

The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany



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Imperial Germany*

What set antisemites apart from anti-antisemites in Imperial Germany was not so much what they thought about ‘the Jews’, but what they thought should be done about them. Like most anti-antisemites, German Social Democrats felt that the antisemites had a point but took matters too far. In fact, Socialist anti-antisemitism often did not hinge on the antisemites’ anti-Jewish orientation at all. Even when it did, the Socialists’ arguments generally did more to consolidate than subvert generally accepted notions regarding ‘the Jews’. By focusing on a broader set of perceptions accepted by both antisemites and anti-antisemites and drawing a variety of new sources into the debate, this study offers a startling reinterpretation of seemingly well-rehearsed issues, including the influence of Karl Marx’s ‘Zur Judenfrage’ and the positions of various leading Social Democrats (Franz Mehring, Eduard Bernstein, August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg) and their peers.

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THE SOCIALIST RESPONSE TO ANTISEMITISM IN IMPERIAL GERMANY

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>Acronyms</i>	xix
Introduction	I
1 Social Democracy's Stance on Antisemitism and the Spectre of 'Philosemitism'	21
2 The Influence of 'Zur Judenfrage' on the Socialist Movement	37
The First Great Misunderstanding	39
The Second Great Misunderstanding	44
The Third Great Misunderstanding	45
3 The Socialist Uses and Abuses of 'Zur Judenfrage'	56
'Zur Judenfrage' in the Mainstream Socialist Press	57
Mehring's Role in the Popularisation of 'Zur Judenfrage'	61
Wilhelm Liebknecht and 'Zur Judenfrage'	64
August Bebel and 'Zur Judenfrage'	70
Antisemitism, 'Philosemitism' and False Consciousness	81
'The Jewish Question' in <i>Die Heilige Familie</i>	85
Mehring's Specific Spin on 'Zur Judenfrage'	91
4 The Social Democratic Party Congress of 1903 and the Case of Hans Leuß	103
The Antisemitic Deputy Hans Leuß	110
Leuß Turns to Mehring	114
The Case of Hans Leuß at the Party Congress in Dresden	116
Eisner and Gradnauer Intervene	120
The Intervention of the <i>Fraktion</i>	126
5 The Former Antisemite Leuß on Antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question'	135
6 Antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' in Dresden	149
Harden's Jewish Background	149
Wilhelm Liebknecht, Karl Kraus and the <i>Fackel</i>	152
Harden and the Party Congress of 1892	168
Yet Another Great Misunderstanding	169

7	The Evolution of Bernstein's Stance on Antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question'	173
	Bernstein's Dispute with Bax (1898/99)	179
	Bernstein, Eleanor Marx and Johannes Menzinger (1898)	187
	'The Jewish Question' in Revolutionary Russia (1906)	193
	Bernstein as a Historian of Anti-Antisemitism (1907)	196
	The Shift in Bernstein's Emphasis During the War	196
	Mehring Verses Bernstein (1904)	202
	Conclusion	213
	<i>Select Bibliography</i>	229
	<i>Index</i>	249

Preface

Like most scholarly inquiry, this book wants to contribute to our understanding of questions that extend beyond its immediate remit. To indicate where I think the wider implications of this book lie, and to make it easier for the reader to understand my approach, I want to begin by explaining what the bigger questions were that guided me while undertaking the research for this book and trying to make sense of my findings.

Any attempt to gauge and interpret current expressions of antisemitism, and to determine how best to contain and oppose them, is invariably to a considerable degree dependent on our notions of historical precedent. Some of the most urgent and controversial relevant issues are currently these: is the antisemitism of Islamicist and Jihadic ideology inherent in its traditional roots and sources or ultimately an import from the ideological arsenal of Western modernity? Is the political Left in the West responding adequately to contemporary antisemitism? To what extent is its response indicative of an already established tradition of problematic dealings with antisemitism and 'the Jews'? To be sure, comparison with antisemitism's historical track record and past attempts to counter it are not our only means of assessing current risks and realities and determining suitable strategies to confront them. It is obvious, though, that historical precedent will always play a prominent role in this process. Consequently, the historical development and dynamics of modern antisemitism, and the experiences of those who opposed it in the past, apart from being a matter of historical interest, are also issues of considerable contemporary import. Yet, if what we take to be historical precedent is in fact based on a misreading of previous encounters between antisemitism and anti-antisemitism, then the conclusions we draw from that ostensible precedent will invariably be skewed, leaving us ill equipped to meet contemporary challenges.

The Socialist response to antisemitism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as exemplified by the endeavours of Imperial German Social Democracy, is one such encounter between antisemitism and anti-antisemitism that scholars have misinterpreted in a number of significant ways. In the first instance, my interest is obviously to set the record straight on the ways in which Imperial German Social Democrats grappled with antisemitism. Hopefully, though, the approach I have developed to do so is one that colleagues working on other comparable encounters, and on

relations between Jews and non-Jews more generally, will also find useful in refining their analysis.

I fully concur with Adorno's contention that Auschwitz has established a new categorical imperative that compels mankind to undertake everything within its power to ensure that nothing comparable to the Shoah can recur. If we are to take this imperative seriously, we initially need to understand what the conditions actually were that facilitated the perpetration of the Shoah in the first place. It is this task that informed my decision to become a historian and that ultimately lies at the heart of all my academic endeavours. How it was possible for a highly developed European society to commit genocide in the way German society did during the Shoah is a question that continues to vex and haunt many of those engaged in the study of the Shoah, of National Socialism and of modern German history more generally. It is an issue that has been riddled with controversy, both scholarly and polemical.

What allowed Daniel Goldhagen to cause such a stir with his *Willing Executioners* in 1996 was the emphatic way in which he placed antisemitism squarely at the heart of his explanation of the Shoah and insisted on the primacy of antisemitism as the main motive force behind it. His approach broke radically with a false dichotomy that the long-standing controversy between the intentionalist and structuralist interpretations of National Socialism and the Holocaust had previously established. The intentionalists emphasised the significance of antisemitism as the (or at least a) central motive force underlying the Shoah. Yet they located the intention to exterminate Jewry almost exclusively with the Nazi elites and portrayed its implementation as an imposed top-down process in which German society as a whole collaborated only reluctantly and almost entirely under duress. The structuralist model, by contrast, redirected the focus towards the activities and experiences not only of the entire state and military apparatus but also of German society more generally. The complex and variegated picture of the Shoah's perpetration that consequently emerged invariably made the issue of the motive forces driving and facilitating the Shoah a more complex and variegated issue too. This presents a real enough challenge, of course, but there can be little doubt that some historians, most notably perhaps Hans Mommsen,¹ pursued the structuralist path from the outset with the intention of dislodging antisemitism from its central role in any explanation of the Shoah. Instead, a form of discourse increasingly emerged that, as Alois Hahn has put it rather aptly,² discusses the Shoah as if a reconstruction of the means by which the perpetrator acquired the murder weapon

¹ Cf., for instance, Hans Mommsen, 'The Civil Service and the Implementation of the Holocaust,' in Michael Berenbaum, Abraham J. Peck (eds.), *The Holocaust and History* (Washington, Bloomington: USHMM, Indiana University Press, 1998): 219–227.

² Alois Hahn, 'Dialektik der Aufklärung Revisited,' in Max Miller, Hans-Georg Soeffner (eds.), *Moderität und Barbarei* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1996): 156–174, here 169.

already offered a comprehensive explanation of the reasons for the murder. Yet, of what relevance are potential means and opportunity where there is no motive? In fact, without such a motive they cease to be means and opportunity and simply revert to being straightforward circumstances.

Goldhagen sought not only to reassert antisemitism as the crucial point of departure for any explanation of the Shoah, he also tried to do so in a way compatible with the notion of extensive societal responsibility for its perpetration. The Shoah was not only the intentional realisation of an ideologically motivated project but this was a project, he argued, that the bulk of German society subscribed to and it did so with considerable enthusiasm at that.

Only over time did it become clear to his supporters and detractors in the public forum that Goldhagen had in fact entered into a zero sum game. The strong continuity he ascribed to eliminationist antisemitism in German society prior to the Shoah was complemented by an equally radical but quite inexplicable discontinuity in its aftermath. Almost overnight, the spectre of democratic re-education had apparently beaten the eliminationist antisemitism previously integral to the makeup of German society for centuries into retreat. As Goldhagen made this assumption more explicit, it became clearer that the preparedness to engage his stark portrayal of societal implication in the perpetration of the Shoah was in effect a cathartic exercise rewarded with a clean bill of health for post-war German society. Thus the public debate soon sailed into steadier waters and Goldhagen turned from a bogeyman to a highly decorated pet.

The problem with Goldhagen's explanatory model is not so much that its portrayal of the implication of much of German society in the perpetration of the Shoah is unduly stark or bleak. In this respect the merits of his book remain considerable. The real problems lie elsewhere. In granting post-war German society a clean bill of health, Goldhagen not only legitimised the increasingly aggressive calls to draw a final line beneath the critical examination of German society's responsibility for the Shoah but also sanctioned the strategies actually developed after 1945 to deal with that responsibility. Yet the bulk of these strategies in fact did more to minimise and evade than to explain and address the implication of much of German society in the Shoah. More importantly for our context here, however, his exclusive focus on the alleged continuity of eliminationist antisemitism in German society prior to the Shoah is a reductionist one that grossly oversimplifies the questions he claims to answer.

The suggestion that most Germans were rabid antisemites hell-bent from the outset on physically annihilating the Jews only detracts from the issues that need to be engaged if we genuinely want to understand and acknowledge German society's actual (indeed extensive and horrendous) implication in the perpetration of the Shoah. What we really need to understand is why the physical annihilation of the Jews struck a sufficient cross section of the

German population as a plausible and feasible 'solution' to a supposedly real, existing problem. Why did the measures leading up to it not disquiet the bulk of German society sufficiently to stop the escalation towards this 'solution' in its tracks?

It is often said that the chief responsibility of most Germans for the Shoah lay in their indifference. Perhaps many Germans did feel fairly indifferent towards the act of genocide itself. Some of them may genuinely not have realised what was going on. Many chose not to know, either by failing to inquire even when developments before their own eyes or reports they received from sources they trusted clearly begged the question or simply by wilfully ignoring what was in fact blatantly obvious. The vast majority probably had a reasonably good idea of what was going on, even if their knowledge of the precise details was patchy. Yet, however great the role may have been that indifference played in these various responses to the act of genocide itself, indifferent towards the Jews the Germans most certainly were not. Virtually all Germans subscribed to a basic set of anti-Jewish stereotypes and the conviction that an unresolved 'Jewish Question' in more or less urgent need of a comprehensive solution existed.

To be sure, subjectively most of them were presumably convinced that all they wanted was to see the situation of the Jews 'normalised' once and for all. The Jews needed to be put in their place and the (alleged) issues of their undue influence and their inclination to subvert accepted values required a definitive resolution. The Jews had been granted emancipation on the condition that they assimilate. Yet, they had done so only partially or opportunistically or, even worse, in order to mask the ways in which they continued to maintain their own, specifically Jewish interests. Hence, sturdier measures than politicians had previously dared apply were presumably called for to guarantee that 'the Jewish Question' really was satisfactorily resolved. We should not forget that for many Germans National Socialism's preparedness to implement radical 'solutions' that all previous politicians had shied away from was in any case one of its main attractions.

Yet this edifice of stereotypes and the entire discourse on the claims and limitations of Jewish assimilation were in large part predicated on assumptions whose underlying logic implied that the Jews were not genuinely capable of assimilating fully. In this respect, the godfather of respectable antisemitism, the leading Imperial German historian and National Liberal deputy in the *Reichstag*, Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896), had already set the standard in the late 1870s. When it came to formulating what he thought the practical consequences of his 'analysis' of 'the Jewish Question' should be, he did no more than appeal to Jewry to show more modesty and to assimilate more thoroughly. Yet the main body of his 'analysis' not only allowed for no other conclusion than that the Jews were in fact intrinsically incapable of assimilating but it also implied that the existence of

unassimilated elements within its sphere posed a threat to the very existence of the German nation that it could not, in the long run, afford to tolerate.³

Now, it is no foregone conclusion that people will draw the implications of their beliefs and convictions to their logical consequence, let alone that they will attempt to implement those logical consequences. Many of the remarks and statements we will encounter were made in the political arena. Often they were primarily meant to score points, rather than add up to a conceptually consistent alternative position. Whether they genuinely questioned the generally established terms of reference or those that one's opponents adhered to was therefore often of little or no concern to those who made these statements. Yet this in no way diminishes their ultimate responsibility for thereby helping to maintain and reproduce the prevalent discourse on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' and the exclusionary dynamics generated by that increasingly consensual discourse.

It is surely fair to say that no government or regime will ever be able to mobilise sufficient popular support for genocidal policies unless these policies in fact represent the ultimate consequence of an exclusionary logic with which the society whose support is required is already saturated. The National Socialists would obviously have had quite a struggle on their hands, had they tried to single out all healthy blue-eyed little girls with blonde ponytails for physical annihilation. In short, it is sustained anti-Jewish discourse that initially stops well short of explicitly drawing its own implications to their logical consequence that nevertheless helps render society susceptible to that logical consequence. It makes increasingly radical suggestions moving further and further towards that logical consequence seem worthy of serious consideration because they are in keeping with well-established patterns of reflection upon 'the Jewish Question'.

Consequently, options that would otherwise be dismissed out of hand because they seem intolerable or untenable gain the potential to move gradually from the lunatic fringe to the heart of viable governmental policy-making decisions. In Imperial Germany even the self-avowed antisemites rarely admitted to themselves that the logical consequence of their arguments could only be the wholesale removal of the Jews from non-Jewish society, let alone that this wholesale removal might best be brought about by their physical annihilation. Hitler himself, when he began to present his emerging own brand of antisemitic ideology to the public immediately after the war, was in no doubt that there could be no solution short of the Jews' removal [*Entfernung*]. Yet he used the terms 'expulsion' [*Ausweisung*] and 'annihilation' [*Vernichtung*] interchangeably. That annihilation would be the method of choice was no foregone conclusion, then. On the other

³ Cf. Klaus Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001): 165–247, especially 204, 210–211. Hereafter Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus*.

hand, it was not an option Hitler felt the need or the desire to rule out either.⁴

To be sure, for most Germans, to adapt an apt formulation by Anthony Kauders, 'the dream of a Germany without Jews' by no means invariably implied 'the dream of a Germany strewn with the victims of annihilation'.⁵ Yet without the former the latter could never have become reality. This dream of a future without Jews was, of course, no exclusively German phenomenon, far from it. The non-Jewish obsession with Jews and the stereotyping of Jews as a central plank of Western identity formation have been enduring features of European civilisation. Fortunately, not all warped perceptions of Jewry invariably lead down some high road to genocide but that hardly merits complacency. The degree of often willing collaboration the Germans could count on throughout Europe in the implementation of the Shoah bears testimony to the destructive potential at stake here.

Even so, it was the interaction between regime and society in Germany that turned the physical annihilation of the Jews into the centre piece of a supposedly redemptive mission and generated the determination and stamina required to see it through with such awful consequence. What we need to understand are the conditions and mechanisms that allow or compel a society to draw the logic of the stereotyping and exclusionary ideas prevalent in its midst to their ultimate consequence. Surely, our attempts to do so are most likely to succeed if we focus on the specific context in which we know that mechanism to have functioned most effectively and devastatingly.

National Socialist antisemitism only stood a chance of advancing from the lunatic fringe to viable governmental policy because German society was saturated with a set of perceptions regarding 'the Jews' whose implications, when taken to their ultimate logical consequence, made options that would otherwise have seemed plain mad appear plausible. These options struck many as daring and revolutionary, to be sure, but they nevertheless seemed plausible enough to deserve support, support that was perhaps unconditional but more likely conditional, perhaps it was merely tacit – but it was support all the same and there was enough of it to render the perpetration of the Shoah viable.

The purpose of this book is to help us understand the process of societal saturation with perceptions of 'the Jewish Question' that underpinned this development by throwing a light on the extent to which both self-avowed antisemites and those opposed to political antisemitism in Imperial Germany subscribed to many of the same anti-Jewish stereotypes. On the whole, what

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 417–420.

⁵ Anthony Kauders, 'Legally Citizens: Jewish Exclusion from the Weimar Polity,' in Wolfgang Benz, Arnold Paucker, Peter Pulzer (eds.), *Jüdisches Leben in der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1998): 159–172, here 172.

set those who did consider themselves antisemites apart from those who did not was not primarily *that* they thought there was a problem with the Jews, nor even, in large measure, *what* they thought that problem was. In this respect, most contemporaries tended to agree to a startling degree. What set them apart was what they thought should be done to resolve the ostensible problem. In other words, it was their prescriptions for 'the Jewish Question', rather than their perceptions of it, that set them apart.

Given the extent to which the alleged problem was imagined rather than real, it could never actually have been resolved in keeping with the widely accepted terms of reference. Let alone could the underlying rival visions of a pluralist society or an ethnically homogeneous community be reconciled. Unless one of these options won out decisively over the other there could only ever be a tenuous balance between them. 'The Jewish Question' was only a symptom of this tenuousness, of course, but for many it soon became one of its most potent symbols. Since 'the Jewish Question' was no genuine conflict capable of genuine resolution, it had an inbuilt, virtually boundless potential for escalation. The more one desired its amicable resolution the more its inevitable failure to materialise would intensify the sense of frustration and futility felt even by those who subjectively wished the Jews no harm. Short of acknowledging that 'the Jewish Question' did not in fact exist, even those with the best intentions eventually had to concede that more radical measures would apparently be required to resolve the issue than they had ever envisaged at the outset.

Prima facie, it might well seem that a world that could be neatly divided into antisemites and non-antisemites would make our task inordinately easier. Yet as far as the situation in Imperial Germany is concerned, matters are far more complicated and the seemingly so tempting clear-cut juxtaposition of antisemites and non-antisemites can seriously impede our comprehension of the issues at stake. It forces us to portray in black and white a constellation actually characterised by various very murky shades of grey. It is more than evident that Imperial German society was pervaded by a set of perceptions regarding 'the Jews' that was more than problematic in its own right without necessarily amounting to fully blown antisemitism.

Shulamit Volkov has suggested that antisemitism was 'transmitted' from Imperial Germany to the Weimar period, not so much via a direct continuity of organised political antisemitism or explicitly antisemitic ideology, but primarily 'through the persistence of a cultural system of norms, vocabulary, and associations'⁶ that were, for the most part, not avowedly antisemitic. If we take this contention seriously, it immediately becomes evident that it is precisely the shades of grey that are of the utmost importance for our understanding of this process of transmission. It is they that ultimately formed the prevalent set of perceptions regarding 'the Jews' in Imperial

⁶ Shulamit Volkov, [Review] in *TAJb* 9 (1980): 545–546, here 546. Hereafter Volkov, 'Review'.

German society, and this more general set of perceptions, in turn, clearly did more in the long run to render German society susceptible to National Socialist antisemitism than the ideological or organisational continuity of pre-war political antisemitism in its own right. If we limit ourselves to the more straightforward juxtaposition of antisemites and non-antisemites, we are invariably compelled either to demonise this entire spectrum of problematic perceptions by classifying them as antisemitic or to exculpate them altogether by qualifying them as non-antisemitic. Either way we impede our ability to understand the dynamics and significance of these perceptions for the process rendering German society capable of the perpetration of the Shoah. Therefore it is precisely on these shades of grey that this book will primarily focus. More specifically, it will examine the relevance and dynamics of these perceptions by checking for their impact on that sector of non-Jewish Imperial German society where we would least expect it to have gained ground: Social Democracy.

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At the heart of this book is the thesis for which I received my PhD from University College London (UCL) in 2003: *Social Democratic Responses to Antisemitism and the Judenfrage in Imperial Germany: Franz Mehring (A Case Study)*. The debt of gratitude I incurred during my three years as a doctoral student (and teaching assistant) in the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department at UCL is immeasurable. I have yet to be convinced that there could be a friendlier and more conducive academic department. I very much hope that all my colleagues there – including the world's two most fantastic administrators! – are aware of the extent of my admiration and appreciation for them. Michael Berkowitz was the most considerate and encouraging supervisor one could wish for. John Klier and Ada Rapoport-Albert, as the former and current heads of department, have been extraordinarily supportive throughout. As an Honorary Research Fellow in the department I continue to teach there and take considerable pride in my ongoing affiliation with the department, which I have no intention of allowing to lapse. I greatly enjoyed and benefited immensely from Dorothea McEwan's truly marvellous German Palaeography course at the Warburg Institute, which I took in 2001/2002. Finally, I am grateful to Peter Pulzer and Donald Sassoon for agreeing to be my examiners and for treating me to a painless, stimulating, and thoroughly enjoyable viva.

Already more than spoilt with a wonderful home department at UCL, I was fortunate enough to secure my first full-time appointment as a Lecturer in Modern European History in another outstanding and extraordinarily welcoming department, the Department of History at King's College London. My colleagues there were extremely supportive and I could hardly have expected to undergo the transition from doctoral student to lecturer under better conditions. Having previously done my level best at UCL to convince students of Jewish History that they need to look beyond the immediate remit of their discipline, I now had to convince my students – and colleagues – at King's that the Jewish experience with modernity is paradigmatic for the experience with modernity more generally and that 'the Jews', far from being marginal to 'mainstream' history, have served as an integral 'other' in the process of Western identity formation. This element of role reversal was extremely useful in helping me focus and clarify my thoughts as my thesis evolved into this book, which is now very much a

product of the truly blissful two-and-a-half years I spent at King's before taking up my current position at UCL.

Over the years, a number of colleagues have shown a generous interest in the work that has gone into this book, foremost among them Jack Jacobs, who has been happy to help with queries and requests and with whom it is always a pleasure to be in touch. Serious ill health notwithstanding, Thomas Höhle was extremely generous with his time and expertise, especially in the early phases of this project. I was very impressed by his perceptiveness and open-mindedness. That said, he will almost certainly disagree fundamentally with the thesis my book now presents. I have benefited greatly from opportunities to present and discuss some of the issues raised in this book, both formally and informally, *inter alia*, in the context of the Seminar in Modern European Jewish History in Oxford, the Jewish and Israel Studies Program at Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT) and the Fellows' Meeting at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies (Washington, DC). Many thanks to all those colleagues who invited me and critically engaged my suggestions on these occasions.

I am grateful to the colleagues at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin and Koblenz and the Archiv der sozialen Demokratie in Bonn for their support during my research there. The colleagues in Bonn have also been extraordinarily cooperative throughout in feeding material into the Interlibrary Loan system (and their counterparts at UCL are equally deserving of praise for all their assistance over the years). Anyone who has even been to the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam will know that it deserves a special mention. All the colleagues I have had the pleasure of meeting there during my various stays, and Mieke Ijzermans in particular, have been exceptionally welcoming and supportive and I look forward to many more pleasant and productive visits there.

I am neither a man of independent means nor do I have wealthy relatives or a partner who could support me financially. Without massive financial support from a whole array of institutions (as well as a handful of generous individuals who shall remain unnamed here but are hopefully aware of my heartfelt gratitude) an academic career would have been utterly out of the question for me and I cannot thank them enough for having enabled me to pursue this path nonetheless. The UCL Graduate School takes pride of place among these institutions for funding my PhD with a Major Graduate School Research Scholarship. Over the years I have also been awarded additional funding, in some cases more than once, by the UCL Graduate School, the Royal Historical Society, the German Historical Institute London, the University of London Central Research Fund, the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies (Washington, DC), the School of Humanities at King's College London and the Deutsche Literaturarchiv in Marbach. Not all these grants were directly related to the research that features here but they have all been instrumental in allowing me to make this book what it now is.

I thank Lewis Bateman for his initial interest in my manuscript and Eric Crahan for the enthusiasm with which he has brought this project to fruition. Both readers consulted by the press were extraordinarily generous in their comments and I hope they will be satisfied with my attempt to address their concerns. I am grateful to all the colleagues involved in the practical process of producing this book and putting it out there and hope I have not made their lives more difficult than absolutely necessary.

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Acronyms

IRSH	<i>International Review of Social History</i>
IWK	<i>Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung</i>
JbA	<i>Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung</i>
JHI	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
JSS	<i>Jewish Social Studies</i>
LBIYB	<i>Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook</i>
LVZ	<i>Leipziger Volkszeitung</i>
MEGA2	Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, <i>Gesamtausgabe</i> . Berlin: Dietz, 1975 ff.
MEW	Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, <i>Werke</i> 1–39. Berlin: Dietz, 1956 ff.
NPL	<i>Neue Politische Literatur</i>
NZ	<i>Neue Zeit</i>
TAJb	<i>Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte</i> ; previously: <i>Jahrbuch des Instituts für deutsche Geschichte</i> (Tel Aviv)
WaM	<i>Welt am Montag</i>

Introduction

SPOT THE JEWISH CONNECTION!

Any assessment of past encounters between antisemitism and anti-antisemitism will obviously depend on a sound understanding of what people did and did not mean when they talked about antisemitism. What exactly were they taking issue with when they professed their opposition to it? What did people actually mean when they said that they encountered very little or a great deal of antisemitism, that they considered it a threat or a negligible nuisance? Is it likely, for that matter, always to be obvious to us when people were referring to antisemitism or ‘the Jews’? How Imperial German Social Democrats did and did not speak about antisemitism and ‘the Jewish Question’ will therefore be a central issue throughout this book. As will soon become evident, their habits and assumptions when speaking (or choosing to remain silent) about antisemitism differed in a number of fairly substantial ways from ours. To help drive this point home, I want to begin by presenting two short texts and asking my readers to try and spot their ‘Jewish connection’. Do these texts refer to either antisemitism and/or matters Jewish and, if so, how? All will be revealed – for the first text in the course of the introduction and for the second text in the [final chapter](#).

[Our opponents] held their party congress in Kassel from 8 to 10 October. The deliberations began with a toast to the *Kaiser* and a Bismarck commemoration. In the debate that followed the report of the *Fraktion* [parliamentary party] on parliamentary activities, Werner reprimanded the stance of those members of the *Fraktion* that had voted *against the naval bill* while Bindewald defended this course. Subsequently, the main point of discussion was the *Mittelstandspolitik* [economic policy predicated on small and medium-sized independent enterprises]. Two motions were carried stipulating, firstly, that the party should oppose cooperative associations and junk markets [*Ramschbazzare*] as well as female competition in offices and shops and, secondly, that it should strive for the abolition of all cooperative associations for civil servants and officers and all private savings associations.

[This publication] epitomizes Lassalle’s merits and Lassalle’s faults. In this publication, to begin with the latter, Lassalle frequently indulges in the most ugly quibbling that tends towards a distortion of his opponent’s notions. His

inclination, professed by himself in his diary, to take refuge in shouting down where arguments fail, shows itself here too: on several occasions the polemic no longer refutes, but merely shouts down. Lassalle is not content with the demonstration of his opponent's inadequacy in terms of his scholarly aptitude and the nature of his suggestions, ultimately he also questions his opponent's motives excessively, while passing over Schulze's factual objections to the idea of state-financed production co-operatives with a few unproven assertions.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOCIALISM'S DEALINGS WITH ANTISEMITISM AND 'THE JEWISH QUESTION'

The issue of Socialism's dealings with antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' is by no means a new one. A relatively lively debate on the matter ensued especially from the mid-1940s to the early 1980s, and Jack Jacobs subsequently revisited the debate with a number of essays published together as a monograph fifteen years ago.¹ Initially, interest in the matter presumably stemmed from two sources. On the one hand, German Social Democracy had, to say the very least, obviously not succeeded in immunising the bulk of its constituency sufficiently against antisemitism for it to have presented a serious hurdle to the perpetration of the Shoah. On the other hand, Stalin's antisemitic campaigns and the antisemitic subplot of the East European show trials in the early 1950s clearly reinforced the need to question the more or less automatic assumption that the political Left was above suspicion when it came to antisemitism.

The relevant literature can be divided roughly into two strands. The more pessimistic line extends from Edmund Silberner² and George Lichtheim³ to Robert Wistrich.⁴ Shlomo Na'aman also tended increasingly in this direction towards the end of his life.⁵ This school of thought maintained that the Socialist movement does indeed have a substantial problem to address in connection with its (past) dealings with antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question'. Silberner went even further and occasionally suggested that Socialism had generated its very own antisemitic tradition. Needless to say, this more critical evaluation was also well in keeping with the conceptual endeavours of those, from Talmon to Sternhell, who argued that the Enlightenment project in its entirety was intrinsically totalitarian and that it was therefore

¹ Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and "the Jewish Question" after Marx* (New York: New York University Press, 1992). Hereafter Jacobs, *Socialists*.

² Cf. Edmund Silberner, *Sozialisten zur Judenfrage* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1962). Hereafter Silberner, *Sozialisten*; idem, *Kommunisten zur Judenfrage* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1983).

³ Cf. George Lichtheim, 'Socialism and the Jews,' in *Dissent* (July–August 1968): 314–342.

⁴ Cf. Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews* (London, Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982). Hereafter Wistrich, *Socialism*.

⁵ Cf. Shlomo Na'aman, *Marxismus und Zionismus* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1997). Hereafter Na'aman, *Marxismus*.

little wonder if the political Left and the political Right seemed virtually indistinguishable at certain junctures.

The other, more optimistic line of scholarship evaluating especially Imperial German Social Democracy's track record began with Paul Massing.⁶ It was propagated in one of Shulamit Volkov's earlier papers⁷ and culminated in Rosemarie Leuschen-Seppel's monograph published in 1978.⁸ Here it was argued that all its relevant shortcomings notwithstanding, Social Democracy had ultimately stood firm against antisemitism. Nobody could reasonably have assumed that all the ambiguities and deficiencies that can indeed be demonstrated should have been representative of Social Democracy rather than marking the exceptions that prove the rule.

In fact, both schools of thought share an important underlying consensus. They agree that Social Democracy was the least antisemitic of the significant political camps in both Imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic. Yet, while for some this is already the answer, for others this is only where the interesting questions begin. As Volkov pointed out in her review of Leuschen-Seppel's monograph, Leuschen-Seppel ultimately concluded that 'while the [Social Democratic] party was practically immune against anti-semitism on the political level, it consistently succumbed to it on the cultural level'. Yet this failure surely 'must be seen as fatal indeed' when set in relation to the fact that it was precisely 'the persistence of a cultural system of norms, vocabulary, and associations',⁹ rather than a direct continuity of organised ideological antisemitism, that facilitated the transmission of anti-semitism from Imperial Germany to the Weimar period. This was a process of transmission, then, in which Social Democracy, given its susceptibility to this 'cultural system', was clearly implicated, its party-political opposition to organised party-political antisemitism notwithstanding.

GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE MARXIST PROJECT

Yet in order to examine the relevance and dynamics of this 'cultural system' by checking for its impact on Social Democracy as the sector of non-Jewish Imperial German society we would least expect to subscribe to it, we need to define our focus more precisely. It should be commonplace by now that neither 'the working class' nor 'the labour movement' can form our frame

⁶ Paul W. Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1949). Hereafter Massing, *Rehearsal*. On the background here cf. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press [2nd edition], 1996): 170–171, 219–252. Hereafter Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*. Martin Jay's monograph on the Frankfurt School was first published in 1973.

⁷ Shulamit Volkov, 'The Immunization of Social Democracy Against Anti-semitism in Imperial Germany,' in *TAJb Beiheft 2* (1977): 63–81.

⁸ Rosemarie Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie und Antisemitismus im Kaiserreich* (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1978). Hereafter Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*.

⁹ Volkov, 'Review,' 546.

of reference here, nor even Social Democracy in its entirety. In Imperial Germany, 'Social Democracy' was, after all, the generic term used to refer to the entire spectrum of organisations under the sway of the Socialist labour movement. This resulted not least from the simply breath-taking degree of disenfranchisement – political, social and cultural – to which the German working class was initially subjected. As a result, Social Democracy replicated a wide-ranging net of institutions which in effect simulated the rights and integration refused their constituency within mainstream Imperial German society. As Peter Nettel¹⁰ and others¹¹ have pointed out, the problem in this context is that a subculture like this can come to hinge all too exclusively on the profound sense of disenfranchisement that led to its creation in the first place. Those belonging to it are then highly likely to seize the first best opportunity to substitute the real thing, in other words integration into society, for the replicated sense of belonging offered by their subculture.

By 1914, the membership of the party exceeded one million and many more were associated with Social Democracy more generally. To want to make claims as to what 'the members' or 'the supporters' of Social Democracy thought and wanted is an extremely daring enterprise. That is not to say that it is impossible to reconstruct, within certain limits, the impact on the rank-and-file of the sorts of debates that will feature prominently throughout this book, and it goes without saying that this is an important task in its own right. Yet, in order to do so we first need to reconstruct and understand as precisely as possible the options and influences that are likely to have helped shape the perceptions and choices of the rank-and-file and it is to this first step that this book is dedicated.

One point often conveniently forgotten in this context is that the single most important formative influence (potential) Imperial German Socialists were subjected to was obviously not specifically Social Democratic at all. Just like everyone else, potential Social Democrats needed to confront the attempts of the state, the church and mainstream society to churn out and maintain loyal Imperial subjects. When it comes to such phenomena as authoritarianism, lack of initiative and the much-cited 'revolutionary attentism' within Social Democracy¹² the odds are, therefore, that these were not so much vices created by Social Democracy. Rather, they reflected attitudes and behavioural patterns that Imperial German society considered

¹⁰ J. P. Nettel, 'The German Social Democratic Party 1890–1914 as a Political Model,' in *Past & Present* No. 30 (April 1965): 65–95.

¹¹ Especially Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹² Cf. Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus* (Frankfurt/Main, Vienna: Propyläen, 1973); idem, *Emanzipation und Integration* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1999); Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft [3rd corrected edition], 1972).

virtuous and Social Democracy failed to tackle with sufficient determination or success.

The formative influence I would assume to have been best equipped to allow Social Democracy to combat the impact of standard Imperial German socialisation on its potential constituency is Marxism. Now, it is important to understand that Marxism, in the sense in which I propose we use this term, was not an organic, spontaneous outgrowth of the Socialist labour movement. In practical terms, it was a minority position that developed on the fringes of the emerging Socialist labour movement. Originally, it was quite literally a set of ideas, then a political project that was developed by Marx and Engels, their close associates and those who subsequently became convinced of the pertinence and usefulness of the Marxian mode of analysis and its strategic implications. This small group of men (and very few women) tried, in a more or less coordinated fashion, to penetrate relevant groups on the far Left of the emerging labour movements. To varying degrees, they were able to establish, over time, a Marxist strand within the Socialist labour movement. More often than not this resulted in a process of syncretism that transformed individual tenets of the Marxian approach quite considerably before they entered circulation as one ideological currency among others accepted as legal tender in the highly eclectic ideological dealings of Social Democracy.

As is well known, one of the central tenets of Marxism is historical materialism. Social and historical phenomena cannot simply be taken at face value, so the assumption goes. Although they often appear to result from natural 'facts of life' beyond human control, they are in fact in every instance the outcome of the historical process that generated them. Hence, they can be understood and accounted for as resulting from the interplay of the factors that contributed to that genetic process. These contributing factors can in turn be identified as representing the specific interests of various social groups. Consequently, social realities are man-made and therefore also alterable, provided we can identify the points at which the development that has led to the current state of affairs needs to be reversed or altered to bring about an alternative outcome.

One might be forgiven for assuming that people who subscribed to this approach should have been singularly well equipped to see through political myths prevalent at the time, including the two most rampant and crude ones among them: nationalism and antisemitism. That most Socialists were in fact by no means immune against these myths is now a commonplace that is usually enlisted to demonstrate the supposedly intrinsic deficiency of historical materialism. However critical one may be of historical materialism, though, there can be no doubt that self-avowed Marxists were susceptible to the myths of nationalism and antisemitism, or at least to some of the concepts and notions on which these myths drew, not because of their historical materialism but in spite of it. It is in this sense that Marxists can

be counted among those whom one would least expect to subscribe to the prevalent perceptions of 'the Jewish Question'. Hence, the fact that they nevertheless did subscribe to at least some of these perceptions provides a particularly good opportunity to gauge the impact of those perceptions on society as a whole.

In the course of this book the readers will meet a number of leading Socialists, all of whom considered themselves Marxists at least at some point in their career yet whose political orientations nevertheless cover the entire spectrum from the founding father of revisionism, Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), to two of the founding members of the German Communist Party (KPD), Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) and Franz Mehring (1846–1919). As we will see, each of these Socialists brought his or her own emphases, nuances and idiosyncrasies to the debates about antisemitism and 'the Jews'. In this sense, Jack Jacobs is entirely right in criticising the 'overgeneralization'¹³ characteristic of much of the earlier literature and, up to a point, his contention that 'there was not a Marxist attitude towards the Jews, but a spectrum of Marxist (and socialist) attitudes towards the Jews'¹⁴ is indeed valid. Yet, as we will see, the closer we look at these Socialists' varying emphases, nuances and idiosyncrasies, the clearer and in some respects even more remarkable certain fundamental commonalities between all of them (with the partial exception of Rosa Luxemburg) become.

ANTISEMITIC STEREOTYPING AND THE KERNEL-OF-TRUTH APPROACH TO ANTISEMITISM

Innumerable attempts have been made to define precisely what constitutes antisemitism or qualifies an individual as an antisemite.¹⁵ Although the matter is destined by its very nature to remain controversial, the fundamental issues in this debate are well rehearsed. My argument throughout this book will be based on a categorical rejection of the kernel-of-truth approach to antisemitism.¹⁶ That is not to say that individual antisemitic perceptions can never coincide with individual aspects of Jewish reality. Of course a connection exists between the realities of Jewish existence and antisemitic perceptions. But the crucial question is whether that connection is of a coincidental or a causal nature. Put simply: does it make any difference to the antisemites, and is it of any significance to the way in which antisemitism functions, whether their claims and contentions about Jews are true (in the sense that they could be empirically verified) or not?

¹³ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 1. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ For probably the best survey, cf. Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus*, 26–115. Cf. also Wolfgang Benz, 'Anti-Semitism Research,' in Martin Goodman, Jeremy Cohen, David Sorkin (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 943–955.

¹⁶ On this issue specifically, cf. Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus*, 62–77.

The kernel-of-truth approach to antisemitism proceeds as follows. Firstly, it tries to identify the extent to which some of the antisemites' claims and contentions coincide with some aspects of some Jews' reality. Secondly, it tries to identify how the actual behaviour of some Jews makes 'the Jews' a foil for the projection of additional, entirely unfounded, anti-Jewish notions. The implication is this: those partial aspects of Jewish reality where a coincidence can be demonstrated are in fact the cause of the antisemitic claims and contentions that they coincide with. While the process subsequently snowballs out of control, allowing totally unfounded claims to be projected onto the Jews as well, what originally sets the ball in motion are partial aspects of Jewish reality that really do coincide with anti-Jewish contentions. The connection between these particular aspects of Jewish reality and antisemitism is therefore not coincidental, but actually causal.

This approach fails to address at least three fundamental issues. Although its proponents suggest that some of the antisemites' claims have a causal basis in reality, they do not deny, of course, that the way in which the antisemites portray these partial aspects of reality is distorted. How, then, and why does the ostensible kernel of truth gives rise to its own distortion and misrepresentation? Secondly, if some of the antisemites' contentions really do have a basis of sorts in reality, where do those come from that clearly have no basis in reality at all? And why, thirdly, does it make no difference to the antisemites either way whether their claims at least seem to have some basis in reality or quite clearly have none at all?

Shulamit Volkov rather succinctly spelt out the implications of this dilemma: 'Having provided the historical background for the anti-Jewish feelings endemic in the Christian world, having analysed the particular circumstances, [...] having disclosed the strains within [...] society at the time', the crucial 'task of explaining the *process*' by which antisemitic perceptions are actually formed and related to these circumstances, still remains to be tackled. 'There is only one way by which this task can be avoided', she added: 'Only if one assumes that the antisemites' claims were truthful [...] is one exempt from the effort to show how men [...] succumbed to the patently false worldview of antisemitism'.¹⁷

As is well known, modern political antisemitism tends to be particularly obsessed with the notion that emancipation would allow the Jews to integrate into society. Consequently, they would become indistinguishable as Jews, they would become invisible and it is precisely this that makes them so dangerous because it allows them go unnoticed as they proceed to subvert society from within. This line of argument not only does not claim to be based on empirically verifiable contentions, it overtly dismisses empirical

¹⁷ Shulamit Volkov, 'Antisemitism as a Cultural Code – Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany,' in *LBIYB* 23 (1978): 25–46, here 36.

verifiability as a legitimate criterion. The danger lies precisely in that which, by definition, cannot be empirically verified.

Moreover, even where some coincidence between an antisemitic perception and an actual aspect of Jewish existence is not entirely out of the question, we still need to ask to what extent a phenomenon that may well be empirically verifiable *post facto* was actually in any meaningful sense of the word visible or palpable in everyday life at the time. After all, the fact, say, that the share of Jews in a particular profession is larger than their share of the population is not something one can simply see. One needs to compile statistical data to verify such an assumption, which begs the question why one should bother to do so in the first place. To do so makes sense only if one already suspects an iniquity. Needless to say, even then it is not the figures themselves that bear out that iniquity. For the data to take on the desired meaning, one first needs to pre-assume a fundamental distinction between Jews and non-Jews and must then posit that there is something iniquitous about the possibility that the share of Jews in any walk of life might be larger than their share of the population. The data do not, therefore, in any way demonstrate the existence of a 'Jewish Question', they presuppose it.

Antisemitic ideology has always proved more than capable of combining notions about 'the Jews' whose coincidental connection to reality one can just about discern with ones that are patently absurd. It has proved equally capable of integrating a variety of claims about Jewry that are in effect mutually exclusive. From the antisemites' point of view, the claims to which scholars have time and again attributed some kernel of truth are no more valid than those claims behind which one cannot by any stretch of the imagination discern such a kernel of truth. This surely demonstrates that for the antisemites the truth value of these contentions, in any meaningful sense of the word, is neither here nor there. From the antisemites' point of view, possible contradictions between their claims or difficulties in verifying them are easily enough explained: they demonstrate the extent to which 'the Jews' have already succeeded in turning the world on its head and making the non-Jews lose their bearings.

All that said, antisemitic projections are obviously 'by no means altogether irrational', but rely on a form of 'applied rather than spontaneous irrationality'.¹⁸ They are in fact the outgrowth of an active process of stereotyping. Antisemitism is often referred to as a form of prejudice. Now, prejudice is in many ways a strange concept. In common parlance, it is often used to imply that people pass premature and thus unjust judgement without full

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda.' This article, first published in 1946, has been reprinted in Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften* 8 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998): 397–407, here 401.

knowledge of the facts. Were they in full command of all the facts, they would judge the matter in a more appropriate manner.

Yet in fact our judgements are never based on *full* knowledge of the facts though they do, one would hope, draw on *sufficient* knowledge of the facts. It is not full knowledge of the phenomenon that we are trying to judge that allows us to assess whether we are in sufficient command of the facts pertaining to that phenomenon to pass judgement on it. Instead, we rely on our critical faculties, on a generic set of criteria that will hopefully allow us to determine in any given instance whether our knowledge is sufficient to allow us to pass judgement, whatever the particular phenomenon at hand. More fundamentally, we are in fact inherently incapable of simply perceiving phenomena around us without at the same time applying our generic critical faculties in an attempt to make sense of them. In this sense there is no perception that does not automatically involve projection. No phenomenon can impress itself on our perceptions without us at the same time impressing on it our attempts to make sense of it.

As Horkheimer and Adorno pointed out in their 'Elements of Anti-semitism',¹⁹ the crucial issue is therefore not that antisemitic notions regarding 'the Jews' are based on projection. In that respect they are no different from any other form of human perception.²⁰ What radically sets them apart is the fact that they are predicated on a radical exclusion of the reflective and critical faculties from the process of projection.²¹ Hence they amount to a false projection²² that blurs the distinction between the projecting subject and the object.²³ The object is reduced to a mere foil on which the projecting subject can see only what it has projected there in the first place. This is not a process, then, in which the subject's interaction with the object is cut short and the subject therefore passes premature judgement on the basis of incomplete knowledge. Instead, the subject refuses all interaction with the object from the outset in order to render it a suitable foil for the projection of an established set of stereotypes.

The notion of prejudice suggests a process that transpires by default. The concept of stereotyping, by contrast, emphasises the active and aggressive nature of the process and its violation (not to say conceptual annihilation) of the object. It is therefore far better suited to characterise the antisemitic impulse. Subjectively, of course, most individuals will simply have grown into an already given consensus on the (negative) qualities of 'the Jews'. They will not therefore encounter themselves as engaged in active stereotyping. Yet while it is true that they are not, for the most part, actively *inventing* the stereotypes, they certainly are actively *reproducing* them. It is not least for this reason that 'the truth' about the Jews provides no antidote to antisemitic stereotyping. As Adorno explained, 'one cannot "correct"

¹⁹ Cf. idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998): 211–225.

²⁰ Ibid., 212. ²¹ Ibid., 214. ²² Ibid., 211. ²³ Ibid., 212.

stereotyping by experience', the false projection cannot be remedied 'merely by taking a *real* look'. Instead, one 'has to reconstitute the capacity for having experiences'.²⁴ To do so, the critical faculties need to be admitted and reflective interaction between the subject and the object needs to be established.

To clarify this issue, let us consider the concept of the exception that proves the rule. What it in effect amounts to is the denial of something that is patently true on its own terms. This denial is obviously not predicated on any quality inherent in the object of our denial. Whether a particular phenomenon confirms or questions a more general assumption is not something that can be concluded from an analysis of the phenomenon itself. It can only be determined by putting the phenomenon into a larger context and applying generic critical and reflective techniques to make sense of the phenomenon in relation to that context. Hence, to return to our specific issue, the fact that we have only ever met wonderful Jews, in and of itself, can no more disprove antisemitism than the fact that we have only ever met horrid Jews, in and of itself, could prove it. 'Facts' about Jews only take on meaning once we begin to make sense of them. Consequently, antisemitism can only be remedied by altering the mechanism deployed by antisemites to 'make sense' of facts about Jews, not by trying to channel their attention from some facts onto others.

This means that what Jews do or do not do ultimately has no genuine influence on the antisemites' perceptions. Given that most of us like to think of Jewish history primarily as the account of Jewish agency in history, this is obviously an intensely frustrating state of affairs. The Shoah provides the most dramatic case in point. Few historical phenomena have had as fundamental an effect on Jewry. Yet at the same time it is hard to imagine a historical phenomenon on which Jewry itself was less capable of making an impact. Against this background the desire to put Jewish agency back into the history of antisemitism is an understandable one and often the willingness to concede a kernel of truth to antisemitic projections is presumably born of this very intention.

Indeed, the readers of this book may well find themselves feeling increasingly frustrated by the radical disjunction between Jewish realities and anti-Jewish stereotypes. The Social Democrats whose deliberations on antisemitism we will encounter were all convinced that they were not only addressing antisemitism in a sophisticated manner but also providing a sound response to 'the Jewish Question' itself. Yet, the concrete realities of actual Jews' lives and experiences play no genuine role in this entire discussion. They fail to feature in this book not for lack of interest or

²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Prejudice in the Interview Material.' This text, first published in 1950, has been reprinted in Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften* 9 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998): 265–331, here 303.

compassion for actual Jewish concerns on my part. Instead, their absence is in a very important sense part of the story this book tells: it is because the concrete realities of actual Jewish existence were almost entirely absent from the Social Democratic discourse on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' that they are equally absent from my account of this discourse.

Why is all this important for our discussion in this book? It is important because seemingly identical formulations can mean entirely different things, depending on whether those uttering them subscribe to the kernel-of-truth approach to antisemitism or not. Take the seemingly straightforward statement that antisemitism is a response to capitalist modernisation. Made by somebody who rejects the kernel-of-truth approach this statement implies something along the following lines: the process of capitalist modernisation creates conditions conducive to the emergence of antisemitism by negatively affecting certain individuals or groups who then respond to the strains imposed on them by projecting their dissatisfaction onto 'the Jews'. Made by somebody who subscribes to the kernel-of-truth approach, on the other hand, the statement implies something very different: antisemitism, the argument would go, is a response to capitalist modernisation because the Jews really do play the role in it and bear the responsibility for it that the antisemites ascribe to them. Admittedly, the antisemitic ideologues tend to embellish their portrayal of this role and base false generalisations on it. Nor would the partial or total elimination of Jewry from society actually resolve any of the problems the antisemites claim it would address. But the popular anti-Jewish sentiments that the antisemites draw on nevertheless do represent a real and direct response to actual and specifically Jewish phenomena. Needless to say, these are two radically opposed and mutually exclusive notions. Yet they can both be expressed in the same seemingly straightforward statement that antisemitism is a response to capitalist modernisation and we can only determine from the concrete context which of the two implications is the intended one.

The leading Imperial German Social Democrats we will meet in the course of our discussion clearly did subscribe to the kernel-of-truth approach to antisemitism. Yet some of their formulations, taken out of context, might seem to suggest otherwise. Take, as a concrete example, a characterisation of the Conservatives from among the prison notes Karl Liebknecht²⁵ made in 1917–1918. The *Deutschkonservative*, he suggested, were characterised 'primarily by their opposition [*Gegensatz*] to mobile [*beweglichen*] capital, an opposition that grows proportionately to

²⁵ Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919) was one of the sons of German Social Democracy's long-standing second in command, Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826–1900). Elected to the Prussian Diet in 1908 and the *Reichstag* in 1912, his opposition to the war aligned him with the radicals in the party. Imprisoned from May 1916 to October 1918, he was among the founding members of the KPD. He was captured together with Rosa Luxemburg and murdered in January 1919.

the mobility of the capital; hence also [their] particularly antisemitic and anti-stock-exchange tendency'.²⁶

Let us compare this with Moishe Postone's theory. He suggested that the anti-capitalist notion at the root of antisemitism is predicated on a distinction between the functions of capital in the sphere of production, on the one hand, and the sphere of circulation, on the other. Although both aspects are in fact integral to capitalism and are inextricably linked, industrial capital becomes associated with the use value of commodities and the productivity of 'honest' labour – categories, in other words, that are supposedly timeless and not specific to capitalism. Capital's more conspicuous functions in the financial sector, on the other hand, are identified as unproductive and parasitical and are seen to constitute the genuine essence of capitalism. Thus, one aspect of capitalism is artificially singled out as supposedly representative of capitalism as a whole, and the traditional association of Jewry with the money economy then allows for a projection that pins the responsibility for capitalism and its alienating and exploitative nature on 'the Jews'.²⁷

Did the early-twentieth-century activist Liebknecht and the late-twentieth-century academic Postone essentially make the same statement, then? Far from it, Liebknecht in fact subscribed to the position whose critical analysis was at the heart of Postone's conceptual endeavour. Where Postone is trying to explain the dynamics behind a process of projection, what Liebknecht was suggesting was simply this: the capitalisation process infringed on the economic interests the *Deutschkonservative* primarily represented, hence compelling them to turn on those responsible for this process: the Jews and the stock exchange. In instances such as this we clearly need to be sure that we really are reading the material correctly and must resist the temptation of crediting Socialists with profound insights into the anti-semites' projections when in fact they subscribed to those very projections themselves.

Invariably, some readers will have misgivings about my categorical rejection of the kernel-of-truth approach to antisemitism. Since this rejection is critical to my overall argument, they will also find it difficult to agree with my subsequent conclusions on all counts. I am confident, though, that they will nevertheless find the distinctions I have introduced to explain my rejection of the kernel-of-truth approach useful for the analysis of the material I present. This book should have much to offer even to those whom I ultimately fail to convince of the need to abandon the kernel-of-truth approach.

