

# President Weizman tells Germans he cannot forgive

FROM ROGER BOYES  
IN BONN

PRESIDENT WEIZMAN of Israel stunned Germany yesterday with a speech to parliament that set aside the usual diplomatic niceties and openly addressed the problems still dividing Germans and Jews.

Speaking in Hebrew to a special session of the two chambers of the German parliament, Mr Weizman said it was impossible for him to forgive Germany for the crimes committed by the Nazis. During his four-day visit to Germany, he said, he had heard "voices [of the six million victims of the Holocaust] crying to me from the earth".

"As President of the State of Israel, I can mourn for them and commemorate them, but I cannot forgive in their name," he told the deputies who included President Herzog and Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor. Mr Weizman, who was

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a Royal Air Force pilot in the Second World War, said it was important that he speak in Hebrew to German deputies for Hebrew was "the language that was screamed in the gas chambers in the prayer Shema Israel".

The President tried to balance his criticism with a few optimistic remarks, emphasising that his use of Hebrew to a German audience was also "a symbol and proof of our rebirth".

However, the visit has been uncomfortable for the Germans from the outset. Plainly shocked by

a visit to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, Mr Weizman said later that he could not see how 40,000 Jews were able to still live in Germany. The remark was explained away by Israeli diplomats as a reflection of the President's Zionism. "He was simply saying that the Jews have a natural home in Israel," one diplomat said.

The remark stunned the Germans, however, and Rita Süßmuth, the parliamentary Speaker, told the Israeli head of state: "You are visiting a different, a democratic, a European

Germany that has learnt its lesson from hate and genocide, war and expulsion and is aware of its responsibility."

The same brittle tone has influenced the many German Jewish seminars that have been staged to coincide with the visit. At the Institute of German History at Tel Aviv University, Zohar Shavit, an Israeli historian, shocked her German colleagues with a scathing account of how German youth literature portrayed the Holocaust. In these books she said, Germans were often depicted as victims of the alien Nazis, Jews were romanticised or depersonalised and the Nazis often drawn in the manner of old anti-Semitic cartoons as small, dark and with hooked noses.

German historians at the seminar said that the analysis was biased and that most young Germans' views of the Holocaust were

shaped by television and the cinema. The friction is evident at almost all levels. Israelis point to opinion polls indicating that 78 per cent of Germans have no interest in the Middle East. The Germans say that Israeli interest in their country is so limited that there is not even an Israeli state television correspondent in Germany.

The most enduring Israeli complaint is about far-right activity. Neo-Nazis have frequently desecrated Jewish cemeteries and have twice set fire to synagogues. Mr Weizman called on Germans yesterday to stamp out this kind of activity and said: "I urge you to recognise every stirring of racism and smash every stirring of neo-Nazism."

German officials said yesterday that the openness of the President's remarks was an indication of how normal relations had become between Germany and Israel.



President Weizman of Israel applauds his audience in the German parliament after his speech in Hebrew yesterday