken or written.

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1. A Nazi propagandist and editor of the popular anti-Semitic publication, *Der Stürmer* (see below).

2. One must recall that Löwith’s reflections date from the year 1940. The allusion to 1938 is undoubtedly a reference to Kristallnacht, when the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazis turned into a bloody and horrifying reality.