²⁶ Karl Liebknecht, *Gesammelte Reden und Schriften* 9 (Berlin: Dietz, 1982): 378.

²⁷ Moishe Postone, 'Anti-Semitism and National Socialism,' in Anson Rabinbach, Jack Zipes (eds.), *Germans and Jews Since the Holocaust* (New York, London: Holmes & Meier, 1986): 302–314, here 309–312.

WHEN IS AN ANTI-ANTISEMITE AN ANTI-ANTISEMITE?

The nature of antisemitism has been widely debated. What constitutes anti-antisemitism or qualifies an individual as an anti-antisemite, by contrast, is an issue that has received rather less systematic attention. One observation we soon make if we look at anti-antisemitic statements in Imperial Germany is that we are confronted, well nigh universally, with a phenomenon we might call the embarrassment of anti-antisemitism. Anti-antisemites typically expressed an obviously heart-felt urge to state explicitly and in an almost formulaic gesture that their stance was not intended to suggest a 'blanket exoneration' of Jewry's 'unpleasant traits'. They displayed a profound sense of embarrassment that they might appear in some way too unconditionally positive in their attitudes towards Jewry and a conspicuous urge to develop a more or less juicy rhetoric suited to dispel the unpalatable suspicion of excess friendliness towards Jews. This is an issue in urgent need of careful systematic research that I intend to address elsewhere.

As already mentioned, if we take a careful look at the relevant discourse in Imperial Germany it transpires that antisemitic and anti-antisemitic positions were in fact more often than not largely identical both in terms of what they actually identified as 'Jewish' and even in their evaluation of many of the phenomena they subsumed under this label. If we subscribe to the kernel-of-truth approach, this seems rather unremarkable. In fact, it would seem to provide neat confirmation of the basic assumption that antisemitic perceptions ultimately did derive from empirically verifiable Jewish phenomena that were of concern to anti-antisemites too. If we reject the kernel-of-truth approach, however, the far-reaching commonality of perceptions between antisemites and anti-antisemites obviously takes on a rather more disquieting dimension.

When, then, is an anti-antisemite an anti-antisemite? All other things being equal, the attempt to answer this question is beset by one absolutely fundamental problem. To us it seems self-evident that the term antisemitism can only be usefully applied to denote the stance of an individual, a group or an ideology *vis-à-vis* (supposedly) Jewish phenomena. Admittedly, on occasion, we might suspect somebody who has made no explicit remarks about Jews of being antisemitic because his or her orientation more generally also implies a problematic attitude towards Jews. But in that case too our use of the label antisemitism is motivated by the wish to criticise a problematic stance regarding 'the Jews', albeit an implicit rather than explicit one. It follows automatically that the decisive characteristic of anti-antisemitism must surely be opposition to an anti-Jewish orientation. Yet when it comes to the prevalent anti-antisemitic discourse within Imperial German Social Democracy, matters are in fact rather more complicated.

Take the following incident that occurred in the autumn of 1898 during Rosa Luxemburg's ill-fated tenure at the helm of the *Sächsische*

Arbeiter-Zeitung in Dresden. (Her short-lived appointment in Dresden made her the first female editor-in-chief of a Socialist daily in Germany.) On 18 October 1898, she published a rejoinder in the paper directed at the anti-semitic *Deutsche Wacht*. 'The *Deutsche Wacht*', she wrote, 'naturally did not like the remarks in our paper' about the recent congress of the antisemitic *Deutschsoziale Reformpartei* in Kassel. It now sought 'to give itself a sense of satisfaction by hurling 25 lines of abuse at us which conclude with the statement that one could have no serious dealings with "a Jewish madam who churns out such tasteful clichés". Unfortunately', Luxemburg explained, 'I must disappoint the *Deutsche Wacht*. The remarks it found so injurious were in this case not by me but by my perfectly Christian colleague'.²⁸

So, what had the *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung* actually had to say about the antisemitic congress in the first place? The editors of Luxemburg's collected works, in their annotation of her rejoinder, provide us with the following information about the initial report in the *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung*: 'Criticism was directed especially against the antisemitic stance of the party as well as its support for the imperialist armament policies'.²⁹ Well obviously, one is tempted to think, of course a critical article about an antisemitic party congress would be directed 'especially against the antisemitic stance of the party'. It seems almost redundant to say so.

Let us take a look, then, at the initial report published in the *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung* on 12 October 1898. It is in fact the first of the two texts whose 'Jewish connection' I asked my readers to spot at the beginning of this introduction:

The Antisemites held their party congress in Kassel from 8 to 10 October. The deliberations began with a toast to the *Kaiser* and a Bismarck commemoration. In the debate that followed the report of the *Fraktion* on parliamentary activities, Werner reprimanded the stance of those members of the *Fraktion* that had voted *against the naval bill* while Bindewald defended this course. Subsequently, the main point of discussion was the *Mittelstandspolitik*. Two motions were carried stipulating, firstly, that the party should oppose cooperative associations and junk markets as well as female competition in offices and shops and, secondly, that it should strive for the abolition of all cooperative associations for civil servants and officers as well as of all private savings associations.³⁰

This short text does offer several of the anti-antisemitic arguments we will become familiar with in the course of our discussion: the antisemites claim

²⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, 'Die "Deutsche Wacht"', in *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung* 9, 242 (18 October 1898): 3; reprint in *eadem*, *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1970–1975): 1-I: 256. Hereafter Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke*.

²⁹ Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke* 1-I: 256 n2.

³⁰ 'Die Antisemiten,' in *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung* 9, 237 (12 October 1898): 2.

to be anti-authoritarian, yet in fact they revere Bismarck and the *Kaiser*. They cannot agree among one another even on issues as important as the naval bill. Their policies are designed to get one over on their professional and commercial rivals. Crucially, however, what does not feature in this short piece is any reference whatsoever to the antisemites' stance regarding 'the Jews'. What, then, are we to make of the suggestion that its 'criticism was directed especially against the antisemitic stance of the party', as the annotation to Luxemburg's rejoinder suggested? This case is paradigmatic for the way in which scholarship to date has often automatically *assumed* that Social Democratic anti-antisemitism *surely* took issue with the antisemites' anti-Jewish stance. How could it not have done so?

Yet in fact, the Social Democratic approach to antisemitism was rather more diffuse than that. Imperial German Social Democrats applied three main criteria to identify who or what was antisemitic. Firstly, and probably more often than not, the term antisemitic was used simply to denote the self-avowed party-political affiliation of those involved in the antisemitic movement. Yet, deputies elected to the *Reichstag* on an antisemitic ticket, for instance, obviously considered 'the Jewish Question' their foremost priority but they were not necessarily one-issue politicians. They frequently spoke on any number of issues and whatever they had to say on those matters was then considered 'antisemitic'. Consequently, a wide range of criticisms could be (and were) levelled against 'antisemites' without necessarily making the slightest reference, critical or otherwise, specifically to their stance regarding 'the Jews'. Needless to say, most organised political antisemites were rabid anti-Socialists. It is hardly surprising that this was an 'antisemitic' trait the Socialists particularly liked to brandish. Yet this, in and of itself, obviously implied no critique of the antisemites' anti-Jewish orientation.

The second criterion did hinge on attitudes towards 'the Jews': individuals, groups or ideologies that *explicitly* called for the reversal of the emancipation process, *explicitly* professed to hold Jewry responsible for all the woes of the world and therefore *explicitly* claimed that the curtailment or removal of the Jews would more or less instantaneously rectify all of society's maladies were classified as antisemites. Anti-Jewish sentiments or stereotypes that did not find their expression in these explicit formulations, on the other hand, in and of themselves were considered neither antisemitic nor problematic unless they were articulated by political opponents.

The third criterion, then, hinged not on *what* was said about Jews, but on the crucial question of *who* was speaking *about whom*. It struck Social Democrats as perfectly legitimate to remark critically on the, as they saw it, 'actual' Jewishness of bourgeois Jews. Yet, an essentially identical remark could well strike them as antisemitic when it was directed by a political opponent against the, to their minds, 'alleged' Jewishness of one of their comrades of Jewish extraction who had (supposedly) relinquished his (or her) Jewish identity.

When trying to assess Imperial German anti-antisemitism, the first thing we need to establish is whether any given instance of anti-antisemitism actually took issue with the antisemites' stance regarding 'the Jews' in the first place. If so, we then need to ask in a second step to what extent those anti-antisemitic arguments that did address the antisemites' attitudes towards 'the Jews' took issue with the sorts of concerns that compel us to anathematise antisemitism. In the course of our discussion we will come across numerous problematic anti-antisemitic 'arguments' popular among Social Democrats. To clarify the problem, some of them should perhaps be indicated at this point. The Jews were indeed exploiters, it was usually conceded, but it was untrue that they only exploited non-Jews. While they did ordinarily stick together, a similar argument went, the fact that they were not quite as clannish as the antisemites suggested was demonstrated by the readiness with which they sacrificed all solidarity among one another for profit's sake. Antisemitism offered no genuine solution, it was argued, because even if all Jews were removed non-Jews would take on their roles as exploiters. Did the non-Jewish majority not realise, it was asked, that it would be showing itself up (and giving the Jews far too much credit) if it conceded that it had failed to prevent the Jewish minority from wreaking all the havoc the antisemites ascribed to the Jews? Another line of argument suggested that the antisemites would only provoke Jewry into refusing further assimilation and falling back into its admittedly ghastly clannish ways. Hence, the antisemites would in fact only aggravate the very problem they claimed to offer a solution for (a problem that indeed required a solution, as the Social Democrats readily conceded). If non-Jews had failed to get the better of the Jews in the past, it was suggested, then the antisemites stood no chance of doing so in future either. Great emphasis was placed on the (alleged) disingenuousness of the antisemitic activists. They claimed to be democrats and anti-capitalists but in fact they were in cahoots with the capitalist and reactionary establishment. They themselves borrowed money or bought products from Jews while calling on their compatriots to boycott the Jews. In fact, they were the ones who would take over the Jews' roles as exploiters if the Jews really were removed, and their antisemitism was merely a ploy to achieve this goal. Social Democrats took great pleasure in pointing out that numerous leaders of party-political antisemitism had criminal records for libel or perjury or had in the past been forced to declare themselves bankrupt. Moreover, they were disunited and competed among one another, often in the most vicious ways. In short: the antisemites were in (almost) every respect so unpleasant that one would (almost) rather be a Jew than an antisemite.

Many of these problematic ostensible counter arguments obviously sprung from the basic notion that antisemitism was essentially a form of anti-capitalist protest that did not go far enough. Social Democrats did not make up these 'arguments' to gain a pretext that would allow them to avoid

the anathematisation of antisemitism lest they alienate its supporters (whom Social Democracy hoped to win over in the long run). They refrained from its anathematisation not for tactical reasons but because they genuinely believed that the arguments on which the antisemitic case hinged were, within the limits they pointed out, correct. In fact, of course, the problem with antisemitism is not that it does not take its own anti-capitalist impulse seriously enough but that it conceptualises and articulates it with a thrust that precludes *a priori* any possibility of a development in which anti-capitalism and human emancipation, instead of being pitted against one another, might become inextricably linked. All the contextualising sensibility of the world cannot change the fact that in this respect Social Democracy's dealings with antisemitism were excruciatingly inept.

In short, we must fundamentally reconsider our approach to the anti-antisemitism of Imperial German Social Democracy. We need to determine on a case-to-case basis whether any given instance of Social Democratic opposition to antisemitism hinged on genuine opposition specifically to the antisemites' stance *vis-à-vis* 'the Jews' and how effectively (if at all) it did so. Once we do so, Imperial German Social Democracy's publicly articulated anti-antisemitism very quickly dries up to little more than a barely discernible trickle.

THE 'PHILOSEMITISM' DISCOURSE

To complicate matters yet further, much of the Social Democratic discourse pertaining to antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' in fact addressed neither directly and instead hinged on a critique of 'philosemitism'. This will be a recurrent theme throughout the book, but a few more general remarks on the matter seem in order at this point because most scholars use the term 'philosemitism' with only the slightest conceptual underpinning, if any. For reasons that will become clearer in the course of our discussion, 'philosemitism' is, to my mind, a term we should use with the utmost discrimination and only to denote very specific and clearly defined phenomena; ultimately, it is a term that we should only ever use in inverted commas.³¹

Hans Joachim Schoeps, to give one example for the sort of specific phenomena I have in mind, famously applied the term to the dealings of a small number of seventeenth-century Christian intellectuals (especially millenarians) with an equally limited number of rabbinic scholars.³² Here the term made a certain amount of sense because it denoted the way in which the essentially conversionist agenda of these 'philosemites' inadvertently paved

³¹ For an interesting discussion of some of the following issues, cf. Wolfram Kinzig, 'Philosemitismus,' in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 105, 2 (1994): 202–228 and 105, 3 (1994): 361–383.

³² Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Philosemitismus im Barock* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1952).

the way for an unprecedented degree of mutual respect and a genuine fascination with Judaism. To give another example, the term has also been applied, this time pejoratively, to characterise a strategy adopted by the bulk of the political class and polite society in West Germany and Austria for some four decades after 1945 to deal with the perpetrator societies' implication in the Shoah.³³ It allowed society to distance itself as conspicuously as possible from the antisemitic consensus that had facilitated the perpetration of the Shoah without critically examining and addressing that consensus and its origins and dynamics. Hence, a wilfully positive attitude towards Jewry (or at least towards certain Jews) was displayed that in fact maintained the traditional stereotypes but simply inverted their evaluation. Where one previously spoke of the sly and exploitative rich Jew one now referred to the smart and economically successful Jew and so on. Similarly, the outspoken support for the State of Israel that tended to be part and parcel of this 'philosemitism' was ultimately an outgrowth of the notion that Jewry was the anti-nation, the negation of the national principle. The State of Israel was seen as the most effective check on Jewry's supposedly anti-national proclivities that could be achieved under the current circumstances, and therefore deserved support. The term 'philosemitism' was hardly well chosen to denote this strategy, but the phenomenon it refers to can at least be clearly defined and identified.

In the Imperial German context, the term 'philosemitism' had a very clear connotation.³⁴ The organised political antisemites initially introduced the term to denounce their opponents, and it promptly became a generally accepted shorthand to denote all those who opposed organised political antisemitism. This usage obviously signifies an equally general acceptance of the assumption that there could, on this matter, be no neutral ground. One could only be either for the Jews or against them. The mechanism by which the Jews were singled out as a distinct group supposedly necessitating this sort of harsh choice in the first place, however, was not debated.

These terms of reference also made it possible to rationalise one's anti-Jewish sentiments and partial sympathies for the antisemitic cause and render them respectable by formulating them as a critique, not of Jewry but of 'philosemitism'. This procedure will strike not least those unsettled by the increasingly ferocious populist onslaught of recent years on affirmative action and 'political correctness' as disquietingly familiar. Among Social Democrats, this procedure hinged not least on the contention that 'philosemitism' purported to defend the Jews against antisemitism only in order to defend capitalism – a notion that was to remain popular

³³ Cf. Frank Stern, 'Philosemitismus. Stereotype über den Feind, den man zu lieben hat,' in *Babylon* No. 8 (1991): 15–26.

³⁴ Cf. Michael Brenner, "'Gott schütze uns vor unseren Freunden" – Zur Ambivalenz des Philosemitismus im Kaiserreich,' in *JbA* 2 (1993): 174–199.

on the political Left far beyond the context of Imperial German Social Democracy.

Against this background, the use of the term ‘philosemitism’ to simply denote the fact that not all non-Jews were at all times unrelentingly awful to all Jews or as a blanket term for opposition to antisemitism in one guise or another strikes me as problematic and prone to reproduce the very ambiguities that characterised the usage of the term in Imperial Germany. Hence, where ‘non-antisemitic’ or ‘anti-antisemitic’ might just as aptly describe a given historical (or contemporary) stance, the term ‘philosemitism’ should really be avoided.

Imperial German Social Democracy’s anti-‘philosemitism’ is at the heart of the discussion in Chapter 1. It has generally been argued that this critique of ‘philosemitism’ was a pet obsession of Mehring’s, but it will become more than evident that it was in fact widely accepted among German Social Democrats. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the ways in which Imperial German Social Democrats appropriated Karl Marx’s ‘Zur Judenfrage’. On this count too it has generally been argued that Mehring’s stance was an exceptional one. Yet, as we will see, other leading Social Democrats made rather more extensive and substantial references to ‘Zur Judenfrage’ than the literature has hitherto suggested. On the other hand, they all misunderstood and misrepresented the actual argument of ‘Zur Judenfrage’ and its role for the development of Marx’s thought in a number of significant ways, which rules out any suggestion that ‘Zur Judenfrage’ exerted a formative influence on them. In other words, it failed to exert this formative influence not, as most of the more recent literature suggests, because Socialists did not know or failed to acknowledge ‘Zur Judenfrage’ as an authoritative source but because their preconceptions prevented them from ever engaging the position Marx had actually developed in ‘Zur Judenfrage’ in the first place.

A particularly interesting test case for the extent to which Social Democracy actually took issue specifically with the antisemites’ attitudes towards ‘the Jews’ is its treatment of former antisemites. What, we might ask, beyond the change of party-political affiliation, made a former antisemite a *former* antisemite? Chapters 4–6 deal with this issue in some detail by examining the case of the former antisemitic deputy, Hans Leuß (1861–1920).

Chapter 7 takes a more systematic look at the evolution of Eduard Bernstein’s stance on antisemitism and ‘the Jewish Question’ up to the middle of the First World War. Bernstein has generally been singled out as a Socialist of particular sensitivity for these matters. Consequently, Bernstein and Mehring are often presented as the two extreme points that delineate the continuum of positions *vis-à-vis* antisemitism and ‘the Jews’ prevalent among the Social Democratic elites. The deconstruction of this juxtaposition is one of this book’s main themes. It will become clear that on this particular issue neither Bernstein nor Mehring strayed very far from the clearly discernible mainstream and that the continuum whose opposing ends they supposedly

represented was rather shorter and more densely populated than the scholarship to date suggests. Because of the centrality of this line of argument, Bernstein and Mehring feature particularly prominently in my discussion. By contrast, Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), who emerged as the chief theoretician of the Second International after Engels's death in 1895 and therefore forms a crucial focal point for Jack Jacobs's discussion, plays a less explicit role in my account. None too surprisingly, though, in most of the relevant debates and controversies involving Bernstein and/or Mehring that I discuss Kautsky was in fact never far and in all these instances one would be hard pressed to discern a substantial difference between Kautsky's approach and that of his peers. I do nevertheless intend to offer a more comprehensive discussion of Kautsky elsewhere.

Chapter 7 ends with a rather bizarre but intensely telling episode in the autumn of 1904, in which none other than Mehring publicly accused Bernstein of antisemitism. This episode is particularly instructive not least because Bernstein, in his attempt to refute Mehring's accusation, pointed his readers to a text of which we today would have not the slightest cause to suspect that it refers critically to (supposedly) Jewish qualities had Bernstein himself not told us so on this occasion.

The conclusion, finally, offers a tentative discussion of a series of remarkable anti-antisemitic articles Rosa Luxemburg published in the autumn of 1910. Though Luxemburg shared in the Socialist *consensus communis* on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' to a considerable degree, these articles nevertheless offer us a tantalising glimpse of the fact that it was obviously not objectively impossible for a Marxist of her generation, at least on occasion, to transcend some of the conceptual constraints that underpinned it. Luxemburg hence emerges, to some extent, as the exception that proves the rule. Yet, given her contested status on the margins of Imperial German Social Democracy, this can hardly mitigate the bleak overall picture that emerges of the German Socialists' failure to challenge prevalent anti-Jewish preconceptions.

Chapter 1

Social Democracy's Stance on Antisemitism and the Spectre of 'Philosemitism'

The Social Democratic response to antisemitism in effect amounted to playing *va banque*. This was not recognised, though, for the simple reason that the game was supposedly being played with a double safety net. The first ostensible safety net was afforded by the following assumption: not only the much-discussed unpleasant traits ascribed to Jewry but ultimately all features distinguishing Jews from non-Jews merely reflected a specific socio-economic constellation and Jewry's role and status within that constellation. Since historical progress would render this particular socio-economic constellation obsolete, all the features currently still setting Jewry apart, and thus Jewry itself as a distinct entity, would become equally obsolete and consequently disappear. The assumption offering the second ostensible safety net was this: antisemitism could only take hold among specific strata of society. Which sections of society would take to antisemitism could again be defined in socio-economic terms. Those whose livelihoods and economic activities were becoming increasingly incompatible with the emerging fully fledged capitalist economy responded with a cryptic form of anti-capitalist protest in the form of antisemitism. Yet, once their form of economic existence had been rendered entirely obsolete, these strata would also disappear altogether, just as the Jews would.

If Jewry and antisemitism were both destined to disappear as history progressed, the whole issue was obviously at best a transient one and the only substantial problem with antisemitism was its ability to muddy the waters. Yet, reality itself would solve this problem. Mehring for one was convinced that all the 'healthy' elements currently in the antisemites' thrall would in the end invariably cling to the 'rock' that was the working class (which for him, needless to say, was not a sociological but a political category). In fact it was just as well that they did not try to clamber onto that rock at an earlier stage. After all,

had all the ruined farmers and petty-bourgeois individuals with their confused illusions gone over to Social Democracy straight away, the party would have had a hard nut to crack and it may well be that all the theoretical instruction of the world would not have drummed economic dialectics into them as quickly as antisemitism will do as a result of its practical effectiveness.¹

¹ Franz Mehring, 'Das zweite Wahlergebnis,' in *NZ* 11-II, 41 (28 June 1893): 417-421, here 420.

By 'practical effectiveness' he meant, of course, the exact opposite – the fact that none of the antisemites' prescriptions would ever be able to remedy the problems they claimed they could solve. Not only, then, would the inevitable course of development invariably rob antisemitism of its prerequisites (the Jews as a target and the social strata susceptible to it). While it still existed, it would also prove ineffective and therefore ultimately function as an additional eye-opener, underscoring yet further that Socialism alone offered genuine solutions.

As already mentioned, those who publicly opposed the emerging political antisemitism in the 1870s were promptly referred to, by general consent, as 'philosemites', even though calling them 'non-antisemites' or 'anti-antisemites' would have been far more accurate. As is well known not least from Abraham Cahan's recollections of the International Socialist Congress in Brussels in 1891,² opposition to this 'philosemitism' was certainly popular with French Socialists. Moreover, as Cahan recalled, the leading German Social Democrat, Paul Singer (1844–1911), and the leader of the Austrian party, Victor Adler (1852–1918), both themselves of Jewish extraction, vehemently pleaded with him to withdraw his anti-antisemitic motion at the Congress in Brussels to avoid a show down. They made it perfectly clear that they would under no circumstances let themselves be forced into a position where they might be seen to defend Jews. Hence, in the event, they raised no objections, to say the least, to the International Congress's final resolution which was then directed with equal emphasis, as the resolution put it, against both antisemitic and philosemitic 'incitement'.

Ultimately, 'philosemitism' was in fact assumed by some to be made of more solid stuff than antisemitism. Mehring certainly was in no doubt as to which was the more daunting foe: 'The brutalities committed against the Jews by antisemitism, in words rather than deeds, should not lead us to loose sight of the brutalities philosemitism commits, in deeds rather than words, against anyone, be he Jew or Turk, Christian or Pagan, who resists capitalism', he wrote in 1891 in a much-cited formulation. For, as he went on to explain, 'philosemitism opposes antisemitism only to the extent that antisemitism opposes capitalism. Antisemitism is capitalism *avec phrase*, philosemitism, however, is capitalism *sans phrase*'.³

Mehring's case is particularly instructive because here we know for sure what in other instances we can only infer, namely, that his appropriation of the 'philosemitism' discourse took place before he became a Socialist. It

² Abraham Cahan, *bleter fun mayn lebn* 3 (New York: Forverts, 1926): 149–185; Cf. also Edmund Silberner, 'Anti-Semitism and Philo-Semitism in the Socialist International,' in *Judaism* 2, 2 (1953): 117–122; Jack Jacobs, 'Die Sozialistische Internationale, der Antisemitismus und die jüdisch-sozialistischen Parteien des Russischen Reiches,' in Wladislaw Hedeler et al. (eds.), *Ausblicke auf das vergangene Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: VSA, 1996): 156–168.

³ Franz Mehring, 'Anti- und Philosemitisches,' in *NZ* 9-II, 45 (27 July 1891): 585–588, here 587.

in fact transpired when he was a rabid anti-Socialist.⁴ It cannot, therefore, by any stretch of the imagination, be the outflow of a specifically Marxist critique of capitalism. We know this for sure because of a rather remarkable incident, in 1891, related by Thomas Höhle, the biographer of the early Mehring who essentially accepted Mehring's own point of view on the matter. In that year, Mehring was publicly accused 'of having, at one and the same time, written pro-semitic articles for the *Volks-Zeitung* and antisemitic ones in the *Saale-Zeitung* which was untrue on both counts'.⁵ Mehring subsequently 'refuted the senseless attacks concerning pro- and antisemitism'⁶ by offering a comparison of relevant articles demonstrating, as he saw it, that he had formulated the same stance throughout. Yet, as Mehring himself pointed out, 'I admit [...] that this evidence is not entirely conclusive' because the indictment might actually be taking issue with 'my perfectly reticent objections to certain philosemitic excesses'.⁷ Which articles had he chosen to compare? He wrote: 'Of the incidentally only very few "strongly antisemitic" articles I wrote for the *Saale-Zeitung* I have chosen the one that led to a boycott of the paper by Jewish subscribers and advertisers and which one might, therefore, assume to be the "most strongly antisemitic" of them all'. As he hastened to add, 'it also epitomizes the general attitude of that paper to the Jewish question'.⁸ By contrast, 'of the again very few articles on antisemitism that I published in the *Volks-Zeitung* I do not want to focus on the one that led, in 1886, to a boycott of the paper by Jewish subscribers and advertisers, because it was not by me [...] and I merely published it'.⁹ The context here is a polemical one, of course, and Mehring's mood clearly defiant. Even so, the way in which he himself introduced the fact that he had on two occasions, once directly and once indirectly, caused Jewish boycott calls against papers for which he was working is surely remarkable. Far from being a source of soul searching or contrition for him, these boycott calls obviously struck him as veritable badges of honour.

⁴ Mehring's path to Socialism was not only long and difficult, but also full of vacillations and detours, some of them quite dramatic. Born into a conservative Protestant family, Mehring had started his career as a left-liberal journalist and indulged in an initial flirtation with Social Democracy in the mid-1870s. Then he had become a zealous anti-Socialist, building a reputation for himself as an expert on the application of anti-Socialist strategies and someone capable of lending those strategies scholarly respectability. By the mid-1880s, he had returned to the left-liberal fold and eventually stood at the helm of the *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, the left-liberal flag ship in northern Germany and the only non-Socialist paper to be temporarily banned during the *Sozialistengesetz*, before finally becoming a Social Democrat in 1890, at the age of 45.

⁵ Thomas Höhle, *Franz Mehring* (Berlin: Rütten & Loenig [2nd revised edition], 1958): 274. Hereafter Höhle, *Franz Mehring*. Höhle's monograph was first published in 1956.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁷ Franz Mehring, *Kapital und Presse* (Berlin: Kurt Brachvogel, 1891): 82–83. Hereafter Mehring, *Kapital und Presse*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 83. ⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

What then of the comparison he offered? The article he chose from the *Saale-Zeitung* was one written in September 1881, when he was a militant anti-Socialist. It dealt with the extensive (or in his eyes not so extensive) anti-Jewish unrest that swept his home province of Pomerania that year.¹⁰ In this article he claimed that 'the philosemitic incitement of the local papers carries a considerable degree of responsibility for such unrest as did actually occur' and then stated:

We hope that the *Saale-Zeitung* will continue to uphold its established and upright stand, respecting every honest and decent person, be he Christian, Jew, Turk, or whatever else, but also denouncing every form of mendacity and deceit, every instance of usury, not only when they are committed by Germans or Turks, but also when they are committed by Jews.

Again we meet the Turks as a rhetorical device deployed by Mehring to emphasise the alleged equanimity and detachment of his approach. Yet the Turks promptly disappear from the equation again when it comes to what Mehring would have us believe is the actual alternative here: 'Neither incitement against Jews, nor Jewish domination: the same rights for all citizens, that is the straightforward and unambiguous credo which is entirely in keeping with Liberalism and is equally opposed to philo- and antisemitic incitement'.¹¹

The article from the *Völk-Zeitung* that he offered in comparison was one published in November 1890, at a time when Mehring, now a respected left-liberal publicist, had already fallen from grace with the publishers of the *Völk-Zeitung* and was on the verge of defecting to Social Democracy. This article offered no more than a conventional critique of the leading Christian Social antisemite, Adolf Stoecker (1835–1909), without as much as an allusion to 'philosemitism'. In fact, then, Mehring could equally well have argued that he had abandoned his anti-'philosemitic' commitment and that the later text differed from the earlier one not out of hypocrisy but because he had changed his mind. Yet nothing could have been further from Mehring's mind. Having contrasted a juicy anti-'philosemitic' rant with a tame anti-antisemitic text without even a hint at the existence of

¹⁰ Cf. Bernhard Vogt, 'Antisemitismus und Justiz im Kaiserreich: Der Synagogenbrand in Neustettin,' in Margret Heitmann, Julius H. Schoeps (eds.), *"Halte fern dem ganzen Lande jedes Verderben..."* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1995): 379–399; Stephen C. J. Nicholls, *The Burning of the Synagogue in Neustettin* (Brighton: Centre for German-Jewish Studies, 1999); Christhard Hoffmann, 'Politische Kultur und Gewalt gegen Minderheiten: Die antisemitischen Ausschreitungen in Pommern und Westpreußen, 1881, in *JbA* 3 (1994): 93–120; idem, 'Political Culture and Violence against Minorities: The Antisemitic Riots in Pomerania and West Prussia,' in Christhard Hoffmann et al. (eds.), *Exclusionary Violence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002): 67–92.

¹¹ Mehring, *Kapital und Presse*, 84.

'philosemitism' he nevertheless reached the somewhat stunning conclusion that 'as one can see, in all instances [...] I weave the same thread'.¹²

This claim is mind-boggling enough. More important for our discussion, though, is this: writing in 1891, at the very juncture at which he was finally becoming a Social Democrat, Mehring himself not only published material clearly demonstrating that he acquired his anti-'philosemitism' in the period of his militant anti-Socialism but also used the opportunity to publicly reaffirm his commitment to this anti-'philosemitism'. This is all the more remarkable, given that he himself pointed out, as we saw, that it was presumably this anti-'philosemitism' that had been misconstrued as antisemitism by his critics in the first place. He now maintained that his anti-'philosemitism' in the very form in which he had expressed it while still an embittered opponent of Socialism was free of any ambiguity that would justify its characterisation as ultimately antisemitic. Thus we have Mehring's own word for it that his 'Marxist' anti-'philosemitism' was identical with his pre-Marxist and anti-Socialist anti-'philosemitism' and that his appropriation of Marxism required no modification of this anti-'philosemitism'. On the other hand, the fact that Mehring was able to publish his anti-'philosemitic' rants in as solid a National Liberal paper as the *Saale-Zeitung* is noteworthy in its own right. It gives a clear indication that anti-'philosemitism' was by no means a preserve of the Socialist Left but acceptable to mainstream Liberals too.

Mehring's 'obsession' or 'preoccupation with the iniquities of philo-Semitism'¹³ is undeniable and it invariably lends a far-reaching ambiguity to all his anti-antisemitic utterances. In at least one hitherto apparently unnoticed instance this ambiguity even earned him the praise of a periodical whose sympathies for the antisemites were quite clear-cut, namely the weekly journal *Die Grenzboten*, edited at the time by Johannes Grunow. In a survey of the Social Democratic press, in its 21 April 1892 edition, it remarked that an article in the *Neue Zeit* had aroused its 'unmitigated delight'. The article in question discussed the case of Paul Marx, a journalist who had sued the most respectable of German papers, the *Vossische Zeitung*, for unfair dismissal claiming that he had been sacked simply because he was

¹² Ibid., 86. The butt of Mehring's most viciously anti-'philosemitic' remarks in *Kapital und Presse* was a journalist called Woth. Woth had allegedly lost his post with the *Saale-Zeitung* because he refused to publish Mehring's anti-'philosemitic' articles. Mehring claimed that he had in no way been implicated in Woth's departure from the paper. That Mehring was clearly lying is borne out by correspondence between Mehring and the head of the paper's *Feuilleton*, the Orientalist Richard Gosche (1824–1889) (SAPMO-BArch NY 4043/8 Bl. 21, 23–29.) Cf. Lars Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses to Antisemitism and the Judenfrage in Imperial Germany*. PhD Thesis, UCL (University of London), 2003, 28 n12. Hereafter Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*.

¹³ Robert S. Wistrich, 'Anti-Capitalism or Antisemitism? The Case of Franz Mehring,' in *LBIYB* 22 (1977): 35–51, here 47. Hereafter Wistrich, 'Anti-Capitalism'; idem, *Socialism*, 123–124.

of Jewish origin. The 'lesson from the affair' that the article in the *Neue Zeit* had discussed in a 'rather humorous' fashion was 'that, however strong the bond of Jewry's common interest, the bond of the capitalist interest was ultimately always stronger and when push came to shove the former always gave way to the latter'.¹⁴

Mehring had indeed argued that the fate of Paul Marx epitomised the 'philosemitic' hypocrisy. The same political spectrum that ordinarily screamed blue murder when Jews became the victims of an anti-capitalist critique immediately sensed that in this particular case a rather different principle was at stake: never mind that the victim was a Jew, 'every capitalist has the right to throw his slaves onto the street when it suits him and that's that!'¹⁵ Consequently, Marx's case should prove particularly instructive for the 'honest antisemites', Mehring reasoned, those 'who due to an essentially honourable hatred for the moral hideousness of capitalism want to eliminate the Jews as the allegedly sole cause of that hideousness'.¹⁶

It hardly seems surprising that Mehring has generally been singled out, either as someone whose utterances 'reveal in a particularly illuminating manner the tactical and ideological dilemmas confronting the labour movement in the 1890s and the difficulty in demarcating the Marxist from the anti-Semitic critique of liberal capitalism',¹⁷ or as an outright 'special case'.¹⁸ In part, this notion hinges on a quantitative argument. 'No other socialist wrote as extensively on the Jewish question'¹⁹ as did Mehring, nor, we might add, did any of his peers address the 'iniquities of philosemitism'²⁰ as extensively, persistently and with as much vitriol. It has become widely accepted that the extent, persistence and heftiness of this coverage was directly proportionate to the strength of his 'obsession' with the matter. Yet this line of argument disregards the fact that few of his peers wrote as extensively on any issue as did Mehring on this one (or others, for that matter), nor did he criticise other phenomena with any less contempt. This issue is worth exploring in a little more detail.

¹⁴ 'Von der sozialdemokratischen Presse,' in *Grenzboten* 51, 17 (21 April 1892): 180–182, here 180.

¹⁵ Franz Mehring, 'Der Fall Marx,' in *NZ* 10-I, 16 (6 January 1892): 481–485, here 483. Hereafter Mehring, 'Fall Marx'. Cf. also idem, 'Kapital und Presse,' in *NZ* 10-II, 30 (14 April 1892): 97–101, here 100.

¹⁶ Mehring, 'Fall Marx,' 481. ¹⁷ Wistrich, *Socialism*, 116; cf. idem, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 36.

¹⁸ Cf., for instance, Silberner, *Sozialisten*, 198, 201–203, 289; Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 162–171; Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus von links* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002): 190 n27. Hereafter Haury, *Antisemitismus von links*; Reinhard Rürup, 'Sozialdemokratie und Antisemitismus im deutschen Kaiserreich,' in Micha Brumlik, Doron Kiesel, Linda Reisch (eds.), *Der Antisemitismus und die Linke* (Frankfurt/Main: Haag und Herchen, 1991) [hereafter Brumlik et al. (eds.), *Antisemitismus*], 17–31, here 23. Hereafter Rürup, 'Sozialdemokratie'; Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978): 422 n2. Hereafter Carlebach, *Karl Marx*.

¹⁹ Wistrich, *Socialism*, 116; idem, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 35. ²⁰ Idem, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 47.

The two leading Social Democrats who produced comparable quantities of relatively high-quality journalistic work were Kautsky and Bernstein. Yet their situation differed from Mehring's in several relevant and telling ways. Throughout the nineties, when the bulk of Mehring's particularly problematic articles on antisemitism and 'philosemitism' were written, Kautsky, as the *de facto* editor-in-chief of the *Neue Zeit*, lived in Stuttgart, while Bernstein, due to the prosecution pending in Germany for his illegal activities during the *Sozialistengesetz*, was stuck in London. Kautsky was partly tied down by administrative duties and focused mainly on theoretical and especially economic issues. Bernstein concentrated particularly on theoretical issues and the international movement. Both were at liberty to contribute articles on current affairs if and when they saw fit. Yet, unlike Mehring, neither of them was the Berlin correspondent of the journal and thus compelled to churn out editorials on a weekly basis that unlocked the deeper meaning of current events in a city that was both the empire's capital and a major focal point of antisemitic activism.

Given the heavy journalistic workload he shouldered, it is perhaps little wonder that Mehring recycled what he held to be his expertise in any given field wherever possible. Once he had taken on a certain issue, for whatever initial reason, his readers were highly unlikely ever to hear the last of it. His determination to spell out what he held to be the implications of Marxism for as many aspects of life as possible was thus compounded by this habit of relentlessly recycling, not least for reasons of pure expediency, ideas and issues he felt he had at some point managed to formulate rather aptly. The likes of Bernstein, Kautsky and the party's uncontested leader during the first half-century of its existence, August Bebel (1840–1913), tended to comment on antisemitism on fairly rare occasions and in more or less carefully chosen contexts. Generally, these utterances were instantly recognisable as pronouncements of grave ideological significance. Mehring's relevant remarks, by contrast, popped up throughout the huge corpus of his varied writings, in his most banal and his most respectable texts alike. Consequently, they were often likely to catch their readers ideologically at ease or off guard. This would have placed Mehring in an exceptionally good position to challenge prevalent preconceptions, had he wanted to do so. One might therefore argue that he bears a particular responsibility for in fact doing the exact opposite. He obviously enjoyed spelling out, deftly and with verve, what tended to remain abstract ideological formulations in the relevant pronouncements of his peers. That his peers were usually rather more reticent in spelling out in detail what they thought were the implications of the party's official stance on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' is beyond doubt. Yet that does not automatically allow us to surmise that their formulations, had they actually tried to explicate those implications in greater detail, would have been any more palatable to us than the ones Mehring actually came up with.

Moreover, Kautsky and Bernstein surely wrote less regularly about the turbulences caused by the antisemitic movement or the antics of the antisemitic deputies in the *Reichstag* during its sessions in Berlin primarily because they lived in Stuttgart and London and therefore did not directly witness events in Berlin. Automatically to infer from the fact that they commented less frequently on the matter that they were less 'obsessed' with it seems a rather short-circuited procedure. On purely quantitative grounds, then, and given that his remarks pervaded a much broader spectrum of ideologically less charged contexts than comparable pronouncements by his peers, Mehring is indeed likely to have played a particularly strong role in allowing Social Democrats to maintain and rationalise their preconceptions regarding 'the Jews'. This, in and of itself, would only make his role a genuinely exceptional one, though, if we assume that the less frequent utterances of his peers seriously challenged these preconceptions and that Mehring was exceptional in accommodating them.

In short, the assumption that Mehring wrote as extensively on antisemitism and 'philosemitism' as he did simply because he could not help himself is misguided. We in fact need to systematically weight our analysis against this quantitative line of reasoning. One might well argue, after all, that Bernstein's decision, for instance, to comment on the matter on the far less frequent occasions on which he chose to do so is ultimately in greater need of explanation than the fact that Mehring did so as frequently and as extensively as he did. At the very least, Bernstein was in a far better position (and therefore also laboured under a greater responsibility), on those select and self-chosen occasions, to discuss the issue in a more reasoned and more carefully reflected way than Mehring who was continuously compelled to come to a penetrating yet spontaneous assessment of events as they unfolded. Finally, Bernstein and Kautsky could have raised possible misgivings about Mehring's stance on antisemitism and 'the Jews' with him personally. Yet neither of them seems to have done so. Had Mehring's stance genuinely been as exceptional as most of the literature suggests, this would be hard to explain.

It is against this background that we need to examine the 'proof-text' enlisted well nigh universally²¹ to demonstrate that Mehring's stance on 'philosemitism' was supposedly not only exceptional but even criticised publicly within the party: Bernstein's 'Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus' [The Catchphrase and Antisemitism].²² A closer look at this 'warning against the use of the catchword of philo-Semitism'²³ that

²¹ Cf., for example, Massing, *Rehearsal*, 188, 267 n15; Wistrich, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 47; idem, *Socialism*, 124; Na'aman, *Marxismus*, 93. For details, cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 32–33. For a discussion of other references to 'philosemitism' by Bernstein cf. Chapter 7.

²² Eduard Bernstein, 'Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus,' in *NZ* 11-II, 35 (17 May 1893): 228–237. Hereafter Bernstein, 'Schlagwort'.

²³ Massing, *Rehearsal*, 188.

supposedly 'cautioned the Social Democratic Party against ambiguity of language and attitude in the Jewish question'²⁴ is well worth the effort.

The text is in fact a review article. 'It is my task', Bernstein began,

to review three publications²⁵ dealing with the Jewish or, some might argue, the so-called Jewish question. According to the terminology widely accepted in the Socialist press too, these publications would have to be classified to the effect that two of them are antisemitic while the third is distinctly philosemitic. Somehow I am just not comfortable with this juxtaposition, though, and I have decided, partly in order to develop the reasons for my diverging opinion, partly since it strikes me as being an issue of current interest anyway, to combine this review [...] with the discussion of a number of aspects not always given sufficient consideration in the assessment of antisemitism.²⁶

Although the juxtaposition of anti- and philosemitism is indeed the single most important theme running through Bernstein's article, it also touches on numerous other issues. Bernstein repeatedly deployed anti-Jewish stereotypes, sometimes ironically, sometimes in earnest, to underscore his critique of the authors at hand. 'If it really is a principle of "Jewish commerce" to put quantity and cheap showmanship before quality', he mocked in one instance, 'then Herr Waldhausen's text is indeed an example for the contagiousness of a bad example. [...] The shallowest Viennese *Judenliterat* could not have worked less conscientiously'.²⁷ Resorting to another anti-antisemitic line of argument popular at the time, Bernstein contended that even based on 'only moderately sound judgement', anyone who read Waldhausen's publication 'in an unprejudiced manner' had to conclude 'that the Jews could not possibly have wreaked all the havoc he ascribes to them, unless they had become involved with spiritually and morally totally depraved peoples'.²⁸

One of the issues discussed by the other antisemitic publication under review was the fact that when charged to appear in court Jews were more likely than non-Jews to be acquitted. Bernstein criticised the author of the pamphlet for using this 'merely as proof for the greater slyness and scrupulousness etc. of the Jews'. A number of objections to this line of reasoning spring to mind, the most obvious being that of those dragged before the courts the Jews were really more often innocent of the charges brought against them than the non-Jews. After all, in a social climate pervaded by anti-Jewish sentiments, it would hardly be surprising if unfounded

²⁴ Ibid., 267 n15.

²⁵ The publications in question were: Wilhelm Giese, *Die Juden und die deutsche Kriminalstatistik* (Leipzig: F. W. Grunow, 1893); Robert Waldhausen, *Jüdisches Erwerbsleben* (Passau: Rudolf Abt, 1892); Walter Pohlmann, *Das Judentum und sein Recht* (Leipzig, Neuwied: Heuser, 1893).

²⁶ Bernstein, 'Schlagwort,' 228–229. ²⁷ Ibid., 229. ²⁸ Ibid., 230.

accusations were levelled at Jews with some frequency and non-Jews reasoned that they might be able to enlist the legal system to contain the effects of Jewish emancipation. Yet to Bernstein's mind it was quite right to reject any such 'blanket interpretation of the larger percentage of acquitted Jews in their favour'. What was 'simply ridiculous', though, was to 'attach the stigma of moral guilt to *all* those acquitted'.²⁹ Put simply: the suggestion that Jews are *generally* acquitted because they manipulate the system is unproblematic, problematic is only the attempt to deny that *occasionally* Jews do get off because they are genuinely innocent.

It was only when turning to the third publication under review that Bernstein began to address the issue of 'philosemitism'. There were in fact, Bernstein began, two different types of 'philosemitism'. The first type implied 'merely a certain sympathy for the Jews that rules out neither a condemnation of notorious mistakes nor a repudiation of their presumptuousness where it shows itself'. The other type, by contrast, amounted to 'obsequiousness towards capitalist money-Jewry, support of Jewish chauvinism, glossing over injustices perpetrated by Jews and loathsome characteristics developed by Jews'. While the latter was obviously unacceptable, the former was legitimate, Bernstein conceded. The 'merely' at the beginning of the formulation clearly indicates, though, that Bernstein felt defensive even about this mild, acceptable form of 'philosemitism'. With their critical remarks directed against 'philosemitism', Socialists risked tarring both types of 'philosemitism' with the same brush and thus playing into the hands of the antisemites, Bernstein then explained. For the latter applied the term indiscriminately 'to everyone who will not subscribe to their unconditional condemnation of the Jews and their demand that the Jews be deprived of their rights'. It was this, Bernstein went on, that led him 'to question the wisdom of granting them a certain legitimacy by using the term in the way outlined above'.³⁰

He directed his remarks explicitly at those who for 'very commendable' reasons were the 'most frequent' critics of 'philosemitism' in the party, 'namely the comrades of Jewish descent who, precisely because they are of Jewish extraction, consider it their special duty to spare the party any suspicion of aiding and abetting [*Begünstigung*] Jewish interests'. The usage of this ambiguous catchword, 'which the antisemites use in a completely different sense from the Social Democrats', was not, however, the right way of realising this wish. It 'can be better and more effectively underscored' by referring to the genuine 'other extreme' opposed to antisemitism, namely 'pansemitism'. Antisemitism and pansemitism stood against one another 'as slavophobia and panslavism' do. 'We are as determined in our opposition to the former as we know ourselves free of the latter', Bernstein added in a slightly ambiguous formulation leaving it open whether he was referring

²⁹ Ibid., 232. ³⁰ Ibid., 233.

primarily to matters Slavic, Semitic or both.³¹ The analogy Bernstein introduced here is surely a remarkable one. Panslavism may ultimately have proved a 'phantom',³² rendering the harsh rejection and resentment it provoked from Marx and Engels and much of mainstream Western Socialism quite disproportionate. Yet it was a self-avowed and self-styled ideology that actually existed.

The image of anti-Napoleonic coalition troops entering Paris in March 1814 with Tsar Aleksandr I at their helm was firmly etched into the consciousness of Europe's democrats and radicals. For them, it epitomised Russia's role as the stalwart of reactionary politics in Europe. Hence the prompt rejection by Marx and Engels and their collaborators around the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* of the panslav ideology and movement from its very inception during the revolution of 1848/1849. Far from initiating some novel form of animosity, this rejection cemented an already habitual distrust towards Russia firmly established among European progressives. This is borne out not least by the fact that distinctly non-Marxist and anti-Marxist strands of Western Socialism were subsequently no less partial to this habitual distrust.

As is well known, the Imperial German government consciously (and very successfully) sought to capitalise on this distrust in the immediate run up to World War I when insisting, against the increasingly impatient military leadership, that Russia must under all circumstances be seen to declare war first.³³ In the event, the deeply ingrained Russophobia in fact sufficed for the bulk of Social Democracy to convince itself that it was facing a war of national defence against Russia (and a Russian attempt to quash European civilisation), even though the military ultimately forced the German government's hand without waiting for a Russian declaration of war. Somewhat ironically, given our discussion here, Bernstein too was among the Majority Socialists in early August 1914 and nurtured no doubt at all concerning the alleged Russian war guilt.³⁴

Now, as Na'aman has pointed out, 'true, there were some staunch allies of the Jewish community, motivated largely by religion and humanism, but there was never any movement of sympathy for Jews parallel to anti-semitism'. What in fact transpired here was 'the artificial fostering of

³¹ Ibid., 234.

³² Cf. Harrison Thomson, 'A Century of a Phantom. Panslavism and the Western Slavs,' in *Journal of Central European Affairs* 11, 1 (1951): 57–77; Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953): esp. 82–89; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace, 1958): 222–266.

³³ Cf. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* 3 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995): 1152–1168, esp. 1158, 1165–1166.

³⁴ Cf. Bernstein's own testimony in Eduard Bernstein, 'Entwicklungsgang eines Sozialisten,' in Felix Meiner (ed.), *Die Volkswirtschaftslehre der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen* 1 (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1924): 1–58, here 45. Hereafter Bernstein, 'Entwicklungsgang'.

animosity towards a mythical “philosemitism” which never appeared in concrete form in any broad or narrow movement’.³⁵ Crucially, this ‘juxtaposition of a hypothetical philosemitism *vis-à-vis* a real-existing antisemitism’ culminated in the suggestion that ‘both needed to be rejected in equal degree’.³⁶ This mechanism and the logic behind it, far from being questioned by Bernstein’s line of argument, could in fact only be reinforced by the analogy that he now introduced. After all, he now placed what was, to his mind, an illegitimate form of ‘philosemitism’ on a par with an actually existing, self-styled ideological and political movement; and, what is more, he placed it on a par with a specific self-styled ideological and political movement that was the object of a long-standing enmity on the part of European radicals and Socialists.

It seems rather significant that Bernstein’s text was published in mid-May 1893, less than six weeks after the establishment of the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* [Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith] on 26 March of that year. Born of the insight that German Jewry needed to articulate its own interests in a manner that went beyond mere opposition to antisemitic propaganda, the *Centralverein* soon established itself as the dominant (though never uncontested) voice of mainstream German Jewry prior to 1933. Perhaps Bernstein felt that with its inauguration ‘pansemitism’ had finally become a real-existing movement like panslavism. Should this assumption be correct, we would obviously need to reconsider Bernstein’s motives for writing this article. Perhaps his main concern was that the ‘philosemitism’ discourse as it stood might prevent Social Democrats from appreciating the far more real danger that lay in the ‘pansemitism’ exemplified by the establishment of the *Centralverein* and this event was in fact what convinced Bernstein that he needed to go public with his concerns.

Bernstein went on to explain that antisemitism, though an ostensible barrier against Socialism, would in fact turn out to be its precursor. The commercial dealings of bourgeois society had become so ‘intricately interwoven that no substantial accusation directed against Jews’ could be envisaged that would not at the same time apply ‘on a massive scale’ to non-Jews too. ‘Consequently’, and what now followed is truly remarkable,

the antisemitic propagandists are pushed more and more from ostensible to actual opposition and are eventually genuinely persecuted [...] Temporarily the persecuted antisemites are Social Democracy’s strongest but inherently least robust opponents. They must either eat humble pie in which case the masses will abandon them, or draw the logical conclusion from

³⁵ Shlomo Na’aman, ‘The Beginnings of Historical Animosity Between Marxism and Zionism,’ in Haim Shamir (ed.), *France and Germany in an Age of Crisis* (Leiden, New York: E. J. Brill, 1990): 356–401, here 369, 371. Hereafter Na’aman, ‘Beginnings’.

³⁶ Idem, *Marxismus*, 25.

their persecution and recognize the solidarity between the exploiters of all denominations and then work directly for Social Democracy.

Mehring, as we saw earlier, sought the 'healthy element' within antisemitism primarily in the supposedly duped masses that supported it rather than the functionaries who did the duping. He did not suggest, as Bernstein did here, that the antisemitic activists themselves would be forced either to withdraw their claims or become Social Democrats. At this point, Bernstein's contention amounted to a particularly far-reaching formulation of the assumptions prevalent in the party and certainly went far beyond the claims made by Mehring.

Now, the 'philosemitic' author of the third publication under review, Pohlmann, sought to explain all the Jews' faults merely as an outflow of the centuries of oppression they had suffered. 'Even to the extent that this is the case, and true as it is that the proven faults of the Jews [*die den Juden nachgewiesenen Fehler*] can also be found among non-Jews', Bernstein explained, 'this cannot do away with the fact that certain unpleasant traits are indeed found more frequently among Jews than among non-Jews, albeit not to the extent claimed by the antisemites'. It would amount to a 'pointless whitewash' to want to deny 'that the Jews had executed their economic superiority to the detriment of the people with whom they were involved and that many of the practices in question were still handed down among them when all historical justification for them had long ceased to exist'.³⁷

While formal emancipation might not have fully succeeded in redirecting the Jews into productive professions, it had certainly rendered obsolete 'any excuse for segregation, for a special solidarity among Jews *vis-à-vis* non-Jews, for a tribal or racial morality in dealings between Jews and non-Jews'. Wherever such separatism was to be found 'it cannot be combated forcefully enough. No one will claim that it had disappeared entirely when antisemitism emerged, but that it was rapidly disappearing is borne out by a wealth of evidence'. The antisemites alleged, and in many cases apparently genuinely believed, that their antisemitism targeted these sorts of separatist Jewish practices. Yet it was 'in fact the most suitable means to facilitate their regression and re-ignite them. And it is here, above all, that the critique of antisemitism has to begin [*Und hier hat seine Kritik vor allem einzusetzen*]. There could be no prescription less suited to remedy the maladies it seeks to cure'.³⁸ Again the question arises whether it may not well have been the establishment of the *Centralverein* that specifically alerted Bernstein to this most critique-worthy aspect of antisemitism, namely its ability to (re)generate Jewish separatism. Given that he clearly had no intention of letting any antisemite outdo him in his opposition to this separatism, he must have found the nascent *Centralverein* most irksome and its inauguration may

³⁷ Bernstein, 'Schlagwort,' 236. ³⁸ Ibid., 236–237.

well explain why he felt the need to speak out on the matter in a more principled form at this particular juncture.

It is hard to see how Bernstein's line of argument in 'Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus' should have been any less ambiguous than Mehring's habitual comments. When Mehring asked him about this article, Kautsky replied on 12 June 1893: 'ultimately, I am convinced that your stance and Bernstein's are not in fact all too different. Your differences strike me as being primarily of a formal nature'.³⁹ Nor, for that matter, did Kautsky himself venture to use this opportunity to air any misgivings of his own about the 'philosemitism' discourse.

Although Bernstein had so clearly singled out the usage of the term 'philosemitism' specifically by 'comrades of Jewish descent', Mehring had written to Kautsky on 7 June:

Presumably Bernstein's article on philosemitism and antisemitism was supposed to be an indirect polemic against me? On the issue of antisemitism the difference of opinion seems to be predominantly of a formal nature, on the issue of philosemitism, however, it is apparently of a more principled nature. I think I have already written to you about this on an earlier occasion and have frequently experienced since that it is especially among the advanced workers [*gerade in vorgeschrittenen Arbeiterkreisen*] that 'philosemitism' is regarded just as I understand it.⁴⁰

In his already cited letter, Kautsky replied on 12 June that

as far as I know Bernstein's articles are not directed against you. He has been discussing the issue of philosemitism with me for quite a while; when mentioning people who, to his mind, use the term wrongly, he did not mention you, but particularly Victor Adler in Vienna who indeed propagates a stance similar to yours and [does so], should that be possible, even more emphatically [than you do].

Adler argued the case even more emphatically, Kautsky went on to explain, because Austrian Social Democracy was confronted more frequently and intensely than its German counterpart with a much more virulent antisemitism. 'Nowhere has "philosemitism" emerged in such force as a natural response to antisemitism' as it had in Vienna, Kautsky added. He then characterised 'philosemitism' as 'that school of thought that regards every event and every phenomenon exclusively from the vantage point whether it will benefit or harm the Jews'. It was beyond doubt that 'philosemitism in this sense exists', and it was 'equally indubitable that the antisemites use the word in a different sense than we do'.⁴¹

³⁹ Russian Centre for Preservation and Research of Modern Historical Documents (RCCHIDNI, former IML/CPA), Fonds 201: Franz Mehring: 50. Hereafter Fonds 201.

⁴⁰ IISH Karl Kautsky D XVII: 43.

That Bernstein's much-cited article was in any way suited to 'caution the Social Democratic Party against ambiguity of language and attitude in the Jewish question'⁴² is a claim borne out neither by the text itself, then, nor by the way in which it was discussed by his peers at the time. Far from challenging the fundamental logic and emotive thrust underlying the anti-'philosemitic' argument, Bernstein's article reinforced it and his main concern was not to see anti-'philosemitism' abandoned or curtailed but to see it given its due in the most effective way possible. Kautsky too was critical of 'philosemitism' and could see no substantial difference between Bernstein's and Mehring's position on the matter. The suggestion that Mehring's peers did not share his stance on 'philosemitism' and even criticised it, publicly or otherwise, is therefore simply untenable.

The 'philosemitism' discourse did more, though, than offer a welcome opportunity to rationalise one's anti-Jewish sentiments and render them respectable by formulating them as a critique, not of Jewry, but of 'philosemitism'. It in fact made it an anti-'philosemitic' duty to express those sentiments as clearly as possible in order to prevent 'philosemitism' from obscuring antisemitism's eye-opening function and thus impeding the inevitable historical and socio-economic development that would automatically render both Jewry and antisemitism obsolete. Another factor added to the vehemence with which Social Democrats criticised 'philosemitism', namely the desire to vent their embarrassment of anti-antisemitism. Given that the disappearance of both the social strata susceptible to antisemitism and of Jewry as a distinct entity was supposedly a foregone conclusion, organised political antisemitism, while it still existed, needed to be addressed merely because (and merely to the extent that) it was a reactionary political force. Even where its perceptions and prescriptions did go beyond a critique of 'the Jews' that Social Democrats considered legitimate, they required critical attention only in so far as they helped mobilise support for reactionary politics. Beyond that, antisemitism was best left to its own devices so that it could take its supposedly self-eliminatory course, driving its current supporters inexorably towards Socialism in the process.

Yet this strategy could not be maintained if 'philosemites', instead of letting antisemitism run its course, continuously insisted on making it the centre of undue attention. It was ultimately this 'philosemitic' insistence that forced Social Democrats to engage the antisemites' antics. Strictly speaking, this critical engagement therefore represented only an indirect response to antisemitism but a direct response to 'philosemitism'. To the extent that Social Democrats, like most anti-antisemites, were angered and embarrassed at being forced into a partial defence of 'the Jews', it was the 'philosemites' rather than the antisemites who were the cause of this anger and embarrassment. If we are looking for the immediate source of the discomfort actually

⁴¹ Fonds 201: 50. ⁴² Massing, *Rehearsal*, 267 n15.

felt by many Socialists in connection with political antisemitism, it is therefore not so much antisemitism itself (let alone its impact on Jewry) we need to turn to but rather the activities of the ostensible 'philosemites'. Hence the vehemence with which the Social Democrats took these 'philosemites' to task. Conversely, the fact that the Social Democrats could so easily construe as diffuse and marginal a phenomenon as the actually existing anti-antisemitism in Imperial Germany into a 'philosemitic' bogeyman requiring so much attention gives an additional indication of just how strong the embarrassment of anti-antisemitism actually was. Just how comprehensively the 'philosemitism' discourse drowned out the basic insight that antisemitism was the real culprit in the game may be hard to determine. It definitely ruled out, though, any possibility of recognising that probably the greatest threat in the long run would lie in the general societal defencelessness against, and often susceptibility to, a crucial cross section of the fundamental assumptions and concepts on which the antisemitic case rested.

Chapter 2

The Influence of 'Zur Judenfrage' on the Socialist Movement

Karl Marx's early double essay 'Zur Judenfrage' [On the Jewish Question] has received a huge amount of attention.¹ So much so that it feels almost embarrassing and certainly a little daunting to return to the issue yet again. The main focus of the discussion here will be on the influence that 'Zur Judenfrage' may or may not have exerted on the Socialist movement. This issue too has been much discussed but it has not hitherto been satisfactorily resolved and we therefore need to turn our attention to it once more.

'Zur Judenfrage' was published in Paris in the first and only issue of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* [German-French Yearbook] in the spring of 1844. Technically speaking, 'Zur Judenfrage' was a review essay discussing Bruno Bauer's *Die Judenfrage* [The Jewish Question] (1843). Its first part, begun in the autumn of 1843, discussed at great length the (to Marx's mind, fundamentally flawed) assumptions on which Bauer had based his rejection of the call for Jewish emancipation. The second, much shorter part, written in the winter of 1843/1844, already took issue with Bauer's initial response to some of his critics.² The first part barely touches directly on matters Jewish and is quite inoffensive in this respect. Its main focus is on the correct interpretation of the social and political factors that form the context for the debate on Jewish emancipation. In the second part, Marx turns directly to 'the Jews' and it is here that the real problems begin. It is telling, though hardly surprising, that most Socialists who did draw on 'Zur Judenfrage' tended to focus almost exclusively on its second part; not, I hasten to add, because they found it problematic but because it resonated so strongly with their own preconceptions.

While the 'Bauer Controversy' caused a considerable commotion in 1843/1844, it would barely be remembered today were it not for Marx's contribution to the debate. This is somewhat ironic, given that at the time 'Zur Judenfrage' went virtually unnoticed,³ not least because the attempt to smuggle the journal into Prussia failed and the bulk of its first and only issue was confiscated at the border. The journal subsequently folded and

¹ For an impressive, though now inevitably somewhat dated, survey cf. Carlebach, *Karl Marx*.

² Cf. MEGA2 I.2 Apparat, 650–651; Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 44–45.

³ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 177, 187–188, 405 n80. However, cf. MEGA2 I.2 Apparat, 651.

the one published volume has been something of a collector's item ever since.⁴

Until fairly recently it was generally assumed that Karl Marx's 'Zur Judenfrage' exerted a crucial formative influence on the Socialist movement. Silberner, for instance, suggested that 'hundreds of thousands, millions have read "Zur Judenfrage" with the same zeal and the same fervour as they read the *Communist Manifesto*',⁵ thus implying that its influence could hardly be overestimated. This is a notion to which few scholars today would still subscribe,⁶ although it continues to hold sway over most of the less scholarly discourse on the matter.⁷

The altered scholarly perception of the influence of 'Zur Judenfrage' reflects not only a more thorough examination of the concrete issue in its own right but also an increasing methodological refinement in the field of intellectual history more generally. The underlying assumption that Silberner and others based their evaluation on was basically this: the primary source of ideological orientation and legitimacy for the Marxist labour movement was provided by Marx's writings. Hence the mere existence of 'Zur Judenfrage' vouches more or less automatically for the fact that the Socialist movement subscribed to the position reflected in this text. We are now more inclined to consider the existence of a text like this not the answer but merely the point where the interesting questions begin. Whether, and in what ways, texts such as 'Zur Judenfrage' exerted an influence can only be established by examining in concrete terms when, where, by whom and in what ways it was drawn upon and referred to by others.

Consequently, much of the argument underpinning the now generally accepted notion that 'Zur Judenfrage' had little, if any, influence on the Socialist movement hinges on two issues: how well-known and readily available was the text and to what extent did leading Socialists make explicit and affirmative references to 'Zur Judenfrage'? We will turn to these issues in Chapter 3. First we should address another question that has received rather less attention in recent scholarly debate: to what extent is the stance on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' prevalent within German Social Democracy actually compatible with Marx's position in 'Zur Judenfrage' and its role in the development of Marx's thought more generally?

⁴ Still the most helpful introduction is Nathan Rotenstreich, 'For and Against Emancipation. The Bruno Bauer Controversy,' in *LBIYB* 4 (1959): 3–36. Hereafter Rotenstreich, 'Bauer Controversy'.

⁵ Silberner, *Sozialisten*, 142.

⁶ For the now largely accepted general consensus, cf., for example, Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 86; Susanne Miller, 'Vorwort,' in Jack Jacobs, *Sozialisten und die "Jüdische Frage" nach Marx* (Mainz: Decaton, 1994): 7–10, here 8; *eadem*, 'Deutsche Sozialdemokratie, Juden und Israel,' in *Neue Gesellschaft. Frankfurter Hefte* (April 1998): 331–336, here 331; most recently, Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus von links*, 179.

⁷ For a rather puzzling recent discussion by a renowned scholar that returns to the notion of 'Zur Judenfrage' as 'the foundation text for Socialists confronting Jewish issues' whose content 'became doctrine', cf. David Cesarani, *The Left and the Jews* (London: Profile, 2004): 21, 23. Hereafter Cesarani, *The Left and the Jews*.

What our inquiry will ultimately show is this: leading Social Democrats made rather more frequent and extensive affirmative references to 'Zur Judenfrage' than the current scholarly consensus would have us believe. The notion that 'Zur Judenfrage' exerted no formative influence on them nevertheless remains valid, but it holds true not because they failed to engage 'Zur Judenfrage' in the first place but because the way in which they did so was fundamentally at odds with the thrust of the text and Marx's intentions when writing it. To be sure, 'Zur Judenfrage' hardly provided the movement with a legacy of analytical acuity in its dealings with antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question', but its significance was largely limited to the role of a repository offering a limited selection of quotes well suited, in isolation, to provide already existing perceptions and convictions with the ostensible seal of approval of the founder of *scientific Socialism*. To put it slightly differently: Socialists' preconceptions regarding 'the Jews' clearly did shape their understanding of 'Zur Judenfrage', but 'Zur Judenfrage' in no way shaped their stance *vis-à-vis* 'the Jews', which would have been no different had 'Zur Judenfrage' never been written.

The thrust of 'Zur Judenfrage' and its significance for the development of Marx's thought were radically at odds with the subsequent Socialist *consensus communis* regarding 'the Jewish Question' in at least three respects. Firstly, it was widely accepted that in 'Zur Judenfrage', Marx had equated Jewry and capitalism. Yet this suggestion is nonsensical, given that Marx had not as yet developed his specific concept of capitalism at the time he wrote 'Zur Judenfrage'. Secondly, 'Zur Judenfrage' stands out as one of the few public pronouncements of the nineteenth century that explicitly opposed the general consensus that emancipation and assimilation were inextricably linked. For Imperial German Social Democrats, however, as well as virtually all their contemporaries, it simply went without saying that emancipation and assimilation were two sides of one coin. Or rather, it could have gone without saying how inextricably the two were linked, given how self-evident it seemed to them. That so many Socialists (again like most of their contemporaries) nevertheless felt the urge to keep reiterating it is therefore telling in its own right. Thirdly, for Marx the entitlement of the Jews to legal equality was simply a fact that followed from objective social conditions. For most Socialists in the second half of the nineteenth century and beyond, it was a right the Jews needed to earn by supporting the claims of other social and political groups to emancipation.

THE FIRST GREAT MISUNDERSTANDING

The most obvious major misunderstanding we need to address is this: in 'Zur Judenfrage', Marx, to use Claussen's apt formulation, did '*not* equate Jewry and capitalism because at the time he as yet had no concept of capitalism'. Yet the assumption that Jewry could and should be equated

with capitalism was one that few Imperial German Social Democrats would ever have dreamt of questioning. 'Zur Judenfrage' is one of Marx's earliest texts, its author is the pre-Marxist Marx, the 'Marx before Marxism'. In this text he could not have equated Jewry with capitalism (in the specific Marxist sense of the word) even if he had wanted to, simply because he indeed 'as yet had no concept of capitalism'.⁸ In the relevant second part of 'Zur Judenfrage', Marx is concerned with Jewry's involvement in the money economy. He inclines strongly towards a demonisation of the money economy and this is reflected in a concomitant demonisation of Jewry as its alleged personification. The process by which he subsequently did then develop his specific concept of capitalism, due to the radical shift in focus it entailed, pulled the plug on this whole line of thought.⁹

The critique of the money economy reflected in 'Zur Judenfrage' was obsessed with surface phenomena, with the particularly conspicuous functions of money in the sphere of circulation – money as a means of speculation, say, or of conspicuous consumption. Supposedly, it was these functions of money that epitomised the economic system as a whole. The novel concept of capitalism he subsequently developed took a totally different approach. Its heart piece was the assumption that the capitalist mode of production hinges crucially on the way in which labour is utilised to produce surplus value. Money only functions as capital in the strict sense of the word in so far as it facilitates the extraction of surplus value from labour in the sphere of production. Money's more conspicuous functions in the sphere of circulation, by contrast, merely signify the redistribution of surplus value that has already been pressed out of labour. Hence, they are only relevant to the specific nature of capitalism in so far as they facilitate the continued extraction of surplus value from labour.

According to Marx, the capitalist mode of production originated historically in a complex constellation of identifiable group interests but now functioned impersonally and with a momentum of its own. It was the sum total of that complex constellation, yet the whole had now become something that was bigger than the mere sum of its parts and functioned independently of them. While it pitted the bourgeoisie against the working class, it nevertheless transcended the immediate interests of individual groups within each of these major blocks. Consequently, nothing was to be won by trying to pin the responsibility for capitalism on individual groups within the bourgeoisie, let alone could one overcome capitalism by targeting such groups. With the emergence of this concept the fixation on Jewry and its role in the money economy invariably became obsolete and

⁸ Detlev Claussen, 'Die antisemitische Erbschaft in der Sowjetgesellschaft,' in Brumlik et al. (eds.), *Antisemitismus*, 83–95, here 85. Hereafter Claussen, 'Erbschaft'. Cf. also idem, *Vom Judentum zum Antisemitismus* (Darmstadt, Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand, 1987): 18, 92.

⁹ For a similar argument, cf. Haury, *Antisemitismus von links*, 171.

any suggestion that Jewry could be equated with capitalism was rendered senseless.

How, then, could the equation of Jewry with capitalism hold sway throughout the Socialist movement without anyone even realising that there was something at odds here? Presumably this misunderstanding is not just a one-way street. The readiness to equate Jewry with capitalism even though this equation was ultimately incompatible with the Marxist concept of capitalism not only allowed for the accommodation of anti-Jewish preconceptions but also reflected the extent to which, in this respect as in many others, many Socialists in any case failed to grasp the full implications of the Marxism they professed.

Yet following a well-known intervention by Engels in 1890, Socialists would no longer have been required to work all this out for themselves. In the much-cited section of his letter to Isidor Ehrenfreund (21 March 1890) that was subsequently published in several papers,¹⁰ Engels claimed that antisemitism stood a chance only in backward societies whose socio-economic base had not yet become fully capitalist. The process that did render them fully capitalist would also spell the demise of antisemitism. Rather tellingly, not only Socialists at the time but most scholars since have focused predominantly on Engels's emphasis on the backwardness of the antisemites.¹¹ Far less attention has been paid to the other side of this argumentative coin. Engels clearly assumed that industrialization and modernization would render obsolete the causes of antisemitism not only by robbing those strata inclining towards it of their existence but also by dislodging the Jews (to the extent of turning increasing numbers of them into proletarians) and asserting the dominance of non-Jewish over Jewish capital. 'Only there [i.e., in the backward countries] is the capital predominantly Jewish and only there does antisemitism exist', he explained. In the United States, for instance, the Rothschilds were 'veritable paupers' compared to the genuinely wealthy Americans among whom there was 'not a single Jew'.¹² Clearly, then, Engels too assumed the socio-economic role supposedly personified by Jewry to be essentially a pre- or proto-capitalist one rendered obsolete by fully fledged capitalism. That so little attention was paid to this side of Engels's argument demonstrates just how entrenched the notion that Jewry could be equated with capitalism actually was.

There is a certain irony to the fact that Marx's earlier demonisation of the money economy was stimulated, to say the least, by none other than Moses Heß (1812–1875). Put bluntly: Marx would seem to have drawn inspiration for his most 'antisemitic' invectives from the work of the subsequent

¹⁰ *Inter alia*, in the *Berliner Volksblatt* 7, 109 (13 May 1890): 1–2. It reprinted the text from the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Vienna).

¹¹ Cf., for instance, Wistrich, *Socialism*, 128–130. ¹² *MEW* 22: 50.

'father of Zionist Socialism' and precursor of Jewish nationalism more generally. Heß had submitted an essay 'Ueber das Geldwesen' [On the Nature of Money] for publication in the first edition of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*.¹³ Marx, as the journal's co-editor, was therefore familiar with the manuscript when finalizing the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage'. To what extent Marx may in effect have plagiarised Heß's text (which was not then included in the periodical) is an issue that has been belaboured in some detail. Carlebach clarified that the extensive similarities between 'Ueber das Geldwesen' and 'Zur Judenfrage' suggested by some authors are not borne out by a more careful textual comparison.¹⁴ Yet what remains as 'the closest parallel between the two writers' is precisely the point of crucial interest to our discussion here: their 'evaluation of money'.¹⁵

'Ueber das Geldwesen' is an extremely vicious and venomously anti-Jewish text that can certainly hold a candle to Marx's anti-Jewish rant in the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' and probably even trumps it.¹⁶ Either way, just how much of a favour one is doing Heß by stressing his influence on Marx at this particular juncture¹⁷ certainly seems rather debatable. Na'aman commented on this whole issue during a seminar discussion in Hannover at the end of 1977. These comments seem to have received little attention from Anglophone historians, yet to my mind they still offer the most pertinent assessment of the matter to date and thus deserve to be quoted at some length:

So, Heß wrote an essay on the nature of money. You probably know that. And Marx wrote an essay on the Jewish Question. What emerges is the following problem [...] It transpires that basic ideas in Marx's essay are contained in Heß's 'Geldwesen', well, that is terrible, of course. So, Marx did not let Heß [...] state his case [...] in order to publish his own piece which 'plagiarizes' Heß. But that is terrible! That is inhumane! From a personal point of view, assuming that was really the case, one may well wonder, and it may also be of biographical relevance to establish that Heß, who was older than Marx, also formulated an issue. But: the real problem is, it is not that. The question is: Who formulated this idea more correctly, more precisely, whose formulations

¹³ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 113. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 120. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the respective demerits of the two texts, cf. *ibid.*, 123; Shlomo Avineri, 'The New Jerusalem of Moses Hess,' in Alkis Kontos (ed.), *Powers, Possessions, and Freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979): 107–118, here 111. As Moshe Mishkinsky pointed out in his review of Avineri's monograph on Hess (in *Polin* 3 (1988): 386–389, here 388), Avineri subsequently modified his position, cf. Shlomo Avineri, *Moses Hess* (New York: New York University Press, 1985): 123–124, 132, 157 n32. Cf. also Shlomo Na'aman, *Zur Entstehung der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Hannover: SOAK, 1978): 7 (hereafter Na'aman, *Entstehung*); Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 45.

¹⁷ Cf. Zwi Rosen, 'Moses Hess' Einfluß auf die Entfremdungstheorie von Karl Marx,' in Walter Grab, Julius H. Schoeps (eds.), *Juden im Vormärz und in der Revolution von 1848* (Stuttgart, Bonn: Burg, 1983): 169–198, here 176. For an earlier, more moderate formulation, cf. *idem*, 'Der Einfluss von Moses Hess auf die Frühschriften von Karl Marx,' in *TJb* 8 (1979): 143–174, esp. 173–174.

are more capable of further development. And at this point it transpires that Heß is caught up in a one-sided perception of capital as money. From his formulation of the problem he can never find the way to an analysis of the capitalist mode of production. He will always remain stuck with, bogged down by, the money issue. Marx too is still heavily embroiled in the money issue but not in the same way and not so deeply that he could not move beyond it. When one analyses Marx's essay one can imagine how the same Marx will think later on.¹⁸

Carlebach is in any case right in his warning not to overestimate Heß's influence on Marx at this juncture, 'if only because the moral revolt against "money" was such a strongly felt and widespread attitude in the radical circles of that time'.¹⁹ This is a warning we should heed equally when considering the later perceptions of Imperial German Social Democrats. Needless to say, German Social Democrats did not need Marx's pre-Marxist analysis in 'Zur Judenfrage' to adopt a stance on antisemitism and 'the Jews' that hinged on a demonisation of the money economy rather than a genuine critique of capitalism in the Marxian or Marxist sense of the word; let alone could one argue that 'Zur Judenfrage' would have led Socialists to abandon Marxist anti-capitalism and a concomitant indifference towards Jewry for a pre-Marxist fixation on the money economy and Jewry as its personification. Rather, 'Zur Judenfrage' could be, and was, utilised to accommodate and legitimise already prevalent, conventional forms of anti-Jewish stereotyping that fell short of a genuine critique of capitalism along Marxist lines.

The 'philosemitism' discourse too needs to be evaluated against this background. Just as the reference to the ostensibly Marxian equation of Jews with capitalism in fact seized upon Marx's pre-Marxist fixation on the money economy, the identification and denunciation of anti-antisemitism as pro-capitalist obviously hinged on a mere reversal of that same false equation. It is hard to see how anti-antisemitism could amount to a defence of capitalism unless one subscribed to the assumption that Marx had identified Jewry and capitalism after all. Over time these two false notions presumably began to mutually reinforce one another. If 'philosemitism' was pro-capitalist, then that which it was directed against, i.e., antisemitism, must surely be anti-capitalist. The notion that 'philosemitism' utilised anti-antisemitism to defend capitalism, once internalised, no longer only pre-supposed but also seemingly *demonstrated* that antisemitism was in fact anti-capitalist.

Derek Penslar, we might note in passing, has offered an intriguing account of the emphasis placed by influential segments of Jewry itself on the substantial contributions of *Homo economicus judaicus* to the capitalist order.²⁰

¹⁸ Na'aman, *Entstehung*, 5–7. ¹⁹ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 122.

²⁰ Derek J. Penslar, *Shylock's Children* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 124–173.

This obviously begs the question. Could not the Socialists have seized on this emphasis as ‘proof’ for their pre-Marxist identification of Jewry with ‘capitalism’? The simple truth of the matter is this: the Social Democrats were in no position to enlist this actual Jewish affirmation of capitalism and Jewry’s role in it for their own purposes. In order to do so they would have needed to engage the relevant inner-Jewish discourse in the first place. Yet with very few exceptions, Social Democrats only ever related to Jewry as it was reflected in the disputes between antisemites and anti-antisemites but never directly. Somewhat ironically, they therefore continued to draw comfort from their misinterpretation of the weakest and most dated sections of ‘Zur Judenfrage’ without even realising that contemporary Jewry itself was producing a constant stream of material that could easily have been exploited to help them maintain their pre-Marxist identification of Jewry with capitalism.

THE SECOND GREAT MISUNDERSTANDING

In a truly ground-breaking but still oddly neglected study that makes it painfully palpable just how brilliant an impulse giver we have lost in its author, the late Amos Funkenstein identified as ‘the only sound political theories of Jewish emancipation [...] those which, against the *consensus communis* argued for the disjunction of emancipation and assimilation’.²¹ This disjunction was rarely suggested, yet for Funkenstein, Marx’s ‘Zur Judenfrage’ was one of the few texts that had done so. He conceded that the text’s ‘stench’ made it difficult to appreciate its ‘interesting core’²² but then demonstrated convincingly that this interesting core indeed hinges crucially on the disjunction of emancipation and assimilation. Yet this was a disjunction so incomprehensible to all those who subsequently professed to follow in Marx’s footsteps that they never even realised that his argument in ‘Zur Judenfrage’ had directly targeted the, to his mind ridiculous, notion that formal emancipation effectively presupposed assimilation.

The basic message of the first part of ‘Zur Judenfrage’ is clear enough. ‘The liberal state’, to stay with Funkenstein’s paraphrase, ‘purports to stand above all particular social interest-groups. In reality, though, it expresses and institutionalizes the atomisation of society. The “freedom” or equality which it propagates [...] are nothing but a tool’ to make the individual ‘free to sell himself, his labor, as a commodity in the market’.²³ The Jews ‘cannot but be emancipated into this state, which cannot let either religion or family stand in the way of political emancipation of man: his transformation into a

²¹ Amos Funkenstein, ‘The Political Theory of Jewish Emancipation,’ in *TAJb* Beiheft 3 (1979): 13–28; reprint in idem, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 220–234, here 222.

²² *Ibid.*, 229. ²³ *Ibid.*, 230.

commodity [...] It is not the Jews', then, 'who have to change in order to be granted emancipation, it is the state which has to change'. As Funkenstein rather intriguingly suggests, 'it seems as if Marx's argument is a caricaturised version of Mendelssohn's'. Mendelssohn had assumed that it was not the Jews who needed to change but the state by adhering to its own ideals. Marx suggested that the change really required of the state was that it 'become its true ugly self'. Moreover, 'Marx, like Mendelssohn, also sees the Jews as better fit than any other social segment for the civil state'. Yet here too Marx substituted what he held to be the 'ugly truth' for Mendelssohn's idealised vision. The Jews are particularly well prepared for the civil state because 'they are the very incarnation of its true essence', namely, 'the atomisation of society into conflicting economic interest-groups'. In this sense, 'the civil state is a Jewish state'.²⁴

Now, whatever else one might possibly be able to say about the way in which 'Zur Judenfrage' was subsequently appropriated in the Socialist movement, this much is clear: that appropriation was always unquestioningly predicated on the assumption that emancipation and assimilation were two sides of one and the same coin. This obviously flew in the face of Marx's central argument in 'Zur Judenfrage'. Of course the demise of capitalism and bourgeois society would spell a form of *human* emancipation that would lead Jews and non-Jews alike into totally uncharted territory. Yet that very process would render the concept of assimilation utterly obsolete since it would not only bring with it the demise of a distinct Jewish existence but would also transcend all distinct forms of non-Jewish existence in their current form. There would, admittedly, no longer be anything specifically Jewish, but there would no longer be anything specifically non-Jewish either to which those who had previously been Jews could assimilate. We may or may not find this vision attractive or realistic but what is crucial for our discussion here is the fundamental fact that the subsequent appropriation of 'Zur Judenfrage' in the Socialist movement, where it did occur, was clearly predicated precisely on the conventional notion that emancipation and assimilation were inextricably linked. This ostensible appropriation was based on the very *consensus communis* against which Marx had directed the main thrust of 'Zur Judenfrage' in the first place and thus blatantly disregarded its central argument.

THE THIRD GREAT MISUNDERSTANDING

If it was a foregone conclusion that Jewry would eventually disappear as a distinct entity, then those who failed to assimilate promptly enough and instead insisted on the legitimacy of a distinct Jewish existence were wilfully

²⁴ Ibid., 231.

setting themselves against the inevitable course of history and the triumph of Socialism that would come with it. This notion found its complement in the accusation that Jews were betraying the cause of general emancipation to maintain their own particular interests. This indictment played a particularly prominent role during the period in which the party was banned by the *Sozialistengesetz* (1878–1890).

The literature generally treats Social Democracy's insistence that the *Sozialistengesetz* and political antisemitism were the product of one and the same reactionary tendency as evidence for its anti-antisemitic integrity.²⁵ Leuschen-Seppel seeks to underscore this notion by contrasting the Social Democratic response to the *Sozialistengesetz* with the response of the bulk of organised Catholicism to Bismarck's campaign against it, the *Kulturkampf*. As she explains, many Catholics were genuinely anguished by the *Kulturkampf* and readily turned on the Jews as an even weaker minority, scapegoating them to compensate for their own sense of exclusion and frustration. The *Sozialistengesetz*, by contrast, generally instilled a sense of pride and superiority in most Social Democrats. Hence they felt no need to indulge in any scapegoating, she suggests, and instead emphasised the common cause of all those affected by discrimination. This line of argument automatically presupposes, though, that the only motive the Social Democrats could have had in turning on Jewry would have been the desire to vent a sense of *inferiority* provoked by the *Sozialistengesetz*. In fact, however, it was their very sense of *superiority* that tended to drive Socialist polemics against Jewry in this period. Now, it is by no means my intention to deny that solidarity among social groups denied (constitutional) rights is always the most honourable basis on which to fight for those rights. Yet this particular discourse was over-determined from the outset by a more elementary and deep-seated distrust of Jewry and thus offered yet another opportunity to rationalise and articulate anti-Jewish preconceptions.

A text particularly well suited to illustrate this is the pamphlet *Der Wahrheit die Ehre. Ein Beitrag zur Judenfrage in Deutschland* [Calling a Spade a Spade. A Contribution on the Jewish Question in Germany]. It was published early in 1881 under the pseudonym Wilhelm Revel by Wilhelm Hasenclever. Hasenclever (1837–1889) had been Schweitzer's successor as the final president of the ADAV²⁶ from 1871 until its merger with the Eisenacher SDAP²⁷ at the Congress in Gotha in May 1875. In Gotha he was initially

²⁵ Cf. Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 94, 114–115; Rürup, 'Sozialdemokratie', 20.

²⁶ The *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein* (General German Workers' Association) had been founded by Ferdinand Lassalle in Leipzig in 1863 and formed the indigenous, non-Marxist strand within the early German labour movement.

²⁷ The *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei* (Social Democratic Worker's Party) was established by Bebel and Liebknecht in 1869 and represented the Marxist strand within the early German labour movement that was affiliated with the First International.

elected as joint chairman of the united SAPD²⁸ and subsequently even took over as the party's executive chairman, but then resigned in October 1875 after his constituency party asked him to choose between his post in the *Vorstand* and his role as editor of the *Hamburg-Altonaer Volksblatt*.²⁹ Having represented the ADAV and the SAPD in the *Norddeutscher Reichstag* and then the *Reichstag* for many years, he finally resigned in June 1888 and died on 3 July 1889.³⁰

The scholarly community was only alerted to the fact that Hasenclever was the author of *Der Wahrheit die Ehre* in 1989.³¹ Nor does this seem to have been general knowledge when the pamphlet was published and we know nothing of its impact at the time.³² Hasenclever was hardly the most sophisticated Social Democratic leader and Na'aman has convincingly described him as 'the one who best expressed the opinion and mood of the rank and file member' within the leadership.³³ It is here that the significance of *Der Wahrheit die Ehre* lies.

Should anyone be tempted to consider what follows the preserve of the Socialist Left we might note in passing that the articles collected in the pamphlet were first published in a left-liberal [*freisinnigen*] paper in December 1880. The pamphlet was certainly ambitious and wide ranging in its scope. Its two central themes were Jewry's responsibility for the antisemitic upsurge and the hypocrisy with which it stood on its own dignity while betraying the general cause of justice and emancipation. 'What', Hasenclever began, had

actually happened to make everyone in the entire German *Reich* speak of nothing other than the Jewish Question?

Answer: A Court Preacher [i.e. Stoecker] convened meetings in Berlin and several other German localities in which he *campaign*ed against the Jews and that in a manner that was in many ways extremely irresponsible.

Yet 'some of the things the Court Preacher made an issue of in the course of this campaign were justified as even the most eager friends of the Jews in the Prussian Diet conceded'.³⁴ Indeed, if one looked at the recent debates in the Prussian Chamber of Deputies, it was clear that 'more than 200 deputies, the majority in other words, belong to the antisemites'. If one

²⁸ *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (German Socialist Workers' Party).

²⁹ Cf. Dieter Fricke, *Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung 1869–1917* (Berlin: Dietz, 1987): 1, 156.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2: 754.

³¹ Cf. Ludger Heid, Klaus-Dieter Vinschen, Elisabeth Heid (eds.), *Wilhelm Hasenclever. Reden und Schriften* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1989): 12, 53 n89. Hereafter Hasenclever, *Reden und Schriften*.

³² Shlomo Na'aman, 'Social Democracy on the Ambiguous Ground Between Antipathy and Antisemitism,' in *LBIYB* 36 (1991): 229–240, here 231. Hereafter Na'aman, 'Social Democracy'.

³³ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁴ Wilhelm Revel, *Der Wahrheit die Ehre* (Nuremberg: Wörlein, 1881): 1–2.

were to subscribe to the ‘common cliché’ propounded by ‘the liberal papers [...] one would have to count all these gentlemen among the “ignorant masses”’.³⁵ Not only the deputies, though, ‘the *students*, too, at least those who participate in public and political life, are predominantly on Stöcker’s and von Treitschke’s side’. And yet, Hasenclever explained,

when the *students* participated in the *Kulturkampf* or the *attacks on Social Democracy*, they were praised by the liberal press dominated by Judah for their superlative patriotic intelligence, on which one could depend and rely *as the herald of the future*. – Now, of course, that the students do not want to sing from the liberal-Semitic hymn sheet [...] one treats them like children.³⁶

The Christian Social movement, Hasenclever explained, had ‘brought the Jewish Question to the fore, mainly due to the ineptitude of the liberal Press’³⁷ which, ‘instead of hushing up the Christian Social assemblies or reporting on them in a decent manner, saw to it that the wildest racket was unleashed, and conspicuously by *Jewish reporters* at that’.³⁸ Stoecker’s activities, he claimed, ‘had almost stopped to draw any attention. Then’, however,

analyzing the situation correctly, the Christian Social agitator turned to coarse but in many ways justified attacks against the liberal press – and the latter walked into the trap by reciprocating his abuse. [...]

Now [Stoecker] thundered against the *liberal Jewish press*, and quite skilfully at that. The Jews in the employ of the liberal press felt insulted and grumbled all the more and lied in all keys. Now Stöcker attacked the *Jews* and *Jewry* itself – his agitation gradually became interesting and exciting.³⁹

There could be no doubt, Hasenclever conceded, ‘that envy, jealousy, laziness and ineptitude often help unleash hatred against Jews’. Yet it was equally ‘beyond doubt’ that this hatred ‘is also unleashed and indeed intensified to wild hatred by the particular *ruthlessness* with which the Jews engage in the commercial struggle’.⁴⁰

There was no denying, he explained, ‘that the Jews are *superior* to the Germanic people in *the exploitation of the economic conditions*. Hence the better economic status of the Jews, hence their greater wealth and hence their dominance in all economic affairs; hence also the envy, the jealousy, and the hatred against the Jews’. The economic or social issues apart, Hasenclever continued, another ‘aspect of the Jewish Question’ needed to be addressed, namely, ‘the *Race Question*’.⁴¹

³⁵ Ibid., 10. ³⁶ Ibid., 11. ³⁷ Ibid., 14. ³⁸ Ibid., 15. ³⁹ Ibid., 13. ⁴⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

Is, then, the Jewish race in general so much more diligent, so much more able, than the Germanic [race] that the Christian-Germanic people would need to tear their hair out in despair?

Answer: No! No and no again!

Physically, the Germanic tribe is indubitably stronger than the Jewish tribe, and *intellectually* it is more substantial, too.

We hardly need to demonstrate the former [...]

As far as the intellect in *general* is concerned, the Germanic people are superior to the Jews; as far as the intellectual capacity pertaining to the economic and purely social sphere is concerned, however, the Jews are far superior to the Germanic people [...] this is borne out by the names, the great, hallowed names: *Rothschild* und *Bleichröder*.

This was due 'in part to hereditary characteristics, in part to *characteristics* acquired in the course of historical development'. Among the historical factors, one had to count the Jews' '*ruthlessness in the commercial struggle*, provoked by the manifold persecutions' and among the hereditary ones, their '*asiatic cunning* that borders on dishonesty, a hereditary characteristic that the Jews of earlier times share with the Phoenicians and now with the Armenians'. To make things worse, 'the Germanic people in general, when they came into contact with the Jews, were afflicted with a *clumsy honesty*'.⁴² Yet more recently the

Germanic tradesmen and merchants have *acquired* from the Jews their ruthlessness in the commercial struggle and their Asiatic cunning that borders on dishonesty; the good qualities of the Jews, however, their diligence, thrift, and sobriety have drawn *little attention*. Thus the so very unpleasant tone came into German commercial life without the Germanic people having managed to shake off Jewish control or at least gain equality with them.

How far this had gone was demonstrated by the fact that 'so very few businessmen are involved in the current antisemitic movement in Germany'. For this there was an easy explanation. They 'have presumably become aware of the fact that in their commercial dealings they have become "Jewish"'. For 'the commoners, peasants and workers',⁴³ on the other hand, antisemitism was unattractive because it was neither here nor there for them whether their exploitation was 'the work of real thoroughbred Jews or of "Christian" Jews. And indeed, we prefer the original to the imperfect copy any day'. On a similar note, the antisemites, it had to be said, were an unpalatable crowd, 'indeed an *appetizing league*, an *appetizing brethren*. One would almost rather be a Jew!'⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 16. ⁴³ Ibid., 18.

‘One of the worst characteristics of the Jews’, Hasenclever explained, was ‘their almost laughable *touchiness*’.

If a Jew calls his dog ‘Stöcker’, as has occurred, this coarse act is a perfectly permissible joke; if, however, a non-Jew makes as much as an allusion to the *crooked nose* of the Jews, Jewish circles will immediately talk of anti-Jewish incitement. Such behaviour

was ‘impertinent’ and bore testimony to the ‘lack of tact’ that was ‘in any case a prime characteristic of the upstart’.⁴⁵

‘In all honesty!’ he eventually exclaimed,

is the *legal expulsion of Socialists* from hearth and home not far worse than some legal constraint on the *immigration of the Jews* can be?

The Jewish deputies subscribed with genuine ecstasy to the *Kulturkampf* and with even greater ecstasy to the *anti-Socialist incitement* [...]⁴⁶

After such *special legislation* against German nationals [*Stammesgenossen*] [...] has been engineered by *Germans*, aided and abetted by the overwhelming majority of the Jews in Germany [...] one now screams blue murder when a few immature people submit a petition [...] calling for *special legislation against the Jews*!?

It is interesting to observe Hasenclever’s exact line of argument. Initially his point is ostensibly this: *German* Jews have not opposed and indeed supported special legislation against Germans, yet they scandalise the suggestion of special legislation against the further *immigration of foreign* Jews. But then he states that ‘the Jews in Germany’ aided and abetted the Germans who enacted special legislation against other Germans. This clearly implies that ‘the Jews in Germany’ themselves are not Germans. The real message, then, is this: if the Jews saw no cause to protest against special legislation that was being enacted against Germans, i.e. those whose right to be here goes without saying, then they certainly have no cause to protest against the application of special legislation to those whose right to be here really is of a special nature, i.e. themselves. ‘That is simply ridiculous!’⁴⁷ Indeed, one might suggest, to be special but demand exemption from special legislation while supporting the enactment of special legislation against those who constitute the norm surely has little to do with equality. ‘The Jews are no better than the Catholics and the Social Democrats, but they want to be and unfortunately many perceive of them as better because, well *precisely because they have money, a great deal of money*’.⁴⁸

In gross misapprehension of the actual state of affairs, the liberal historian and outspoken anti-antisemite, Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903), had published ‘a pamphlet in which he says one should treat the Jews in Germany just like any *German* tribe, such as, e.g., the Pomeranians or the Saxons [...]

⁴⁴ Ibid., 19. ⁴⁵ Ibid., 21. ⁴⁶ Ibid., 23. ⁴⁷ Ibid., 24. ⁴⁸ Ibid., 24–25.

not even a single Jew would believe that!' Hasenclever exclaimed, demonstrating yet again that he really did not consider 'the Jews in Germany' Germans. Nor, to his mind, were the Liberals interested in the anomalies of Jewry's status as such. The simple truth of the matter was that 'the Liberals would not show the slightest bit of interest in them [...] if the Jews had remained *poor*'.⁴⁹

He had 'demonstrated', Hasenclever reiterated, 'that the Jews are the least tolerant of all, since they most eagerly subscribed to the special legislation of recent years and yet themselves are afflicted by an almost lachrymose touchiness'.⁵⁰ 'But enough!' he eventually concluded,

primarily we demand that Jewry abandon its '*noli me tangere!*' attitude [...]. Moreover, we demand that the Jews, precisely because they claim to be *persecuted*, *never* and in *no* way themselves participate in the persecution of their other fellow human beings.

[...] It is the duty of the Jews, then, to oppose reactionary politics in *all spheres* and *selflessly* – not just reactionary economic policies that impede their freedom of exploitation.⁵¹

Now, while his comrades apparently did not register *Der Wahrheit die Ehre* as a publication by one of their own, Hasenclever's position on antisemitism certainly did not go altogether unnoticed. On 1 September 1882, Bernstein wrote to Engels that Hasenclever, who 'although not himself a worker, is in close contact with them and has the horizon to go with it', epitomised the potential susceptibility of the Social Democratic clientele to antisemitism. 'The chap persistently vacillates between Stöcker and uncle Bernstein'⁵² or Dr Philipps,⁵³ and one keeps fearing he might one day get irreversibly stuck in one position or the other. Mind you, that would be a surmountable loss'.⁵⁴

We also find a rather cryptic relevant reference in Kautsky's posthumously published recollections, although these obviously need to be treated with caution, given that Kautsky did not write them until the 1930s. He mentioned there a statement published by Bebel and Liebknecht on 16 November 1881. In it they explained that the party had negotiated with

⁴⁹ Ibid., 25. ⁵⁰ Ibid., 29. ⁵¹ Ibid., 30.

⁵² Aron Bernstein (1812–1884), the co-founder of the *Berliner Volks-Zeitung* who for decades wrote its daily editorials, was an uncle of Eduard Bernstein.

⁵³ Adolf Philipps succeeded Bernstein at the helm of the *Volks-Zeitung*. He represented the *Fortschrittspartei* in the *Reichstag* but in 1884 helped initiate the *Demokratische Blätter* and the abortive *Demokratische Partei*, the much-cited 'last attempt' to establish a radically democratic non-Socialist party in Imperial Germany. Mehring too was involved in this project. When Philipps died on 20 January 1886, Mehring succeeded him as *de facto* editor-in-chief of the *Volks-Zeitung* (Höhle, *Franz Mehring*, 171–172).

⁵⁴ Helmut Hirsch (ed.), *Eduard Bernsteins Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1970): 122. Hereafter *BWEBE*.

representatives of the Conservatives and Stoecker's Christian Social movement during the election campaign in Berlin. The declaration emphatically rejecting 'any such haggling over votes [*Stimmenschacher*]',⁵⁵ Kautsky related, had been signed by Bebel and Liebknecht. 'Why not by Hasenclever?' he then added in parentheses, 'that was not explained'.⁵⁶

The explanation seems simple enough. Bebel and Liebknecht were both in Dresden at the time and thus were able to sign the statement, while Hasenclever was elsewhere and could not be consulted before the statement was made public. Nor could Bebel and Liebknecht wait for his response because the antisemitic press had already publicised the negotiations and they considered it a matter of urgency to set the record straight. According to Bernstein, Hasenclever 'immediately' approved of the statement when he did become aware of it.⁵⁷ Bebel, on the other hand, in his memoirs, makes no mention of Hasenclever either way.⁵⁸ The reasons the statement gave for rejecting the tactical alliance as so often did not concern the antisemites' stance regarding 'the Jews' but the fact that their policies were reactionary and militated against the interests of the workers.

Since Social Democracy opposed any 'haggling' over votes on principle at the time, the rejection of this particular tactical alliance in and of itself had no specifically anti-antisemitic thrust. Arguably, the most remarkable aspect of this entire incident is the fact that the party officials in Berlin had negotiated with the antisemites in the first place so that Bebel and Liebknecht were now forced to intervene. This incident is generally cited as an example for the party's principled opposition to organised political antisemitism. Yet it could equally well be interpreted as an illustration of the fact that even though the party was opposed to tactical electoral alliances on principle, tactical alliances with the antisemites were not automatically considered anathema. Conversely, the term 'haggling' was presumably chosen to 'unmask' the disingenuousness of the antisemites who opposed 'haggling' as a Jewish practice and yet were more than happy to indulge in it themselves when it suited them.

In short, nothing suggests that Hasenclever's position was seen as a major issue at the time or that anyone took him to task for it. We therefore have no reason to presume that he published *Der Wahrheit die Ehre* under a pseudonym because he assumed his position would be insufficiently anti-antisemitic to be accepted by his comrades. Na'aman suggested it was

⁵⁵ In Bernstein's account, the formulation is 'any such haggling or trading of votes [*Schacher oder Stimmenkauf*]'. Cf. Eduard Bernstein, *Die Geschichte der Berliner Arbeiterbewegung* 2 (Glashütten/Ts.: Detlev Auvermann, 1972): 78. Hereafter Bernstein, *Geschichte*. This volume was originally published in 1907.

⁵⁶ Karl Kautsky, *Erinnerungen und Erörterungen* ('S.-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1960): 497–498.

⁵⁷ Bernstein, *Geschichte*, loc cit.

⁵⁸ August Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben* 3 (Stuttgart: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1914): 193–195.

simply insecurity that led him to do so. No one in the party seemed capable of making an authoritative statement on antisemitism. This series of articles was an attempt 'to deal with this issue from a fresh perspective, which would take into account the Socialist outlook, but would also be acceptable to the general public, which had reservations about Jews, shared by the author himself'.⁵⁹ This undertaking invariably entered totally uncharted territory and therefore posed a risk best minimised by not as yet making his case under his own name. Heid, on the other hand, who is beyond doubt the scholar currently on the most intimate terms with Hasenclever, suggested that he 'hid behind a pseudonym' because 'he knew only too well that popular antisemitism existed within Social Democracy too' and therefore 'feared criticism from within his own ranks'.⁶⁰ In other words, Hasenclever feared that his pronouncements were *too* anti-antisemitic to find favour with his comrades. This would suggest that when it comes to characterising the attitudes to antisemitism prevalent among Hasenclever's peers, the term 'ambivalent' is a euphemism, if ever there was one.

The theme of Jewry's duty to stand up for the cause of general emancipation was also popular with Mehring. Take the introduction to 'Zur Judenfrage' in his edition of the early writings of Marx, Engels and Lassalle, the *Nachlaßausgabe*. Because Jewry's 'political emancipation coincided with the bourgeois revolution', he argued there, Jewry

became very democratic and liberal, with the proviso that it would immediately betray democracy and liberalism should they obstruct its own rule. We have seen ample examples of this over the last half century and can still experience every day how Jewish fellow citizens whom we admired as relentless standard bearers of bourgeois democracy only a moment ago become vicious reactionaries when the consequences of some civil right infringe on some specifically Jewish interest.

This pattern, Mehring claimed, was 'as old as Jewish participation in the public struggles and was precisely what motivated Bruno Bauer's writings on the Jewish Question'. Mehring even quoted Bauer at this point:

'One cries out as if humanity had been betrayed when critics venture to examine the essence inherent in the Jew as a Jew. The same people [...] who watch with pleasure when Christianity is subjected to criticism [...] are capable of condemning anyone who then also wants to subject Jewry/Judaism to criticism. [...] The defenders of Jewish emancipation have hence appropriated the odd position of fighting against privileges and at the same time granting Jewry/Judaism the privilege of immutability, invulnerability, and

⁵⁹ Na'aman, 'Social Democracy,' 231.

⁶⁰ Ludger Heid (ed.), '...gehört notorisch zu den hervorragenden Leitern der Sozialdemokratischen Partei', in Hasenclever, *Reden und Schriften*, 15–68, here 55.

unaccountability.’⁶¹ Do these sentences not sound as if they were written today?⁶²

Mehring then asked. As Carlebach rather aptly put it, this part of Mehring’s discussion indeed ‘owes more to Bruno Bauer than to Marx’.⁶³ Wistrich too remarked that Mehring thus ‘offered an implied apologia for Bruno Bauer’s antisemitic writings on the *Judenfrage*’.⁶⁴ Needless to say, Mehring’s identification with Bauer sprung from his contempt for those he deemed ‘philosemites’⁶⁵ and on this count the affinity between them is indeed conspicuous. Yet, as we saw, Mehring by no means stood alone with this perception that formed a set piece of the Social Democratic discourse on antisemitism and ‘the Jews’.

The logic behind these arguments indeed bears more than a passing resemblance to ‘the conflation of right and morality’⁶⁶ in Bauer’s *Judenfrage*. Bauer claimed that the total renunciation of particular identities was the prerequisite not only for comprehensive human emancipation but also for the granting of formal emancipation. Thus Bauer turned ‘a legal act into an act of conscience’.⁶⁷ Yet it was precisely the rejection of this conflation that had formed Marx’s point of departure in ‘Zur Judenfrage’. He began the first essay by paraphrasing Bauer’s position. How did Bauer respond to the Jewish demand for legal emancipation? He responded by saying,

you Jews are *egoists* if you demand a special emancipation for yourselves as Jews. As Germans, you ought to work for the political emancipation of Germany, and as human beings for human emancipation [...]

Or do the Jews demand equality with the *Christian subjects*? In that case, they acknowledge the *Christian state* as justified and thus also the regime of general oppression. [...]

Why should the German be interested in the liberation of the Jew, if the Jew is not interested in the liberation of the German?⁶⁸

This response followed conclusively, Marx explained, from a line of argument that defined the issue as a purely religious one. Bauer addressed only the questions of who was to be emancipated and who was to emancipate

⁶¹ Bruno Bauer, *Die Judenfrage* (Brunswick: Friedrich Otto, 1843): 2. Hereafter Bauer, *Judenfrage*. In his Marx biography, Mehring even paraphrased this passage without attributing it directly to Bauer (Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx* (Leipzig: Leipziger Buchdruckerei, 1918): 72–73. Hereafter Mehring, *Karl Marx*.)

⁶² Franz Mehring (ed.), *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels und Ferdinand Lassalle* 1–4 (Stuttgart: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1901/1902) [hereafter Mehring, *Nachlaßausgabe*], 1: 354–355.

⁶³ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 270. ⁶⁴ Wistrich, ‘Anti-Capitalism,’ 45.

⁶⁵ This point is also made by Na’aman, *Marxismus*, 95.

⁶⁶ Douglas Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 148. Hereafter Moggach, *Philosophy*.

⁶⁷ Na’aman, *Marxismus*, 14. ⁶⁸ *MEW* 1: 347.

while failing to ask what sort of emancipation was actually at stake; and as Marx insisted, it was precisely in taking this approach that Bauer had gone radically astray. Clearly, then, Marx paraphrased Bauer's response to the call for Jewish emancipation not because he approved of it but because it epitomised just how wrong-headed Bauer's whole approach was.

In this respect too, the stance prevalent among Social Democrats flew in the face of the position developed by Marx in 'Zur Judenfrage'. To their minds, Jewry needed to prove its entitlement to solidarity by demonstrating its commitment to the cause of general emancipation. Yet in fact, so they never ceased to complain, Jewry was only too inclined to betray that cause to pursue its own particular interests. This clearly reflected the very 'conflation of right and morality', the rejection of which had formed Marx's point of departure in 'Zur Judenfrage' in the first place.

In short, the notions prevalent among Social Democrats in fact differed substantially from Marx's position in 'Zur Judenfrage'. This does not, of course, preclude our discussing the Socialist *uses* and *abuses* of 'Zur Judenfrage' as we will do in Chapter 3. It does, however, make it virtually impossible to credit 'Zur Judenfrage' with a formative influence on Social Democracy's stance even where it was actively appropriated.

Chapter 3

The Socialist Uses and Abuses of 'Zur Judenfrage'

As we saw, the bulk of the one published issue of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* containing Marx's 'Zur Judenfrage' fell into the hands of the Prussian authorities, rendering copies of the volume extremely rare. Not least for this reason, one of the questions scholars trying to evaluate the influence of 'Zur Judenfrage' on the Socialist movement have had to address is this: how well-known was the text of 'Zur Judenfrage' (rather than its mere existence) to Socialists and how easily could they access it? We may recall Silberner's suggestion that 'hundreds of thousands, millions have read "Zur Judenfrage" with the same zeal and the same fervour as they read the *Communist Manifesto*'.¹ Yet while the *Manifesto* was regularly being reissued in pamphlet form in all major European languages, in Germany, for example, 'Zur Judenfrage' was not published independently until 1919; and that edition was produced neither under the auspices of the Social Democratic or the Communist party nor even by anyone (still) directly associated with either of them.² Instead, it was edited by Stefan Großmann and published by Rowohlt.³

¹ Silberner, *Sozialisten*, 142.

² George Mosse concluded from a letter the leading party publisher, Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Dietz (1843–1922), wrote to Kautsky in the spring of 1920 that this publication took place 'under party [i.e., KPD] auspices' with the leading KPD official, Ernst Meyer (1887–1930), as its 'behind-the-scenes sponsor'. Cf. George L. Mosse, 'German Socialists and the Jewish Question in the Weimar Republic,' in *LBIYB* 16 (1971): 123–151, here 134–135, 151. Hereafter Mosse, 'German Socialists'. Rather uncharacteristically, Mosse was mistaken in this particular case. Dietz was in fact referring not to Ernst Meyer but to the prominent historian of the labour movement, Gustav Mayer (1871–1948) (IISH Karl Kautsky D VIII: 692). I am extremely grateful to Mieke Ijzermans of the IISH who went far beyond the call of duty in sending me copies of the relevant correspondence. Mayer, of course, was not only no Communist but generally stood slightly to the right of Majority Socialism. Excerpts from the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' were also published at this time by Ernst Drahn in Karl Marx, *Lohnarbeit und Kapital. Zur Judenfrage und andere Schriften* (Leipzig: Reclam, [1919] n.d.): 47–53. Drahn (born 1873) was the director of the SPD archive and library. He was sacked early in 1920 for joining the KPD but at the time of this publication he was still officially affiliated with the Majority Socialists. Consequently, if one wanted to implicate any of the parties in the republication of 'Zur Judenfrage' at this juncture, one would have to opt for the Majority Socialists!

³ Cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 59 n87.

Yet 'Zur Judenfrage', or parts of it, were occasionally reprinted elsewhere. Roughly the second half of the second essay⁴ was published by Wilhelm Hasselmann (1844–1916) in the ADAV's *Neuer Social-Demokrat* on 20 September 1872.⁵ Hasselmann did so as part of a campaign with which the ADAV sought to enamour itself with the workers of Berlin by denying the SDAP the credentials of a genuine workers' party. The SDAP was in fact infiltrated and steered by a group of intellectual *Mühlendammer* – a common anti-Jewish pejorative – who were merely out to manipulate the workers, so the ADAV claimed. Hasselmann prefaced the excerpt from 'Zur Judenfrage' by stating that

a fanatical Hebrew has committed the naivety of calling the editor of the 'Neuer Social-Demokrat' [i.e. Hasselmann] a 'Jew eater' [*Judenfresser*]. Although we by no means enjoy 'biting into Jews'⁶ [*Obschon Schreiber dieses nun durchaus keinen Geschmack daran findet "Juden anzubeißen"*] we do in the following want to enlighten certain easily offended individuals by presenting the definition of Jewry as presented by a man whom the anti-Jew eater in question presumably acknowledges as an authority, namely, Herr Karl Marx.

'ZUR JUDENFRAGE' IN THE MAINSTREAM SOCIALIST PRESS

Among the mainstream Social Democrats, 'Zur Judenfrage' did not in fact resurface until 1881, when the bulk of the second essay⁷ was published in the *Sozialdemokrat*,⁸ the banned party's weekly central organ that was produced abroad and illegally distributed in Germany. Bernstein took over the editorship of the *Sozialdemokrat* in January 1881 and was therefore responsible for this publication of most of the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage'. The details of the process leading to the publication are not entirely clear. In 1879, Bernstein had no copy of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* at his disposal. We know this because he wrote to Engels on 19 June 1879 to inquire how he might come by those older publications of Marx and

⁴ Hasselmann neither cherry picked 'most of the antisemitic passages' from 'Zur Judenfrage' – as Silberner suggested (Silberner, *Sozialisten*, 199) – nor did he reprint both parts of 'Zur Judenfrage', as Wistrich claimed (Wistrich, *Socialism*, 47).

⁵ 'Das Judenthum,' in *Neuer Social-Demokrat* 2, 109 (20 September 1872): 3.

⁶ Hasselmann sought to refute the accusation that he was a 'Jew eater' with irony: given his notorious dislike for 'the Jews' he was hardly inclined to 'eat' them.

⁷ Wistrich wrongly claimed that the *Sozialdemokrat*'s editors 'compressed together' many of the text's particularly offensive passages (Robert S. Wistrich, 'Karl Marx, German Socialists and the Jewish Question, 1880–1914,' in *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 3, 1 (1973): 92–97, here 92. Hereafter Wistrich, 'German Socialists'). Nor did they print the entire second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' as Leuschen-Seppel stated (Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 81). The introductory passage in which Marx criticised the exclusively religious focus of Bauer's approach was left out.

⁸ 'Karl Marx über die Judenfrage,' in *Sozialdemokrat* No. 27 (30 June 1881) and No. 28 (7 July 1881).

Engels that he, Bernstein, was missing, the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* among them.⁹ Engels informed Bernstein on 26 June 1879 that he was in no position to assist him and himself no longer had copies of some of the items in question.¹⁰ It has therefore been suggested that Kautsky most likely brought a copy of the text with him when he returned to Zurich from his three-month stay in London late in June 1881, shortly before the publication of the excerpt from 'Zur Judenfrage' in the *Sozialdemokrat*. How plausible it is to infer from this, should it be accurate, that Kautsky in fact prepared the text for publication and prefaced it while still in London and therefore surely did so with the approval and perhaps even the direct assistance of Marx and/or Engels¹¹ is hard to determine. It certainly seems inconceivable, though, that Bernstein should have undertaken this publication without Kautsky's knowledge and highly unlikely that he would have done so against Kautsky's will, had Kautsky expressed misgivings about Marx's text.

The preface to the first instalment explained the decision to publish the excerpt from 'Zur Judenfrage' as follows: 'Given the significance that the Jewish question has acquired again today it should be all the more pertinent to point to this article. The development in the almost four decades since it was written has only confirmed its content'. Since

Unfortunately, it is too long for us to print it in its entirety, we only want to reproduce the, to our mind, most important passage which deals with *the social significance of Jewry*. In so doing we do believe, though, that we should warn our readers against picking individual easily understandable passages out of their context, otherwise they risk assuming the exact opposite of what Marx, to our mind, develops superbly, namely that the so-called Jewish spirit is a product of bourgeois society, based as it is on the capitalist mode of production, which, where oriental Jews are not already a given, produces Christian Jews; in America, for instance, [it produces] Christian-Germanic Jews.

The emphasis on the 'so-called Jewish spirit' that is in fact 'a product of bourgeois society' is as well in keeping with the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' as it is at odds with prevalent Socialist discourse on the matter. This makes the suggestion of a backdrop of recent debate with Marx and/or Engels all the more plausible, which would suggest that Kautsky was indeed actively involved in this publication, given that he was the one who had just returned from London.

In his much-cited article on Jews and German Social Democracy published much later (in March 1921) in the *Tsukunft*, Bernstein took Hasselmann to task for his publication of part of the same text. 'Although Hasselmann was strongly opposed to Marx', Bernstein remarked, 'he

⁹ BWEBE, 7–8. ¹⁰ Ibid., 11; MEW 34: 381. ¹¹ MEGA2 I.2 Apparat, 652.

couldn't resist the temptation to reprint the above-quoted article in order to prove the correctness of his own opinions about Jews. Had Marx seen this article', Bernstein went on, without explaining why he assumed that Marx had not seen it, 'he would undoubtedly have opposed it because his article had been written for an educated public which could be trusted to see the sociological implications [of Marx's line of argument] [. . .] But Hasselmann's paper was mainly circulated among poorly educated workers'.¹²

Now, Bernstein wrote this four decades after the event when the need to justify the decision to publish the bulk of the second essay in the *Sozialdemokrat* may well have seemed a rather more pressing issue than it did at the time. Even so, Bernstein apparently felt justified in publishing the text because he assumed that his readers, as opposed to Hasselmann's, were 'educated' and could be 'trusted to see the sociological implications' of Marx's argument. On the other hand, his decision to publish the warning that 'easily understandable passages' from the text could, if taken out of context, suggest the 'exact opposite' of Marx's position would seem to indicate that he cannot have been all that certain after all – and quite rightly so. Given what we know about Bernstein's own attitudes towards Jewry at the time,¹³ his intention was most likely to demonstrate that Marx and his followers had no qualms about calling a spade a spade when it came to Jewry's indiscretions either. Yet their critique of 'the Jews' was inordinately superior to that of the ideologues of the emerging antisemitic movement.

Wistrich has astutely remarked that in actual fact the *Neue Social-Demokrat* was 'as sophisticated as any of the publications produced by the Eisenacher socialists'.¹⁴ This is hardly a valid objection to Bernstein's line of argument since his concern was with the sophistication of the publications' readers rather than that of the publications themselves. Bernstein's point was precisely that Hasselmann had made manipulative use of 'Zur Judenfrage' by presenting it to an audience incapable of comprehending its niceties. Yet Wistrich's point is nevertheless well worth making for a slightly different reason. More so than the *Neue Social-Demokrat*, its predecessor, Schweitzer's *Social-Demokrat*, was indeed not only theoretically more sophisticated but it also propagated a doctrinally more radical and, for the most part, more 'Marxist' Socialism than the publications of the *Eisenacher*. This was obviously a thorn in the side of the Social Democrats who needed to explain why the future had belonged to them and their closet Socialist predecessors even though the profile Schweitzer gave the ADAP while he was its leader had in fact been ideologically more advanced. They sought to solve this problem by claiming that the ADAP had essentially been ideologically too advanced for the circumstances. Its leaders might have done (or at least said)

¹² Quoted from the English translation in Massing, *Rehearsal*, 322–330, here 323. Cf. also Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 354–355, 435 n31 and Silberner, *Sozialisten*, 200.

¹³ Cf. Jacobs, *Socialists*, 46 ff. ¹⁴ Wistrich, *Socialism*, 48.

the right things but they had done so in the wrong place and at the wrong time. This was a standard argument and by no means one that Bernstein needed to invent specifically to explain how it could be right for him to publish the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' but nevertheless wrong for Hasselmann to have done so.

'Zur Judenfrage' was subsequently also reprinted in the *Berliner Volksblatt* in October 1890, a point we shall return to. Against this background, the current scholarly orthodoxy on the matter is this: these were all isolated newspaper (and hence by their very nature hardly durable) publications unlikely to have a lasting effect and it was not until Mehring's publication of the text in his *Nachlaßausgabe* in 1902 that 'Zur Judenfrage' became widely available.¹⁵ There it was imbued with the greatest possible respectability and prefaced in a way strongly emphasising not only its significance for the development of Marx's thought but also its validity as the basis for any contemporary Socialist analysis of 'the Jewish Question'. Once again, Mehring is portrayed as an exceptional or at least particularly crass figure. 'None' of his peers, to cite Wistrich, 'so consistently took' 'Zur Judenfrage'

as his model and inspiration [...] Mehring not only considered that Marx's analysis was completely applicable to German society in the 1890s, he made every effort to popularise it in the working-class milieu. This was in significant contrast to other leading German socialists like Kautsky, Bernstein, Bebel and Liebknecht, who rarely, if at all, mentioned 'Zur Judenfrage' and certainly never justified it.¹⁶

As we will see, this assessment calls for numerous qualifications. It certainly is true that Mehring thought very highly of 'Zur Judenfrage'. To his mind, the 'few pages' specifically of the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' 'weigh more heavily than the mountain of literature that has been written on the Jewish Question since'.¹⁷ Thus it was quite 'indubitable that it would be most useful if the historical concept of the Jewish Question established by Marx in this text became the common intellectual property of the modern working class'.¹⁸ It is no coincidence, though, that he referred to the 'historical concept' rather than the text itself. For the text as such, beyond those 'easily understandable passages' the *Sozialdemokrat* had warned in 1881 against taking out of context, stood very little chance of any genuine popularisation, given the heavy Young Hegelian baggage it came with.

Before we turn to Mehring's role in the popularisation of 'Zur Judenfrage', though, we should briefly consider this: clearly, Mehring's contention that Marx's analysis in the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' was 'completely applicable to German society in the 1890s' or at the turn of

¹⁵ For this position, cf. also Claussen, 'Erbschaft,' 94 n12.

¹⁶ Wistrich, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 43; cf. also idem, *Socialism*, 122.

¹⁷ Mehring, *Nachlaßausgabe* 1: 356. ¹⁸ Ibid., 1: 492.

the century was ridiculous. Yet it was no more ridiculous than the already cited claim of the *Sozialdemokrat* in 1881 (under Bernstein and Kautsky's auspices) that 'the development in the almost four decades since it was written has only confirmed its content'. What makes all these claims all the more astounding is the fact that Marx's characterisation of 'the Jews' in 1843/1844 was never based on any form of empirical analysis in the first place. The portrayal of Jewry in the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' (in distinct contrast to the discussion of political and human emancipation in the first part) was based on a purely philosophical deduction *par excellence* that was void of all genuine empirical underpinning. It deployed traditional elements of anti-Jewish prejudice and mythology to generate a new variation on the same themes that generated that mythology and those prejudices in the first place.¹⁹ As Na'aman rightly pointed out, 'the huckstering of the Jews', for instance, 'was neither demonstrated nor examined, but presupposed'.²⁰ None too surprisingly, the uses to which 'Zur Judenfrage' itself was subsequently put followed that same pattern. Carlebach is quite right, therefore, in stating that 'Zur Judenfrage' 'gave stereotypical folk-images an aura of social and philosophical respectability'. Consequently, it turned 'prejudices, hates and preconceptions of centuries of Christian and German nationalist advocates' into "“empirical knowledge” for Marxists"²¹ and thus contributed to the modernisation and secularisation of traditional anti-Jewish preconceptions. Yet one would nevertheless be hard-pressed to demonstrate that 'Zur Judenfrage' actually helped form or generate any of these perceptions in the first place.

MEHRING'S ROLE IN THE POPULARISATION OF 'ZUR JUDENFRAGE'

How significant was Mehring's role in the popularisation of 'Zur Judenfrage' and how accurate is the contention that he played this role in 'significant contrast' to the 'silence' of the other 'German Labour leaders with regard to the essay of the young Marx'?²² Mehring's most substantial contribution to the text's popularisation was undoubtedly the introduction he provided for an edition of 'Zur Judenfrage' published in 1896 by the mainstream Polish Socialists, the nationalist PPS.²³ Na'aman in particular took Mehring to task for his decision to contribute to this publication, and with

¹⁹ Cf. Rotenstreich, 'Bauer Controversy,' 26; Hans-Gerd Henke, *Der "Jude" als Kollektivsymbol in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1890–1914* (Mainz: Decaton Verlag, 1994): 45. Hereafter Henke, "Jude"; Na'aman, *Marxismus*, 51.

²⁰ Na'aman, *Marxismus*, 63. ²¹ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 353. ²² Wistrich, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 44.

²³ Franz Mehring, 'Wstęp,' in Karol Marks, *W kwestyi żydowskiej* (London: Związek Zagranicznego Socjalistów Polskich [PPS Overseas Union], 1896): xi–xxviii. Cf. Wistrich, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 46 and idem, *Socialism*, 374 n142. This introduction was solicited by Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz (1864–1924), one of the leaders of the right wing of the PPS. Mehring's letter of acceptance (19 November 1895) and the German manuscript of his introduction (which is largely identical with his later introduction

considerable justification.²⁴ On the other hand, it was only the introduction that Mehring contributed to this publication and there is no indication whatsoever that his refusal to participate would in any way have questioned the decision of the Foreign Committee of the PPS to publish 'Zur Judenfrage'. This particular popularisation effort was undertaken for a Polish audience. It neither resulted from nor depended upon his initiative and it transpired some six years before he himself published 'Zur Judenfrage' in the *Nachlaßausgabe*.

The publication in the *Nachlaßausgabe* itself was certainly no effective means of popularising 'Zur Judenfrage' (or any other text it contained). Not only did it offer a substantial amount of material unlikely to appeal to a broad party readership, it was also far too expensive to circulate widely among the membership. A fair share of the party libraries may have owned it, although no evidence to that effect has survived. Even there it would have fallen into the category of titles least likely to be borrowed with any frequency.²⁵ The *Nachlaßausgabe* proved an invaluable source for intellectually and historically interested members of the party elites and theoreticians throughout the Second International. Its significance is perhaps best demonstrated by the frequent use Lenin made of it. It was the main source for his understanding of the revolutionary strategy of Marx and Engels in 1848/1849 and the way in which they reflected upon it in the decade or so afterwards.²⁶ This made the *Nachlaßausgabe* highly influential in its own right, to be sure, but certainly no medium of popularisation.

On the other hand, Mehring did participate actively in the party publishers' popularisation initiatives on a number of planes. *Inter alia*, he edited and prefaced (and in one instance even translated) easily accessible and affordable reprints of works by Engels, Weitling, Lassalle, Wilhelm Wolff, Labriola, F. A. Lange, Schweitzer and Marx. Yet, 'Zur Judenfrage' was not among them. Perhaps he would have liked to include it had there been the slightest chance that it might sell. Whatever the reasons, though, the fact remains that he did not publish a *Volksausgabe* [people's edition] of 'Zur Judenfrage'.

The first more readily accessible and affordable edition of 'Zur Judenfrage' – a reprint of the text published in the *Nachlaßausgabe* – appeared

in the *Nachlaßausgabe*, though shorter) with the accompanying letter (6 December 1895) are in Fonds 201: 1160–1161.

²⁴ Na'aman, 'Beginnings,' 370.

²⁵ Cf. Georg Fülberth, *Proletarische Partei und bürgerliche Literatur* (Neuwied, Berlin: Luchterhand, 1972): 110–114, esp. 112–113. Hereafter Fülberth, *Proletarische Partei*; cf. also Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 84–85.

²⁶ For references to the *Nachlaßausgabe*, cf., for instance, V. I. Lenin, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1955–1973), 8: 318, 9: 46, 12: 386, 13: 274, 14: 10, 15: 378. For direct references to Mehring's annotation of the *Nachlaßausgabe*, cf., for instance, *ibid.*, 6: 457, 9: 121–122, 127, 129, 16: 384, 31: 336–337, 36: 120. *Inter alia*, Lenin also used Mehring's *Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* [History of German Social Democracy] regularly, cf., for instance, *ibid.*, 5: 405, 11: 402, 12: 359, 365–366.

in 1908 in *Aus der Waffenkammer des Sozialismus*.²⁷ This was a periodical published twice yearly between 1903 and 1910 by the *Frankfurter Volksstimme* with the express purpose of offering affordable collections of otherwise not easily accessible basic texts. It was presumably edited by (or at the very least under the auspices of) the paper's long-standing editor-in-chief (from 1895 to 1917), Max Quarck (1860–1930), who was a revisionist and regular contributor to the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. To what extent Mehring may have had his fingers in this reprint of 'Zur Judenfrage' is hard to determine.²⁸ Whatever his possible involvement behind the scenes, though, the fact remains that the responsibility for this publication clearly lay with a periodical that he was not closely associated with and that was edited by (or at the very least under the overall control of) a prominent and outspoken revisionist. 'Zur Judenfrage' was published there with only a very short preface. Although originally no more than incidental remarks made in the form of a book review, it explained, the double essay that Mehring had made accessible again deserved more attention than it usually received. 'We still have only very little literature on the nationalities and race question', it continued,

and what has been written *en masse* about the Jewish Question over the last few decades by bourgeois authors does not remotely reach the thoroughness and depth of Marx's discussion. He took 'the decisive step by bringing the religious question down to its secular basis and demonstrating why civil society perpetually creates the Jew from its own entrails, why Jewry only achieves its consummation in civil society and civil society only achieves its consummation in the Christian world' (Mehring). This significance of Marx's Jewish studies justifies the attempt to popularize them more strongly with the following publication.²⁹

Tellingly enough, although *Aus der Waffenkammer* reprinted the entire double essay, the one sentence the preface picked from Mehring's introduction once again paraphrased a passage from the second essay; but Mehring was not, of course, responsible for that choice, at least not directly, nor, for that matter, did that particular paraphrase misrepresent Marx or put any sort of specifically Mehringian spin on the matter.

It is worth emphasising that this particular 'Volksausgabe', which was in a far better position than Mehring's *Nachlaßausgabe* to contribute to the popularisation of 'Zur Judenfrage', was issued under revisionist auspices. After all, it has generally been claimed that the revisionists were at least marginally less uncouth than the so-called orthodox Marxists in their approach to

²⁷ Karl Marx, 'Zur Judenfrage,' in *Aus der Waffenkammer des Sozialismus* [hereafter *Waffenkammer*] 10 (1908): 126–151.

²⁸ Cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 66 n114.

²⁹ 'Vorbemerkung des Herausgebers,' in *Waffenkammer* 10 (1908): 126.

antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question'. Consequently, the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* were, for instance, prepared to offer a forum for the discussion of Jewish nationalism and other contentious issues that the *Neue Zeit* would not tolerate.

This is in any case a tricky line of argument for at least two reasons: firstly, because there is an obvious point of contact between the desire to be rid of the Jews in one's own country and the apparent promise of the Zionists to fulfil that desire; secondly, because there was at the time an equally obvious point of contact between even the most reluctant support for the Zionist cause and rather less reluctant forms of enthusiasm for white settler colonialism and Imperialism more generally. If one conceded that Jewish settlement might contribute to the development of Palestine, how could one deny the civilising character of similar endeavours elsewhere? While the Marxists tended to reject Jewish nationalism in general and Zionism in particular out of hand, some revisionists were indeed more inclined to give these aspirations a fair hearing. Yet for many of them this preparedness had more to do with the desire to make their peace with German colonial ambitions than with their attitudes towards 'the Jews'.³⁰ Be that as it may, the revisionism of Quarck and his colleagues in Frankfurt who were responsible for *Aus der Waffenkammer* obviously did not curtail their enthusiasm for 'Zur Judenfrage'. Clearly, then, Mehring was not quite as peerless in his dealings with 'Zur Judenfrage' as has generally been suggested. Nor can the contention be upheld that Bebel and Liebknecht 'rarely, if at all, mentioned "Zur Judenfrage" and certainly never justified it'.³¹

WILHELM LIEBKNECHT AND 'ZUR JUDENFRAGE'

In Liebknecht's case, this contention is all the more remarkable because he made a substantial reference to 'Zur Judenfrage' in his Marx memoirs.³² This seems to have gone unnoticed in the literature even though these memoirs are a crucial source for the debate concerning the conversion of Marx's father, Heinrich Marx (1782–1838). They offer not only Liebknecht's own view on the matter. More importantly, they include a text by Marx's youngest daughter, Eleanor Marx (1855–1898, generally known as Tussy), in which she responded to a number of questions raised by Liebknecht, including the issue of her grandfather's conversion.³³ She

³⁰ Cf. Dan Diner, 'Sozialdemokratie und koloniale Frage – dargestellt am Beispiel des Zionismus,' in *Die Dritte Welt* 3, 1–2 (1974): 58–87.

³¹ Wistrich, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 43.

³² Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Karl Marx zum Gedächtniß* (Nuremberg: Wörlein, 1896). Hereafter Liebknecht, *Karl Marx*.

³³ *Ibid.*, 85–92, here 92. Incidentally, the literature occasionally portrays Marx as dissatisfied with the poor German language skills of his mother, Henriette Marx, née Preßburg (1787–1863), because they

claimed – quite correctly, as we now know³⁴ – that Heinrich Marx had converted to save (and perhaps even further) his career. Marx's last surviving daughter, Laura Lafargue (1846–1911), later sought to deny this contention of her younger and by then deceased sister.³⁵ She did so with Kautsky's support and based on Mehring's account.

Liebknrecht himself, by contrast, had subscribed to the younger sister's version of events. 'The pagan French', Liebknrecht explained at the outset of his Marx memoirs, had granted equality to all human beings in the Rhineland and thus 'relieved the Jews of the curse of a millennium of persecution and oppression, making them citizens and human beings. The Christian-Germanic spirit of the "Holy Alliance"', however, subsequently

rejected the pagan-French spirit of equality and aspired to a renewal of the old curse.

Shortly after the birth of the boy [i.e. Karl Marx] an edict was issued that forced all the Jews to choose between either letting themselves be baptized or relinquishing all public [*amtliche*] offices and professions.

Marx's father, a respected Jewish lawyer and notary and advocate at the district court, submitted to the inevitable and together with his family converted to Christianity.³⁶

Liebknrecht then added the somewhat dubious remark that 'twenty years later the man that boy had become gave his first response to this violation [*Gewaltstreich*] with his text on the Jewish Question. And his whole life was the revenge'.³⁷ It is hard to say how exactly Liebknrecht meant this remark. It would seem to imply this much, though: Karl Marx was irked by this injustice that the Jews had experienced and the desire to respond to it was at least one of the motives that drove him throughout his life. Yet it remains unclear whether Liebknrecht thought of this desire as a conscious or more of a sub-conscious motive force. Nor does Liebknrecht's formulation necessarily imply that Marx responded to this injustice by making the cause of the Jews *qua* Jews his own. More likely, and nearer the truth, would be that Liebknrecht simply meant this: the experience of this injustice so

supposedly reflected her discernible Jewishness and lack of assimilation. It is evident from Eleanor Marx's report that her grandmother in fact spoke fluent Dutch which obviously cannot have rendered her discernibly Jewish.

³⁴ On the background here, cf. the discussion by Na'aman, based on the relevant findings of Heinz Monz (Na'aman, *Marxismus*, 33–41.)

³⁵ Cf. Lewis S. Feuer, 'The Conversion of Karl Marx's Father,' in *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 14, 2 (1972): 149–166. Hereafter Feuer, 'Conversion'.

³⁶ Liebknrecht, *Karl Marx*, 1. In fact Heinrich Marx initially converted alone and the children and his wife were only baptised on two later occasions.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

close to home sharpened Marx's sense for all forms of injustice and thus helped generate his urge to search for comprehensive solutions that would rectify the problems of Jews and non-Jews alike. As we will see, Mehring nevertheless felt the need to ring the anti-'philosemitic' alarm bells in response to this statement by Liebknecht.

Laura Lafargue had occasion to comment on the matter in response to an inquiry from John Spargo (1876–1966)³⁸ at the end of 1907. She insisted that her grandfather had converted 'freely & not in obedience to any official edict. He believed in God, he told his son, as Newton, Locke & Leibniz had done before him. He also believed in Voltaire'.³⁹ Lafargue recommended that Spargo should turn to Mehring's introduction in the *Nachlaßausgabe*. There he would find 'the fullest information & abundant material, historical & biographical' on her father. In the *Nachlaßausgabe*, Mehring explicitly rejected Liebknecht's version of events. He added that the connection Liebknecht had drawn between the alleged reason for the conversion and 'Zur Judenfrage' suggested that its content was of a nature entirely at odds with the text's actual thrust.⁴⁰ Mehring apparently feared that Liebknecht's account might lead people to believe that 'Zur Judenfrage' was essentially a 'philosemitic' text.

Kautsky too directed Spargo towards the *Nachlaßausgabe*. Writing to Spargo in the spring of 1908 he explained that 'Mad. Lafargue is quite right with her statement on the renunciation of the Jewish religion by Karl [sic!] Marx. Liebknecht was mistaken. But not Mehring', who had dealt with the matter in the *Nachlaßausgabe*. 'Mehring's preface and commentaries to that edition are of the utmost importance for anybody writing on Marx'.⁴¹ This was an obvious blanket recommendation. Had Kautsky had serious misgivings about Mehring's treatment of 'Zur Judenfrage' in the *Nachlaßausgabe* then this surely would have been a most suitable opportunity to indicate them, in however guarded a fashion, especially given that Kautsky was making this recommendation specifically in connection with the Jewish background of Marx's family. This makes it highly unlikely that Kautsky was simply praising the *Nachlaßausgabe* in general at the expense of possible misgivings regarding Mehring's presentation of 'Zur Judenfrage' in particular.

Now, Spargo presumably consulted Laura Lafargue, assuming she could provide him with first-hand information based either on documents in her possession or on authentic personal recollections of one kind or another. The authenticity of these recollections, however, and the exact nature of her explicit recourse to Mehring present us with something of a chicken and egg issue. Not least in an attempt to shore up his own position against

³⁸ On Spargo, cf. Feuer, 'Conversion,' 159. ³⁹ Quoted *ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁰ Mehring, *Nachlaßausgabe*, 1: 3–4. ⁴¹ Quoted by Feuer, 'Conversion,' 162.

Kautsky (and Riazanov),⁴² Mehring later related in the introduction to his Marx biography on what good terms he had been with Laura Lafargue as the last immediate heir of Karl Marx. She had sent him friendly greetings only hours before her death, he claimed. 'I had earned her friendship and trust', he explained,

not because she considered me the most scholarly or ingenious of her father's students, but because she considered me the one who had penetrated his human nature most deeply and knew how to portray it most accurately. In letters and in direct conversations alike she frequently assured me that many a largely faded recollection of her parental home had become fresh and vivid again; many a name she had frequently heard her parents mention had only emerged from the shadows and become a concrete character for her, due to the account in my party history and especially in my *Nachlaßausgabe*.⁴³

We might well wonder, then, whether her certainty about the circumstances of her grandfather's conversion was also among the 'almost faded recollections' rendered 'fresh and vivid' again by Mehring's account. Alternatively, Lafargue may well have been the main source of Mehring's version of events in the first place. Either way, I would suggest that we are well advised to treat Mehring and Lafargue essentially as one source as far as the issue of Heinrich Marx's conversion is concerned and not as two sources that could bear each other out.

Liebknrecht, in his Marx memoirs, to return to our main argument, subsequently concluded a relatively detailed section on the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* by offering 'a sample – and a *stylistic* sample at that',⁴⁴ from the journal. That sample was the final section of the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage'. He chose an excerpt making for no less than one and a half pages of text (equivalent to roughly one full page in the *MEW*).⁴⁵ 'With the language of the Hegel school', Liebknrecht then added,

⁴² The Russian Socialist David Borisovich Riazanov (Goldenbach) (1870–1938) developed a strong interest in the history of Marxism and a deep knowledge of the primary sources and extant archival holdings while in exile from pre-revolutionary Russia. He subsequently became the director of the Marx Engels Institute in Moscow and held overall responsibility for the publication of the first (abortive) edition of Marx and Engels's complete works. Purged under Stalin he was shot in 1938.

⁴³ Mehring, *Karl Marx*, ix–x. Where Mehring is known at all in the Anglophone academic world it tends to be for this biography. Cf., for example, A. J. P. Taylor in his edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, first published in 1967: 'The standard life of Marx is by Franz Mehring'. A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 1985): 49.

⁴⁴ Liebknrecht, *Karl Marx*, 5.

⁴⁵ The American edition of Liebknrecht's Marx memoirs: Wilhelm Liebknrecht, *Karl Marx. Biographical Memoirs* (Chicago: C. H. Kerr, 1901) hence also made this final section of the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' available in English long before the essays as a whole were published in English in the 1920s; cf. Carlbach, *Karl Marx*, 421 n13.

which Marx still speaks in this treatise, the reader may grapple as best he can. [Yet] The *train of thought* anyone can grasp. Marx understands the Jewish Question as an economic question, as a question of the capitalist system. The persecution of the Jews – the name antisemitism had not yet become fashionable – is mere competitive envy of the Christian huckstering *vis-à-vis* the Jewish huckstering, and only once human society has emancipated itself from this huckstering spirit, i.e. to express it in modern terms, from *capitalism*, will the Jews be emancipated like all other human beings and nations.

Here, then, we already find the idea of the *Communist Manifesto* and the *International Workers' Association*.⁴⁶

Now, for all that Liebknecht's Marx memoirs sought to give themselves a casual and incidental air, it is no coincidence that they were published in the year following Engels's death.⁴⁷ With Engels no longer around, Liebknecht could claim with some justification to be the only senior figure in the party who could bear witness to the goings-on in the Marx household between the late 1840s and the early 1860s.⁴⁸ It seems evident enough that Liebknecht not only presented these recollections to fulfil his duties as an eye witness while he still could. He in fact did so in a very conscious attempt to stake a claim as Engels's true successor at the helm of the movement.⁴⁹ His comparatively detailed discussion of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* and lofty dismissal of the Hegelian diction Marx still employed there most likely reflect an attempt by Liebknecht to emphasise his intellectual stature and thereby to underscore the legitimacy of his claim. At the same time, it seems likely that the final section of the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' struck him as a particularly suitable 'sample' not least because it was the only part of Marx's contributions to the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* that he could really make head or tail of. This much is beyond doubt, though: Liebknecht's comments on this excerpt from 'Zur Judenfrage' may not make an awful lot of sense but they are obviously strongly affirmative and make the suggestion that he 'certainly never justified' 'Zur Judenfrage' simply untenable.

In fact this was by no means Liebknecht's first close encounter with 'Zur Judenfrage'. When, as already mentioned, the *Berliner Volksblatt* published

⁴⁶ Liebknecht, *Karl Marx*, 6.

⁴⁷ Engels died on 5 August 1895, the preface of Liebknecht's memoirs is dated 'Ende März [late March] 1896'.

⁴⁸ Liebknecht, *Karl Marx*, iii–iv, vii.

⁴⁹ Cf. Jan Hans, 'Wilhelm Liebknechts Erinnerungen an Marx – Zum Subjektbegriff der sich etablierenden Sozialdemokratie,' in Wolfgang Beutin, Holger Malterer, Friedrich Mülner (eds.), *„Eine Gesellschaft der Freiheit, der Gleichheit, der Brüderlichkeit!“* (Frankfurt/Main, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2001) [hereafter Beutin et al. (eds.), *„Gesellschaft der Freiheit“*], 193–206, here 197.

'Zur Judenfrage' in six instalments in October 1890,⁵⁰ Liebknecht was its editor-in-chief.⁵¹ He had moved from Leipzig to Berlin on 20 September to take over the paper. Shortly before his departure, Adolf Pichler, a party veteran from Hannover, had visited him in Leipzig and on this occasion suggested to him that he publish 'Zur Judenfrage' in the *Berliner Volksblatt*. Liebknecht had responded positively and on 4 October Pichler sent him the first part of the manuscript 'that I promised you in Leipzig'.⁵² Pichler had offered to prepare the text for publication since Liebknecht did not have a copy of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* at his disposal. 'I am already looking forward to the *capers* our opponents, especially the *antisemites*, will cut when the article is published', Pichler wrote in another letter. 'It'll be hilarious'.⁵³ On 30 October 1890, Pichler could promptly report to Liebknecht 'that we are embroiled in a struggle with the antisemites here. For the latter have finally broken their silence on *Karl Marx's* article "Zur Judenfrage" [...] a merry "Jewish Debate" [*Juden-Debatte*] will most likely now unfold'.⁵⁴

The short preface to the first instalment in the *Berliner Volksblatt* pointed out that Marx's 'famous essay on the Jewish Question that has recently been referred to frequently because of its topicality' had originally been published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Copies of this publication were extremely rare and a more comprehensive edition of Marx's collected works was hardly imminent. Hence, 'we want to make this ingenious [*genial*] piece of work by the emerging master that has hitherto only been known to a small minority available to the German people by publishing it in the columns of our paper'.

Liebknecht had in fact been trying to gain Engels's support for a *Gesamtausgabe* [complete edition] of Marx and Engels's works. Engels, however, had shown himself categorically opposed to this idea. Alternatively, Liebknecht had suggested the publication of all of Marx and Engels's contributions to the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in pamphlet form, including the correspondence between Ruge and Marx ('Ein Briefwechsel von 1843'). Pichler continuously encouraged this endeavour and urged Liebknecht along. He supplied Liebknecht with copies of the relevant material from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* and also offered to proofread the final version. The text of 'Zur Judenfrage' in the *Berliner Volksblatt* had been 'replete with typos', he remarked on 14 December,⁵⁵ and on 6 January 1891 he sent Liebknecht a corrected version.⁵⁶ A few days earlier he had promised

⁵⁰ 'Karl Marx über die Judenfrage,' in *Berliner Volksblatt* 7, 236–238 (10–12 October 1890) Beilage 1: 1; 7, 240 (15 October 1890) Beilage 2: 1; 7, 242 (17 October 1890) Beilage 2: 1; 7, 244 (19 October 1890) Beilage 2: 1–2.

⁵¹ For the following, cf. also *MEGA2* I.2 Apparat, 653–654.

⁵² SAPMO-BArch NY 4034/180 Bl. 58. ⁵³ SAPMO-BArch NY 4034/180 Bl. 54.

⁵⁴ SAPMO-BArch NY 4034/180 Bl. 60. ⁵⁵ SAPMO-BArch NY 4034/180 Bl. 100.

⁵⁶ SAPMO-BArch NY 4034/180 Bl. 124.

to give his own copy of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* to Liebknecht as a present if he decided to reprint all the relevant texts. 'For me it is only important that I own a *complete* edition, whether it is the *original* or a *reprint* is neither here nor there'.⁵⁷ Engels still had his doubts, though. Writing to Liebknecht on 18 December 1890 he especially questioned the merit of publishing 'this muddled correspondence' between Ruge and Marx 'which is today quite incomprehensible in its Hegelianized [*verhegelt*] language'. He added that 'I readily give my consent to the reprinting in pamphlet form of such individual pieces by Marx as are comprehensible today without annotation and commentary, *just to their reprinting*, that is, *without any annotation and commentary*'. Any other endeavours he would nip in the bud.⁵⁸ An edition of these early texts without any annotation and commentary was hardly a viable project and this presumably explains why Liebknecht's plan to publish the texts from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* was subsequently abandoned. At no point throughout these deliberations did anybody suggest, however, that it might be questionable to continue reprinting 'Zur Judenfrage'. It was considered an integral part of Marx's early writings. Hence, the notion that Liebknecht 'never justified' it is true at best in the sense that he would not have understood the need to do so in the first place. Far from being reluctant to refer to it, he counted 'Zur Judenfrage' among Marx's particularly authoritative statements and readily took recourse to it when he felt it suited his purposes.

AUGUST BEBEL AND 'ZUR JUDENFRAGE'

The *locus classicus* for any discussion of Bebel's stance on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' is his much-cited speech at the 1893 Party Congress in Cologne. This speech has had a remarkably good press. Rürup has credited it with a 'penetrating analysis of the causes, form and functions of political antisemitism'.⁵⁹ To Leuschen-Seppel's mind, it presents a 'detailed and still valid analysis of the function of antisemitism and its social following'.⁶⁰ Henke too would have us count it among 'the great sociologically substantiated analyses of antisemitism'.⁶¹ That said, Leuschen-Seppel also claims that Scheidemann's infamous lament on the degeneration of the antisemitic movement, published in the *Neue Zeit* in 1906,⁶² a text we will discuss at the end of this chapter, offered 'no substantially new aspects that went beyond

⁵⁷ SAPMO-BArch NY 4034/180 Bl. 109. ⁵⁸ *MEW* 37: 527. ⁵⁹ Rürup, 'Sozialdemokratie,' 22.

⁶⁰ Rosemarie Leuschen-Seppel, 'Sozialdemokratie und Antisemitismus im Kaiserreich 1871-1914,' in Anneliese Mannzman (ed.), *Judenfeindschaft in Altertum, Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Königstein/Ts.: Scriptor, 1981): 65-79, here 73.

⁶¹ Henke, "Jude", 100.

⁶² Philipp Scheidemann, 'Wandlungen des Antisemitismus,' in *NZ* 24-II, 45 (1 August 1906): 632-636. Hereafter Scheidemann, 'Wandlungen'.

Bebel's analysis of 1893'.⁶³ This already demonstrates that we may be well advised not to get unduly carried away by the anti-antisemitic credentials of Bebel's speech, its 'still valid' analysis notwithstanding.

This general enthusiasm for Bebel's speech is probably due at least in part simply to the fact that Bebel's speech is undeniably in almost every respect considerably less offensive in its portrayal of Jewry than 'Zur Judenfrage' (and many other relevant pronouncements). The less offensive tone apart, the esteem in which Bebel's speech is held by many also illustrates the vagaries of the kernel-of-truth approach to antisemitism to which both Rürup and Leuschen-Seppel certainly subscribe.⁶⁴ After all, as Jack Jacobs has pointed out, Bebel's speech 'does not deny the anti-Semitic charge of "Jewish exploitation", but merely condemns it as "one-sided"'. Nor, for that matter, does it offer any sort of moral condemnation of antisemitism.⁶⁵

In other respects too, the entitlement of Bebel's speech to the anti-antisemitic credentials it has often been granted deserves careful examination. Much emphasis has been placed on Bebel's use of irony, especially in connection with his portrayal of antisemitism as an expression of envy felt by lazy or inept Germans *vis-à-vis* determined and diligent Jews. His ostensible insistence on the fact that the admittedly irksome character traits of the Jews were a product of the conditions they had endured in the course of their history (rather than immutable characteristics) also features prominently in evaluations of his speech. Yet the consistency of this insistence is as questionable as the extent to which his use of irony really represents a redeeming feature. While Bebel clearly did concede the importance of historical factors, he also persistently portrayed them as having reinforced intrinsic Jewish traits. Thus, to give an example, he explained how 'due to their historical development, the natural inclination and disposition of the Jews to trade [...] has been furthered and developed in the extreme'.⁶⁶ For

if a race is persecuted and isolated over a long succession of generations and circumstances compel it to withdraw into itself, then it already follows from Darwin's laws of adaptation and hereditary transmission that the particular characteristics of the race will be developed and perfected more and more over time. The persecution adds its particular imprint to this development and hence Jewry took on its present guise.⁶⁷

⁶³ Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 200.

⁶⁴ Cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 73 n145–146.

⁶⁵ Jack Jacobs, 'Friedrich Engels and "the Jewish Question" Reconsidered,' in *MEGA Studien* 2/1998: 3–23, here 12.

⁶⁶ August Bebel, *Sozialdemokratie und Antisemitismus* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1894): 4. Hereafter Bebel, *Sozialdemokratie*. I will be quoting from this version of Bebel's speech. I have compared it with the original version in the minutes of the Congress (*Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitag der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Köln a. Rh. vom 22. bis 28. Oktober 1893* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1893) [hereafter *Parteitag 1893*]: 224–237) and shall presently comment on the one critical respect in which the two versions differ.

I am not suggesting that Bebel's mild-mannered adherence to racial logic at this point is in any way unusual, let alone particularly emphatic or malign, given the intellectual and cultural context in which he and his peers were moving. Were it not for his explicit reference to Darwin, one would almost be tempted to assume he might still have been using the term 'race' in the old-fashioned way designed to denote nothing more than an 'ethnic group'. What I would suggest, though, is this: rather than simply ignoring it, one would surely need to critically engage the fact that Bebel resorted to this kind of racialised conceptualisation in order to determine whether or to what extent his speech might nevertheless qualify as a 'penetrating', 'still valid', 'great sociologically substantiated' analysis of antisemitism.

As for his use of irony, if the minutes of the Congress are anything to go by it is certainly true that Bebel repeatedly aroused the amusement of the delegates. He did so, for instance, with his reference to the 'additional *malheur*' that burdened the Jew, namely that 'of a conspicuous physical appearance, so that one immediately recognises the Jew by his nose (Amusement among the delegates). Since he is therefore in the eyes of his foes already distinguished by nature', Bebel explained, 'we find here an additional element that furthers hatred and enmity'.⁶⁸ When touching on instances in which Jews had been forced to wear distinguishing garments or markers, he again added: 'the characteristic nose was not enough; (Amusement among the delegates).'⁶⁹ He also aroused the delegates' amusement by stating that 'throughout all of human history there are only two examples, two peoples, that, despite living fragmented and dispersed among foreign peoples, have maintained themselves in total purity. These are the Jews and the Gypsies. (Amusement among the delegates.)'⁷⁰ I am at a loss to explain why the delegates should have found this amusing but suspect that I am better off not knowing why. Easier to explain is why Bebel struck a chord with his comrades when claiming that 'in one respect the Jews do distinguish themselves positively, they have adhered strictly to the commandment of their fathers: Be fruitful and multiply like sand at the beach! (Considerable amusement among the delegates.)'⁷¹ Now, the birth rate was lower among German Jews than among non-Jewish Germans throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, German Jewry was by this time discernibly at the forefront of the bourgeois trend to limit family sizes (preceding similar developments among their non-Jewish compatriots by some two decades).⁷² How, then, does Bebel's amusing remark about Jewish fertility fit into the context of a 'great sociologically substantiated analysis'?

⁶⁷ Bebel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 6. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 6. ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷² Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991): 42.

Just how limited Bebel's interest in, and knowledge of, contemporary Jewry actually was is illustrated rather dramatically by a remark he made in the *Reichstag* in the spring of 1904. On 29 February 1904, *Reichskanzler* von Bülow (1849–1929) made a reference in the *Reichstag* to Russian students in Berlin who were engaged in radical political activities. They would be deported if they did not desist. The radical student activity, Bülow claimed, transpired 'under the leadership of Mandelstamm and Silberfarb'.⁷³ It seems obvious enough that Bülow singled out these two because their names were recognisably Jewish and thus had pejorative connotations well suited to denounce the activities of the Russian students as a whole as 'subversive'. We will have cause to return to this denunciation of Mandelshtam⁷⁴ and Zilberfarb⁷⁵ in the [final chapter](#).

Following their actual expulsion, Bebel took the opportunity on 14 April 1904 to remark on the matter in the *Reichstag*. The way in which the names Mandelshtam and Zilberfarb had been utilised in public debate was despicable, Bebel declared. The two deserved for the truth about their personalities and activities to be made public. Before turning to Mandelshtam and relating his biography at some length, Bebel sought to demonstrate how utterly misguided Bülow had been in mentioning Zilberfarb in this context. Zilberfarb was 'neither an anarchist nor a terrorist, he is not even a Socialist', Bebel explained. 'Rather, this Silberfarb is a *Zionist* (Hear, hear! from the Social Democrats); in other words', Bebel went on to explain, 'he is an orthodox Jew and nothing could be further from the mind of a man of his inclination than revolutionary machinations'.⁷⁶ Now, how much of an expert in Jewish affairs did one have to be, by 1904, to realise (to single out just this one issue) that 'orthodox Jew' and 'Zionist' were hardly terms that could simply be used synonymously or interchangeably?

In his speech in Cologne, Bebel also dabbled in the application of a range of the usual, highly ambivalent, anti-antisemitic 'arguments'. Having described the long history of discriminatory measures and legislation, for instance, he concluded:

⁷³ Cf. *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags. XI. Legislaturperiode. I. Session, erster Sessionsabschnitt 1903/1904* [hereafter *Stenographische Berichte*] 2: *Von der 30. Sitzung am 11. Februar bis zur 56. Sitzung am 12. März 1904* (Berlin: Norddeutsche Buchdruckerei und Verlagsanstalt, 1904): 1390.

⁷⁴ Presumably the Russian Social Democrat Martyn Nikolaevich Mandelshtam, generally known as Liadov (1872–1947), a former Populist who represented the Bolsheviki at the International Congress in Amsterdam in 1904. His early biography matches the details subsequently related by Bebel in the *Reichstag*. Cf. Roland V. Layton, Jr., 'Liadov, Martyn Nikolaevich (1872–1947),' in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History* 19 (1981): 234–236.

⁷⁵ Moshe Zilberfarb (1876–1933) is best known for his role as Vice-Secretary and then Minister for Jewish Affairs in Ukraine between 1917 and early 1919. Cf. Yosef Kruk, 'Moshe Zilberfarb (meah shanah lehuledeto),' in *He'avar* 22 (1976): 276–279.

⁷⁶ *Stenographische Berichte* 3: *Von der 57. Sitzung am 14. März bis zur 80. Sitzung am 30. April 1904* (Berlin: Norddeutsche Buchdruckerei und Verlagsanstalt, 1904): 2062.

Now, if all this legislation that, as mentioned, has continued in varying forms for almost one and a half millennia did not achieve its goal, then this alone should be proof enough for the enemies of the Jews that their endeavours are impracticable and would not become practicable even in the unthinkable case that they gained power.⁷⁷

This is a statement made half a century before the Shoah and in some respects it is a good illustration of just how different the world has become after Auschwitz. Clearly, it *was* practicable for the antisemites who finally did gain power to first comprehensively exclude the Jews from society and then proceed to an even more radical 'solution' by physically annihilating them. It would be unjust to suggest that Bebel and his peers could have foreseen this development. Even so, the suggestion that one could undermine the antisemites' case by criticising them for their inability to carry out their threats (or keep their promises, depending on one's perspective) clearly has a particularly haunting quality and seems to be tempting fate in a most unfortunate way. On the other hand, we would have more than enough cause to be profoundly concerned about antisemitism even if the Shoah had never been perpetrated. But the Imperial German Social Democrats were entirely oblivious to the threat even on this level and for this failure they most certainly can be held accountable.

Not only was it unlikely that one would ever really get the better of the Jews but even if one did, it would not really solve the problem. Ultimately, and here Bebel reiterated what was clearly one of the all-time favourites, 'one could remove all Jews from Germany and the substance of our society *would not be changed by a hair's breadth*. [...] Remove the Jews today and tomorrow so-called Christians will take their place'.⁷⁸

What all these anti-antisemitic arguments have in common is that they only work if one acknowledges the core of the antisemites' accusations in the first place. The Jews really are like the antisemites say they are, they really do play the role the antisemites ascribe to them. It was not the antisemites' analysis that was wrong, it was the inferences they drew from their essentially correct analysis that were at fault. Clearly, then, Bebel did to all intents and purposes see antisemitism as a direct product of the socio-economic circumstances. 'Were antisemitism really no more than the product of catch phrases, the result of the work of certain activists', he explained, 'we would not need to deal with it; (Agreement from the floor) and the current movement as it actually exists would be unthinkable. (Hear, hear!) To dismiss antisemitism with such a claim would move on the very same plane on which our opponents believed for decades they could rebuff us. (Hear, hear!)'⁷⁹ After all, while the underlying sentiments were obviously older, it was 'only with the year 1877' that

⁷⁷ Bebel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 10. ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

this movement gained publicity as a political phenomenon [...] How did this come about? It was the natural effect and consequence of the economic conditions brought upon us in Germany by the great Crash of 1874. (Hear, hear!) [...]

Now, there can be absolutely no doubt that the Jews – I add that when I speak of Jews I am always focusing on the majority of Jews – stood at the forefront of our economic development once they had attained equality in all respects.⁸⁰

It had been claimed, he went on, that the recent election results were remarkable in that 'the antisemitic movement found such fertile ground precisely where there are so relatively few Jews', namely, in Saxony. 'But given the current organization of society it is not decisive whether the Jew is personally in town, crucial is whether, and how, he is perceptible as a competitor. As such, however, he is perceptible everywhere'.⁸¹ This remark epitomises the fundamental ambiguity of Bebel's entire line of argument. Is 'the Jew' supposedly 'perceptible everywhere' as a competitor because his competition can genuinely be experienced everywhere in an empirically verifiable sense of the word? Or is Bebel simply taking it for granted that even people who are not personally involved with Jews cannot encounter their own specific social reality on the ground without also encountering the 'objective' role that 'the Jew' plays in society as a whole? Assuming Bebel was in fact implying the latter, as I would argue, it is hard not to sense a disquieting affinity here to the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage'.

In any case, since the prescriptions of the antisemites would soon prove futile, their movement was doomed, and 'as soon as the antisemitic movement reaches rock bottom it is our turn, [...] then the hour of our harvest will come'.⁸² The antisemitic movement 'in its struggle for power will be compelled, in spite of itself, to overshoot its mark'. This trend was 'already evident', for instance, in Ahlwardt's case. Ahlwardt had

entered the fray arm in arm with the *Junker* establishment and was elected. Gradually, however, the mood of the bulk of his voters has compelled him to issue the slogan: Against Jews and *Junker*! As soon as the point is reached where it will no longer suffice for the antisemites merely to proceed against the Jews and they are compelled to turn on capitalism in general – and their struggle against the Jewish capitalists will automatically propel them there – [...] then the moment will also have arrived where our notions can and will fall on fertile ground. We will then win the following we as yet seek to gain in vain (Agreement from the floor.)⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2. ⁸⁰ Ibid., 10–11. ⁸¹ Ibid., 20. ⁸² Ibid., 20–21. ⁸³ Ibid., 21.

The libellous antics of the antisemite, Hermann Ahlwardt (1846–1914),⁸⁴ and the legal proceedings they embroiled him in between 1891 and 1894 clearly marked the high point of Social Democratic ambiguity *vis-à-vis* the antisemitic movement.⁸⁵ This went so far, in fact, that even the otherwise indubitable and categorical party-political opposition to party-political antisemitism crumbled momentarily. Ahlwardt initially got himself imprisoned for four months by libelling Bleichröder. When he subsequently libelled the Jewish-owned armaments supplier Loewe in his infamous *Judenflinten*, he narrowly escaped renewed imprisonment by successfully contesting the *Reichstag* mandate for the Pomeranian constituency of Arnswalde-Friedeberg in a by-election in November 1892. He was returned again in the regular elections the following year in which the antisemites generally fared rather well, gaining 3.4 percent of the vote and returning no less than sixteen deputies. Ahlwardt was in fact to remain in the *Reichstag* until he too fell prey to the general melt down of parliamentary party-political antisemitism in 1903. Once elected, he sought to exploit as best he could the publicity the *Reichstag* offered and his immunity as a deputy to intensify his denunciatory campaign against alleged Jewish corruption and abuse, thus getting himself into ever more trouble. He commanded considerable popular support, many identifying with him as ‘one of us’ who dared to speak out against ‘them up there’, undaunted by the ‘persecution’ to which the establishment subjected him. Many Social Democrats interpreted this anti-authoritarian impulse as a clear indication of antisemitism’s increasing tendency ‘in spite of itself, to overshoot its mark’, and ‘turn on capitalism in general’.

Mehring too was vociferous in propagating this notion, embellishing it with vicious anti-‘philosemitic’ remarks.⁸⁶ Consequently, he also took issue with the attempts of the Liberals to see Ahlwardt ostracised within the *Reichstag*.⁸⁷ To Mehring’s mind, it went without saying that Social Democracy could only maintain a ‘strict reticence’ in the midst of this ‘parliamentary Ahlwardt racket [*Ahlwardtkrakehl*]. It has as little to do with the antisemitic monk as it has with the capitalist rabbi’.⁸⁸ Yet occasionally he did worry about the party’s response to the *Ahlwardtkrakehl*. ‘Your letter again aroused my vehement regret’, Mehring wrote to Kautsky on 28 March 1893,

⁸⁴ For the following, cf. Peter Pulzer, ‘Die Wiederkehr des alten Hasses,’ in Michael A. Meyer (ed.), *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt/Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1997) [hereafter Meyer (ed.), *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte*], 3: 193–248, here 219–220.

⁸⁵ Cf. Wistrich, *Socialism*, 109–110.

⁸⁶ Cf., for example, Franz Mehring, ‘Berliner Geschichten,’ in *NZ* 10-II, 34 (11 May 1892): 225–229. For a detailed discussion of the following, cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 78–82.

⁸⁷ Cf., for example, Franz Mehring, ‘Im Wechsel der Zeiten,’ in *NZ* 11-II, 28 (28 March 1893): 1–4.

⁸⁸ Idem, ‘Mönch und Rabbi,’ in *NZ* 11-I, 27 (22 March 1893): 841–844, here 844.

that you and the *Neue Zeit* aren't here [i.e., in Berlin]; if so, we could do so much more good than we are, hopefully, already doing. Particularly in the Ahlwardt and the Hauptmann⁸⁹ business – to use these shorthand terms for brevity's sake – the course being pursued here is not quite right. Thanks to Frau Natalie⁹⁰ and her Jewish blood,

Mehring then added, following a logic that neither requires nor deserves any comment, 'good old Liebknecht is far too much of a philosemite and the *Fraktion* too is embroiled in the bourgeois discourse'.⁹¹ 'Generally speaking', he reiterated on 1 May 1893 in another letter to Kautsky,

I do not think that the party has been, and is, operating in quite the right way as far as the Ahlwardt business is concerned. Liars as the antisemitic leaders are, Social Democracy has no reason to have a go at the antisemitic masses [...]

At the moment the assault is being launched in far too one-sided a manner on the antisemites – to the delight of the capitalists. [...] One may tear its programme to shreds and brandish its leaders as harshly as possible, but one should also point out the genuinely guilty party: capitalist liberalism.⁹²

And yet the differences within the party on how best to deal with Ahlwardt cannot have been all that substantial. Mehring had already conceded in his letter to Kautsky on 28 March that 'Schönlank has brought matters back on track in the *Vorwärts*. I don't generally like him, and I am of course hardly pleased' that it was Schoenlank⁹³ who rectified the matter, 'especially, since he has taken part of his material from [Mehring's publication] *Kapital und Presse*, but I nevertheless have to acknowledge that he got the *Vorwärts* off the hook in this instance'.⁹⁴ In fact, as early as June 1892 Mehring had already felt compelled to praise the *Vorwärts* in this respect.⁹⁵ Clearly, then, Mehring's evaluation of Ahlwardt was to all intents and purposes identical to that of Bebel and fully in keeping with the official party line. We might note once again, though, that here too Mehring distinguished very clearly between the antisemitic activists themselves, on the one hand, and the masses who were (supposedly) being duped by those activists, on the other.

⁸⁹ An unrelated issue to do with the playwright Gerhart Hauptmann (1862–1946).

⁹⁰ Wilhelm Liebknecht's second wife, Natalie Liebknecht (1835–1909).

⁹¹ IISH Karl Kautsky D XVII: 36. ⁹² IISH Karl Kautsky D XVII: 41.

⁹³ Bruno Schoenlank (1859–1901) was Mehring's predecessor as editor-in-chief of the *LVZ* from 1894 until his death. Initially on extremely friendly terms, Mehring and Schoenlank fell out in 1892, hence Mehring's reservations at this juncture. As we will presently see, they were later reconciled. Cf. Ursula Ratz, 'Aus Franz Mehrings marxistischer Frühzeit. Ein Briefwechsel Franz Mehrings mit Lujo Brentano (1891–93),' in *IWK* No. 19–20 (December 1973): 20–44.

⁹⁴ IISH Karl Kautsky D XVII: 36.

⁹⁵ Franz Mehring, 'Wenn Zwei sich streiten. . .,' in *NZ* 10-II, 41 (29 June 1892): 449–453.

As we saw earlier, this distinction was not always maintained with equal clarity by other leading Social Democrats.

Yet Bebel and his fellow Social Democrats in fact did rather more than just articulate their interpretation of Ahlwardt's role and significance in articles or speeches. 'I repeatedly negotiated with Ahlwardt these last few days', Bebel wrote to Engels on 18 April 1893 in a letter that seems to have received little attention in the literature. 'The man displays an ignorance and ineptitude that surprised me', he continued,

even though I assumed I already knew him well enough. He still hasn't submitted the motion approved by the President that I prepared for him yesterday. His own people do not know what he is going to do. The man is a twerp [...] which is connected to his excessive drinking [...]

the six gentlemen in the *Reichstag* are split into three or four factions. It has generally been noted that not one of them has taken the word on the Usury Law. We will throw that at them,

Bebel concluded, 'when the third reading is over and there is nothing more they can do about it'.⁹⁶

Blumenberg, in his edition of the correspondence between Engels and Bebel, provided two notes for this passage. One concerns the final point which presents us with yet another variation on the anti-antisemitic theme of denouncing antisemites by unmasking them as disingenuous. In this case the anti-antisemitic indictment ran as follows: you claim to oppose Jewish usury but are nowhere to be seen or heard when constraints on usury are actually being legislated. In the event, the antisemites Liebermann von Sonnenberg and Böckel did in fact speak during the third reading of the amendment to the Usury Law.⁹⁷ Thus Bebel's plan to criticise their lack of involvement on that occasion was thwarted. More importantly, though, Blumenberg also explained the background to Bebel's negotiations with Ahlwardt. Ahlwardt

had levelled accusations against members of the *Bundesrat* and the *Reichstag* in the *Reichstag* on 18 and 21 March and asked for the documentation that he wished to present to the *Reichstag* to be examined. Since the [organized antisemitic] parliamentary group did not have the requisite fifteen members, the Social Democrats provided the necessary votes.⁹⁸

This, surely, is truly remarkable. Whether the Social Democrats in the *Reichstag* supported Ahlwardt (or any of his 'democratic' colleagues) in this way on other occasions too I cannot say. Even if this was a one off, though, it nevertheless illustrates rather dramatically just how seriously Bebel and

⁹⁶ Werner Blumenberg (ed.), *August Bebels Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels* (London, The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1965): 679.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, loc cit. *n*5. ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, loc cit. *n*4.

his associates took their claims about the supposedly inevitable course the antisemitic movement would run: that it would be 'compelled to become revolutionary, in spite of itself and with necessity' and therefore objectively 'plays into our hands'.⁹⁹ Presumably Bebel and his peers thought they could hasten this process by offering Ahlwardt the sort of support rendered in this instance.

Bebel's speech in Cologne clearly did portray antisemitic sentiments as an obvious and reasonable, though short-sighted and ultimately futile, response to specifically Jewish phenomena. But that is not all. Wistrich, as we saw, counted Bebel among those who 'rarely, if at all, mentioned "Zur Judenfrage" and certainly never justified it'. Yet he also admitted that Bebel's speech deployed 'terms reminiscent of the young Marx',¹⁰⁰ and 'even echoed the Marxian phrase that money was the "secular God of the Jews"'.¹⁰¹ On closer inspection, the literature turns out to be a little confused on this particular issue. For elsewhere Wistrich himself noted that Bebel had not merely 'echoed' but actually 'repeated the stock formula of Marx about money being the secular God of the Jews'.¹⁰² Leuschen-Seppel, on the other hand, argues that Bebel expressly rejected the use to which Mehring was inclined to put this 'stock formula'. She quotes Bebel in a manner that might well suggest to the reader that Bebel was not citing that 'stock formula' himself but in fact referring critically to an instance in which Mehring had done so.¹⁰³ So what are we to assume? Did Bebel's formulations merely echo Marx's phraseology from 'Zur Judenfrage', did he actually quote from it, or did he distance himself from it?

As we will see, Bebel most certainly did not distance himself from 'Zur Judenfrage'. The answer to the other question, however, whether his speech merely echoed or actually quoted from 'Zur Judenfrage', will differ depending on the version of the speech we are referring to because the text exists in more than one version. It was printed, firstly, in the minutes of the Party Congress, secondly, as a separate pamphlet in 1894, and a slightly revised version of that pamphlet, thirdly, was reissued in 1906. If we turn to the version in the minutes, we indeed find only 'echoes' of 'Zur Judenfrage' and 'terms reminiscent of the young Marx'. If we turn to the version published separately as a pamphlet a somewhat different picture emerges.

Why do the two versions differ in this way? When the motion calling for the separate publication of Bebel's speech as a pamphlet was tabled at the Congress in Cologne, Bebel quickly pointed out that the speech would have to be revised for this purpose.¹⁰⁴ In the process of this revision, Bebel in

⁹⁹ Bebel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 24. ¹⁰⁰ Wistrich, *Socialism*, 134.

¹⁰¹ Idem, 'The SPD and Antisemitism in the 1890s,' in *European Studies Review* 7, 2 (1977): 177–197, here 183.

¹⁰² Idem, 'German Socialists,' 95. ¹⁰³ Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 84.

¹⁰⁴ *Parteitag* 1893, 239.

fact changed relatively little. One alteration that obviously did strike him as important, though, was the transformation of the reminiscences and echoes of 'Zur Judenfrage' that had already been discernible in the speech when he held it at the Congress into a direct reference. In the pamphlet version, Bebel inserted a short section claiming that just what he, Bebel, was saying, Marx had expressed

in a text from the forties *Ueber die* [sic!] *Judenfrage* as follows:

[“]What is the secular basis of Judaism? Practical need, self-interest.

What is the worldly religion of the Jew? *Huckstering*.

What is his worldly God? *Money*.

Very well then! Emancipation from huckstering and money, consequently from practical, real Jewry/Judaism, would be the self-emancipation of our time. . . .

In the final analysis, the emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of mankind from Jewry/Judaism.[”]

What he is saying, then, is: our entire society consists of huckstering and striving for money and is hence a Jewish society.

When Bebel reissued his speech in 1906 he went even further. Whereas in the initial version he described modern society simply as ‘Jewish’ [*jüdisch*], in 1906 he used the term *verjudet* [judaised] instead.¹⁰⁵ In so doing he finally erased the last remnant of conceptual ambiguity. This was a term straight from the unambiguous vocabulary of the antisemites. It was a term that could never be neutral, let alone have a positive connotation, not even in theory. It described a form of contamination and made it quite clear that the problem at hand was not one that society had with itself but one that it had with an alien entity in its midst. It is therefore little wonder that Bebel concluded by summing up Marx’s argument as follows: ‘*With the demise of bourgeois society the particular nature of the Jew too will disappear*’.¹⁰⁶

In Marx’s original formulation it remained ambiguous whether he envisaged the emancipation of society from its Jews or its own ‘Jewish’ characteristics. This is an issue we will take up again later. In Bebel’s paraphrase this ambiguity had gone, the focus had shifted from the emancipation of Jews and non-Jews alike to the disappearance of the Jews. What Marx envisaged as the emancipation of society as a whole, Bebel could only express negatively as ‘the demise of bourgeois society’. What he could express in positive terms, though, was the promise that Jewry would disappear as a distinct entity. It is against this background, I would argue, that we need

¹⁰⁵ August Bebel, *Sozialdemokratie und Antisemitismus* (Berlin: Vorwärts [2nd edition], 1906): 13.

¹⁰⁶ Bebel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 11.

to interpret Bebel's position. Take, for instance, his already cited statement that 'given the current organization of society, it is not decisive whether the Jew is personally in town, crucial is whether and how he is perceptible as a competitor. As such, however, he is perceptible everywhere'.¹⁰⁷ This contention needs to be understood in conjunction with the claim that 'our entire society' is *verjudet*. When we take the two together, the interpretation I suggested earlier becomes all the more compelling: empirical verifiability, in any meaningful sense of the word, was not Bebel's frame of reference when he spoke of the ubiquitous perceptibility of 'the Jew'.

Clearly, then, for Bebel 'Zur Judenfrage' remained an obvious and important source to turn to when it came to lending his speech additional authoritative clout. Rather tellingly, when he did so, while not even being able to remember the title correctly, he automatically turned to the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage'; and the passage that caught his fancy there was one of the most notorious of those 'easily understandable' passages the *Sozialdemokrat* had warned (back in 1881) against taking out of context because they could otherwise suggest the exact opposite of what Marx had intended to say. Which, in an important sense, was exactly what now happened. Bebel's interpretation may not have amounted to the exact opposite of Marx's stance, but it was certainly worlds removed from it. In this respect Bebel's use of this passage is paradigmatic for the use to which 'Zur Judenfrage' was generally put by those leading Social Democrats who did draw on it.

ANTISEMITISM, 'PHILOSEMITISM' AND FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

As we have already seen, explaining the serious notions underlying especially the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' is a rather murky business since it invariably requires us to rationalise (and thus, by implication, to gloss over) its portrayal of 'the Jews'. This portrayal is malicious and spiteful and grounded in traditional forms of stereotyping. That Marx deployed these stereotypes demonstrates not only his indifference to empirical knowledge but also genuine contempt for 'the Jews'. This contempt clearly reflects both a disturbing narrow-mindedness in the first place and a perplexing refusal to widen his horizons. In other words, this contempt not only resulted from but also imposed conceptual constraints on him. Nor can there be any doubt that it overdetermined the central ideas that Marx developed in 'Zur Judenfrage'. Yet one would nevertheless be hard-pressed to demonstrate that it actually determined his line of thought or diverted it from the path it would most likely have taken if only Marx had nurtured a more rational attitude towards Jewry.

One notion basic to the whole argument developed in 'Zur Judenfrage' that we need to understand at this point is the following idea which leant

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 20.

heavily on Feuerbach: religious consciousness (and ideology more generally) is essentially a projection whose purpose it is to compensate for the iniquities of life as it transpires in reality. The religious notions prevalent in a social group are basically a reflection, albeit ordinarily a distorted reflection, of that social group's inability to allow all its members to fulfil their potential in a mutually beneficial manner. To grossly oversimplify the matter: religion promises what the social group cannot afford its members. Tell me how your social group fails to offer its members a decent and gratifying life and I will tell you what your religion aspires to. It is this connection between religion and social reality that the critique of religion allows us to recognise. However, and it is at this point that Marx shed his Young Hegelian and Feuerbachian egg shells, in order to change the world for the better, one obviously has to tackle the actual problems of society. No critique of religion as the distorted reflection of those problems, however radical, will actually resolve them. The boot is on the other foot: it is the actual resolution of those problems that will render religion obsolete.

Within this scheme of things, differing forms of religious consciousness must obviously reflect differing social realities that are deficient in different ways. Judaism differs from Christianity not because Jews and Christians stubbornly cling to (partially) differing texts and traditions. Rather, the differences between their religious practices indicate that their religions are compensating for differing social conditions and constraints. Until a fundamental revolutionary transformation rendered religion obsolete altogether, it would always be the social conditions and constraints that form religious consciousness and not vice versa. Hence the religious particularity of the Jews was at root a reflection of their social particularity. They had played a prominent role in the money economy at a time when it was still fairly marginal to society as a whole. Hence, their religious consciousness was as marginal to society as the money economy and seemed as peculiar and unsettling to society as the money economy. As the money economy became increasingly integral to society as a whole, the religious consciousness it had previously generated in the Jews was also becoming integral to society as a whole, be it in an expressly religious or in a more secularised, ideological guise. Only comprehensive social emancipation could render the need for this form of consciousness obsolete for Jews and non-Jews alike. It is in this sense that 'the *social* emancipation of the Jews', as opposed to their merely formal or political emancipation, would signal 'the emancipation of society from Judaism/Jewry'.

It is impossible to grasp this without carefully reading both parts of 'Zur Judenfrage' in conjunction. One need not accept Marx's notion as valid or desirable to concede that it is worlds removed from the way in which Bebel understood the particular 'easily understandable passage' that he chose to quote from 'Zur Judenfrage' to lend additional authority to his speech. Marx concluded that the comprehensive social emancipation of the Jews

presupposed the comprehensive emancipation of society as a whole. For this reason it would signal the obsolescence of the conditions and constraints that had once generated their particular religious consciousness and now fettered Jews and non-Jews alike. Bebel's emphasis, by contrast, lay simply on the fact that the 'demise of bourgeois society' would also herald the disappearance of the 'particular nature of the Jew'. Bebel believed in this scenario and we need to take his confidence at face value. He was enlisting Marx's far-reaching vision in 'Zur Judenfrage' to underscore an extremely simple message: your accusations against the Jews are right but if you really want to get rid of them you will need to trawl more deeply.

There is a gaping chasm, then, between Marx's vision and the rather more sturdy and uncouth form in which leading Social Democrats tended to represent it when they did refer back to 'Zur Judenfrage'. One explanation for this chasm is presumably the simple fact that Marx wrote 'Zur Judenfrage' in an attempt to address what he thought of as 'the Jewish Question' while Bebel and his peers were groping for a response to antisemitism. There were two distinct questions here and the Social Democrats were treating what was a problematic but complex answer to one of them as if it could equally well be used to address the other. Little wonder that its interesting core was finally obliterated in the process and only the stench remained.

As we have already seen, for Marx 'the Jewish Question' was in fact two questions. One could be answered unconditionally by granting Jews the formal or political emancipation to which they were indubitably entitled. The other hinged on the same problems that non-Jews too would need to surmount in order to gain comprehensive social and human emancipation. Hence its solution presupposed a more complex process. It was this differentiation that both allowed and compelled Marx to insist on the disjunction of emancipation and assimilation and reject Bauer's 'conflation of right and morality'.

In this context there was a strong discrepancy between the way in which Social Democrats perceived of Jews (or 'philosemites'), on the one hand, and antisemites, on the other. Jews who stood on their dignity rather than giving their utmost to securing a form of general emancipation that rendered their Jewish existence obsolete were portrayed as wilfully setting themselves against the inevitable course of history. This criticism clearly did conflate right and morality. Antisemitism, on the other hand, was seen in large part as a product of the objective conditions. Antisemites could not simply abjure their antisemitism. Why not? Because it was only a change in the objective conditions that could compel them finally to transcend the cryptic anti-capitalism of their antisemitism and substitute a fully fledged Socialist anti-capitalism for it. In fact the prevalent assumption seems to have been that one ultimately had to subscribe to the Marxist scheme of things to recognise antisemitism's futility even on its own terms (not to mention the fact that it might be politically and morally wrong).

In theoretical or conceptual terms, this is not quite as far-fetched a contention as it might seem at first sight. After all, within the scheme of things explained earlier, one could indeed argue that antisemitism is like any other form of religious or ideological consciousness: it cannot be rendered obsolete without first radically transforming the social conditions and constraints of which it is a distorted reflection. Now, this touches on complex issues where there are no straightforward answers and the contentions at hand are not simply right or wrong. At stake here are the fundamental dialectics that govern the relationship between structural determination and human agency within the Marxian mode of analysis. Probably the most famous 'proof text' for this issue is Marx's remark at the beginning of the first section of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (first published in 1852). 'Men make their own history', Marx wrote there, 'but they do not make it as they please, not under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under extant circumstances directly given and handed down [to them]'.¹⁰⁸ This remark is now prone to feel as stale as all 'proof texts' almost invariably do when they have been excessively belaboured over long stretches of time and with decreasing discrimination.

Not only the ability to act on reality is quite literally conditioned by the circumstances, though; the way in which we see and think about reality too is conditioned in this way. Engels touched on this issue in a much-cited letter written to none other than Franz Mehring on 14 July 1893. 'Ideology is a process', Engels explained there, 'which the ostensible thinker indeed undertakes consciously but based on a false consciousness. The motives that really drive him remain unknown to him; otherwise the process would not be an ideological one'. The adherents of historical materialism indeed denied that ideological developments could transpire independently of their material environment. Yet that by no means implied, Engels hastened to add, that 'we would also deny them any *historical impact*'.¹⁰⁹ This was a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of their critics. The point here is this: our outlook on the world and the way in which we choose to position ourselves within it are not either entirely determined by the circumstances or entirely the outgrowth of our ability to transcend and radically change those circumstances. We are always looking at some sort of balance, however tenuous, between the two.

Within this scheme of things the way in which Jews (or 'philosemites') and antisemites see the world and respond to it, to return to our main argument, is formed both by the objective circumstances and by subjective choices. The issue is not whether their perceptions and stances are a matter of circumstance or of choice but how circumstance and choice mix to make Jews and antisemites think and act as they do. Against this background it is surely remarkable that Social Democratic commentators were inclined

¹⁰⁸ MEW 8: 115. ¹⁰⁹ MEW 39: 97–98.

to draw such uneven conclusions. Antisemitism they understood predominantly as determined by the circumstances. 'Philosemitism' they understood predominantly as a matter of choice. Both were supposedly doomed. Yet while the demise of antisemitism could generally be left to a change of the circumstances that generated it in the first place, the 'philosemites' needed to be taken to task for their wrong choices. Those in the thrall of antisemitism were best treated with patience, not least to avoid alienating them by treating them in an unduly harsh manner. Yet it was considered a matter of considerable urgency to show the 'philosemites' the error of their ways and to do so in no uncertain terms.

'THE JEWISH QUESTION' IN *DIE HEILIGE FAMILIE*

In one important respect, it is much easier for us to interpret and contextualise 'Zur Judenfrage' than it was for Bebel and Liebknecht and their peers. We can directly trace the development of Marx's stance by comparing 'Zur Judenfrage' with the three sections discussing 'the Jewish Question' in a work published but a year later under the title *Die heilige Familie* [The Holy Family].¹¹⁰ Scholars discussing 'Zur Judenfrage' have occasionally taken note of these slightly later comments in *Die heilige Familie*. Yet they have generally remained rather vague regarding the possible implications of these remarks for the evaluation of 'Zur Judenfrage'.

Is Carlebach right in suggesting that 'Marx practically re-wrote'¹¹¹ 'Zur Judenfrage' in *Die heilige Familie*? If by that Carlebach meant that the notions reflected in the two texts are substantially at odds and, by implication, that Marx set out to 'rewrite' 'Zur Judenfrage' with the intention of publicly setting the record straight, then the answer is clearly no. Why, then, did Marx return to this issue so soon if it was not his intention to set the record straight? The explanation is simple enough. The 'holy family' whom *Die heilige Familie* set out to destroy were none other than 'Bruno Bauer & Consorten', and Marx's renewed discussion of 'the Jewish Question' in *Die heilige Familie* was simply an outgrowth of his ongoing critique of Bauer. It was not interest in 'the Jewish Question' itself that made Marx return to this topic, it was the opportunity this debate offered him to show Bauer up.

Avineri rightly identified Marx's strategy in the three relevant sections of *Die heilige Familie*. His main point is that Bauer did 'not get the better' of his Jewish critics even though they were 'far inferior to Bauer as polemicists'.¹¹² That this is Marx's actual motivation in returning to the issue is also borne out by another fact: none of Marx's references to Bauer's Jewish critics actually draw on their original contributions to the controversy; Marx is

¹¹⁰ *MEW* 2: 91–95, 99–104, 112–125. ¹¹¹ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 174.

¹¹² Shlomo Avineri, 'Marx and Jewish Emancipation,' in *JHI* 25, 3 (1964): 445–450, here 446. Hereafter Avineri, 'Marx'.

familiar with them only from Bauer's responses to them.¹¹³ In other words, he never actually engaged the debate as such. His point of reference were exclusively Bauer's writings. It was because they touched on 'the Jewish Question' that Marx's critique of Bauer also engaged this issue again.

Carlebach is nevertheless right in stating that 'Marx set out to correct the inadequacies of the earlier essays in the *Holy Family*'.¹¹⁴ Of course Marx saw certain things clearer when working on *Die heilige Familie* than he had done when preparing 'Zur Judenfrage'. His sustained confrontation with Bauer was instrumental in allowing him to clarify his thought on a number of issues and the controversy concerning 'the Jewish Question' had played an important role in bringing that confrontation to a head. Clearly, Marx wanted to be even more spot on now than he had already been a year earlier but we really have no indication that Marx was in any way unhappy with 'Zur Judenfrage' and now wanted to put things right. Far from it, in April 1851 Hermann Becker¹¹⁵ began to publish a collection of Marx's *Gesammelte Aufsätze* [collected essays] that in the event never got beyond the first instalment because Becker was arrested the following month. Marx was consulted on the publication of this collection and was perfectly happy to see 'Zur Judenfrage' included in it.¹¹⁶ Surely he would at least have questioned this decision, had the relevant sections of *Die heilige Familie* genuinely been intended to supersede what he had written in 'Zur Judenfrage'.

In short, we can confidently read the relevant sections of *Die heilige Familie* as a check and corrective for 'Zur Judenfrage' in the sense that they allow us to determine the most likely actual meaning or thrust of statements that remained ambiguous in 'Zur Judenfrage'. Compared with 'Zur Judenfrage', we indeed find a number of significant shifts in emphasis in *Die heilige Familie*. In *Die heilige Familie* 'the vigorous polemic of the first essays [i.e., 'Zur Judenfrage'] is transferred from the Jews to Bauer'. *Die heilige Familie* indeed stresses 'the historical necessity of social and political development' by drawing a sharper 'contrast of the positive and negative aspects of civil society'. This 'implicitly' allows Marx to present 'a more positive view of the role of the Jew in civil society as an agent of change'.¹¹⁷ If society is undergoing both positive and negative change, Jewry's implication in that change obviously must have both positive and negative aspects too. But Marx goes even further in *Die heilige Familie*. He in fact 'takes the

¹¹³ Bruno Bauer, 'Neueste Schriften über die Judenfrage,' in *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 1, 1 (December 1843): 1–17 and 1, 4 (March 1844): 10–19.

¹¹⁴ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 176.

¹¹⁵ Hermann Heinrich Becker (1820–1885) joined the *Kommunistenbund* in 1850 and was among those sentenced during the *Kölner Kommunistenprozeß* (1852). Later a deputy for the *Fortschrittspartei* in the Prussian *Landtag* and *Norddeutscher Reichstag*, he eventually joined the National Liberals and was the mayor first of Dortmund (1871–1875) and finally of Cologne.

¹¹⁶ Cf. MEGA2 I.1 Apparat, 976–979; I.2 Apparat, 651; I.10 Text, 493–497.

¹¹⁷ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, loc cit.

degree to which Jews enjoy political and civil rights as the criterion for the modernity of any particular state'. He makes it perfectly clear that 'the Rights of Man [...] have first of all to be achieved in order to be transcended',¹¹⁸ an issue that Na'aman has also stressed. With Bauer 'Jewry disappears without having participated in the process of emancipation; for Marx [it disappears] after having participated in civil emancipation [...]. This distinction is fundamental'.¹¹⁹

Yet perhaps the most dramatic clarification that *Die heilige Familie* offers *vis-à-vis* 'Zur Judenfrage' is contained in a seemingly unremarkable formulation that claims to state nothing new. Supposedly it merely paraphrases 'Zur Judenfrage'. In 'Zur Judenfrage', Marx explained, he had demonstrated the following: that the task of 'transcending [*aufzuheben*] the Jewish essence in fact amounted to the task of transcending the Jewishness of bourgeois society [*das Judentum der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*], [i.e.] the inhumanity of present-day practical life epitomised by the money system [*Geldsystem*]'.¹²⁰ We might note in passing the use of the term 'aufzuheben'. Given the Hegelian background of the whole debate Marx obviously used this term intentionally. In this context it denotes the following: a (superior) new state of affairs does not merely abolish or negate the (inferior) state of affairs it succeeds. It can only genuinely transcend the earlier state of affairs if it preserves and consummates the valid and perfectible elements inherent in that earlier state of affairs. The implication, then, is that the 'Jewish essence' would not simply (be made to) disappear without trace. Rather, its valid and perfectible core would be preserved and truly come into its own within a more advanced state of affairs. Admittedly, though, in its perfected form within that more advanced state of affairs this core would then no longer be in any way specifically 'Jewish'.

More important for our main line of argument, however, is this. One of the major problems we have with the interpretation of 'Zur Judenfrage' (and German texts on antisemitism and matters Jewish more generally) is a linguistic one. The term 'Judentum' can cover what are in English three distinct concepts: Judaism, Jewry, and Jewishness. Take the final clause of the much cited, indeed infamous, last sentence of the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage'. 'Die gesellschaftliche Emanzipation des Juden ist die *Emanzipation der Gesellschaft vom Judentum*', Marx claimed there. 'The Jew's social emancipation is the *emancipation of society from*' – from what exactly? In this context 'Judentum' could mean either Judaism or Jewry, though not, in this form, Jewishness. Whether we assume 'Judentum' to mean 'Judaism' or 'Jewry' in this context, either way the formulation can lend itself to rather unpalatable interpretations that imply a need for society to purge itself of an essentially extraneous Jewish influence. Now let us revisit the formulation in *Die heilige Familie*. There Marx stated that it was 'das Judentum der

¹¹⁸ Avineri, 'Marx', 449. ¹¹⁹ Na'aman, *Marxismus*, 15. ¹²⁰ MEW 2: 116

bürgerlichen Gesellschaft' that needs to be transcended. In this form that can mean only one thing: what needs to be transcended is 'the Jewishness of bourgeois society'.

To be sure, this line of argument is problematic enough in its own right and with the benefit of hindsight it is all the more obvious just how troubling its implications actually are. We know just how futile (at best) the supposedly anti-antisemitic strategy of denouncing the antisemites as the 'real', albeit 'uncircumcised', Jews has proved. The suggestion that the Jewish influence has long ceased to be a merely extraneous one and has in fact seeped into the very heart of non-Jewish society, thus all the more insidiously corrupting its very essence, has turned out to be a particularly potent and dangerous trope integral to modern antisemitism. But then Marx wrote 'Zur Judenfrage' several decades before the emergence of modern political antisemitism. He was no historian of antisemitism and antisemitism was not the concern of 'Zur Judenfrage'. We now look on Bauer as one of the intellectual founding fathers of modern political antisemitism and there are indeed elements in *Die Judenfrage* that prefigure his later fully fledged antisemitism. But the Bauer of *Die Judenfrage* still belongs very much to the pre-history of modern antisemitism rather than its history and we need to read 'Zur Judenfrage' in the context of that pre-history, not as a response to modern antisemitism proper. Its problematic implications notwithstanding, then, Marx's statement in *Die heilige Familie* that society needed to transcend its own Jewishness makes 'the Jewish Question' an issue that society has with itself rather than an issue that society has with 'the Jews' as an alien entity. It seems inconceivable that he should have seen this one way when writing 'Zur Judenfrage' and the other when preparing *Die heilige Familie*. Hence, this is surely also the correct interpretation of the more ambiguous formulation at the end of 'Zur Judenfrage'.

If we read both parts of 'Zur Judenfrage' together, it is clear that Marx's main concern was the suggestion that the formal emancipation of the Jews presupposed their assimilation. This suggestion he rejected for two reasons. Firstly, it made no sense to demand the disappearance of distinct (religious) identities if the material conditions that generated these identities in the first place were not going to change. The Jews were as unpleasant as they admittedly were because the conditions they were forced to live in were untenable. As long as the state was in no position to change those conditions for the better it was in no way superior to the Jews. Thus, secondly, the state had no grounds on which to refuse the Jews their formal emancipation. As we saw, Marx's line of argument was this: in the past the specific socio-economic conditions that had generated the specifically Jewish identity had been exceptional and peripheral to society as a whole. Now, however, those socio-economic conditions were becoming characteristic of society in its entirety. Hence the conclusion that society as a whole was becoming 'Jewish'.

Now, non-Jews who took on 'Jewish' characteristics obviously did so because of the 'Jewishness' of the society in which they lived, not because they were in any conventional sense of the word Jews. Strictly speaking, the same would now obviously have to apply to individuals who really were of Jewish extraction. They maintained their Jewishness not because they happened to be of Jewish extraction but because they lived in an increasingly 'Jewish' society. They did differ from non-Jews in one important respect, though: whereas the non-Jews had to learn their 'Jewishness' from the bottom up, as it were, the Jews had a head start on them because of their Jewish background. In this sense, then, on the level of formal or political emancipation, far from being less qualified than non-Jews to exercise full citizenship rights the Jews were in fact better prepared to do so than the non-Jews. On the level of comprehensive human emancipation, the implication was that Jews and non-Jews alike would ultimately have to struggle in equal measure to overcome what was now emerging as the generalised 'Jewishness' of society as a whole.

This interpretation of Marx's line of argument again represents a rationalisation. Marx's formulations in 'Zur Judenfrage' were as ambiguous as they were not because he somehow failed to find quite the right words. They were as ambiguous as they were because Marx took great pleasure in elaborating on the way in which full human emancipation would transcend not only the 'Jewishness' of society as a whole but also all the concrete and specific unpleasantness he and his contemporaries contemptuously associated with real-existing Jewry. (It is worth reminding ourselves, though, that it was nevertheless Jewry's 'unpleasantness' that Marx thought this process would do away with and by no means the Jewish individuals displaying that unpleasantness.) Yet in *Die heilige Familie*, the urge to dwell on this unpleasantness and its negation in so juicy and detailed a fashion is no longer evident. Consequently, this urge cannot have been crucial to the main line of argument in the first place.

Finally, we might note that Marx maintains his negative fixation on the *Geldsystem*, the money economy, in *Die heilige Familie*. This is noteworthy because it demonstrates that even the pre-Marxist Marx who had not yet developed his distinct concept of capitalism already gave up on the notion that Jewry could be singled out as being responsible for the socio-economic changes he and his contemporaries were witnessing. In other words, even while he still lacked a more systematic understanding of the socio-economic development and inclined towards a demonisation of the money economy he concluded – and publicly stated – that the real problem, far from merely concerning a minority living in its midst, was in fact inherent in the way society as a whole was organised.

Consequently, if we read not only both parts of 'Zur Judenfrage' together but also interpret 'Zur Judenfrage' in conjunction with the relevant sections of *Die heilige Familie* we come to a very clear conclusion. However

ambiguous and problematic Marx's line of argument may have been, it was inordinately more sophisticated than the attitudes prevalent in the Socialist movement and the suggestion that these attitudes drew directly on Marx's own position are almost entirely untenable. The problem, however, is this: *Die heilige Familie* was not only even more difficult to get hold of than 'Zur Judenfrage' but its very existence and significance was far less present in the minds even of leading Social Democrats. While Bebel automatically turned to 'Zur Judenfrage' for a short snappy quote to shore up his own authority he would not have dreamt of turning to *Die heilige Familie* and its in many ways much more precise formulations on the matter. Why not? Simply because the existence and relevance of 'Zur Judenfrage' was firmly impressed on the minds of many Socialists whereas *Die heilige Familie* was *terra incognita*.

As we saw, the claim that 'Zur Judenfrage' only really became widely available again with Mehring's *Nachlaßausgabe* is rather questionable. Such a claim would in fact be far more valid for *Die heilige Familie*. Yet one will obviously not be able to hold Mehring accountable for the re-publication of one but not the other. If we are going to hold Mehring responsible for lending 'Zur Judenfrage' new influence and respectability we will also have to credit him with the publication of *Die heilige Familie* including those passages in it that ought to have demonstrated yet further just how inadequate the interpretations of 'Zur Judenfrage' accepted throughout the Socialist movement really were. We might add that Mehring's introduction to 'Zur Judenfrage' in the *Nachlaßausgabe* in fact not only offered 'a good summary of the positions of Feuerbach, Bauer and Marx'. It even 'concluded with a final statement which interestingly enough draws more on Marx's second version of the Jewish question in the *Holy Family* than on the original essays'.¹²¹

What Mehring provided, then, was a relatively accurate paraphrase of 'Zur Judenfrage' that stressed the importance of both parts and the need to read them in conjunction. Whatever its shortcomings, Mehring's summary certainly did 'Zur Judenfrage' more justice than virtually all his peers did in their more or less perfunctory dealings with it. What is more, his paraphrase clarified some of the ambiguities of 'Zur Judenfrage' by drawing on the less ambiguous formulations in *Die heilige Familie*. It is all the more remarkable that all this did not prevent him from still subscribing to the fundamental misunderstandings of Marx's stance prevalent among his peers. Why was he unable to recognise these misunderstandings despite his more intimate familiarity and more sustained dealings with the sources? Did the strength of his own anti-Jewish sentiments prevent him from recognising that his peers had got it wrong? Or was the prevalent misinterpretation of Marx's stance simply so widely and unquestioningly accepted that any suggestion it was

¹²¹ Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 270–271.

wrong would have seemed like suggesting that the earth was flat after all? Either way, as far as these fundamental misunderstandings are concerned, the fact remains that Mehring, far from being an exception among Imperial German Social Democrats, was entirely representative of his peers

MEHRING'S SPECIFIC SPIN ON 'ZUR JUDENFRAGE'

Although Mehring's stance was generally in keeping with the *consensus communis*, there was one point at which Mehring's introduction to 'Zur Judenfrage' really did go beyond it. His already mentioned appreciation of Bauer and his Young Hegelian milieu clearly represented an innovative twist to the prevalent discourse. This does not automatically put him at odds with the attitudes prevalent among his peers, of course. He could equally well just have been the first among them to spell out this particular implication of the *consensus communis*. One thing is quite clear, though: according to Mehring, Marx himself had shared this appreciation and this was simply not true.

As we saw earlier, Marx's very point of departure in 'Zur Judenfrage' had been his rejection of the 'conflation of right and morality' implied by Bauer's line of argument. Yet most Socialists, their claims notwithstanding that they shared Marx's stance, subscribed to this 'conflation of right and morality'. In this connection we first came across Mehring's surprising appreciation of Bauer's original stance. Early on in his discussion of 'Zur Judenfrage', Mehring in fact claimed that 'as far as Bauer's conceptualization went, Marx acknowledged its consistency'.¹²² This is a highly misleading formulation, to say the least, and it is quite clear that Mehring was determined to bend over backwards to demonstrate that not only Bauer but Marx too had shared his own contempt for the 'philosemites'.

Mehring began his discussion of the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage' with an account of the emergence of 'the Jewish Question'. 'Much as the Jewish money might [*jüdische Geldmacht*] extended itself with the capitalist mode of production and made itself indispensable for the governments', he explained,

the dogged resistance that absolutism and feudalism pitted against the revolutionary transformation of bourgeois society precluded the political emancipation of the Jews.¹²³

Of all the sins committed by the governments of the *Vormärz* era, however, this one, relatively speaking, stirred the mass of the nation least.

¹²² Mehring, *Nachlaßausgabe*, 1: 347. In his Marx biography, he similarly misrepresented Marx's position by speaking of the 'thoroughness, boldness and pungency for which Marx praised his [i.e., Bauer's] treatises on the *Judenfrage*' (idem, *Karl Marx*, 72–73.)

¹²³ Idem, *Nachlaßausgabe*, 1: 352.

In fact, during the 1840s a fair number of radicals had increasingly come to see Jewish emancipation as a test case for the ability of the Prussian regime to reform more generally. Their support for the cause of emancipation may have been feeble and they indeed readily abandoned it when push came to shove. Yet it is hard to see how the 'Bauer Controversy' should ever have drawn so much attention in the first place had the issue been one of such indifference as Mehring suggested. It was certainly no matter of indifference to the opponents of Jewish emancipation – as Bauer's *Die Judenfrage* clearly demonstrated. On balance, it is probably fair to say that 'the mass of the nation', far from *not* being stirred by the regime's refusal to grant emancipation, *was* stirred by the possibility that the Jews might be emancipated after all.

Be that as it may, why, then, if we stick with Mehring's scheme of things for a moment, did 'the mass of the nation' find it hard to get worked up about this particular sin on the part of the regime, i.e., its refusal to emancipate the Jews? Because 'the murderous role that Jewish usury had played in the dissolution of the feudal order had aroused an inordinate amount of hatred against Jewry and not just among the peasants and artisans sucked dry by usury [*ausgewuchert*]'. It was because 'the mass of the nation' hated the Jews, then, and hated them for good reason, that it had supposedly been *indifferent* to the fact that the regime would not grant them equal rights.

Why had the Jews nevertheless been emancipated in the end? Clearly, democratic pressure from below cannot be the reason since 'the mass of the nation' was not inclined to demand a reform of this kind from the regime. Why, then, would the regime take this step if pressure from below had not forced it to do so? Because Jewry, or to be more specific, 'Jewry as a class won far too much power as a result of the economic development for it not to take on the constraints that still fenced in its actual rule'.¹²⁴ This had placed 'the Jewish Question' firmly on the agenda.

'It is well known that the vanguard of our classical literature and philosophy was not exactly well disposed towards the Jews', Mehring explained. Yet he had to concede, of course, that this held true 'with the sole exception of Lessing, their bourgeois representative'. Lessing was one of those topics Mehring had acquired a certain expertise on that he recycled relentlessly. Now, as is well known, Lessing's stance towards Jewry, however problematic on its own terms, was singularly positive compared to the attitudes prevalent among his contemporaries. One can well imagine how this irked Mehring, given his admiration for Lessing. One of the mantras dearest to his heart was therefore the clarification that Lessing's 'friendliness towards Jews had nothing in common with the philosemitism of today'. It was motivated exclusively by the abstract insight 'that the political suppression of the Jews violated the bourgeois *Weltanschauung*'. For it was hardly as if the Jews had

¹²⁴ Ibid., I: 354.

anything to show for themselves that might have merited granting them equal rights. At this point, Mehring's argument began to parallel one on which Bauer had placed the utmost emphasis:

Jewry did not contribute to the glorious work of our great intellectuals and poets [*Denker und Dichter*]; Moses Mendelssohn was anything but a path-breaking thinker and it is precisely the commendable part of his activities, his attempts to cultivate the Jews, that demonstrates how remote Jewry was from the intellectual life of the nation,¹²⁵

Mehring argued. Bauer himself had gone out of his way to emphasise that a Jew, as a Jew, could make no contribution to the development of the arts, the sciences or scholarly endeavours.¹²⁶ Why not? Because these were activities that transpired in and through history. Jewry, however, not only stood outside history. It was fundamentally characterised precisely by the fact that its very existence set it against the course of history.¹²⁷ 'The Jew' led 'a war of annihilation [*Vertilgungskrieg*] against history', and this 'war of annihilation' in fact amounted to 'a graver crime than the war his ancestors were required to lead against the Canaanite hordes'.¹²⁸

Needless to say, Bauer did not conclude this from empirical evidence. He posited it by means of a philosophical deduction. To his mind, this philosophical deduction followed self-evidently from the Hegelian scheme of things that we briefly touched on before. As we saw, this scheme of things was based on the assumption that more advanced philosophical and religious systems transcended less advanced ones. Yet the more advanced systems do not simply abolish the previous ones altogether. Rather, the perfectible elements of the previous systems are contained and perfected (*aufgehoben*) in the more advanced ones. It lies in the nature of Hegel's dialectical system that the implications of this line of thought can seem somewhat paradox at first sight. On the one hand, this line of argument implied that the previous systems that had now been superseded were valid in their own time and had contained perfectible elements. On the other hand, it rendered those previous systems doubly obsolete. Not only had they passed their sell-by date. What is more, their perfectible elements had now irreversibly become part of the most recent more advanced system. The Hegelian scheme of things emphasises both the validity of historical religions and philosophies in their time, then, and their subsequent obsolescence. The point here is precisely that these are not alternatives. Instead, one implication cannot be thought without the other. It hardly takes a genius, though, to see how intellectuals subsequently appropriating Hegel's system, especially when embroiled in directly political or polemical debate rather than lofty philosophical discourse, would be likely to emphasise one of these

¹²⁵ Ibid., I: 353; for Bauer's comments on Mendelssohn, cf. Bauer, *Judenfrage*, 82–83.

¹²⁶ Bauer, *Judenfrage*, 9–10. ¹²⁷ Ibid., 5. ¹²⁸ Ibid., 79.

implications at the expense of the other. When it came to Judaism and the controversy regarding Jewish emancipation, people were generally inclined to pick the notion of Judaism's utter obsolescence from the Hegelian system. The issue of its historical validity and the perfectible elements within it, by contrast, rarely caught anyone's imagination. This certainly holds true for Bruno Bauer.

In Hegel's scheme of things, Christianity was the ultimate and most advanced religious system. In Bauer's vision Christianity, in turn, would be superseded by Atheism. The very existence of post-Biblical Judaism was not only an anomaly in the sense that it contradicted the course of historical development. By maintaining its distinct existence, post-Biblical Judaism also amounted to an active revolt against the potential perfection of Biblical Judaism's perfectible elements and thus against its very essence. 'Not the daughter [i.e., Christianity] is ungrateful *vis-à-vis* her mother [i.e., Judaism]', Bauer explained. 'Rather, the mother will not acknowledge her daughter because she represents the true essence of that which went before and that which went before has lost its true essence once its consequence has appeared [. . .] If one of them exists, the other does not'.¹²⁹

Consequently, Jewry could not even provide a comprehensive account of its own essence. For in order to do so it would have to perceive of itself as the precursor of Christianity.¹³⁰ To Bauer's mind, it had therefore fallen to none other than Johann Andreas Eisenmenger (1654–1704) to produce a valid account of Judaism's essence. This claim is, of course, remarkable by any standards. Eisenmenger's *Entdecktes Judenthum* is, after all, indubitably the most influential Judaeophobic compendium of the early modern period and has remained a significant source of religious anti-Judaism ever since its first publication in 1700. Bauer added that should there ever be an account superior to Eisenmenger's the one thing one could be sure of was that it too would not be produced by a Jew.¹³¹ Admittedly, Christians too were impaired in this respect. They too were ultimately incapable of genuine theoretical and scientific achievements until they finally became Atheists. Yet their form of prejudice [*Befangenheit*] was nevertheless a considerable advance on that of the Jews.¹³²

While Mehring felt a strong affinity for Kant, he never seriously engaged Hegel. His discussion of the Hegelian origins of the Marxian project never went beyond a paraphrasing of the pronouncements that Marx and (especially) Engels themselves had made on the matter. Occasionally this discussion in fact reflected Lassalle's understanding of Hegel more than that of Marx and Engels.¹³³ Bauer's categorical denial of the Jews' aptitude for

¹²⁹ Ibid., 16; cf. also ibid., 45. ¹³⁰ Ibid., 85. ¹³¹ Ibid., 86. ¹³² Ibid., 87.

¹³³ Cf. Josef Schleifstein, *Franz Mehring* (Berlin: Rütten & Loenig, 1959): 96; Helga Grebing, Monika Kramme, 'Franz Mehring,' in Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker 5* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972): 73–94, here 83; Fülberth, *Proletarische Partei*, 51–52; Lars

artistic, scientific or scholarly endeavours obviously struck a strong chord with Mehring's preconceptions, though. Hence, it seems to have given rise to one of the few occasions on which he wholeheartedly took on board a genuine product of Hegelian (though not Hegel's) philosophical labour. Yet what had been a purely philosophical deduction with Hegelian underpinning in Bauer's *Die Judenfrage* Mehring now reintroduced as (allegedly) empirical evidence that neatly bore out his own anti-Jewish sentiments.

It would, of course, be silly to suggest that Bauer himself had shed a previously positive or indifferent attitude towards Jewry because he felt compelled by the logical implications of Hegelian thought to adopt a negative one instead.¹³⁴ For him too the Hegelian concept had done no more than offer an opportunity to lend a sense of sophistication, detachment and necessity to his negative preconceptions. 'It may be that our notion of Jewry seems even harsher than the one we have come to expect from the opponents of Jewish emancipation', Bauer explained towards the end of his introduction, as if he were not one of them. 'It may be that it really is', he conceded and then added, as if he were pained by the need to be so cruel but had no other choice: 'but my only concern can be its veracity'¹³⁵ [i.e., the veracity of his 'notion of Jewry'].

As already suggested, Bauer's case is in many ways typical for what was most likely the prevalent long-term influence of Hegel's thought on Judaism and Jewry. Few are likely ever to have penetrated the intricacies of Hegel's relevant pronouncements anyway. Hegel himself had in fact never come up with a comprehensive solution that genuinely satisfied him and his accounts therefore varied in certain aspects. Little wonder, then, if few others could ultimately make head or tail of the matter. Within Hegel's scheme of things, Judaism was not directly superseded by Christianity. One can imagine how this alone made it far from easy to utilise his system for more common forms of political discourse and polemical purposes. What was catchy, though, and clearly appealed to existing preconceptions was his concept of historical progress with its notion that the religious and philosophical systems that had been superseded were irredeemably obsolete and that their valid elements were contained in the systems that had superseded them.

Within the parameters of the Enlightenment discourse the matter had been handled somewhat differently.¹³⁶ There it was claimed that Judaism

Lambrecht, *Intellektuelle Subjektivität und Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1985): 207. Hereafter Lambrecht, *Subjektivität*.

¹³⁴ Quite apart from everything else, Hegel himself, his highly critical notions of Judaism notwithstanding, had in fact actively supported the Jewish claim to equal rights. Cf. Shlomo Avineri, 'A Note on Hegel's Views on Jewish Emancipation,' in *JSS* 25, 2 (1963): 145–151; Lars Fischer, 'Hegel in Support of Jewish Emancipation: A Deliberate Political Act?' in *Owl of Minerva* 37, 2 (2006).

¹³⁵ Bauer, *Judenfrage*, 3.

¹³⁶ The standard work on Enlightenment attitudes towards Judaism and Jewry is now the superb study by Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

was a purely revealed or positive religion. Jews were not allowed to question the rationality of the rules laid down by revelation. They were duty-bound to adhere to those rules out of obedience, not insight. Judaism was therefore based entirely on unquestioning obedience to a set catalogue of stipulations that expressly disallowed genuine conviction as a standard by which to measure their validity. Consequently, it was a religion that was structurally incapable of reform. It could not perfect itself and become a religion in which obedience to God and insight into the rationality of God's commands would become one. Christianity, on the other hand, was assumed to be both a revealed and a natural religion. Hence it could go where Judaism could not. The assumption was this: God had created a natural ability in human beings to recognise the rationality of his commands. Hence, there could be no real contradiction between God's commands, on the one hand, and what human beings could determine for themselves as the right course of action, on the other. Where human beings had failed in the past to apply this ability in a proper and sufficient manner, God had used revelation as an additional means of communication to help them along the way. In so doing, God had to accommodate himself to the human beings to whom he was revealing himself. Hence revelation had appealed to human superstition to instil obedience among the believers. As human beings became more and more capable of fully applying their rational faculties, however, they would shed all dependence upon superstition as a substitute for rational insight. Instead of doing the right thing out of obedience they would do it out of inner conviction. Instead of acting in accordance with external stipulations (heteronomy) human beings would be able to determine under their own steam how to act properly in equal accordance with God's wishes and their own interests (autonomy).

For mainstream Enlightenment thinkers, then, Christianity was on a path of reform and perfection from revelation to natural insight, from obedience to conviction, from heteronomy to autonomy. For Judaism none of this was possible. Jews had nothing to go by than an externally stipulated catalogue of rules that they were bound to adhere to out of obedience, not insight. This was a qualitative judgement that could, in theory, be unravelled. Assuming one could conclusively prove that Judaism was not as immutably tied to its initial revelation as its critics claimed and hence perfectible after all, the whole issue of Judaism's alleged inferiority would have to be revisited. In an important sense, the Jewish reform movement set out to achieve just that. The Hegelian model, by contrast, rendered this option impossible even in theory. Judaism was obsolete. Whatever perfectible elements might once have inhered in it were now being perfected elsewhere. Clearly this offered a watertight case. That history obviously could not be turned back went without saying. For most participants in these debates history and progress were one and the suggestion that history could be reversed would have amounted to claiming that time itself could be turned back.

Within this scheme of things, nothing that might be presented in defence or praise of original, 'pre-obsolescent', Judaism could claim to underscore the legitimacy of a continued distinct Jewish existence.

Let us return to Mehring's account in his introduction to 'Zur Judenfrage'. 'The emancipatory struggle of the Young Hegelians against Christianity could not, of course, transpire without Judaism too being criticised', he explained. Now, in and of itself this is a perfectly valid point. *A priori*, there is no reason why a general critique of religion should be any more sparing in its dealings with Judaism than it is in its approach to any other religion. This argument only holds, though, when critics of religion actually criticise all religions in equal measure and with equal emphasis. One of the problems in this particular historical context is this: the Young Hegelians were constantly radicalising their critique of religion. As they did so, they increasingly applied criticisms (or negative stereotypes) that had previously been associated specifically with Judaism to religion in general and/or to Christianity. Yet within the Hegelian scheme of things this much was clear: as the religion of the day, Christianity had to be the most advanced religion, however critique-worthy it might be on its own terms. The Young Hegelians had to be able to explain what set the two religions apart and what rendered Judaism inferior to Christianity. Since they had now already used most of the critical ammunition that previous generations had used to assault Judaism to shoot at Christianity and religion in general they were fishing ever nearer the bottom of the barrel for reasons to maintain that Judaism was inferior to Christianity. Consequently, their critical 'arguments' against Judaism tended to become more and more extravagant and injurious.

Against this background, Mehring's contention that this unavoidable critique of Judaism had been undertaken 'in a perfectly historical way', i.e., based on sound historical research, is simply laughable. To Mehring's mind, the way in which Feuerbach had 'analysed Judaism as the religion of practical egoism' was a good example for this kind of 'perfectly historical' research. By contrast, 'the Nuremberg Professor Daumer had applied somewhat cruder instruments', Mehring conceded, but ultimately even he had made a valid contribution to the necessary critique of religion that just could not avoid criticising Judaism too. One might have been forgiven for assuming that it was a little unusual, to say the least, to want to rehabilitate Bauer despite the fact that Marx had rejected his stance so emphatically. That Mehring was now intent on finding redeeming features even in Daumer's Judaeophobic obsession with blood cults and human sacrifice, though, is clearly a *faux pas* of a totally different order of magnitude.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ For a particularly succinct outline of the truly hair-raising 'research' by Georg Friedrich Daumer (1800–1875), cf. his 'Vorläufige Anzeige. Der Feuer- und Molochdienst der alten Hebräer als

None too surprisingly, all this 'perfectly historical' and unavoidable criticism of Judaism had provoked a Jewish response. These 'Jewish lamentations' had been entirely 'fatuous' but one did have to concede, Mehring admitted, that the Young Hegelians had not only failed to explain 'how Judaism had been able to survive for so long alongside Christianity'. They had also failed to explain 'how it [i.e., Judaism] could be overcome'.¹³⁸ At this point 'the decisive step was only undertaken by Marx'.

Mehring then went on to emphasise the significance and merits of 'Zur Judenfrage'. It was certainly well suited to refute false accusations that leading antisemites had levelled at Marx. 'Forty years after the publication of this text by Marx', Mehring explained,

the Imperial Court Preacher Stöcker and Professor Wagner unrolled the filthy handkerchief of reactionary antisemitism as their banner and travelled through the land trying to persuade the workers gagged by the *Sozialistengesetz* that the Jew Marx had indeed attacked the industrious and diligent manufacturers but never the Jewish usurers; it would be a pity were this glorious triumph of Christian-Germanic truthfulness ever forgotten.¹³⁹

As we heard before, Mehring felt strongly that the 'historical concept of the Jewish Question' presented in 'Zur Judenfrage' deserved to become the 'common intellectual property of the modern working class'. He concluded his introduction to 'Zur Judenfrage' by remarking that 'this concept admittedly beats the life out of liberal philosemitism but it is precisely that which makes it the most effective antidote to reactionary antisemitism'.¹⁴⁰

Mehring's attempts to rehabilitate Bauer were not limited to his introduction to 'Zur Judenfrage'. He even managed to sneak an anti-'philosemitic' remark in support of Bauer into his introduction to *Die heilige Familie*. As we saw, Marx emphasised in *Die heilige Familie* that Bauer had not got the better of his Jewish critics even though he was essentially the superior polemicist. Mehring reiterated this, adding that one could well understand the contempt Bauer expressed *vis-à-vis* the discourse prevalent in the mid-1840s. Bauer's complaint, Mehring explained, had been this: on the one hand, 'the Jewish spokesmen called for the "authorities to silence" the critics of Judaism'. On the other hand, 'the Christian-Germanic rowdies saw "Jewish money" behind every broom that threatened to infringe on their rot and decay and raved wildly that "the Jews have usurped almost the entire press"'. Against this background one could well understand Bauer's declaration of despair: "'What an ill-fated struggle this is when both sides resort to such empty rhetoric and denunciations!'" Bauer had been justified in this critique but he had drawn a fallacious conclusion from this state of affairs. Bauer had assumed that the 'empty rhetoric and denunciations' signalled

urväterlicher, legaler, orthodoxer Cultus der Nation historisch-kritisch erwiesen durch G. Fr. Daumer,' in *Deutsche Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst* No. 46 (24 February 1842): 183–184.

¹³⁸ Mehring, *Nachlaßausgabe*, 1: 355. ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 356. ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1: 492.

the imminent exhaustion of both parties. Here Bauer had been mistaken. 'He was to live just long enough', Mehring then added rather ominously, 'to see that this delightful rhetorical tit for tat was still as alive in the eighties as it was in the forties'.¹⁴¹

To the uninitiated reader, this formulation surely suggests that Bauer happened to live long enough to be able to observe the polemics between antisemites and 'philosemites' following the emergence of modern political antisemitism in the late 1870s. Yet, as Mehring knew only too well, Bauer was, of course, no mere observer of the emergence of modern political antisemitism. During the final year of his life, Bauer had stood at the helm of an aggressively antisemitic journal, *Schmeitzner's Internationale Monatsschrift*.¹⁴² But Bauer was not only a direct participant in the emerging antisemitic movement. He had also played a substantial role in the intervening decades in preparing the ideological ground for this development. In a short note on the occasion of Bauer's death in 1882, Ludwig Philippson (1811-1889), the editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, even called him 'the actual father of antisemitism'.¹⁴³

Perhaps his most important contribution had been his article on Jewry in Wagener's *Staats- und Gesellschafts-Lexikon*.¹⁴⁴ In this article Bauer had taken a position that, to quote Rotenstreich, went 'far beyond the boundaries of contemporary conservative thought'¹⁴⁵ on 'the Jewish Question'. Particularly significant in this context was the article's 'emphasis on the racial aspect and its special application to the Jews'.¹⁴⁶ The stance Bauer articulated in this article was hence 'indicative of a new stage in the discussion of the Jewish problem'¹⁴⁷ and signalled a 'significant evolution of anti-Jewish and anti-emancipationist thought'.¹⁴⁸ We might add that it would have been easy for those interested in the matter to establish how Bauer's position in Wagener's *Staats- und Gesellschafts-Lexikon* compared to the more conventional Conservative stance. For Wagener himself had published a classic formulation of this more conventional stance only five years earlier in his *Das Judentum und der Staat*.¹⁴⁹ This makes it all the more remarkable that Wagener and his Conservative backers apparently genuinely failed to recognise the originality of Bauer's position.¹⁵⁰

Admittedly, Bauer's article in Wagener's *Staats- und Gesellschafts-Lexikon* was not signed. Yet we know for sure that Mehring for one knew exactly

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 2: 83.

¹⁴² Cf. Ernst Barnikol, *Bruno Bauer* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1972) [hereafter Barnikol, *Bauer*], 425-454; cf. also Moggach, *Philosophy*, 186.

¹⁴³ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 46, 17 (25 April 1882), 282.

¹⁴⁴ 'Judenthum,' in Hermann Wagener (ed.), *Neues Conversations-Lexikon. Staats- und Gesellschafts-Lexikon* Pts. 97-100 (1862): 599-692. The section on post-Biblical Jewish history (614-671) is more well known in the edition published separately with a short introduction as Bruno Bauer, *Das Judentum in der Fremde* (Berlin: F. Heinicke, 1863).

¹⁴⁵ Rotenstreich, 'Bauer Controversy,' 33. ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 34. ¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 33. ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 27-32. ¹⁵⁰ Barnikol, *Bauer*, 352.

who the article's author was. In May 1893, Max Schippel published excerpts from this article in the *Neue Zeit*¹⁵¹ without realising that Bauer was the author. On 7 June, Mehring promptly informed Kautsky that 'Schippel is wrong, incidentally, if he attributes the articles on Jewry in Wagener's Lexikon to the East-Elbian Junkerdom. They are by Bruno Bauer'.¹⁵² Apparently, Kautsky was not aware of Bauer's authorship of the article either. He replied on 12 June that he found Mehring's information on the matter 'very interesting'.¹⁵³ As we saw, Bauer's position went beyond the conventional Conservative approach towards 'the Jewish Question'. In this sense, Mehring's remark that Bauer's stance and that of 'the East-Elbian Junkerdom' could not simply be lumped together was in an important sense a valid observation. But how likely is it that this was Mehring's reason for wanting to distinguish between Bauer and the Conservatives? Far more likely is this: Mehring felt that Bauer deserved to be singled out because he still stood above the prevalent 'rhetorical tit for tat' then as he had done in the 1840s, whatever else one might want to say about or against him.

All this raises two crucial questions. Why, firstly, did Mehring go to such lengths to formulate his appreciation for Bauer and credit Marx with his own anti-'philosemitism' in this obviously untenable way. Secondly, how consciously disingenuous was he in doing so? Take Wistrich's contention that Mehring was effectively construing 'Zur Judenfrage' as an alibi for his own anti-Jewish sentiments and preconceptions.¹⁵⁴ If Wistrich was suggesting that this was a conscious act on Mehring's part, this notion would ultimately depend on two basic premises. Firstly, it would presuppose that proof texts by Marx and Engels were absolutely central to Mehring's sense of what could and could not be argued legitimately. Consequently, he would have consistently sought to cover his back by taking recourse to such proof texts. At the same time, he would have been highly reluctant to criticise them even when he was in fact at odds with them. Secondly, it would presuppose that the anti-'philosemitism' Mehring was wrongly crediting Marx with was actually a marginalised position in the party. If not, why would he need an alibi?

To my mind, neither of these preassumptions is tenable. To be sure, Mehring loved to dwell on his affinity to Marx and Engels. As we saw, the trust placed in him by individuals closely associated with Marx and Engels was important to his sense of legitimacy, and he conspicuously basked in their praise when he received it. Yet one of the hallmarks of his entire party career was his determination to take on party myths and question the canonised accounts of the party's historical and ideological development. He clearly had no qualms whatsoever about publicly contradicting Marx

¹⁵¹ Max Schippel, 'Die Konservativen und der Antisemitismus,' in *NZ* 11-II, 37 (31 May 1893): 298–302.

¹⁵² IISH Karl Kautsky D XVII: 43. ¹⁵³ Fonds 201: 50. ¹⁵⁴ Wistrich, 'Anti-Capitalism,' 43–44.

or Engels if that was what he thought it took. The most obvious illustration of this was his sympathetic treatment of Lassalle (and in part even of Schweitzer). In this context he persistently maintained that Marx and Engels, for all their superiority in the lofty heights of ideological discourse, had lost touch with the realities on the ground. Yet it was for these realities that Lassalle had been just the man. Another example is the way in which, in the *Nachlaßausgabe*, he adopted Rosa Luxemburg's stance on the Polish question and used his introduction there to explain why the position Marx and Engels had taken on the matter could no longer be upheld.¹⁵⁵ His almost wilfully iconoclastic approach to accepted doctrines and traditions embroiled him in numerous conflicts. It is hardly a coincidence that the pretext leading to his *de facto* removal from the *Neue Zeit* in 1913 sprung from a renewed controversy in which he had criticised Marx and Engels's assessment of Lassalle as profoundly misguided.

If Mehring had no qualms about setting Marx straight on other occasions, why should he have chosen intentionally to misrepresent him in this particular instance? If he could say that Marx got his evaluation of Lassalle or the Polish question wrong, why should he have hesitated to say: Marx should have been more anti-'philosemitic'? It would only make sense to suggest that he really did feel the need to cover his back in this particular instance if we had reason to assume that his anti-'philosemitism' broke a radical taboo in the party, one that was far more closely guarded than the official position, say, on the merits and faults of Lassalle. Yet, as we saw, there was no such taboo. Particularly outspoken and vitriolic Mehring's anti-'philosemitism' may have been, in any way unusual or frowned upon by his peers it was not. This really only leaves us with one possible conclusion: Mehring was in fact perfectly convinced that he portrayed matters correctly in his introductions to 'Zur Judenfrage' and *Die heilige Familie*.

Again we can only speculate as to what was cause and effect here. Did he get things so desperately wrong, despite his sustained dealings and intimate familiarity with the sources, because his personal anti-Jewish sentiments and preconceptions predisposed him to do so? Or did his interpretation seem so plausible to him because it tallied so well with the fundamental misconceptions prevalent in the party anyway? Presumably it was a mixture of both. Conversely, we would have to ask: if he really did stand relatively alone with the particular idiosyncrasies of his spin on the matter, why do none of his peers seem to have noticed or taken issue with the obvious discrepancies between the material Mehring was commenting on and the way in which he commented on it? Surely, then, we have to see Mehring's annotation of 'Zur Judenfrage' and *Die heilige Familie*, including the obvious misrepresentations it contained, as the outflow of a common set of perceptions that

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Mehring, *Nachlaßausgabe*, 3: 44, 270.

were shared and accepted by most of his peers rather than the expression of an exceptional and marginalised individual stance.

It was probably not upon those who actually read (or at least browsed through) 'Zur Judenfrage' that Mehring's introduction exerted its greatest influence, but upon those who preferred not to engage Marx's text in the first place and relied on Mehring's introduction instead. This is rather blatantly illustrated by Scheidemann's already mentioned lament on the degeneration of the antisemitic movement published in the *Neue Zeit* in 1906. Scheidemann made it quite clear in his text that it was not his intention to theorise about the causes of antisemitism. Why indeed should he? After all, anyone interested in that sort of thing could turn to an 'excellent article on the Jewish Question' in Marx's literary *Nachlaß* that 'the editor of the *Nachlaß*, Franz Mehring, has prefaced with an instructive essay'. To illustrate just how fabulously helpful a resource this was he quoted two passages – two passages that were not, however, taken from Marx's text but instead from Mehring's introduction. The first passage dealt with the 'murderous role that Jewish usury had played in the dissolution of the feudal order' and explained how the peasants and artisans were 'sucked dry by usury'. The second passage referred to the Jewish 'standard bearers of bourgeois democracy' who immediately became 'vicious reactionaries when the consequences of some civil right infringe on some specifically Jewish interest'. It included the reminder that it was this behaviour that had given rise to Bauer's discussion of 'the Jewish Question' in the first place. 'Here', Scheidemann then added, 'we see the roots of antisemitism *in nuce*'.¹⁵⁶ It was from here that he moved on to discuss in detail, and in formulations that are unusually stark and crude, how the likes of Böckel and Ahlwardt had entered the fray with democratic, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian demands and promises but had degenerated into lackeys of the Conservatives and *Junker*.

As we saw, Leuschen-Seppel suggested that this text by Scheidemann offered 'no substantially new aspects that went beyond Bebel's analysis of 1893'.¹⁵⁷ Given just how crude Scheidemann's lament is, I am inclined to think that Leuschen-Seppel was perhaps a little too strict with Bebel at this point. After all, his speech, for all its shortcomings, is much less offensive and far more sophisticated than Scheidemann's text. It is nevertheless true, though, that the underlying analysis and the basic conclusions of the two texts do not differ in substance. Scheidemann's lament is fully in keeping with the attitudes prevalent in the party. And that includes the crass use it made of Mehring's introduction to 'Zur Judenfrage' in an attempt to enlist Marx's authority without actually engaging Marx's text.

¹⁵⁶ Scheidemann, 'Wandlungen', 632. ¹⁵⁷ Leuschen-Seppel, *Sozialdemokratie*, 200.

Chapter 4

The Social Democratic Party Congress of 1903 and the Case of Hans Leuß

Imagine the following scenario: A fairly well-known backbencher with a sideline in journalism launches a scathing attack on a prominent colleague within his (or her) own party. Among this backbencher's misgivings is the following: the colleague in question tried to help a former antisemite find acceptance and a role within the party. In how many ways could we interpret the thrust of this critique? Admittedly, our backbencher might be making such a big deal of this issue because he (or she) is out to get the prominent colleague in question for other reasons anyway. To be sure, how the party should deal with former antisemites may be a question with more general implications. Even so, this much is surely clear: it would make no sense to criticise somebody for supporting a former antisemite unless one assumed that this former antisemite was not really a *former* antisemite at all and in fact still subscribed to a problematic stance on 'the Jewish Question'. The actual accusation, then, is this: either the prominent colleague in question is profoundly lacking in sensitivity for the still problematic nature of the not so former antisemite's attitude towards 'the Jews' or, even worse, the colleague in question in fact sympathises with that attitude, at least in part.

Take, then, the following occurrence. The revisionist Edmund Fischer (1864–1925) represented Zittau in the *Reichstag* and wrote regularly for the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. For a time, he also edited a regional weekly with close ties to the *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung* called *Der Arme Teufel aus der Oberlausitz* [The Poor Devil From the Oberlausitz; the Oberlausitz is the region around Zittau.] There, in the autumn of 1903, he published a scathing attack on Mehring. Among other things, he criticised Mehring for having supported the attempts of a former antisemitic member of the *Reichstag* called Hans Leuß to find a new role within Social Democracy.¹ Again, I would contend that there is really only one plausible interpretation for this statement. At best, Mehring's support for Leuß demonstrated an unhealthy ambivalence towards Leuß's problematic stance regarding 'the Jews'. Or, even worse, Mehring in fact supported Leuß because he himself sympathised with Leuß's antisemitism (or at least with certain aspects of it). Conversely,

¹ The only copy of this article that I have been able to trace is among those clippings collected at the time by Vollmar (IISH Vollmar 3413) that bear no date. The article ends with a reference to Mehring's related statement in the *LVZ* of 28 October and hence presumably appeared in the edition of *Der arme Teufel* immediately following that date. Hereafter Fischer, 'Der arme Teufel'.

had it been beyond doubt that Leuß really was a *former* antisemite, i.e., had his position *vis-à-vis* 'the Jewish Question' been examined and found beyond reproach, then it would have been quite pointless to criticise Mehring for supporting Leuß.

If we bring our current sensitivities to Fischer's critique, I find it hard to see how we could interpret it in any other way. Yet if we examine the background of Fischer's critique in detail, things quickly take a rather surprising turn. The following chapters will examine Fischer's critique and its context from a variety of perspectives and show that what strikes us as the self-evident and indeed only plausible interpretation of this critique is entirely off the mark.

Let us take a closer look, then. Fischer's critique was in fact a contribution to a sustained controversy that arose at the Social Democratic Party Congress in Dresden in September 1903. The Congresses of Eisenach (1869), Gotha (1875) and Erfurt (1891) apart, the Party Congress in Dresden in 1903 is probably the German party's best-known Congress prior to World War I. It is so well known because it saw a major showdown between revisionists and Marxist traditionalists. This showdown seemed to end with a clear-cut victory over the revisionists. Yet subsequently this proved a pyrrhic victory, not least because it created a false sense of security among centrists and radicals alike. The Congress was also the scene of another confrontation, though, that was even more dramatic and emotive than the heated debate on grand strategic issues. This confrontation raged for some two-and-a-half days (14–16 September) and concerned Franz Mehring.

The substantive issue at the root of this confrontation was this: should party journalists contribute to non-party publications and, if so, to what extent and under what conditions? That party journalists should not contribute to anti-Socialist publications seemed self-evident. Yet a second problem lurked here: how did one determine definitively what publications were anti-Socialist rather than merely non-Socialist? This was a serious enough issue. The party press, its many achievements and merits notwithstanding, remained persistently under-funded and under-resourced and dogged by mediocrity and narrowness. This was in part the result of material conditions for which there was no quick fix. In part, though, the problem was also aggravated by the reluctance of some of the better-educated and more intellectually minded members of the party who had the requisite literary talent to commit themselves fully to the party press. Their often thinly veiled disdain for the mediocrity and narrowness of much of the party press and desire to contribute to periodicals of higher intellectual and literary stature may well have been understandable. Yet it was equally clear that the quality of the party press could hardly be raised without the unre-served commitment of these comrades who instead chose to concentrate their efforts elsewhere. One can well imagine that people like Mehring who, despite their own misgivings and personal reluctance, had dedicated

themselves fully to the improvement of the party press were frustrated and genuinely anguished by this behaviour. To them it was more than obvious where the party journalists' priorities should lie.

This was the substantive core of the dispute. But why did it come to a head in Dresden and blow up in so dramatic a form? Mehring nurtured a long-standing and passionate enmity for the prominent publicist, Maximilian Harden (1861–1927), and detested his journal, the *Zukunft* [Future].² In the early 1890s, Mehring and Harden had been on friendly terms for a short while. In Mehring's eyes, Harden was by inclination a radical democrat and his enthusiasm for Nietzsche merely a youthful aberration. There could be no doubt that Harden was in fact on the verge of seeing the Socialist light and hence deserved a little tolerance and gentle prodding. Instead, Harden had soon abjured the democratic cause altogether. Far from moving towards Socialism, Harden discovered his heart for Bismarck. He threw his lot in with those who suggested that Germany had gone to seed under Bismarck's successor, Leo von Caprivi (1831–1899), and who never ceased to enthuse and fantasise about how much better everything could and would have been handled along Bismarckian lines. Even so, Harden's political orientation was nothing if not highly complex. His Bismarck adulation by no means precluded his remaining a thorn in the side of the establishment. He maintained a fundamental anti-liberalism and anti-capitalism spiced with anti-Jewish and anti-'philosemitic' rhetoric (his own Jewish extraction notwithstanding). In this respect, he was by no means as far removed from the prevalent discourse within Social Democracy as Mehring and others would have us believe. In the *Zukunft*, Harden in any case published a wide range of authors, covering quite an array of political and philosophical positions. This made it extremely difficult to pin the journal's profile down in an unambiguous fashion. Mehring's opponents therefore suggested one could not simply classify the *Zukunft* as an anti-Socialist publication and that matters were rather more complicated than Mehring suggested.

To Mehring's mind, Harden had done more than just not live up to his promise. He had betrayed his true calling by wandering off into the camp of Social Democracy's opponents. At the same time, Mehring had displayed a serious lack of judgement in his dealings with Harden and this was obviously a source of some embarrassment for him. Consequently, the fact that he and Harden undoubtedly continued to hold more in common than either of them cared to admit must have been a cause of profound unease for Mehring. It is therefore little wonder that he felt such a strong urge to draw a clear line between himself and Harden and repeatedly lashed out at Harden and the *Zukunft* with a vehemence that could be quite disproportionate. One can well imagine, then, how outraged Mehring was when, in January 1903, the young journalist and party member, Georg

² Cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 102–105.

Bernhard (1875–1944),³ chose to publish an article on ‘Parteimoral’ [party morals] in Harden’s *Zukunft* of all places.⁴ It should be added, though, that Mehring by no means stood alone with the anger about Bernhard’s piece that he expressed in no uncertain terms in the *Neue Zeit*.⁵ At the Congress in Dresden, it became clear that it had in fact been Kautsky who suggested to Mehring in the first place that he should take up the matter and use the opportunity to clarify the party’s position on collaboration with the non-Socialist press.⁶ Kautsky also responded in person to Bernhard’s subsequent rejoinder.⁷

Mehring’s critique in the *Neue Zeit* in turn led to an official complaint against him by a number of prominent intellectuals and officials on the right wing of the party. Mehring’s article, they argued, amounted to an unjustified blanket denunciation of party comrades who collaborated with Harden and the *Zukunft* and constituted an attempt to curtail their freedom of expression. Thus the conflict escalated. The *Vorstand* rejected their complaint and the closer the Congress in Dresden came the clearer it became that the restrictive position of the *Vorstand* on collaboration with the non-Socialist press in general and the *Zukunft* in particular was backed by the bulk of the party. Many felt that the *Vorstand*’s response was, if anything, too timid. Consequently, any attempt at the Congress to justify one’s collaboration with the *Zukunft* by presenting it as a journal worthy of the participation of Socialist authors was obviously doomed. At the same time it also became increasingly clear that the revisionist cause with which the complainants were all closely associated was hardly heading for a field day in Dresden either. Here too, Mehring had to shoulder a fair share of the blame, given that from 1902 to 1907 he stood at the helm of the party’s foremost daily, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, which formed one of the decisive and most deftly outspoken anti-revisionist strongholds in the party. Against this background, the complainants apparently decided that if they stood no chance against the message, they could at least try to kill the messenger: never mind the merits of this particular case, who, given his chequered past, was Mehring to reprimand others for their lack of ideological purity and instances in which they might have strayed from the straight and narrow!

³ Bernhard is best known for his tenure as editor-in-chief of that pillar of respectability, the *Vossische Zeitung*, from 1914 to 1930. He died in exile in New York where he worked for the Institute of Jewish Affairs during his final years.

⁴ Georg Bernhard, ‘Parteimoral,’ in *Zukunft* 23 (10 January 1903): 79–81.

⁵ Franz Mehring, ‘Konzessionsschulzes,’ in *NZ* 21-I, 16 (14 January 1903): 481–484. Hereafter Mehring, ‘Konzessionsschulzes’.

⁶ *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Dresden vom 13. bis 20. September 1903* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1903): 172. Hereafter *Parteitag 1903*.

⁷ Georg Bernhard, ‘Parteimoral,’ and Karl Kautsky, ‘Nachwort der Redaktion,’ in *NZ* 21-I, 19 (4 February 1903): 602–606.

The party leadership became aware in the course of the summer that something was brewing. Only days before the Congress, on 9 September, Bebel wrote to Mehring: 'I'm assuming that you are also coming to Dr[esden]. I think that is necessary, not least to guarantee instant correction [i.e., of false accusations], but also to ensure that it does not even *appear* as though you were ducking the deliberations. Watching a dispute with the revisionists from afar is in any case only half as much fun'.⁸ Even so, neither Bebel and his colleagues nor Mehring himself realised the magnitude of what lay in store. On the afternoon of the first full day of the Congress, 14 September 1903, Heinrich Braun (1854–1927), one of the leading reformist publicists within the party, mounted the most astounding attack on Mehring.⁹ No one who knew the full truth about Mehring's chequered past would think of allowing him to pass judgement on the loyalty of others towards the party. Why did Mehring's peers not know the full truth? Because Mehring had misrepresented his past. 'You [i.e., Mehring] live solely on lies', Braun exclaimed.¹⁰ As an anti-Socialist, Mehring had sought to damage the party from the outside. Now he was doing it all the more harm on the inside by sowing discord both within German Social Democracy and between the German party and its brother parties abroad. 'There is perhaps only one man in Germany who could take pleasure in Mehring's rabble-rousing and party-destroying activities, namely, the Prussian police minister', Braun concluded. 'Hence I say: as an enemy you (directed at Mehring) posed no danger to us, and you would pose no danger to us if you became our enemy again. [...] But we need to protect ourselves against you as a dangerous friend who endangers the very core of our party's continued existence!'¹¹ The confrontation escalated even further when Bernhard began to lay into Mehring¹² and it emerged that he was using material from Mehring's earlier private correspondence with Harden to attack him. This obviously raised the question of how Bernhard had gained access to this material and suggested that the whole assault on Mehring might have been masterminded by Harden.

Bebel became increasingly agitated and repeatedly interrupted both Braun and Bernhard. He then defended Mehring at length.¹³ He also conceded, though, that Mehring could be exceptionally difficult to get along with and that he had repeatedly found Mehring a 'psychological enigma'.¹⁴ Bebel thus coined a phrase of which Mehring was never to hear the last. Mehring scholars too have proved immensely fond of it. Assuming that Harden had initiated, or at least actively helped prepare, what now looked increasingly like an orchestrated campaign against Mehring, Bebel

⁸ Fonds 201: 745, published in August Bebel, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften* (Munich: K G Saur, 1995 ff.) [hereafter *ABARS*], 9: 63–64.

⁹ *Parteitag 1903*, 162–171. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 167. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 170–171. ¹² *Ibid.*, 202–209.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 210–229. Excerpts in *ABARS* 7-II: 438–463. ¹⁴ *Parteitag 1903*, 216, cf. also 221.

launched a massive broadside against Harden and the *Zukunft*. Not that he did not genuinely share the notion that the *Zukunft* was indeed one of the last publications Socialist authors should be collaborating with. He had expressly asked Mehring, prior to the Congress, to provide him with material on (or rather: against) the *Zukunft*. Clearly, then, Bebel had intended all along to state the case against collaboration with the *Zukunft* in no uncertain terms. Now, though, that he had cause to suspect that Harden stood directly behind this confrontation, his critique of Harden and the *Zukunft* was presumably even more forceful than it would otherwise have been. We will return to some of his remarks about Harden later. It transpired soon after the Congress that Harden's behaviour in the run up to the Congress had perhaps been mischievous but by no means conspiratorial. Not only had he not masterminded the attack on Mehring. When asked to do so, he had in fact, on at least one occasion, expressly refused to spearhead the assault.¹⁵ Bebel thus found himself in the extremely unenviable position of having to apologise to Harden. 'Having now studied *pro* and *contra*', Bebel explained at a constituency meeting in Berlin on 6 October, 'I have to say: should I be forced to revise anything I said in Dresden, then only what I said against Harden'. He added that 'the position I am in is far from pleasant. It is infuriating to have to admit that the opponent has behaved more decently than one's own party comrades'.¹⁶

Mehring, who was in any case a hopeless public speaker, was utterly overwhelmed by the events unfolding at the Congress. He told the delegates that he had been warned just before the Congress that something was being planned against him. It was now clear that his opponents had spent weeks, probably even months, preparing this ambush against him. They had spent all that time compiling material pertaining to the last twenty-five years of his life. He could not possibly now get hold of all the material required to refute their claims while the Congress was still in session.¹⁷ He had never denied his chequered past. He had never forced himself upon the party and would have understood had it rejected him. Yet the party leadership had nevertheless seen fit to enlist his support. Consequently, those who now questioned the legitimacy of his role in the party were actually questioning

¹⁵ For Harden's version of events cf. his three-part article 'Bebel und Genossen,' in *Zukunft* 44 (26 September 1903): 495–514, 45 (3 October 1903): 1–20, and 46 (10 October 1903): 47–65. Hereafter Harden, 'Bebel und Genossen'. Substantial excerpts were reprinted in the *LVZ* 10, 221 (24 September 1903) Beilage 2: 1–2; 10, 227 (1 October 1903): 1–2, and 10, 233 (8 October 1903) Beilage 2: 1 and in the *Vonwärts* 20, 231 (3 October 1903) Beilage 1: 1–3 and 20, 237 (10 October 1903) Beilage 1: 1–2. Lambrecht first drew attention to the *Zukunft* as an important source for the Congress in Dresden and offered the most comprehensive account of this background to date (cf. Lambrecht, *Subjektivität*, 174 ff. and 271 n174.) The correspondence with Mehring's assailants on which Harden based his case still exists among Harden's papers in the *Bundesarchiv* (Koblenz) (N 1062/14, 20, 49) and generally bears out his account.

¹⁶ 'Bebel über den Dresdner Parteitag,' in *LVZ* 10, 232 (7 October 1903) Beilage 2: 1–2.

¹⁷ *Parteitag* 1903, 248–249.

the party leadership who had bestowed that role upon him. This lent the assault on him a significance that went beyond the merely personal. The party leadership would need to decide whether the accusations against him were true or not. Until it had done so he would suspend his activities for the *Neue Zeit* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.¹⁸

To help clear his name, Mehring then began to compile and annotate the relevant material, and in late October, some five weeks after the Congress, he published it in pamphlet form as *Meine Rechtfertigung* [My Justification].¹⁹ Throughout this time the controversy raged on, claims and counterclaims abounding in the party press. A second edition of *Meine Rechtfertigung* followed within little more than a fortnight.²⁰ In its appendix, Mehring addressed new issues that had been raised following the initial publication of *Meine Rechtfertigung*. The *Parteivorstand* finally decided the issue on 23 November. It cleared Mehring's name and asked him to take up his work for the *Neue Zeit* again. At the same time, the party leadership in Leipzig asked him to resume his work for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.²¹

It was in this context, following the publication of Mehring's *Meine Rechtfertigung*, that Edmund Fischer published his critique of Mehring in *Der arme Teufel aus der Oberlausitz*. Fischer had in fact already been among Mehring's assailants in Dresden. It was there that he first introduced the issue of Mehring's dealings with the former antisemitic deputy, Hans Leuß. To his mind, these dealings were a weighty case in point for the argument against Mehring. As he now reiterated, Leuß had not been rejected by the party because he was an 'adulterer and perjured convict', as Mehring seemed to be suggesting. What had jarred with so many in the party was

the fact that we were expected to welcome with open arms the *former anti-semitic leader* [...] who came with *Mehring's warm recommendation*, in order to let him play a role in our rows. [...] I, like many others, could not understand this peculiar introduction into our party of this former antisemitic chieftain with whom we had previously concerned ourselves critically on dozens of occasions in the press and in pamphlets.²²

As I suggested earlier, if an accusation of this sort were made against a public figure today, there could surely be no doubt as to what its thrust is. Let us assume for a moment that Fischer's critique did hinge on the notion that Mehring had revealed his own susceptibility to antisemitism by supporting

¹⁸ Ibid., 250.

¹⁹ Cf. *LVZ* 10, 245 (22 October 1903) Beilage 1: 1–2.

²⁰ Cf. 'Nach dem Dresdner Parteitag,' in *LVZ* 10, 260 (10 November 1903) Beilage 1: 1–2.

²¹ 'Der Parteivorstand gibt bekannt,' in *LVZ* 10, 272 (25 November 1903) Beilage 1: 2. Reprinted in *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten vom 18. bis 24. September 1904* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1904): 42–43.

²² Fischer, 'Der arme Teufel'.

Leuß. In that case, Fischer's critique would finally provide us with hard evidence for the notion that Mehring's stance was at odds with that of most (or at least some) of his peers and that they did take him to task for it. As I have already indicated, though, while this seems the most obvious and indeed only plausible interpretation of Fischer's critique to us, Fischer's intentions were in actual fact completely different.

THE ANTISEMITIC DEPUTY HANS LEUSS

Who, then, was Hans Leuß, and what was the nature of Mehring's involvement with him? Initially a Conservative,²³ Leuß (1861–1920) became an outright antisemite in late 1888 when Adolf Stoecker appointed him as the founding editor of the Christian Social party organ, *Das Volk*. It was here that Leuß met one of the other young hopefuls of the antisemitic movement, Hellmut von Gerlach (1861–1935), who was to become a life-long friend. In 1890, Leuß abandoned the Christian Social party for the more anti-authoritarian and more militantly antisemitic German Social party on whose ticket he was elected to the *Reichstag* for Eschwege-Schmalkalden in 1893. This was no mean achievement for a man in his early thirties. Yet Leuß's spectacularly promising career came to an abrupt and equally spectacular end only a year later.²⁴ Leuß perjured himself in order to defend the 'honour' of a woman with whom he had an adulterous affair. When his partner subsequently broke down in court and admitted the affair, Leuß's previous denial notwithstanding, he was sentenced to *Zuchthaus* and imprisoned in Celle for forty months.²⁵ His reputation irredeemably tarnished, his political career in the antisemitic movement was over.

During his time in the *Reichstag*, Leuß submitted a contribution to the *Zukunft* that Harden published in May 1894.²⁶ It offers us an interesting insight into Leuß's frame of mind at the time and is worth looking at in some detail so that we can later gauge the extent to which the stance of the former antisemite Leuß actually differed from that of Leuß, the antisemitic deputy. As Leuß explained, he had been reading the *Zukunft* since early 1893 and was impressed by it. For he had repeatedly come across comments in the *Zukunft* 'that indicated their authors' objective approach to antisemitism. The antisemites are, after all, not exactly spoilt in this respect'. Indeed, given the rough treatment they usually had to put up with, 'we antisemites

²³ Cf. the obituary by Albert Weidner, 'Hans Leuß' Lebensgang,' in *WaM* 26, 40 (4 October 1920) Beilage: 1. Hereafter Weidner, 'Leuß'; Franz Gerrit Schulte, *Der Publizist Hellmut von Gerlach* (Munich: K G Sauer, 1988): 269 n19. Hereafter Schulte, *Gerlach*.

²⁴ Cf. Hans Leuß, *Aus dem Zuchthause* (Berlin: Johannes Råde, 1903): 14–45. Hereafter Leuß, *Aus dem Zuchthause*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vii.

²⁶ Idem, 'Die antisemitische Bewegung,' in *Zukunft* 7 (19 May 1894): 327–332. Hereafter Leuß, 'antisemitische Bewegung'.

are somewhat surprised when we occasionally encounter an attempt in the non-antisemitic press to judge this movement objectively'. The *Zukunft* was apparently happy to provide a forum for such attempts and he therefore hoped that it might also be willing to publish what he had to say on the matter.

Leuß then began with a discussion of the causes and origins of the anti-semitic movement. The Social Democrats in particular misrepresented the antisemitic movement by claiming that it had 'exclusively economic causes'. In fact there was far more to it. It was certainly 'not true that Stöcker had "started it"; the boot is on the other clerical foot'. Not the Protestant Stoecker but organised political Catholicism had started the anti-Jewish campaigning during the *Kulturkampf*. The crucial impulse, however, had come from an altogether different corner: it was the position taken by 'the "Jewish" press' during the *Kulturkampf* that had provided the decisive impulse. In a sense, history had repeated itself here, for centuries earlier 'in Spain, the impulse for the expulsion of the Jews' had also been 'given by the assault [*Attentat*] of the "Marranos", the *nuevos Christianos*, on the Catholic church'. Those whose animosity towards the Jews was not economically or religiously motivated had been perturbed by the undue 'legislative influence of the Jews (Lasker and Bamberger)'.²⁷ They attributed their own economic difficulties and the general failure to rein in market forces and curtail the *Gründerei* [the frantic economic bustle following the establishment of the German *Reich* in 1871] to this Jewish influence. Another factor that drove people towards antisemitism was the 'strong participation of Jewish politicians in Social Democratic propaganda'.²⁸

Given that so many people had so many good reasons to support the antisemites, one might well wonder why the likes of Stoecker had not been more successful. As we saw, Leuß himself had defected from Stoecker's camp in 1890. It hardly comes as much of a surprise therefore that Leuß held Stoecker himself responsible for his lack of success. He had done a good job of bringing antisemitic convictions to the Protestant masses. But then he concentrated too exclusively on Berlin. 'Had Stöcker invested half the effort he squandered on Berlin in the provinces and gone beyond the oratory to undertake actual organisational work', Leuß suggested, 'he would stand at

²⁷ Ibid., 327. The liberal politicians Eduard Lasker (1829–1884) and Ludwig Bamberger (1823–1899) had been forced to go into exile following the revolution of 1848/1849 (Bamberger was even sentenced to death *in absentia*). Following their return to Germany, they eventually played a prominent role, as National Liberal deputies, in realising Bismarck's programme of legislative modernisation that laid the ground for, and then helped implement, German unification. They were frequently singled out to demonstrate the ostensible Jewish predominance in this field. Both left the National Liberals when the party drifted more and more to the right. Lasker, incidentally, actively opposed the *Sozialistengesetz* and, when it could not be averted, was instrumental in ensuring that the ban was enacted as a temporary measure that would lapse unless renewed at regular intervals.

²⁸ Ibid., 329.

the helm of an antisemitic *Fraktion* of between fifty and eighty deputies today'.²⁹

One thing that had 'very substantially aided' the antisemitic cause was the inauguration of the *Abwehrverein*, the small association of non-Jewish and mostly liberal anti-antisemitic dignitaries established in 1890. 'A very extensive cross section of the German people [...] had remained passive *vis-à-vis* the antisemitic movement', Leuß explained. Yet that by no means implied that they 'nurtured friendly feelings for the Jews [*judenfreundlich*]'. Hence, even though they did not support the antisemitic cause, they were nevertheless 'annoyed when they were suddenly expected to support the Jewish cause'. This was something the *Abwehrverein* had entirely failed to take into account. By attempting to mobilise them in defence of the Jews, the *Abwehrverein* was in fact driving people into the arms of the antisemites. The demand for antisemitic publications had also 'increased to a quite extraordinary degree' as a result of the *Abwehrverein*'s activities. For many people only became aware of the existence of these antisemitic publications thanks to the anti-antisemitic counter-propaganda.

Now, it was generally assumed at the time by well-meaning Jews and non-Jews alike that anti-antisemitic arguments were only credible when articulated by non-Jews. The *Abwehrverein* therefore bent over backwards to ensure it could not possibly be denounced as a Jewish organisation acting 'merely' out of self-interest. Yet this did not prevent Leuß from claiming that the way in which the association worked epitomised bad Jewish practice. Throughout history, various nationalities had had exactly the same experience with the Jews.

As clever as the Jewish nationality is in other respects, however apt it is in asserting its interests and acquiring influence and power: when defending itself against attacks, it always becomes imprudent and excessive. Had the German Jews responded to the first stirrings of antisemitism in the late seventies and early eighties with a little preparedness to act against the deplorable state of affairs, had they imposed greater reticence upon themselves in the press and the economy, the antisemitic movement would have been nipped in the bud whereas now it not only achieves direct electoral successes but has carried its stance into the other parties (the Conservatives, the National Liberals, and the *Zentrum*).³⁰

The people had now witnessed more than enough Jewish abuses. The principle of 'tolerance at any price' was therefore increasingly being replaced by that of 'national egoism'. Any 'judicious assessment' of the antisemitic movement would surely have to concede

²⁹ Ibid., 328. ³⁰ Ibid., 329.

that it represents the outrage, the revolt of a people that is rebelling against a powerful Other [*mächtig gewordenes Fremdthum*] and seeks to shake off this Other. One may deem such rebellions justified or not, one may see in them a source of vigour or just a barbaric brutalization – the fact itself, however, one should concede [...]

The national energy of a people draws strength from opposition to the Other [*das Fremde*], against an Other that it feels and recognizes as disgraceful and oppressive [*ein als schändlich und bedrückend empfundenenes und erkanntes Fremdthum*].

Was not the affirmation of this stark juxtaposition of non-Jews vs. Jews as the Other likely to promote violent anti-Jewish instincts? Far from it, Leuß argued. The antisemitic movement was doing the exact opposite: it was redirecting those instincts in an orderly fashion that was conducive to the nation's reinvigoration. Moreover, he contended somewhat ambiguously, 'the awareness of the great superiority in numbers precludes any idea of a bloody struggle [*blutige Auseinandersetzungen*]'.³¹ It is not entirely clear what he meant here. Perhaps the suggestion was that it would obviously be quite unnecessary for the overwhelming majority of non-Jews to resort to violence in dealing with so minuscule a minority as the Jews. Alternatively, he may have felt that no self-respecting majority of such overwhelming proportions would stoop so low as to apply violence to resolve its differences with so minuscule a minority. Either way, this too is a formulation that may have seemed remotely plausible in a world before Auschwitz but certainly no longer does so now.

Admittedly, Leuß went on, the programmes of the antisemitic parties were still in a process of gestation. Yet they were not simply 'restricted to antisemitic negation'. They also took issue with many other "achievements" of the liberal era; they have taken up the economic aspirations of the farmers and artisans as well as a whole range of social and other issues'. It was therefore 'unjust [...]' to accuse antisemitism of amounting to no more than dull anti-Jewish incitement [*öde Judenhetze*].³² At the moment, the vision of a total separation of Jews and Germans was really no more than 'pie in the sky', Leuß added. The antisemites' demands and aspirations for the immediate future were far more modest: 'the abolition of emancipation, the prohibition of ritual slaughter (and later perhaps the elimination of circumcision)'. In the meantime, they simply hoped that 'the progress of the movement itself might neutralize Jewish influence'.

What, then, of the common suggestion that any wholesale removal of the Jews would change nothing because non-Jews would simply take their place and act in the same way? This was an erroneous assumption, Leuß insisted. The negative and divisive qualities that produced social conflict had been

³¹ Ibid., 330. ³² Ibid., 331.

brought into society by the Jews. Foremost among these negative qualities was the Jews' 'boundlessly contaminating addiction to profit [*Alles durchseuchende Profitwuth*]'. No other negative quality was remotely as contagious. Society could only rise from the squalor and corruption of this addiction if the Jewish example was eliminated. If the Jews really were put in their place, though, society would be able to cleanse itself of the Jewish contamination. It would shed its divisive qualities and social conflict would become a thing of the past. Because the non-Jews would no longer be contaminated by the Jewish addiction to profit once the Jews had been removed, the notion of taking the Jews' place and continuing their exploitative practices would be anathema to them.

Whatever else one might want to say for or against antisemitism, Leuß concluded his discussion in the *Zukunft*, one thing was surely undeniable. The antisemitic movement had already demonstrated its ability to bring out the best in its supporters who showed a degree of enthusiasm and dedication that immunised them against the fanaticism of Social Democracy while the 'old parties' had become so lacklustre that only reliance on the state's instruments of coercion allowed them to persevere.³³

LEUSS TURNS TO MEHRING

Life as an ex-convict was not easy. Not only his former antisemitic associates wanted no more to do with Leuß. Apparently the more established bourgeois and liberal press too initially showed Leuß the door when he tried to build a new career for himself as a writer. Leuß was becoming increasingly desperate and it was at this point that he first turned to Mehring. Leuß hoped that Mehring might be able to help him get published. There was little that Mehring could do in this respect, but he did see to it that a selection of Leuß's poems was published in the *Neue Zeit* and wrote a preface to them.³⁴

In this preface, Mehring also touched on Leuß's political track record. As Mehring saw it, Leuß had been a 'tireless, extremely skilful propagandist' both in his oratory and in his writing. 'He regarded antisemitism as his cause', Mehring explained. This 'was neither rare nor unnatural among the youth growing up under the influence of the formative experiences of the year 1870. Nevertheless', he contended, 'an unbridled love of freedom remained at the heart of his nature throughout'. It then transpired that Mehring had in fact received a character reference for Leuß from a public figure we have already come across. Rather ironically from our point of view, this reference came from none other than Hellmut von Gerlach, Leuß's

³³ Ibid., 332.

³⁴ Franz Mehring, 'Gedichte von Hans Leuß,' in *NZ* 17-II, 47 (9 August 1899): 665-668.

former colleague and fellow rising star in the antisemitic movement who had also abandoned organised party-political antisemitism in the meantime. As Mehring explained,

Herr v. Gerlach who knew him back then and whose judgement can count as sound, given that he is the most talented among the younger publicists of the bourgeois press, recently wrote to me about Leuß, saying: 'He was an idealist through and through. . . . Whatever he did he did forcefully; no matter what he undertook, he was always involved with all his soul. . . . As a Friesian he was a dyed-in-the-wool liberal [*freiheitlich gesinnt bis auf die Knochen*] [. . .].' For a full-blooded nature of this type antisemitism could only be a transitional orientation,

Mehring concluded, 'and so it was'.

Throughout this book I have claimed that Mehring, in contrast to many of his peers, distinguished quite clearly between the masses who were temporarily duped into supporting the antisemitic movement but destined to see the Socialist light, on the one hand, and the activists themselves, on the other, whose antisemitism would spell their undoing. Does this assessment of Leuß's development not contradict my claim? It obviously would do, had Mehring genuinely considered the younger Leuß a fully fledged antisemitic activist. I would argue, though, that Mehring essentially assumed Leuß never to have been a proper antisemite in the first place. He considered Leuß's earlier antisemitic activism no more than a youthful aberration. Consequently, as Mehring saw it, Leuß had ultimately belonged to the duped rather than those who did the duping. This is a rather stiff claim to make when it comes to somebody who had successfully contested a seat in the *Reichstag* on an antisemitic ticket, but this is how Mehring seems to have seen the matter.

Taking Leuß's own assurances at face value, Mehring stated that Leuß had already been well on the way to reforming himself when he was 'torn from political life by his criminal conviction'. On his release, Leuß had, 'of course, found all the doors to the bourgeois world closed'. The 'of course', we might add, refers to the fact that Leuß was a convicted perjurer and ex-convict. From our point of view at least one other issue springs to mind that might conceivably have led people to be wary of Leuß: the fact that he was a former antisemite and his notions regarding 'the Jews' might still be problematic. Yet, not only was this an issue that did not interest Mehring but it also never even entered his mind that it might interest others. The odds are that he was probably right. That Leuß was no longer affiliated with an antisemitic party was beyond doubt. In that sense, he had ceased to be an antisemite. Consequently, his attitudes regarding 'the Jews' were no longer of any great interest to anyone.

The publication of his poems was not the only target, though, that Leuß had set himself before leaving prison, Mehring explained. His other goal was

to enlighten the public about the desperate and unworthy state of the prison system. This was surely a deserving cause. It was subsequently agreed that Leuß should contribute a number of pieces on the state of the prison system to the *Neue Zeit*. He also began to work for a number of leading Social Democratic papers, among them the *Vorwärts* and the *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Not everyone in the party was equally happy to have Leuß on board, though, and the matter was discussed in the *Reichstagsfraktion* in December 1899 and again a year later, when it was finally decided that Leuß should no longer be allowed to publish under his name in the Social Democratic press. We will come back to this intervention by the *Fraktion*.

Leuß presumably never intended to place all his eggs in one basket anyway. As soon as the opportunity arose, he spread his activities fairly widely, certainly more widely than those were likely to find acceptable who felt strongly that party journalists should tread carefully when it came to cooperating with non-Socialist publications – which brings us back to the confrontation in Dresden. As we saw, the issue of collaboration with non-Socialist publications had triggered that confrontation. Consequently, the matter of Mehring's strictness or leniency *vis-à-vis* Leuß in this respect could be used as a measure of his credibility. In the run up to Dresden, Mehring had argued for an extremely strict adherence to the party's principles on collaboration with the non-Socialist press. Yet how strictly had he himself applied these principles in Leuß's case? Leuß had worked as a consultant on social affairs for the papers published by the Ullstein publishing house. These were papers that one could justly classify as anti-Socialist. He also began to write regularly for the *Welt am Montag*, a paper edited by his friend Hellmut von Gerlach who, following his defection from organised political antisemitism, was initially a supporter of Friedrich Naumann's National Social movement. Clearly, then, the *Welt am Montag* was no Socialist paper either, to say the least. Why, one might ask, had Mehring not kicked up the sort of fuss about Leuß's work for Ullstein and Gerlach that he had kicked up about Bernhard's article in the *Zukunft*?

THE CASE OF HANS LEUSS AT THE PARTY CONGRESS IN DRESDEN

It was against this background that Fischer had raised Leuß's case in Dresden. Fischer claimed that he did not oppose the position of the *Vorstand* on the collaboration with the non-Socialist press on principle. 'I do, however, find it outrageous – and have made no secret of this fact – that this whole initiative is entirely the result of one of Franz Mehring's personal disagreements'.³⁵ The real reason for this entire conflict was Mehring's long-standing struggle

³⁵ *Parteitag 1903*, 176, in part reprinted in Franz Mehring, *Meine Rechtfertigung* (Leipzig: Leipziger Buchdruckerei, 1903): 12. Hereafter Mehring, *Rechtfertigung*.

with Harden and the *Zukunft*. Mehring had pounced on this issue for purely personal reasons and then blown it out of all proportion.³⁶ In this instance, Mehring insisted on the highest possible standards. Yet one could hardly claim that the *Neue Zeit* itself maintained the same high standards in all instances.

Fischer was by no means addressing Mehring alone when he raised this issue in Dresden and introduced Leuß's case as an example for the double standards allegedly applied by the editors of the *Neue Zeit*. Fischer did address one of the journal's editors directly when embarking on his critique but it was not Mehring he singled out. 'Take the case of Hans Leuß', Fischer exclaimed, 'nobody mentioned anything about "cleanliness" then, comrade Kautsky! (From the floor: Very good!)'³⁷ Kautsky was, of course, the *de facto* editor-in-chief of the *Neue Zeit*. As we saw, it was he who encouraged Mehring to take up the issue of Bernhard's article in the *Zukunft* and use the opportunity to restate the party's position on collaboration with the non-Socialist press. Speaking immediately before Fischer at the Congress in Dresden, Kautsky emphatically defended Mehring. In his speech, Kautsky also explained his own principles regarding the collaboration of the *Neue Zeit* with non-Socialists or recent converts to Socialism. He had always maintained a 'wariness of anyone who comes to us from the bourgeois parties and used to fight against us', Kautsky stated. This was 'a principle of mine, which some of you should do more to embrace'.³⁸

To Fischer's mind, this only underscored the hypocrisy of the editors of the *Neue Zeit*. Here was Kautsky claiming that he was extremely reluctant, on principle, to offer previous opponents of the party a forum in his journal until they had proved themselves. Yet in Leuß's case, Kautsky had abandoned his principles and welcomed Leuß without the reservations he supposedly maintained *vis-à-vis* such newcomers 'Leuß was an antisemitic deputy', Fischer explained. He had been

sent to prison for an act of perjury that he had committed, as Mehring claims, for honourable reasons. Maybe; but he hadn't seduced his friend's wife for honourable reasons. In any case, he was finished and then approached Mehring, who sang his praise: he had a strong democratic bent etc. Leuß was allowed to write for the *Neue Zeit*. At the same time, he wrote articles for the *Zeitgeist* section of the *Berliner Tageblatt* (From the floor: for the *Welt am Montag* too). Nobody mentioned anything about "cleanliness" then [...] The *Reichstagsfraktion* had to intervene to ensure that this sense of cleanliness was given its due. I found that outrageous, primarily, however, the so-called revisionists were the ones who made the concerted effort to see a cleanly state of affairs reasserted.

³⁶ *Parteitag* 1903, 177. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 176. ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

This last remark is a little surprising. For as Fischer himself went on to add, the dividing line between Leuß's supporters and detractors had not coincided with the rift between revisionists and non-revisionists (the 'old school [*alte Richtung*]', as he called them). Even so, Fischer argued, the crucial point was this: Leuß did not actively support the revisionist cause.³⁹ Mehring therefore had no interest in silencing him and consequently felt no need to insist on the hallowed principles regarding the collaboration with non-Socialist journalists or periodicals. Bernhard, by contrast, *was* a revisionist so that Mehring did have an interest in stopping him in his tracks; and he had published his article in the *Zukunft* of all places so that the whole conflict had become over-determined yet further by Mehring's personal squabble with Harden.⁴⁰ In this instance, then, Mehring had not one but two motives for wanting to lash out and the principles governing the collaboration with the non-Socialist press provided him with the pretext he needed to do so.⁴¹ As Fischer reiterated a little later in his article in *Der arme Teufel aus der Oberlausitz*, he had only brought up Leuß's case 'to demonstrate that the quest for "cleanliness" within the *Neue Zeit* was very one-sided and only directed against certain people. [...] Since "cleanliness" was made an issue at the Party Congress I thought it appropriate to mention *this* case, too', Fischer concluded, adding that 'Mehring is in no position to play the stickler for principles and party schoolmaster [...] It was this and nothing else that my intervention was intended to demonstrate'.⁴²

This and nothing else. We have no reason not to believe Fischer. It is perhaps worth recapitulating his line of argument. The issue of collaboration with the non-Socialist press, in and of itself, was a perfectly debatable one and on this matter he was not in fundamental disagreement with the *Vorstand*. What he found critique-worthy was the reason why this issue was being debated in this instance. The debate was taking place not for reasons that lay in the nature of the matter itself but because Mehring was using the party's official position as a pretext to embark on one of his personally motivated vendettas. That the party's position was no more than a pretext for Mehring was borne out by the fact that Mehring himself only adhered to that position when it suited him. Even when he did adhere to the party's position, in other words, he did so not out of principle but because it provided him with a pretext allowing him to pursue his own agenda (in this case against the revisionists and against Harden.) Where he had no axe to grind, he could not care less about the principles he now enlisted against Bernhard. In this respect,

³⁹ It would be difficult to credit Leuß with any developed or consistent ideological position. Hence Fischer's point here really was that irrespective of his own possible ideological orientation, Leuß did not speak out in favour of the revisionist cause and Mehring therefore had no reason to shut him up.

⁴⁰ On this count Mehring would have had equally good reasons to reject Leuß, of course, given that he had published a lengthy programmatic article in the *Zukunft*, as we just saw. It is unlikely, though, that Fischer would have been aware of this.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 176. ⁴² Fischer, 'Der arme Teufel'.

Kautsky was no better than Mehring. He claimed to be extremely wary of offering former political opponents a forum in the *Neue Zeit*. Yet in Leuß's case he had thought nothing of it. At no point does Fischer give the slightest indication that he is specifically concerned about Leuß's antisemitism, if by that we mean more than his (former) party-political affiliation. He does, of course, mention that Leuß was a former antisemitic deputy. To us it would seem to follow *automatically* that Fischer was questioning Leuß's position *vis-à-vis* 'the Jews' and, by implication, the tolerance that Mehring and Kautsky had displayed towards this apparently problematic position by supporting Leuß. For Fischer and his peers, however, none of this followed at all. That the particular form of opposition to Social Democracy that Leuß had been involved in happened to be organised party-political antisemitism was neither here nor there for Fischer's line of argument. Put bluntly: if Leuß had been some sort of 'philosemitic' Jewish Liberal, it would not have made the slightest bit of difference to Fischer's argument.

In *Meine Rechtfertigung*, Mehring set aside a whole section for 'Der Fall Leuß' [The Leuß Case].⁴³ As he saw it, his support for Leuß had been blown out of all proportion. He had recommended a possible publisher for Leuß's poems, 'published a short review of his poems in the *Neue Zeit*, and asked comrade Kautsky to accept a number of essays by Leuß on prison discipline for the *Neue Zeit*'. That was essentially it. There are two ways in which we can interpret Mehring's claim that his support for Leuß had been grossly overestimated. One implication would be that he had done less to support Leuß than his critics were making out. The other would be that he was indeed guilty as charged but that others in the party had also supported Leuß at least in equal measure and that it was therefore ridiculous to single him out for so hefty a critique.

Mehring's somewhat imprudent claim that all he had really done for Leuß, apart from recommending him to others, was publish 'a short review' of Leuß's poems in the *Neue Zeit* allowed Fischer to suggest that Mehring was misrepresenting the facts yet again in an attempt to downplay his support for Leuß. As Fischer pointed out with considerable justification, Mehring's 'short review' of Leuß's poems had 'in fact covered three-and-a-half pages in petit type'. Not only had Mehring's preface to Leuß's poems not been short, though, it had also done rather more than merely comment on the poems. It in fact amounted to the 'warmest possible recommendation to admit him [Leuß] into our party'. That may be slightly overstating the case. Yet, as we saw, Mehring's preface did indeed do rather more than just address Leuß's skills as a poet.

Even so, on balance one would be hard-pressed to suggest that Mehring was trying to deny the degree of his involvement with Leuß. Instead, his emphasis lay on the dealings of others within the party with Leuß and the

⁴³ Mehring, *Rechtfertigung*, 12–14.

fact that Leuß's supporters and detractors could be found among revisionists and non-revisionists alike. Apart from his poems, Mehring explained in *Meine Rechtfertigung*, Leuß had submitted three or four articles on the prison system to the *Neue Zeit* that offered valuable insights into the topic. Mehring had known that Leuß also wrote for the *Welt am Montag*. His collaboration with the *Berliner Tageblatt*, by contrast, was news to him. But then Leuß had not actually been a party member so the usual principles regarding collaboration with the non-Socialist press had not applied to him anyway. The *Reichstagsfraktion* had become involved later, when Leuß began to write for one of the party's dailies. After that Leuß had written nothing more for the *Neue Zeit* but had continued to contribute to the *Vorwärts*, the *Sächsischer Arbeiter-Zeitung* and the *Münchener Post*. These were all papers for which he, Mehring, bore no responsibility and that were firmly under the sway of the revisionists. Fischer was nevertheless right, Mehring added, in stating that neither the revisionists nor their opponents had presented a united front *vis-à-vis* Leuß. In Mehring's own camp, only Kautsky and Liebknecht had supported him in his dealings with Leuß. Yet he had been of one mind on this matter with Auer,⁴⁴ Eisner, Gradnauer, Südekum⁴⁵ and Adolf Müller⁴⁶ who were all revisionists. On the other hand, Leuß's most outspoken opponents had in fact been Meister⁴⁷ and Wurm,⁴⁸ both of whom were stalwarts of the 'old school'. He did not know whether Leuß still worked for the party press and had not seen him for more than two years, Mehring concluded.

EISNER AND GRADNAUER INTERVENE

As we saw, Mehring claimed that he had been of one mind on Leuß's case with a number of revisionists including Kurt Eisner (1867–1919) and Georg Gradnauer (1866–1946).⁴⁹ Not so, these two now declared. Writing in the

⁴⁴ The revisionist Ignaz Auer (1846–1907) held the highly influential post of Party Secretary.

⁴⁵ Albert Südekum (1871–1944) was a leading right-winger and the editor-in-chief of the *Sächsischer Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Infamous for his support of the Imperial war effort in 1914, he was later the Prussian Finance Minister from 1918–1920.

⁴⁶ Müller was a revisionist deputy in the Bavarian *Landtag*.

⁴⁷ Heinrich Meister (1842–1906) was a member of the *Reichstag* from 1884 until his death and stood at the helm of the *Völkswille* (Hannover).

⁴⁸ Emanuel Wurm (1857–1920) joined the editors of the *Neue Zeit* in 1902. He was married to Rosa Luxemburg's long-standing friend and correspondent, Mathilde Wurm, *née* Adler (1874–1934). Both later joined the USPD, the independent Socialist party created in the spring of 1917 in opposition to the continued Majority Socialist support for the Imperial German war effort.

⁴⁹ Eisner and Gradnauer, incidentally, were both of Jewish extraction. In the immediate revolutionary and post-revolutionary turmoil they became the prime ministers of Bavaria and Saxony, respectively, making them the first Jewish state prime ministers in Germany. Eisner was assassinated in February 1919. Gradnauer was initially arrested in 1933 but later released. Deported to Theresienstadt in 1944, he was liberated there the following year.

Vorwärts, whose leading editors they were, Eisner and Gradnauer disputed Mehring's account in *Meine Rechtfertigung*. Not that his account was 'in any way strictly speaking wrong'. Even so, the reader would be compelled to conclude from it 'something other than the truth'. Mehring had sought to give the impression that the decision of the *Vorwärts* to collaborate with Leuß had resulted from its revisionist orientation. Yet the 'whole truth' was that 'Leuß's collaboration with the *Vorwärts* and the continuation of this collaboration are essentially down to Mehring's influence'. He had

still supported his protégé with a warmth that we found most sympathetic, even when misgivings about this collaboration were being voiced in the party. From Mehring's *Rechtfertigung* one could easily conclude that the *Neue Zeit* had been loyal enough to the party to close its pages to Leuß whereas the *Vorwärts*, the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, and the *Münchener Post* had been less unscrupulous.⁵⁰

In fact, however, the *Neue Zeit* had no longer been at liberty to publish texts by Leuß anyway, because the *Fraktion* had already asked the journal to terminate its collaboration with Leuß on 23 November 1899. This seems a slightly odd line of argument. If the *Fraktion* felt that Leuß was unsuitable as a contributor to the *Neue Zeit*, would one not expect the editors of the party's other publications, and especially the *Vorwärts*, to review their collaboration with him too? Admittedly, they had not been ordered by the leadership to terminate their dealings with Leuß. Even so it was surely a legitimate question why they would continue to work with Leuß once he had been deemed unfit to contribute to the *Neue Zeit*. Eisner and Gradnauer were in any case simply wrong. As Mehring subsequently pointed out, 'Leuß in fact wrote a total of three articles for the *Neue Zeit*, all under his name; one of these, a short report of hardly three and a half pages [...] was published before 23 November,⁵¹ the other two, however, on prison discipline, amounting to between 14 and 15 pages, were published after 23 November'. They were in fact published in March 1900.⁵² As far as Mehring was concerned, this said about as much as one needed to know about the reliability of Eisner and Gradnauer's account: 'The whole truth indeed!'⁵³

Eisner and Gradnauer then turned to the *Fraktion's* second and final decision about Leuß or, to be more specific, to events on the evening

⁵⁰ Eisner and Gradnauer obviously meant exactly the opposite. Since the German words for scrupulous (*skrupulös*) and unscrupulous (*skrupellos*) are relatively similar, this is an easy mistake for a distracted author or typesetter to make. Mehring reprinted the passage uncorrected (Mehring, *Rechtfertigung* [2nd edition], 49).

⁵¹ Cf. Hans Leuß, 'Das Verbrechen als sozialpathologische Erscheinung,' in *NZ* 18-I, 7 (8 November 1899): 213–216.

⁵² Cf. Hans Leuß, 'Disziplin in Strafanstalten,' in *NZ* 18-I, 25 (14 March 1900): 783–790 and 18-I, 26 (21 March 1900): 820–826.

⁵³ Mehring, *Rechtfertigung* [2nd edition], 50.

following that decision. That evening, Eisner and Gradnauer explained, ‘we were together with Mehring and Leuß. Mehring pleaded fervently for the continued employment of the author [i.e., Leuß] and we promised to do so, as long as the relevant party authorities agreed’. Then, about three-quarters of a year later, the ‘inevitable conflict’ between Leuß and Mehring arose. Why was this conflict, as Eisner and Gradnauer saw it, inevitable? Because Mehring was notoriously so unbalanced and quarrelsome that it was only a matter of time before he picked a fight with everyone with whom he was ever involved. Now it was Leuß’s turn. Mehring had promptly written to them, Eisner and Gradnauer related, to say that he had, some time ago, vouched for Leuß. He now needed to retract that guarantee. In short, the two editors explained, ‘Hans Leuß’s collaboration with the *Vorwärts* was exclusively Mehring’s doing, just as he subsequently requested that we terminate this collaboration’. They added, though, that they had not, of course, published Leuß’s texts ‘merely for Mehring’s sake but because they merited publication’.⁵⁴

Mehring’s response to Eisner and Gradnauer forms the sixth and final part of the section he appended to the second edition of *Meine Rechtfertigung*. In it he discussed at length the *Fraktion*’s second and final decision on Leuß on 12 December 1900 and the events that evening. On this issue, Eisner and Gradnauer had themselves carefully refrained from presenting the whole truth, he argued. That evening ‘it was not just “we [i.e., Eisner and Gradnauer], Mehring and Leuß” who were together, but a fifth man joined us whose name Eisner and Gradnauer do not mention; they have a good – or rather: a bad – reason for not doing so’. The fifth man was Südekum. What had really transpired was this: Südekum had granted Leuß ‘such extensive leeway in the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*’ that the press commission in Dresden had become alarmed and prohibited any further collaboration with Leuß. Südekum had declared this decision ‘an infringement of his editorial rights and tendered his resignation’. It was these events that had brought the matter before the *Fraktion* on 12 December 1900 in the first place. Once again, Mehring found it hard to see how any of this could possibly be his responsibility. What, then, of the events on the evening following the decision by the *Fraktion*?⁵⁵ ‘Early that evening Leuß visited me’, Mehring explained. He

informed me that he had arranged to meet Südekum [...] and suggested that I accompany him. Since I was interested in the matter I went along.

⁵⁴ Kurt Eisner, Georg Gradnauer, ‘Franz Mehring und der *Vorwärts*,’ in *Vorwärts* 20, 250 (25 October 1903) Beilage 1: 2. Hereafter Eisner, Gradnauer, ‘Mehring’.

⁵⁵ Mehring’s claim that he only became involved with the decision of the *Fraktion* that evening is in fact untrue. He had written to the veteran deputy, party journalist and popular historian Wilhelm Bloss (1849–1927) about the matter *before* the *Fraktion* convened on 12 December 1900 (SAPMO-BArch, N 2027/29, Bl. 8–9). On this issue, cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 125–128.

Südekum in turn came from the *Reichstag* with Gradnauer, and Gradnauer phoned the *Vorwärts* to say that Eisner should come over [...]

Naturally we discussed the decision of the *Fraktion*. Essentially it had backed the press commission in Dresden and Südekum would now have to go. At the same time it had placed Leuß in a position which, in my opinion, he needed to think through on his own. Whether he was able and willing to collaborate with the party press under the conditions set out by the *Fraktion* was a matter on which, to my mind, no third party should seek to advise him. As far as I could see, he took the matter with perfect calm while Südekum openly expressed his dissatisfaction.

Later that evening they had moved on to another venue and Mehring walked there with Gradnauer at his side. Gradnauer, himself a former editor of the *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung* and at the time the member of the *Reichstag* for the constituency Dresden II, 'used the opportunity [...] to say to me: We cannot be doing with a press row in Dresden; try to persuade Leuß to resign voluntarily so that Südekum can stay; it goes without saying that we would then have to do all we can to make sure that Leuß does not fall through the net'. He, Mehring, had

answered: as far as I know Leuß, he really will resign voluntarily as soon as he realizes that Südekum wants to stay and he will already have noticed that quite a while ago, but you are certainly right in this respect: if the matter is to be fixed as you wish, then it is imperative that Leuß does not go to the dogs in the process. It was then decided that Gradnauer and Eisner would employ Leuß as best they could for the *Vorwärts* and that they would at the same time seek employment for him in Hamburg while I offered to address a request to Leipzig.

That is what happened on the evening of 12 December 1900. Eisner and Gradnauer know that full well, but although they know better they claim that I pleaded 'ferently' that they employ Leuß for the *Vorwärts* and that the collaboration was 'exclusively' my doing. They intentionally distort the truth so as to be able to construe the 'inevitable conflict' and level the wretched accusation that I distil party issues from personal sympathy and antipathy. But let us move on!

All their attempts to 'find however modest an existence for Leuß within the framework of the *Fraktion's* decision of 12 December' had, in the event, 'proved unfeasible. From Hamburg and Leipzig came the concurring response one would not hesitate to employ Leuß', but there were simply no vacancies. Hence, Leuß had 'looked around for alternative sources of income and organised his life on a different basis'. He had done so in ways which struck him, Mehring, as being 'incompatible with his collaboration with the party press, however legitimate and impeccable'⁵⁶ his behaviour

might seem by bourgeois standards. I repeatedly discussed this with Leuß in great detail and these awkward debates then also resulted, as always happens in such cases, in personal ill-feeling; I could not but stand to my opinion while Leuß pointed out that he had obligations towards third parties that made it imperative for him to establish a secure existence which he would not be able to attain under the material and moral pressure of the *Fraktion's* decision of 12 December 1900. Hence he stopped visiting me in July 1901.⁵⁷

and he had 'lost all control' over Leuß's activities. As Mehring then conceded, Leuß 'was generally perceived of in the party as, and indeed to some extent really had been, my "protégé"'. Hence he should perhaps have acted immediately, back in July 1901, to make clear 'in all instances in which I could assume that I shared the responsibility for his collaboration with the party press', that he no longer felt in a position to vouch for Leuß. Again, there is no indication here that Mehring was in any way trying to deny his actual support for Leuß and the extent to which he therefore *shared* the responsibility for Leuß's collaboration with the party press. He had assumed, though, 'that Leuß would give up his work for the party press anyway, given his new orientation. [...] Three months later, however, this assumption turned out to be erroneous. I found out by coincidence that Leuß was still contributing to the party press'. It was at this juncture, in November 1901, that Mehring had contacted Eisner and Gradnauer and written that 'should Leuß still be working for the *Vorwärts* I could no longer uphold whatever guarantee I had offered for him in the past'.⁵⁸

Can we trust Mehring's account? As far as I can tell, Eisner and Gradnauer made no attempt to refute this version of their joint dealings with Leuß. We therefore have no reason not to accept Mehring's account as largely accurate. In this light, one can well understand that Mehring felt it was ridiculous to hold him solely responsible for the fact that Leuß's forays into the party had not been entirely without success.

There is another problem with Eisner and Gradnauer's attempt to wash their hands of all responsibility for Leuß's collaboration with the *Vorwärts*. They insisted that 'Leuß's collaboration with the *Vorwärts* was exclusively Mehring's doing'. Yet they also conceded that 'we did not publish Leuß's contributions merely for Mehring's sake but because they merited publication'.⁵⁹ They themselves had made an active decision to publish Leuß's texts, in other words. Clearly, then, Leuß's work for the *Vorwärts* was *not* exclusively down to Mehring. We might note in passing that Mehring and the *Vorwärts* were in fact forever at loggerheads. If Eisner, Gradnauer and those responsible for the profile of the *Vorwärts* before, alongside and after them had done as Mehring told them, not only would the *Vorwärts*

⁵⁶ Mehring, *Rechtfertigung* [2nd edition], 50. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 50–51. ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁹ Eisner, Gradnauer, 'Mehring'.

have been a very different paper, the history of Social Democracy might well have taken an altogether different course. Whether a reference from Mehring was ultimately more likely to harm or increase a writer's chances of getting published by the *Vorwärts* is hard to say. Perhaps Mehring's support did help sway Eisner and Gradnauer in their decision to collaborate with Leuß. Had they had serious misgivings about Leuß, though, the likelihood of their genuinely changing their mind on Mehring's behest would have been extraordinarily slim, to say the least.

What, then, was the actual issue here? Were Gradnauer and Eisner criticising Mehring because he had supported Leuß although he did not deserve that support? Given that they themselves agreed that Leuß's contributions did merit publication, this would hardly make sense. What really concerned Eisner and Gradnauer was that Mehring had supposedly not told the truth about what had gone on between them. This, after all, was one of the core accusations levelled at Mehring in Dresden: he tried to portray himself as credible by lying to cover up his opportunism and hypocrisy. The issue was not so much whom or what he specifically lied about but simply *that* he lied on a regular basis and did so for purely personal reasons, at that. That it was specifically his dealings with Leuß that he had lied about was ultimately neither here nor there; let alone was it relevant that Leuß was a (former) antisemite.

That the position of Eisner and Gradnauer was hardly informed by profound misgivings about Leuß himself is borne out by another remarkable fact. Only three days after they published their rejection of Mehring's version of events in the *Vorwärts*, their paper led with an editorial praising Hans Leuß's newly published book *Aus dem Zuchthause* [From the Penitentiary].⁶⁰ What did this editorial have to say about Leuß's past? 'His crime did not harm his reputation in *unprejudiced circles*', it explained, 'and that which may have been all too human about the events leading to that crime', the adultery in other words, did his reputation 'no harm in the eyes of the prejudiced because it is common practice among them. Enough! It is not the man we wish to speak of but his work'. Clearly, then, the author of this editorial shared the assumption that Leuß's reputation might be considered compromised, if at all, then due to his criminal conviction. Moreover, the editorial also took Leuß's contention at face value that he had already begun to reform himself prior to his conviction. Leuß himself related in the book, the editorial explained, how, being the 'former antisemitic deputy' he *then* was, he had entered prison with all the prejudices of the establishment. The usual issue arises: in so far as his conviction cost him his seat in the *Reichstag*, he was indeed a former *deputy*, but what of his antisemitism, if by that we mean his notions regarding 'the Jews' rather than merely his formal party-political affiliation? In terms of his party-political affiliation,

⁶⁰ 'Aus dem Zuchthaus,' in *Vorwärts* 20, 252 (28 October 1903): 1.

Leuß was indeed no longer an antisemite. This was beyond doubt not least because his old associates had in any case disowned him, no matter what his own intentions might have been. His attitudes towards 'the Jewish Question', however, seem to have been of no more interest to the author of this *Vorwärts* editorial praising Leuß's book than it was to all the other participants in this debate whom we have met so far. Had they really been the focus of the misgivings formulated by Eisner and Gradnauer, it is surely hard to imagine that the *Vorwärts* would have published an editorial praising Leuß's book, let alone would it have done so while the controversy regarding Mehring's involvement with Leuß still raged.⁶¹

Mehring by no means stood alone with his general attitude towards Leuß, then. Quite irrespective of whether Mehring shared this attitude with many or with only very few in the party, though, this much is clear: the one issue that we would be inclined to think of as the crucial one was never even raised in this dispute. Whether, or to what extent, Leuß's perceptions and prescriptions regarding 'the Jewish Question' had changed interested none of the participants on either side of this confrontation.

THE INTERVENTION OF THE FRAKTION

Finally, let us take another look at the interventions by the *Fraktion*. As already mentioned, the *Fraktion* discussed Leuß's situation twice, once towards the end of 1899 and again a year later. There are very few sources available to us on this matter. The *Fraktion* began to keep regular minutes only in December 1898 and until 1914 these minutes usually documented only the decisions reached without offering any insight into the preceding debates.⁶²

As for the first occasion on which the *Fraktion* dealt with Leuß, the minutes for 23 November 1899 merely relate that the *Fraktion* had, 'following a suggestion by comrade Meister, accepted Bebel's proposal to inform the editors of the *Neue Zeit* of the wish of the *Fraktion* that it no longer accept contributions from the author Leuß'.⁶³ Fortunately, for us, Bebel wrote to Kautsky the following day to inform him of the decision and explain the matter. The fact that Leuß was collaborating with the *Neue Zeit* 'although

⁶¹ I suspect that this editorial was in fact by Gradnauer since he subsequently sang the book's praises in the *Reichstag*. Speaking on 13 May 1904, he called it 'a civilizing book [*Kulturbuch*] of high standing'. It reiterated the basic assumptions of modern criminology in a 'loud and clear' fashion and engaged in a 'noble and enthusiastic feud against societal prejudice'. Gradnauer felt he was surely 'not exaggerating when I say that this book will hold a special place in the history of the criminal justice and prison system'. (*Stenographische Berichte 4: Von der 81. Sitzung am 2. Mai bis zur 100. Sitzung am 16. Juni 1904* (Berlin: Norddeutsche Buchdruckerei und Verlagsanstalt, 1904): 2894.)

⁶² Erich Matthias, Eberhard Pikart (eds.), *Die Reichstagsfraktion der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1898 bis 1918* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1966): cxvii. Hereafter Matthias, Pikart, *Reichstagsfraktion*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 23.

his reputation was not only badly compromised but he also used to act with indescribable contempt towards the party' had led to a debate in the *Fraktion*. 'Meister brought the matter up at the behest of the comrades in Hannover who became aware of it due to the fact that the *Hannoverscher Courier* remarked on the matter. They are particularly outraged because Leuß used to be in Hannover⁶⁴ and they know him'.⁶⁵

Bebel's exact formulation is worth looking at with some care. Its nuances are more obvious in the original German version. Bebel wrote that Leuß's critics had based their case on the fact that he '*nicht nur schwer kompromittiert wurde, sondern auch früher sich gegen die Partei bodenlos gemein benommen habe*'. This could mean simply that Leuß was both compromised and had behaved appallingly towards the party. It is equally possible, though, that the formulation was in fact alluding to two issues: Leuß had been compromised at a certain point, but his contemptible behaviour towards the party predated that point, it preceded whatever it was that had subsequently compromised him. In that case, we could safely assume that Leuß displayed the contemptible behaviour in question during his career as an antisemitic activist. Whatever he had been compromised by, on the other hand, would then have transpired later, i.e., when he was no longer an antisemitic activist. This could mean that Leuß was considered compromised by his conviction for perjury. Alternatively, he could have been considered compromised by something even more recent, most likely the fact that he was so promiscuous when it came to getting his stuff published.

That this is the most plausible explanation is borne out by another piece of circumstantial evidence. A few days later, on 28 November, Bebel informed Kautsky that 'Richter has just given me the attached newspaper item [*Meldung*] that confirms what was suggested but could not be proven in the *Fraktion*. This report will make it easier for you to speak out against L[euß]; needless to say you can also inform Mehring of the report. It will cover his back too'.⁶⁶ The item in question appears to have been lost and we no longer know what it was. But what might it possibly have proven? Surely not that Leuß had said nasty things about Jews or behaved in a beastly fashion towards Social Democracy while he was an antisemitic activist. This, after all, was quite uncontroversial, as was the fact that he had been imprisoned for perjury. We can also rule out that the item in question was the four-line report from the *Hannoverscher Courier* that had first brought the matter to the attention of the comrades in Hannover because Bebel had already sent the text from the *Hannoverscher Courier* to Mehring on the evening

⁶⁴ Leuß's earlier activities in Hannover were reflected not least in his pamphlet: Hans Leuß, *Was ist von unserem Magistrat zu halten?* (Hannover: C. F. W. Warnecke, 1893).

⁶⁵ Karl Kautsky, Jr. (ed.), *August Bebels Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971): 124–125. Hereafter *BWABK*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

of 23 November.⁶⁷ Hence, the *Fraktion* surely must have considered Leuß compromised by something else. Unless the *Fraktion*'s concern had been aroused by something altogether different that has left no trace at all in the sources, what might it possibly have sprung from – other than Leuß's rather indiscriminate dealings with the Socialist and non-Socialist press alike?

If this interpretation is correct, it would, in turn, imply that the *Fraktion*'s misgivings, to the extent that they hinged on Leuß's past as an antisemitic activist at all, hinged on the anti-Socialist activities that had been part and parcel of his antisemitic activism and in no way specifically on his anti-Jewish stance. Even if this interpretation is not correct and Bebel and his colleagues did indeed assume that Leuß's reputation was compromised by his antisemitic past, their strong focus on the contempt with which Leuß had previously treated Social Democracy would still be noteworthy. The *Fraktion* had made its decision because Leuß was *not only* badly compromised *but* had also behaved contemptibly towards the party. That his reputation was compromised alone would not have sufficed; the case against him only held when both issues were seen in conjunction. This surely implies that it was ultimately his previous behaviour towards the party that tipped the scales against him rather than his antisemitic activism as such, should that have been what the *Fraktion* thought had compromised him.

Another extremely interesting point that emerges from Bebel's account is this: those who made Leuß's situation an issue at this point did so not because they themselves had registered Leuß's forays into the party and felt the need to address his political or personal past (for whatever reason). Instead, they did so because a local non-Socialist paper had reported on the matter. This seems rather odd. For the report in question was in fact barely four lines long and simply related in a perfectly matter-of-fact way that 'the former antisemitic deputy *Leuß* sought to enter the Social Democratic fold through Franz Mehring's mediation and succeeded'. It added that the most recent edition of the *Neue Zeit* had already brought an essay by him.⁶⁸ Now, the edition of the *Neue Zeit* in question was by then at least a week old, and Leuß's poems, along with Mehring's detailed and friendly preface, had been published almost exactly three months earlier. Neither of these publications seem to have precipitated any protests within the party. Not Leuß's publications in the *Neue Zeit* as such, then, were apparently the problem. It was the (rather ambiguously formulated) suggestion that he had entered the Social Democratic fold, in other words, that he had become a member. This raised the additional question of just how Mehring and the *Neue Zeit* might have gone about bringing Leuß into the fold of the party. In formal terms, the acceptance of new members clearly lay beyond their competence and remit. Be all that is it may, as Bebel explained to Kautsky in a distinctly distanced manner, 'the final result was that I am supposed to

⁶⁷ Ibid., 124–125. ⁶⁸ *Hannoverscher Courier* 46, 22263 (21 November 1899, Morgen-Ausgabe): 3.

inform you and Mehring in the name of the *Fraktion* of its request that Leuß's role as a contributor be discontinued.⁶⁹

There is certainly nothing to suggest that the initiative against Leuß at this point may have hinged on Mehring's support for him, let alone that it might have been intended as a covert assault on Mehring. Mehring, as so often, would seem to have contemplated such a connection nonetheless. Kautsky apparently informed Bebel that Mehring was being his usual suspicious self. In response, Bebel wrote to Kautsky on 29 November that 'Mehring was involved in the affair *solely* because the comment of the *Hannoverscher Courier* mentioned his name as the one who brought L[euß] to the *Neue Zeit*. Without this remark, no one would have thought of him. He is utterly mistaken if he thinks he has been implicated in some other way'.⁷⁰ At the time, then, Mehring's peers obviously by no means automatically drew a connection between him and Leuß, let alone did they hold him solely responsible for Leuß's involvement with the party and its publications.

On the same day (29 November), Wilhelm Liebknecht, as the editor-in-chief of the *Vorwärts*, wrote to Leuß. The fact that the Moscow archivists inventorised this letter as addressed to one G. Leyss is a good indication of just how little attention Leuß's case has received in the past. His attempts to employ him for the *Vorwärts* had met with resistance, Liebknecht informed Leuß. 'Accusations have been levelled the validity of which I am currently examining and which have nothing to do with your trial'. Again the same picture emerges: Liebknecht himself clarifies that Leuß's conviction was not the issue and how indeed could it possibly have been the object of an 'accusation' whose veracity needed to be established? The same holds true of Leuß's antisemitic and anti-Socialist activism in the past. It would seem, then, that Liebknecht had not yet become privy to the information confirming those apparently novel misgivings against Leuß that Bebel had received from Richter and passed on to Kautsky. He would be in touch again soon, Liebknecht continued, adding that he sincerely hoped that Leuß would succeed in carving out an independent position for himself. Leuß noted on the top of the letter that he had received it on 30 November and then sent it on to Mehring, writing to him on the back of Liebknecht's letter and asking for his advice. Presumably Mehring subsequently went to discuss the matter with Liebknecht – with Leuß's letter in hand, which would explain how it found its way back among Liebknecht's papers.⁷¹

Kautsky had no intention of simply giving in. Bebel, in turn, remained far from convinced of the need to do so. He apparently suggested to Kautsky that the matter might as yet be smoothed over if the *Neue Zeit* clarified its

⁶⁹ *BWABK*, loc cit. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷¹ Russian Centre for Preservation and Research of Modern Historical Documents (RCCHIDNI, former IML/CPA), Fonds 200: Wilhelm Liebknecht, Opus 1.1: 670 (IISH Microfilm Holdings).

position. Hence, Kautsky issued a statement in the *Neue Zeit*. In the name of the entire editorial team it confirmed that the recent publication of an article by Hans Leuß in the *Neue Zeit* had

variously led to the assumption that the author [...] was thus being recognized by the editors as a member of the Social Democratic party.

This assumption is erroneous. We have neither the right, nor do we feel the calling, to determine the party membership of our contributors. Moreover, we have never found it incompatible with the tasks of our journal to open our pages to contributors who obviously do not belong to our party, if their contributions seemed useful to our cause or had no prospect of being published in the bourgeois press.⁷²

Leuß had offered the *Neue Zeit* a series of articles 'in which he wanted to portray his experiences with the prison system. Nobody will doubt that this subject is of the utmost importance to us and that Leuß is in a position to offer us substantial observations on the matter'. He had proposed this series of articles to the *Neue Zeit* 'based on the pertinent assumption that he would be able to speak his mind more freely in our journal than in the bourgeois press'. Against this background, all the inferences regarding Leuß's relationship with the party that had been drawn from the publication of the one introductory article published so far were hopefully 'obsolete'.⁷³

On 6 December 1899, Bebel promptly 'informed the *Fraktion* of a statement by the editors of the *Neue Zeit* arguing that contributions to the *Neue Zeit* did not imply party membership'. The *Fraktion*, however, was not appeased and expressed 'the wish: the editors of the *Neue Zeit* should in future reject contributions from L[euß] and also refrain from publishing the already accepted pieces'.⁷⁴ Bebel himself still did not care much either way. 'If you do intend to publish the subsequent articles', he suggested to Kautsky, 'the easiest thing to do would be to present them under a pseudonym and a different title, that way both sides receive their due'.⁷⁵

Bebel's report, Kautsky now retorted, 'greatly surprised me, Mehring and I had agreed with Meister and Wurm that we issue our statements that clearly testify to the fact that Leuß's collaboration is of an entirely apolitical nature, so that his articles on the prison system, which I committed myself to accept, can no longer be used against us'. He had never intended to continue the collaboration with Leuß beyond that anyway.⁷⁶ Personally he felt 'quite

⁷² Karl Kautsky, 'Die Veröffentlichung des Artikels von Hans Leuß,' in NZ 18-I, 11 (6 December 1899): 324-325.

⁷³ Ibid., 325.

⁷⁴ Matthias, Pikart, *Reichstagsfraktion*, 25. Matthias and Pikart erroneously claim that the NZ subsequently did not publish further contributions by Leuß (ibid., 115).

⁷⁵ BWABK, 127.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 128. The published version is based on a draft still among Kautsky's papers.

indifferent' towards Leuß but he would not renege on a commitment he had already entered into unless it was absolutely necessary. Hence he felt deeply embarrassed by the demand of the *Fraktion*. As we saw, in the event, the *Neue Zeit* did in fact publish two further instalments of Leuß's report on the prison system in March 1900.

The deliberations of the *Fraktion* on Leuß's case at the end of 1899 would seem to present us with the same findings, then, as the confrontation unleashed at the Party Congress in Dresden in 1903. The one issue that we would be inclined to think of as the crucial one did not feature in these deliberations either. Whether, or to what extent, Leuß's perceptions and prescriptions regarding 'the Jews' had changed simply did not strike any of the participants in these deliberations as relevant.

This is borne out yet further if we consider the following. The correspondence between Bebel and Kautsky was edited by Kautsky's second son, Karl (1892–1978). He himself stated in his introduction to the correspondence that 'as the last surviving member of Kautsky's immediate family I was, although no professional historian, even so capable of illuminating otherwise dubious connections contributing to the characterization of many a half forgotten personality'. He had been all the more capable of doing so since he had 'grown up [...] in the atmosphere' of the editorial dealings of the *Neue Zeit*.⁷⁷ This claim is obviously credible primarily for the last decade or so of Kautsky's career as the journal's editor-in-chief.⁷⁸ His son was certainly too young to be able to remember the discussion of Leuß's case at the turn of the century. It is nevertheless noteworthy how Karl Kautsky Jr. annotated Leuß's case. All he had to say on the matter was that Leuß had been imprisoned for perjury because 'he did not want to compromise a woman'.⁷⁹

Now, we may not know exactly how Karl Kautsky Jr. came to select this as the one piece of relevant information on Leuß. Yet the main sources he drew on for his annotation in general are obvious enough: they were, firstly, his personal recollections, secondly, the recollections of surviving associates of his father who were willing to help him and, thirdly, the sources and secondary literature that are in any case in the public domain. Drawing on one or more of these sources it was Leuß's conviction for perjury that struck him as the single most important piece of information worth passing on to the readers of his father's correspondence with Bebel. This is even more remarkable if we take into account that he in fact added a reference to Mehring's *Meine Rechtfertigung*. As Karl Kautsky Jr. pointed out, it contained a whole section on Leuß. Yet, in that section, Mehring quoted from the critique Fischer levelled at him in Dresden, including Fischer's explicit reference to Leuß as a former antisemitic deputy. Assuming Karl Kautsky Jr. ever had a look at the section on Leuß in *Meine Rechtfertigung*,

⁷⁷ Ibid., x. ⁷⁸ Kautsky was finally sacked in 1917 after joining the USPD. ⁷⁹ Ibid., 124 *nn*.

the reference to Leuß's antisemitic past must have failed to strike him as being of any particular importance. Alternatively, he may have included the reference to *Meine Rechtfertigung* unseen. Either way, the fact remains that none of the three types of sources at his disposal suggested to Karl Kautsky Jr. that antisemitism had played a role in this dispute. This would surely be inconceivable, had Leuß ultimately been rejected by the party because he was considered a closet antisemite and had Mehring stood more or less alone in supporting Leuß against the party's 'philosemitic' onslaught.

On a similar note, Matthias and Pikart, in their annotation of the minutes of the *Reichstagsfraktion*, simply explain that Hans Leuß was a contributor to the *Neue Zeit* writing on criminal law and the penal system. They then refer the reader to page 86 of Friedrich Stampfer's memoirs for further information.⁸⁰ There Stampfer, who was himself of Jewish extraction, discussed Leuß in connection with the development of a number of former antisemitic activists. In this context, he introduced an interesting contrast. On the one hand, he discussed Wolfgang Heine (1861–1944)⁸¹ who was notorious for this anti-Jewish animosity even after he had become a Social Democrat. In a formulation that hence tells us rather a lot about the reliability of his judgements on this matter, Stampfer claimed that Heine had 'not only become a Social Democrat but also a veritable philosemite – in contrast', he added, 'to some Jewish Social Democrats who acknowledged a certain relative justification of antisemitism'.

Similarly to Heine, Stampfer then went on, Hans Leuß and Hellmut von Gerlach had initially been antisemites. Then, however, they became 'editors of the radical *Welt am Montag*' and had 'almost exclusively Jewish friends'. In a truly remarkable turn, Stampfer then concluded his discussion by stating that 'Heine, Gerlach and Leuß are in part responsible for the fact that I initially misjudged the National Socialists. They were such great guys and yet they had begun as reactionaries and antisemites. Should one take it to heart, then, if there was always some new ferment that behaved absurdly?'⁸² Given the abundance of inaccuracies in Stampfer's memoirs, it is difficult to determine which period exactly Stampfer was referring to. Leuß only became an editor of the *Welt am Montag* in 1909.⁸³ On the other hand, the fact that he had already been writing for the paper before 1903 must have been relatively well known, given that he was imprisoned at the

⁸⁰ Matthias, Pikart, *Reichstagsfraktion*, 23 n1.

⁸¹ Heine, a prominent lawyer and the revisionist deputy for the constituency Berlin III, was also a regular contributor to the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. He was one of the complainants against Mehring in the run up to the Party Congress in Dresden. It was he who borrowed from Harden the private correspondence between Harden and Mehring that Bernhard then used as ammunition for his assault on Mehring at the Congress.

⁸² Friedrich Stampfer, *Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse* (Cologne: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1957): 86.

⁸³ Weidner, 'Leuß'.

time for an article published in that paper. Whether Stampfer no longer recalled the conflict in which Leuß's initial attempt to gain a foothold in the party had become embroiled or simply decided not to mention it is impossible to decide. Clearly, Stampfer not only considered Leuß a wholly reformed character, though, but felt the urge to say so in no uncertain terms. It therefore seems rather unlikely that Stampfer would have forgotten all about this conflict or refrained from mentioning it, had Leuß really been rejected by the party because the majority of his peers had been adamant that Leuß was still an antisemite at heart.

To add one more stone to our mosaic, let us turn to the colleagues who edited the relevant first volume of Rosa Luxemburg's collected letters under the auspices of Annelies Laschitzka and Günter Radczun. They explain that 'the bourgeois author Hans Leuß had been imprisoned for perjury and had not been able to secure a livelihood on his release'. Hence he had turned to Mehring. Later he had written 'under very restrictive conditions' for Social Democratic papers. In this context, 'dishonesties transpired, aided by opportunists, within one of the papers'.⁸⁴ Leuß's antisemitism past or present finds no mention here either, let alone does it feature as an issue relevant to the conflicts he became embroiled in at the time. It would seem a rather massive coincidence should all the editors and authors just quoted simply have overlooked or disregarded the fact that the controversy surrounding Leuß's collaboration with the party press actually hinged on the fact that most Social Democrats found his position *vis-à-vis* 'the Jewish Question' problematic.

Does the second round of deliberations on Leuß's case in the *Fraktion* a year later offer us anything that might change this picture? Rather remarkably, the report on the debate about Leuß on 12 December 1900 is by far the most detailed account on *any* debate within the *Fraktion* that can be found in the minutes up to that date. It discloses that the matter was discussed for no less than three hours. Yet the information provided remains cryptic. The *Fraktion* ultimately moved the following motion: 'The *Fraktion* expresses its opinion that it is not in the interest of the party that Leuß work under his name in a literary capacity for the party or that he hold some other responsible post or be employed as a regular contributor'.⁸⁵ As for the reasons we are once again left none the wiser.

Clearly, then, the one issue we would be inclined to think of as the most important one in all this, namely the extent to which Leuß's attitudes regarding 'the Jews' may or may not have changed, really did fail to feature in this dispute. To be sure, the fact that Leuß had been an antisemite was mentioned but the term 'antisemitism' was used to denote no more than his former party-political affiliation. The dispute would have been no

⁸⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Briefe* (Berlin: Dietz, 1982–1993) 1: 517 n23. Hereafter *RLGB*.

⁸⁵ Matthias, Pikart, *Reichstagsfraktion*, 52.

different, had Leuß previously belonged to some other party that was not self-avowedly antisemitic. That it might take more than a change of party-political affiliation to shed one's antisemitism is a notion to which not only Leuß himself but everyone involved in this dispute was entirely oblivious. What makes this all the more disquieting is the fact that Leuß's position *vis-à-vis* 'the Jewish Question' in fact remained highly problematic.

Chapter 5

The Former Antisemite Leuß on Antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question'

Leuß certainly made a concerted effort to present himself as a reformed character. Yet in this quest to reinvent himself, attempts to demonstrate an actual change in his notions regarding 'the Jews' did not feature prominently. In this respect, Leuß's approach differed markedly from that of his friend, Hellmut von Gerlach, who repeatedly discussed his defection from organised political antisemitism. For Gerlach, the reasons leading to his change in attitude (and not just in party-political affiliation) were part and parcel of that discussion. That said, Gerlach's 'conversion narratives' all date from the 1920s and 1930s and it is fairly obvious that they were meant as a commentary on the renewed rise of political antisemitism in the Weimar period and the emergence of National Socialism.¹ The escalation of the Weimar years brought with it the beginnings of a fundamental sea change in perceptions of antisemitism. The prevalent emphasis on its futility, disingenuousness and ludicrousness gradually began to give way to an increasing recognition of the serious threat it might pose. To be sure, all too many still did not get it but some did *begin* to develop an inkling of what was at stake. One of them, as we will see in Chapter 7, was Eduard Bernstein. Gerlach too was among them. In this light, his ability to change his orientation took on an entirely different significance. Surely his own antisemitic past qualified him exceptionally well, and thus made it his particular duty, to vouch for the erroneous and futile nature of political antisemitism. Leuß, by contrast, did not live to see this development. He died in the summer of 1920 and his attitude towards his own antisemitic past remained defiant until the end.

As we saw before, Leuß maintained that he had already begun to distance himself from organised political antisemitism at the time of his conviction. This version of events he upheld not only in his subsequent publications but also in private communications. Following the first decision of the *Fraktion*, for instance, Leuß wrote to Kautsky on 9 December 1899. Mehring had already informed him of the 'misgivings I still arouse among former opponents', Leuß explained. 'Five years lie between my former political activity and my current orientation, among them three and a half years [i.e. the duration of his imprisonment] of a self observation and self criticism so thorough', that they more than amply 'explain the drastic change of my opinions'. He then summed up this 'drastic change' as follows: 'I have been

¹ Cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 141–149.

cured of my ambition to have a political “career”. In fact, he ‘had *already* informed my then friends of my decision to resign from parliamentary life *before* my conviction’.² Although Leuß initially spoke of a drastic change in his *opinions*, then, his subsequent emphasis lay elsewhere altogether. All Leuß was really saying was that he had intended for some time before his imprisonment to give up active politics. How he now felt about Jews and what he thought should be done about them was again an issue that was not even on the horizon. He obviously felt no desire to address it of his own accord. Nor does he seem to have assumed that anybody else might be interested in it.

Leuß does tell us a little more about his radical change in *Aus dem Zuchthause*, though. ‘My opinions and notions had reached a dead end’, by the time of his conviction. ‘In the course of fifteen years I had moved from the extreme right further and further to the left’, he explained. ‘As an antisemite’, he went on, ‘I had become one of those “national” antisemites who sympathize with the “Zionists” and think highly of the Jews and hate them not as individuals but only as a community precisely because of their *merits*’.³ On his own account, then, it was *as an antisemite* that he had moved ‘from the extreme right further and further to the left’. This move to the left had not led him to question his antisemitism, it had only changed the character of his self-professed antisemitism. Nor did he claim that its vehemence decreased as a result of this change. He had become the sort of antisemite, Leuß tells us, who ‘hates them [the Jews] not as individuals but only as a community’. He had not stopped hating the Jews but merely hated them in a different way and for different reasons. Surely we would have been more inclined to expect a retreat roughly along the following lines: while I remained critical of the Jews, I realised that hate was no appropriate response to their critique-worthy qualities. Leuß, however, continued to hate the Jews. But it was not only hate that he felt for the Jews, he also thought highly of them and now hated them ‘precisely because of their *merits*’. Needless to say, the solution to this apparent paradox lies in his sympathy for the Zionists. Did Zionism not imply that the Jews would remove themselves from their current countries of residence? To many antisemites this must have seemed like a dream come true. Clearly, the radical separation of Jews and non-Jews was still his goal at the end of these fifteen years in which he had moved persistently ‘from the extreme right further and further to the left’. It was still his goal when he was supposedly already a former antisemite. What emerges as the genuine change again in his account in *Aus dem Zuchthause* is his wish to leave active politics.⁴

We find similar instructive snippets throughout his subsequent publications. In one instance he praised the wisdom of one of the character witnesses he called upon when he was tried for perjury. This witness was

² IISH Karl Kautsky D XV: 451. ³ Leuß, *Aus dem Zuchthause*, 68–69. ⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

a man 'of the most incisive judgement', Leuß wrote in 1906, more than a decade after he had supposedly ceased to be an antisemite. Who was this man 'of the most incisive judgement'? It was 'Dr. König-Witten, then a member of the *Reichstag*'.⁵ This is not the first time we come across this figure in Leuß's writings. A year earlier, Leuß had published a book on Wilhelm von Hammerstein (1838–1904), a former member of the *Reichstag* and stalwart of the Conservatives' extreme right wing who had stood at the helm of the staunchly antisemitic *Kreuzzeitung* (*Neue Preussische Zeitung*) from 1881 to 1895. In this book, Dr. König was introduced as 'the most capable political leader of the antisemites'.⁶ This man not only struck Leuß as a suitable character witness at the time of his trial when he supposedly already radically questioned his previous orientation but even a decade and more later he still held this man in high esteem and thought nothing of it.

Nor did Leuß's radical change prevent him from treating Hammerstein in an uncritical manner. In his book on Hammerstein, he in fact made a rather interesting remark on Hammerstein's antisemitism. In connection with the dealings of his estate in Schwartow, Hammerstein had been commercially involved with a Jewish entrepreneur who was (rather deliciously, we might add) called Priester.⁷ Priester had

established a matchstick factory und wrote to Hammerstein years ago asking for help: he was on the verge of bankruptcy. Hammerstein and his wife agreed to lend Herr Priester a large sum – twenty or thirty thousand Mark – and Frau von Hammerstein personally brought him the money. Herr Priester was sick and soon died. Hammerstein's assistance notwithstanding, the estate was declared bankrupt soon after and the capital was lost.

But then the constellation radically changed. On the one hand, Priester's sons managed to get the factory up and running again. On the other hand, Hammerstein was convicted in 1896 for fraudulently using his position with the *Kreuzzeitung* for the generation of personal income. At this juncture, the Priester family had started to pay regular monthly instalments to begin settling their late father's debt to Hammerstein. 'It would seem, then', Leuß concluded, 'that Hammerstein's antisemitism was of a purely political nature and only influenced his personal attitude towards Jews when political considerations were at stake'.⁸

This anecdote is remarkable in two respects. The first remarkable fact, and presumably the one Leuß wanted to draw our attention to, is this: a local Jewish entrepreneur not only thought it worth asking Hammerstein for support in the first place but actually received it. Yet it is surely equally remarkable, to say the least, that the Priester family decided to pay back their

⁵ Idem, *Gekrönte Sanguiniker* (Berlin: Hermann Walther, 1906): 7.

⁶ Idem, *Wilhelm Freiherr von Hammerstein* (Berlin: Hermann Walther, 1905): 93.

⁷ Priester is, of course, the literal translation of Cohen. ⁸ Ibid., 121.

deceased father's debts even though they were legally in no way compelled to do so. That they did so precisely when Hammerstein had fallen from grace suggests that they acted primarily out of humanitarian concern. Indeed, who would begrudge them the smugness they may well have felt when this high-ranking antisemitic aristocrat was transformed into a beneficiary of private Jewish philanthropy. Yet this side of the story seems to have entirely passed Leuß by.

For Leuß, Hammerstein's 'purely political' antisemitism was clearly a redeeming feature. It set Hammerstein apart from those who were driven by mere mindless resentment or inclined to be petty in their dealings with individual Jews. Hammerstein, by contrast, had belonged to those who saw the bigger picture and aspired to comprehensive solutions without arbitrarily harassing random individuals. It is obvious enough why this differentiation should have been important to Leuß. His emphasis on the ostensible superiority of Hammerstein's 'purely political' antisemitism pointed to the sophistication of his own approach and thus helped underscore his own 'post-antisemitic' credentials. At the same time it allowed him to insist on those credentials without falling into the 'philosemitic' trap. After all, there would have been a far more effective and – by standards a little less warped than those that struck the likes of Leuß as self-evident – far more obvious way to demonstrate his anti-antisemitic credentials: he could simply have placed his emphasis on the noble attitude of the Priester family rather than the merits of Hammerstein's particular brand of antisemitism.

The contrast Leuß drew between Hammerstein's superior brand of antisemitism and other, lesser ones was pretty common fare in Imperial German discourse. Treitschke, for instance, ostentatiously distanced himself from the *Radauantisemitismus* [loutish antisemitism] that was unleashed by Stoecker's propaganda activities. Yet that by no means precluded his maintaining that this *Radauantisemitismus* was a legitimate response to actual Jewish abuse. Nor did it prevent his ostensibly more respectable line of argument from hinging on the same logical structure, substance and implications as Stoecker's propaganda.⁹ The alleged superiority of political over ('merely') emotive antisemitism that Leuß saw as one of Hammerstein's redeeming features was also a well-rehearsed trope. Eventually, this very superiority would be Hitler's point of departure for the development of his specific antisemitic ideology.¹⁰ These differentiations by no means question the plausibility and viability of antisemitism as such. They are no more than discursive devices that allow a flexible adaptation and reproduction of antisemitic ideology under varying circumstances. It is therefore rather striking that they should still seem so self-evident to Leuß a decade after he had supposedly left his antisemitism behind him. All this indicates that a fair share of the tenets that had comprised his world view as an antisemitic activist

⁹ Cf. Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus*, 173. ¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 372.

had survived his defection from organised party-political antisemitism quite unscathed.

Based merely on the few snippets presented so far, this may seem a rather strong claim. There is additional, rather more substantive, evidence though, albeit from a slightly later date. In January 1919, Leuß published a long editorial on 'War Antisemitism' in the *Welt am Montag*.¹¹ There is, of course, an obvious problem here. Can we simply assume that the opinions expressed in this editorial still reflect more or less accurately what Leuß thought at the turn of the century, i.e., during the dispute that concerns us here?

We can best address this issue by examining the juncture at which Leuß wrote this editorial on 'War Antisemitism'. Following the publication of *Aus dem Zuchthause*, back in 1903, Leuß left Berlin. He took on the management of an estate but also continued to write. He returned to full-time journalism in 1909, when he joined Gerlach at the helm of the *Welt am Montag*.¹² Gerlach increasingly inclined towards a pacifist position and in 1914 opposed the war from the outset. Leuß, by contrast, was totally carried away by patriotic fervour.¹³ In his eulogy for Leuß, Gerlach later recalled how Leuß had still welcomed the initial success of the final German offensive on the western front in the spring of 1918 as a major turning point. 'Smiling, I said to him: "Dear Leuß, you will regret this article"'. Gerlach was right, not only in the sense that Germany no longer stood a chance of winning the war. Leuß was not merely proven wrong, he really did come to regret the position he had taken. Gerlach emphasised this in his eulogy. As opposed to many others, Leuß also had the stature subsequently to admit squarely that his support of the German war effort had been misguided.¹⁴ 'As long as I – like many others – judged the issue of Germany's war guilt and the peaceful aspirations of German statesmen differently than v. Gerlach, I also propounded a different political approach to the war', Leuß wrote in the *Welt am Montag* of 31 March 1919. 'I was wrong'. Yet Leuß did not want to stop at an admission of bygone mistakes. 'Given that I got it wrong at the beginning of the war', he concluded, 'I do not now want to get it wrong again with the revolution'.¹⁵

Leuß was deeply disturbed by the increasingly violent conflict within the Socialist camp. He denounced the Communists in no uncertain terms. Their actions only provoked and legitimized counter-revolutionary violence. Yet the Communists were not, in the end, the biggest problem. 'What is the worst aspect of the *Spartakus* weeks', he wrote in the immediate aftermath of the January insurrection and its suppression in Berlin, what was 'most

¹¹ Hans Leuß, 'Kriegs-Antisemitismus,' in *WaM* 25, 4 (27 January 1919): 2–3.

¹² Weidner, 'Leuß'. ¹³ Schulte, *Gerlach*, 140.

¹⁴ Hellmut von Gerlach, 'Hans Leuß †,' in *WaM* 26, 40 (4 October 1920): Beilage 1.

¹⁵ Hans Leuß, 'Halbheit und Winkelzüge,' in *WaM* 25, 13 (31 March 1919): 2.

terrible' about this development, was the 'dreadful fact, which is destined to beget further harm, that the [Spartakist] attempt to establish a tyranny against the will of the people [...] *has driven the revolutionary government to resort to violence!*' Not that the government had really had much choice in the matter but that made the fact no less awful and portentous.¹⁶ In a pamphlet on Scheidemann, he later reiterated this, again emphasising his concern that the government's use of military force had severely shaken many worthy workers' trust in the revolution.¹⁷ This trust needed to be restored and this task now emerged clearly as Leuß's main goal. He was indeed determined 'not to get it wrong again'.

All this strongly suggests that the Leuß we meet again in early 1919 is Leuß at his most radical and critical. As we saw, Leuß developed and first articulated this orientation in the immediate aftermath of the January insurrection. Yet this is also the very juncture at which he published his long editorial on 'War Antisemitism'. It appeared exactly a week after the editorial just cited in which he first described as the worst aspect of the January events the fact that the government had let itself be provoked into resorting to violence. It seems highly likely that at this juncture we not only meet Leuß at his most radical but also at his most anti-antisemitic (in our sense of the word). We may not be able to say for sure whether Leuß thought about antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' in exactly the same way in 1899 or 1903 as he did in 1919. But whatever he did think back then must surely have lain somewhere between what we already know about his earlier approach, on the one hand, and the position presented in this editorial, on the other. As we will see, that hardly leaves much room for variation anyway.

Leuß's editorial on 'War Antisemitism' was a response to the elections for the *Nationalversammlung* [Constituent Assembly]. The Conservatives had given their campaigning for these elections a distinctly antisemitic flavour and Leuß's editorial sought to offer an explanation for the relative success of this strategy. Once again, Leuß exclaimed, antisemitism had reared its head as

the last anchor of the hopeless and the toppled! [This is] the third antisemitic wave to stir the people since the beginning of the last century. Only a wave, not a surge. [...] Greater issues, more crucial questions, more powerful impulses [...] determine the pulse of current affairs and the political will of the people.

Nevertheless, 'a new antisemitic wave there is'. It was 'no more than an episode and a subordinate phenomenon, just as it was in the past', but it was 'not restricted to those who voted for the forty Conservative members

¹⁶ Idem, 'Gewaltherrschaft oder Volksregierung,' in *WaM* 25, 3 (20 January 1919): 2–3.

¹⁷ Idem, *Philipp Scheidemann* (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1919): 16.

of the Constituent Assembly. Democrats, too, even voters of the German Democratic Party pronounce harsh judgements on the behaviour of Jews during the war. But', Leuß contended, unfolding a classic set piece of anti-antisemitism in its crudest guise, 'they are not so stupid immediately to make the Jewish Question the pivot of world history, as the antisemitic mystics do. They are too intelligent to believe the fools who would turn the Jewish Question into a political Procrustean bed and try to force the whole universe into it. The sensible ones', he summed up this point, 'oppose such an overestimation of Jewry'.

Where, then, had this 'new antisemitism' come from? It had

begun when the war began. Initially it was mere mindless hatred not even curtailed by the obvious, purely national interest. Even while the papers were full of Jewish obituaries with the war cross, antisemitic papers published rabble-rousing articles and denunciatory stories of the worst sort. Even when Ludwig Frank¹⁸ – one of the first victims of the fighting in France, had fallen, and while many, indeed very many Jews went to the front voluntarily, the hatred of the fanatics nevertheless failed to fall silent. But this hatred would have remained a miserable plant in the corner,

Leuß continued, 'had not a good many things transpired and developed during the course of the four years that prompted the critique of *serious people*'. The subsequent account displays all the enduring (and necessarily insurmountable) problems inherent in the kernel-of-truth approach to antisemitism. Leuß outlined a catalogue of indiscretions of which the Jews had been accused. It was these perceived indiscretions that had generated the 'new antisemitism'. Yet, as Leuß was, for the most part, happy to concede these accusations were unfounded. How, then, was it that they could nevertheless arouse the critique of '*serious people*' as well? Surely, the accusations levelled at the Jews could only be either true or untrue. They could only *either* justify the critique of '*serious people*' or demonstrate the fallacy of the antisemitic line of argument but not do both.

Leuß's motivation at this point is rather obvious. As a former antisemitic activist, Leuß himself had once subscribed to the antisemites' erroneous perceptions and generalisations. Had he done so out of 'mindless hatred'? Surely not. He, of course, belonged to the '*serious people*' but had nevertheless gone beyond their justified critique of Jewish indiscretions. What in fact lies between a possibly justified critique of individual Jews or groups of Jews

¹⁸ Ludwig Frank (1874–1914), who represented Mannheim in the *Reichstag* from 1907, was of Jewish extraction. He stood on the right of the party and immediately volunteered in 1914. He was killed on 3 September. This lent him martyr status and made him the perfect example for those who wanted to demonstrate that Socialists and Jews, contrary to popular perceptions, would not be outdone in their patriotism.

and the antisemitic generalisation is this: instead of a grasp of reality based on the use of one's critical faculties the antisemite relies on the process of stereotyping that renders negative perceptions of 'the Jews' a self-fulfilling prophecy. The difference between the justified critique and the erroneous generalisation is by no means one of degree, in other words, it is one of principle. An insurmountable chasm gapes between the two. Since Leuß was clearly neither willing nor able to face up to this fact, he could only bridge this gap by fudging the entire issue. He could only invent a palatable version of his own past if there was a direct link between the justified critique and the projection of stereotypes. There had to be a bridge between the two that one could simply cross in either direction without seriously having to question one's previous assumptions and overall world view. Since this bridge does not and cannot exist, he could only posit its existence without further explanation. But if he had been able to cross it first in one direction and then in the other he could obviously hardly deny others – including the 'new antisemites' he set out to criticise with his editorial on 'War Antisemitism' – the right and ability to cross it in either direction as ever they saw fit.

'The war economy', Leuß explained, 'was dependent on the participation of businessmen, of the grain trade, the stock exchanges and banks, and many other branches in which the Jews are very numerous or even in the majority. Naturally the Jews came to the fore'. As a result, 'the animosity towards State control naturally turned against the large number of Jews among its directors and agents'. Why? What should be natural about the projection of dissatisfaction with the state onto the Jews? All the usual questions arise. How did people know whether Jews held the majority of responsible positions in certain sectors? Why did it matter to them? What was the point of turning on the Jews if one held grievances against the state? As always with the kernel-of-truth approach, Leuß's line of argument in fact presupposes what it claims to explain: the anti-Jewish animosity and stereotypes have to be there in the first place. Otherwise nobody would know how and why to hold 'the Jews' accountable for things for which they were quite obviously not responsible.

'Jews were among the beneficiaries of the war', he continued. Hence they 'became welcome and easily "identifiable" targets for the general aversion to war profits'. This truly paradigmatic formulation surely needs to be turned from its head onto its feet: the Jews did not *become* an easily identifiable target because of the things some Jews did. It was because 'the Jews' already were firmly established in the popular imagination as an easily identifiable target that the activities of some Jews seemingly justified the *continued* projection of well-established stereotypes onto all Jews. That Leuß should get this so wrong is all the more remarkable given that he himself readily conceded the fallacy of the argument. The Jews were held responsible

quite without justification, for the war profits accrued on a very equal and inter-denominational basis and the Aryans accepted them just as the Jews did.

[...] everyone knows that all races are equally guilty of participation in that scandalous profiteering frenzy. In fact, were the history of the shady deals, bribes, and mean profiteering to be determined with exactitude one would ultimately ascertain a predominance of

– and now followed a most remarkable switch of perspective – ‘*those* classes that exploit the anti-Jewish hatred now that they face their political demise’. How did we get from ‘*races*’ to classes? We might have expected Leuß’s line of argument to continue as follows: on exact examination, one would not only find that non-Jews had also been among the profiteers, one would in fact find more non-Jews than Jews among them. This goes without saying. By the sheer force of their numbers, non-Jews had, of course, been the ‘predominant’ beneficiaries of the profiteering during the war; to suggest anything else would be nonsensical. Leuß could have scored an easy, though perhaps somewhat banal, point against the antisemites, had this been his concern. But then, this would in turn have raised the question of how and why ‘*serious* people’ too were susceptible to so nonsensical a suggestion and this was a line of inquiry that would have brought Leuß’s entire edifice crashing down.

But none of this was Leuß’s concern anyway. As we saw, the focus of his editorial was on the antisemitic dimension of the Conservatives’ election campaign, i.e., on the organised utilisation of antisemitism for party-political ends. For him the crucial point was this: the Conservatives’ single most important clientele were the elites of the old regime. Now that they were on their last leg and frantically struggling to keep their heads above water, they enlisted anti-Jewish sentiments to back up their cause. Yet they themselves had profited far more from the war than the Jews. Once again, the critique did not hinge on the fact that the Jews were being targeted but on the fact that those targeting them were hypocrites. To make this point, Leuß obviously had to move away from the straightforward juxtaposition of Jews and non-Jews. He needed to find a way of denouncing the Conservatives for the hypocritical exploitation of anti-Jewish sentiments without at the same time denouncing the susceptibility of ‘*serious* people’ to those same sentiments. To achieve this, Leuß shifted the focus from ‘*race*’ to class.

What held true of the profiteering also held true of the scheming to evade military service at the front, Leuß went on. Admittedly, ‘one also saw many Jews in safe locations’, he conceded in another of those classic formulations that beggar the more general question: how exactly does one supposedly ‘see’ Jews functioning in ways that could possibly generate tenable anti-Jewish generalisations that even ‘*serious* people’ might fall for? ‘But if the statistics for requisitioned personnel should one day be differentiated by denomination, social status, and profession then one will receive proof’, that

the picture the antisemites drew was incorrect. Again the same issue arises: we obviously need to differentiate by denomination to ascertain whether Jews and non-Jews behaved differently. But how can a differentiation by social status and profession help us in this respect? Again, Leuß was preparing to switch from 'race' to class. Such an analysis would show 'that members of the nobility and antisemitic, indeed even Pan-German war mongers were just as eager shirkers as the Jews'. This was exactly the same argument as before: the Conservatives' political clientele behaved at least as badly as the Jews. Therefore it is hypocritical of them to enlist anti-Jewish sentiments for their own party-political ends.

In short, 'if all these things are honestly examined and made public, the new antisemitism stands to gain little gratification and will certainly be in no position to pay the way for the Conservative propaganda any more. The nobility and its supporters' – again his focus was not on the non-Jews more generally but on the particular political opponent at hand – 'would then be *exactly in the position of the German Jews* who are forced to point to their dead, their selfless patriotism, the enormous achievements of the many, to offset their share of responsibility for the war rot – the nobility would have to do exactly the same'.

Leuß then turned to another, slightly different form of antisemitism that 'inclines towards more idealistic motives'. It took the 'form of antisemitism that takes issue with the paramount influence of Jews in public life, in the revolutionary governments and institutions'. 'This share is very large', he conceded. He then had a stab at irony. 'Since ruling is today a *very* dubious, stressful and even dangerous pleasure', he went on, 'the considerable share of Jews involved in it cannot quite count as a sufficient reason for envy; but it can nevertheless be "exploited" as material for antisemitic propaganda'.

This brought him back to his main line of argument. 'In fact: all sorts of things can be exploited against the Jews. [...] The recollections of the war offer much material that can be adapted for antisemitic purposes'. Indeed, one really needed to ask why the Conservatives had ultimately got so little out of exploiting anti-Jewish sentiments. Their forty seats in the *Nationalversammlung* 'hardly amount to an overwhelming harvest, given the amply and forcefully scattered antisemitic seed'.

What then follows is truly remarkable and eerily reminiscent of the stance Leuß had formulated as an antisemitic deputy in the *Zukunft* in 1894. All this was obviously regrettable, he went on. But

worse than all this is another effect of the antisemitic agitation: the German Jews had learnt a lot from the last antisemitic movement. They had become more *level-headed* and gradually came to take it for granted that just like other estates, classes, groups, associations, and denominations, Jews too are subject to critique. Some had even progressed far enough to acknowledge *legitimate* criticism of individual persons or occurrences as a form of hostile attention

that deserves gratitude. Jewry in its entirety certainly grew morally, gained strength, and improved itself through its confrontation with antisemitism. The nervous touchiness receded, while self-criticism increased. Just as the Catholic church and Social Democracy owe a great deal to their opponent Bismarck, the Jews owe a great deal to antisemitism.

One must urgently advise the German Jews to stay on this path, and all the more so, since many indicators prove that the acute antisemitic electoral agitation is making some Jews nervous again. There is no reason, no need for that.

How could Jews best counter the antisemitic propaganda? By 'maintaining the most complete calm [...] What must definitely be avoided is the sort of moralizing and defamatory *Abwehr* so popular forty years ago. Back then it served the antisemites *enormously*. Morally, antisemitism, *in and of itself*, should be judged no differently from other political principles', he continued. This suggestion jars radically with our sensitivities. Yet how could Leuß see it in any other way? If one really could move freely between legitimate critique and the projection of stereotypes, if antisemitism was ultimately no more than the legitimate critique of 'serious people' taken too far, then why indeed should it be judged any differently from other political ideologies? And why, we might add, should anyone leaving the antisemitic exaggeration behind and returning to the legitimate anti-Jewish critique of 'serious people' be compelled to justify himself (or herself), why should his (or her) credibility be any more tarnished than that of anyone else who chooses to modify his (or her) political orientation and change his (or her) party-political affiliation? "Class hatred", the struggle against "the *Junker*" and other issues are morally no different from antisemitism', he went on to elaborate. 'They are merely "felt" to be morally different, depending on the point of view of the observer. My colleague v. Gerlach', he then added,

coined the phrase: 'Only he who has had the disease is immune to anti-semitism'. I certainly am, then. I also know about the expedient and inexpedient means of '*Abwehr*' and [...] I declare again what I have said a number of times before: if Jewish authors cannot read antisemitic pamphlets without becoming emotionally anguished they must keep this weakness to themselves. Most of all, they must not think that one could harm antisemitism with a load of moral outrage. On the contrary,

he concluded. This, then, to the best of our knowledge, is Leuß at his most anti-antisemitic and Leuß's stance at the turn of the century will most likely have been, if anything, even more problematic.

Whatever the Social Democrats' response to Leuß's stance *vis-à-vis* anti-semitism and 'the Jews' may or may not have been at the turn of the century, one thing we do know for sure: the position he formulated in 1919 in no way impeded his post-war career in the party. For the revolutionary events

of 1918/1919 finally did make a Social Democrat proper of Hans Leuß, and no mere ordinary member either. Leuß now emerged as a leading Social Democrat in Mecklenburg-Strelitz, where he was elected to the *Landtag* and became the chairman of its Social Democratic *Fraktion*. He refused to become prime minister, opting instead to chair the bulk of the crucial select committees including the *Landesausschuss*. In the year of his death, he was elected as the *Landdrost* (resident magistrate) of Stargard.¹⁹ This made Stargard's historical castle his final home where he died as a sort of Social Democratic lord of the manor.²⁰ Leuß remained a controversial figure, to be sure, and it is hard to imagine he would have wanted it any other way. But it was certainly not his occasional comments on antisemitism and 'the Jews' that made him controversial.

We might note in passing that his friend and colleague, Hellmut von Gerlach, published his first short 'conversion narrative' in January 1920. For all the questions that Gerlach's account raises, it was clearly meant as a response to the new quality that political antisemitism was taking on in the post-revolutionary landscape. Gerlach began to grapple with this issue, in other words, even while Leuß was still alive and maintained his defiant rather than self-critical stance. This does not rule out that he might eventually have shifted from defiance to critical engagement, had he lived to witness the political developments of the 1920s and 1930s, but during his lifetime he certainly did not pick up on the new quality of post-war political antisemitism.

Leuß's position in his editorial on 'War Antisemitism' did differ in one extremely important respect, though, from that reflected in his earlier pronouncements. This fundamental difference lies in his general approach rather than the specific content of his remarks. As we saw, writing in the *Zukunft* twenty-five years earlier, Leuß had insisted that antisemitism was by no means 'restricted to antisemitic negation'. Hence it was quite 'unjust [...] to accuse antisemitism of amounting to no more than dull anti-Jewish incitement'.²¹ Now, in his editorial on 'War Antisemitism', he suggested something radically different. What set the 'serious people' and their legitimate critique of Jewry apart from the antisemites? What set them apart was the fact that they 'are not so stupid immediately to make the Jewish Question the pivot of world history, as the antisemitic mystics do. They are

¹⁹ Weidner, 'Leuß'.

²⁰ A fairly recent publication by the (Social Democratic) Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern on Social Democratic 'roots, traditions and identity' in the region includes a very short biographical sketch of Leuß. It relates that he was a member of the *Reichstag* in 1893/1894 and worked for 'bourgeois' [*bürgerlichen*] papers between 1883 and 1894 without any mention of the fact that he was a prominent antisemite. Cf. Klaus Schwabe et al., *Wurzeln, Traditionen und Identität der Sozialdemokratie in Mecklenburg und Pommern* (Schering: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [2nd edition], 2000): 86–87. I am grateful to Dr Schwabe for sending me this publication.

²¹ Leuß, 'antisemitische Bewegung,' 331.

too intelligent to believe the fools who would turn the Jewish Question into a political Procrustean bed and try to force the whole universe into it. The sensible ones oppose such an overestimation of Jewry'. Put slightly differently: Leuß obviously now thought that antisemitism *was* 'restricted to antisemitic negation' and *did* amount to 'no more than dull anti-Jewish incitement'.

In part, this altered view is obviously a product of his own change in orientation. Most likely his version of events went roughly like this: as one of the '*serious* people' with a legitimate critique of Jewry he had got mixed up with the antisemites because he erroneously assumed that their perspective and aspirations amounted to far more than 'dull anti-Jewish incitement'. When he realised his mistake, he drew the consequences and henceforth stuck with the '*serious* people' and their legitimate critique of Jewry. It is somewhat ironic that Leuß himself had claimed in the *Zukunft* back in 1894 that the antisemitic movement *did* amount to far more than 'dull anti-Jewish incitement'. Assuming he meant this claim seriously at the time the really interesting question Leuß would have needed to ask himself was this: why did it seem to him then that the antisemites did have the sort of comprehensive orientation and programme he now claimed they had lacked all along? Alternatively, Leuß may have been trying to urge the antisemitic movement into adopting the sort of wider perspective and aspirations he felt it *ought* to have. In this case, we might wonder what would have happened had he been more successful in this quest. What if the antisemitic movement really had managed to make its enmity towards Jewry the heart piece of a much more comprehensive ideological package deal, say, in the way the National Socialists did? In that case, Leuß's critique would have been rendered obsolete and he would have had no reason to turn his back on the antisemitic movement.

Leuß's new-found conviction that antisemitism really did amount to 'no more than dull anti-Jewish incitement' is not only the product of his own political biography, though. Rather more significantly, it reflects an important dimension of the fundamental sea change in perceptions of antisemitism from the middle of the war onwards that I mentioned earlier. The political antisemitism that re-emerged in force during the war and the revolutionary period was itself part and parcel of a more comprehensive ideological and political agenda. But people increasingly stopped using the term 'antisemitism' to refer to that overarching agenda as a whole. Instead, they now used it more and more often specifically to denote the anti-Jewish dimension of that agenda. As we saw, the term 'antisemitic' could previously refer to any number of positions taken, or qualities displayed, by antisemites. Now it became increasingly accepted that the term ought only to be applied to positions specifically to do with 'the Jews'. Early on in the war an editorial on 'War Antisemitism' might well still have focused on *some* attitude towards the war formulated or displayed by people known to be

political antisemites. By January 1919, it would have been highly surprising for such an editorial to deal with anything other than specifically with anti-Jewish propaganda and activism. From late 1915 or early 1916 onwards, we can be increasingly certain that critics taking issue with 'antisemitism' *were* now specifically criticising the antisemites' anti-Jewish stance. This by no means implies that we would necessarily agree with their reasons for doing so. Most anti-antisemites still remained indifferent towards a wealth of anti-Jewish sentiments that they found unproblematic but strike us as obviously antisemitic. Nevertheless, this change in perspective is a fundamental one: by the time we reach the early Weimar years we finally *can* assume that anti-antisemitism did take issue specifically with anti-Jewish positions, no matter how contentious the criteria it applied in doing so may still have been by our standards.

Chapter 6

Antisemitism and ‘the Jewish Question’ in Dresden

Perceptions and prescriptions regarding ‘the Jews’ may have been irrelevant to the way in which the delegates at the Congress in Dresden judged the former antisemite, Hans Leuß, but they were by no means absent from the debate. In this chapter, I will discuss four relevant issues that did feature in Dresden: Harden’s Jewish origin, Wilhelm Liebknecht’s infamous critique of the Dreyfusards, the decision of the Party Congress of 1892 to postpone its debate on antisemitism and, finally, Mehring’s idiosyncrasies in this field. As we will see, these issues were brought up in a casual and unsophisticated manner, yet failed to precipitate any sort of critical response from the delegates. This not only makes it inconceivable that the delegates should at the same time have been anything other than at best indifferent to Leuß’s relevant notions. It also throws that indifference all the more sharply into relief. Casual, often almost unconscious, allusions to antisemitism and ‘the Jews’ spontaneously sprang to mind in virtually any situation – except when it really mattered. When assessing the merits of a former antisemite, for example, all interest in these issues mysteriously disappeared.

HARDEN’S JEWISH BACKGROUND

Throughout his speech in Mehring’s defence, Bebel persistently referred to Harden as Wittkowski-Harden (sic!). This was a reference to Harden’s birth name, Felix Ernst Witkowski, or rather, to the fact that Harden was not his birth name. *Prima facie*, this reference seems innocent enough. Bebel explained that he had only recently become aware of Harden. He had, however, had ‘the honour of knowing Wittkowski-Harden’s father. To be introduced to the son I would not count as an honour. (From the floor: Bravo!) Old Wittkowski’, by contrast, ‘was a good democrat’. In the 1860s, he had spent ‘not only many a pleasant evening with this honourable man but also many a serious night discussing problems together until dawn. To this day I recall the conversations with Wittkowski-Harden’s father with pleasure’.¹ In changing his name, so the apparent implication, Harden had disowned his father’s democratic background.

But this debate did not transpire in a vacuum. Imperial German society was obsessed with ‘Jewish’ names and the extent to which Jews should or

¹ *Parteitag 1903*, 213–214.

should not be allowed to modify or change their names.² The antisemitic obsession with the invisibility of the emancipated Jew lent this issue additional emotive force, making it the object of a protracted debate that spanned the entire period from the pre- to the post-emancipatory era. Nobody in Imperial Germany could have been oblivious to this debate and any reference to the name change of an individual of Jewish extraction, like Harden, invariably evoked the dynamics of that entire debate.

Many accepted that the stigmatising function of 'Jewish' names was in fact a healthy and legitimate one. These names were seen as a sort of tracking device that would allow non-Jewish society to chart the extent of Jewish integration. No matter how comprehensively Jewish individuals assimilated, they would remain recognisable by their names. As it became increasingly impossible to tell them apart by any other means, their distinct names emerged as the one remaining safeguard. How should non-Jewish society control and, if need be, curtail or reverse the process of Jewish integration if it could no longer tell the Jews apart?

This obsession with 'Jewish' names was usually rationalised and formulated as a moralising indictment against the Jews. The belief in the immutability of ethnic and racial distinctions was becoming ever more pervasive. Consequently, the notion that one could simply shed one's identity appeared not only futile but also contemptible. Given that one could never genuinely take on an alternative identity, betrayal of one's own racial/ethnic identity emerged as a cardinal sin in its own right. If assimilation could not work, any attempt to assimilate was by definition opportunistic and represented an attempt to ingratiate oneself under false pretences. The Jews' identity might be inferior but that made its betrayal no less of a sin than that of any other racial/ethnic identity. In everyday discourse, people were, of course, perfectly capable of combining both indictments: the Jews did not do enough to assimilate but when they did at least try they did so with an abandon and obsequiousness that made them all the more creepy and subversive. This offers us a good reminder of the fact that the antisemitic mindset not only does not depend on the truth value of the assumptions it subscribes to but does not even require those assumptions to be logically consistent with one another.

What is more, the rights of individuals of Jewish extraction to change their names were in fact curtailed yet further less than a fortnight after the Congress in Dresden. On 25 September 1903, the Prussian minister of the interior issued a decree limiting the rights of baptised Jews to change their family names.³ This may be an uncanny coincidence. Conversely, this decree may have been preceded by a new bout of public debate on the matter so that Bebel was consciously playing to that very debate. As I said

² Dietz Bering, *Der Name as Stigma* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987). Hereafter Bering, *Stigma*.

³ *Ibid.*, 154–157.

before, it was in any case impossible to raise the fact that somebody of Jewish extraction had changed his (or her) name without evoking the dynamics of this entire discourse. If Bebel's only motive had been to reproach Harden for giving up a name that was widely respected in democratic circles, he would have needed to actively distance himself from all the other premises and implications he was invariably conjuring up by raising the issue.

Harden, in his response to Bebel's critique, summed up the logic of the argument as follows:

Someone who changes his name, especially if it is his goal to influence public affairs, is indeed suspicious; all the more so, if the new name sounds German while the discarded one had a Semitic ring. Surely, the reader will then think, this pushy individual has changed his name to cover up his Jewish origin and avoid spoiling his career.

Harden even conceded that 'the prejudice is understandable', but in his case it was unfounded. His father had eventually become mentally ill and abusive towards his family whose reputation was severely tarnished as a consequence. His family had therefore officially been granted the right to give up its original name. Harden himself had kept the pseudonym he had already begun to use as a young actor. The accusation, then, that he had changed his name in order to 'cover up his Jewish origin and avoid spoiling his career' was utterly unfounded. In this respect, Bebel might like to look for suspects closer to home, Harden suggested. Lassalle, after all, had abandoned the straightforward transliteration of his Yiddish family name and instead given it a French appearance. That 'apparently does not outrage Bebel'. Yet Bebel was taking him, Harden, to task even though 'I did not change my name as an ambitious author [i.e., as Lassalle had done] but as a child'.⁴

Bebel was not in fact the first to bring up the issue of Harden's Jewish background. Let us recall that the whole dispute that boiled over in Dresden began with an article in the *Neue Zeit* in which Mehring, encouraged by Kautsky, criticised Bernhard for publishing his article on 'party morals' in the *Zukunft*. In that same article, Mehring characterised Harden as follows: 'Still a Polish Jew only a moment ago, Herr Harden fights for [the Imperial German] throne and altar with the Christian baptismal certificate and the Germanic defiance of Arminius the Cheruscan one moment, only to play the sole freedom fighter and libertarian who still dares speak his mind in Germany the next'.⁵

In short, the issue of Harden's Jewish extraction had resonated throughout this conflict from its inception. This would have made it all the more

⁴ Harden, 'Bebel und Genossen,' III: 56–59. Cf. Sabine Armbrrecht, *Verkannte Liebe* (Oldenburg: bis, 1999): 49 n22; Bering, *Stigma*, 192.

⁵ Mehring, 'Konzessionsschulzes,' 481–482.

imperative for Bebel to clarify what he did and did not want to imply by raising the issue of Harden's name change, especially if he had any misgivings about Mehring's treatment of Harden as a 'Polish Jew'. Consequently, we can only assume that Bebel was indeed intentionally tapping into the sentiments that governed the discourse on 'Jewish' names and name changes in Imperial Germany.

WILHELM LIEBKNECHT, KARL KRAUS AND THE *FACKEL*

In the context of his all-out assault on Mehring at the Congress in Dresden, Heinrich Braun contended that Socialists had in fact not only at all times contributed to non-Socialist periodicals. On occasion they had even collaborated with publications that were clearly anti-Socialist. A good example for this, Braun added, were Wilhelm Liebknecht's contributions to the *Fackel*, the Viennese journal published by Karl Kraus (1874–1936). Victor Adler, the leader of the Austrian party (who also happened to be Braun's brother-in-law), had repeatedly been abused by the *Fackel*. Its attitude towards Social Democracy was 'about as despicable and impertinent as it gets'. All this notwithstanding, Liebknecht had thought nothing of contributing to the *Fackel*. Nor had it been just some 'harmless literary essay' that Liebknecht had published there but 'a very important political article' and one of which he 'had to realize' that it 'could bring a brother party into an extremely difficult situation'. It was 'an article on the Dreyfus Affair' that had promptly precipitated 'quite extraordinary difficulties for the French party back then and for years to come'.⁶

Braun's reference to Liebknecht's anti-Dreyfusard articles in the *Fackel* is in many ways remarkably similar to Fischer's subsequent reference to Mehring's dealings with Leuß. It is no more than a coincidence that the example Braun chose for the collaboration of a leading Social Democrat with an anti-Socialist publication dealt with antisemitism. It would have made no difference to his line of argument had Liebknecht's article dealt with any other topic of some political significance, just as it would have made no difference to Fischer's critique of Mehring, had Leuß been a former political opponent coming from some other party that did not happen to be self-avowedly antisemitic. Since Braun's only interest in Liebknecht's anti-Dreyfusard articles lay in the fact that they appeared in an anti-Socialist periodical, he only needed to mention their existence. There was no need to say anything more about them. Their content was of no relevance to his line of argument.

Since these articles by Liebknecht do not seem to have drawn much attention in the Anglophone literature, they merit a fairly detailed discussion.

⁶ *Parteitag* 1903, 163–164.

They were all written and published in the *Fackel* after Dreyfus's retrial. The first three were also issued separately as a pamphlet.⁷ They were, to say the very least, remarkable and certainly had repercussions for the French Socialists. Liebknecht declared squarely at the outset that 'I do not believe in the innocence of the French Captain Dreyfus'.⁸ He had not wanted to say this publicly before the end of the trial in Rennes so as not 'to vindicate the riff-raff that yearned for the condemnation of "the Jew"'. That Dreyfus had many unpleasant opponents did not mean, though, that there were 'only pure and honest people' among his supporters. Among them one could discern 'a strong whiff of Panama', he added, setting the tone for much of what was to follow. The first 'great injustice' committed by Dreyfus's supporters was that they had 'lumped together the espionage department of the French General Staff with the entire General Staff, indeed with the entire army apparatus',⁹ Liebknecht explained.

That this mad injustice was not entirely unintentional is demonstrated by the fact that the leaders of the 'Campagne', as they stated thousands of times and hinted at hundreds of thousands of times, assumed that the French General Staff had *knowingly* sentenced an *innocent* man. But surely the only interest of the General Staff could be to identify and seize the *guilty* party. And that the Jew Dreyfus should have been sent to Devil's Island merely due to anti-Jewish hatred is an assumption that flies in the face of all psychology and common sense. The antisemitic movement was very weak in France in 1894 – its proponents were ridiculed. It has grown somewhat stronger since, but mainly *as a result of the 'Campagne'*.

This is by now familiar territory, of course. The real responsibility for the rise of political antisemitism always lies with the Jews themselves or, put a little more politely, with the 'philosemites'. 'No one will suspect me of any sympathy for the antisemites', Liebknecht went on,

but whatever my opinion about the hatred of men like Liebermann v. Sonnenberg, Böckel, Ahlwardt, and their comrades may be, I would never think them capable, should they find themselves as judges, of declaring a Jew guilty of a crime that justifies the death penalty merely because he is a Jew and of sending him to the 'dry guillotine'.¹⁰

Prima facie, this may seem like a remarkable shift in focus. We might be tempted to interpret Liebknecht's initial claim that it was unfair to hold the *entire* French General Staff responsible for Dreyfus's fate as follows:

⁷ Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Nachträgliches zur "Affaire"*. Sonder-Abdruck aus der *"Fackel"* (Vienna: Moriz Frisch, 1899).

⁸ Idem, 'Nachträgliches zur "Affaire",' in *Fackel* 1, 18 (25 September 1899): 1–10, here 1. Hereafter Liebknecht, 'Nachträgliches 1'.

⁹ Ibid., 2. ¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

individuals within the General Staff may have plotted against Dreyfus, but that does not make the General Staff as an institution responsible. These individuals may have had antisemitic motives but that does not justify accusing the whole apparatus of institutional antisemitism. Yet the analogy he then introduced made it clear that this was not what he meant. Not even antisemites as dedicated to the cause as Liebermann von Sonnenberg, Böckel and Ahlwardt, he suggested, would pervert the course of justice to sentence an innocent man simply because he is a Jew. Liebknecht's point, then, was not that an institution cannot be held responsible in its entirety for the antisemitism of some of those who hold responsibility within it. His point was that even dedicated antisemites would not let their antisemitism cloud their judgement and corrupt their sense of duty. If even leading antisemites would not sink so low, how much less likely was it that the authorities would do so. Hence, 'should someone say to me: "Urged by War Minister *v. Goßler* a Prussian court martial has found a German officer of Jewish nationality guilty of espionage for France, knowing that he is innocent, simply because he is a Jew" – I would consider him mad'.¹¹ In short, 'I do *not* believe in Dreyfus's innocence',¹² he reiterated.

Yet Liebknecht still had his main trump up his sleeve. 'Is it likely', he asked, 'would it be possible that the government for whom he allegedly or presumably committed that act of treason could tolerate it that an innocent man is imprisoned for five years because of this act of treason and treated as Dreyfus has been treated? This question I had to answer with *No!*'¹³ He then explained the source of his certainty on the matter. 'I know', he stated apodictically, 'that a sort of unwritten international law concerning governmental military espionage exists'. One of its stipulations was 'that an innocent person indicted for espionage is released immediately if the government for whom the act of treason has been committed informally declares that the person in question [...] is innocent'. Since this had obviously not happened in Dreyfus's case, 'I was compelled to conclude that Dreyfus was *not* innocent'.¹⁴ His doubts were 'hardly alleviated' when 'the statements of the German envoy in Paris in 1894 and the more recent one by Secretary of State Bülow'¹⁵ became public. Clearly 'these were the conventional formulae that simply expressed the conventional lie that a government is "neither directly nor indirectly" involved with spies'.¹⁶ The Imperial German government actually had denied that Dreyfus was a German spy, in other words, but it had done so in public statements instead of utilising the correct informal channels with which Liebknecht claimed to be so intimately familiar. Far

¹¹ Ibid., 3–4. ¹² Ibid., 4. ¹³ Ibid., 4–5. ¹⁴ Ibid., 5. ¹⁵ Ibid., 6–7.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7. Cf. also Hyndman's account in Henry M. Hyndman, *The Record of an Adventurous Life* (London: Macmillan, 1911): 436–438. He cites Liebknecht as calling Kautsky one of his Jewish colleagues. There seems to be a particular English predilection for this misapprehension. Cesarani too counts 'notably Karl Kautsky' among the leading German Social Democrats who were Jews (Cesarani, *The Left and the Jews*, 27).

from confirming Dreyfus's innocence, these declarations hence made him look all the more guilty.

One had to be pretty foolish, then, to assume Dreyfus might conceivably be innocent. Why would the Dreyfusards nevertheless insist so wilfully and against all odds that Dreyfus had been wrongfully convicted? What were their motives in going to such lengths to distort the facts and claim that Dreyfus was innocent? And why were the Dreyfusards so oblivious to the obvious fact that their campaign could only backfire? As Liebknecht confessed, he had 'said privately in a conversation with a supporter of the Dreyfusard cause that the leaders of the "Campagne" deserved to be beaten up for the way in which they harmed their own cause and assisted the antisemites and reactionaries'. In the event, Dreyfus had now had his retrial. Not that this was down to the Dreyfusards, Liebknecht added. The need for a retrial had arisen as a result of 'the exposure of the forger Henry by the *bête noir* of the revisionists, War Minister Cavaignac'.¹⁷ At the end of the retrial, Dreyfus had been convicted yet again. Admittedly, 'Dreyfus's guilt has *not* been proven – but neither has his *innocence*; and one should keep in mind that direct, definite evidence seldom exists in espionage trials [...] A single word from the German government would have rescued him, had it known him to be innocent, and *this* word was not spoken'.¹⁸ Against this background, the decision of the French government to pardon Dreyfus 'was not logical but sensible',¹⁹ Liebknecht concluded his first article in the *Fackel*.

He then began his second article by addressing the outcome of the retrial. Dreyfus had been found guilty again but the recognition of 'mitigating circumstances' had led to a less harsh sentence. Some people interpreted this outcome 'as evidence of doubt concerning the guilt of the convicted man', Liebknecht explained. This was 'a totally arbitrary assumption'. Admittedly, mitigating circumstances were often acknowledged when a person's guilt was in doubt. 'Even more frequently, however', and this also held true of Dreyfus's case, 'they are granted due to humanitarian considerations'.²⁰ What weighed even more heavily in favour of the assumption that Dreyfus was guilty was 'his immediate acceptance of the pardon'. This decision was

not heroic, just human. But why retract the appeal? The Dreyfus press simply states: 'Because otherwise the pardon could not proceed'. That is true, but only in the most literal sense, and it throws dust in people's eyes [...] What prevents Dreyfus from waiting for the *outcome of the appeal*? After everything that he has been through, a few weeks more or less surely do not matter and his prison in France was quite bearable. Had his awareness of his innocence and his wish to see it publicly proven been as strong as is purported, then

¹⁷ Liebknecht, 'Nachträgliches 1,' 7–8. ¹⁸ Ibid., 8–9. ¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

²⁰ Idem, 'Nachträgliches zur "Affaire"', in *Fackel* 1, 19 (4 October 1899): 1–12, here 1. Hereafter Liebknecht, 'Nachträgliches 2'.

he could, to my mind, never have acted as he has. His desire to get out of prison was certainly greater than his desire to prove his innocence; he has voluntarily relinquished the best and most immediate chance of ascertaining the truth. That most certainly does *not* speak for Dreyfus's innocence.²¹

Now, like many of his peers, Liebknecht had been a political prisoner himself. His first wife was the daughter of a prison guard whom he met during his imprisonment following the revolution of 1848. Like Bebel, Liebknecht had spent two years in prison for treason because of his refusal to support Bismarck's handling of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/1871. Most recently, already a man of 70, Liebknecht had been incarcerated for four months for *lèse majesté* in 1896 and he mentioned how this had offered him the opportunity to study the French press in detail as the Dreyfus Affair gradually began to unfold in earnest.

Social Democracy, like many political movements, took pride in the steadfastness with which its members refused to be intimidated by repression and imprisonment and considered convictions that were politically motivated a badge of honour. Like many political movements, it also found it immensely difficult to acknowledge and cope with the human cost that repression and imprisonment frequently exacted from those affected and the toll it took on their physical and mental health. Liebknecht was certainly in a better position than most to suggest that Dreyfus should have seen through an appeal even if it meant staying in prison for the time being. Yet even Liebknecht had never been deported to a tropical penal colony. Against the backdrop of this experience, the relative comfort of Dreyfus's current prison regime was presumably neither here nor there and the urgency of his desire to be freed surely merits a rather more charitable interpretation than the one Liebknecht offered.

Liebknecht then began to characterise the Dreyfusard campaign. '*Pretence and publicity. Publicity and pretence [Mache und Reclame. Reclame und Mache]*', he began,

never has there been as pretentious a publicity campaign on such a gigantic scale. It only had *one* fault. Never has pretension been *more visible and palpable and blatant* – and never more clichéd and crude [*niemals schablonenmäßig plumper*]. In part it was a stringently performed concert, in part a well-rehearsed racket – both with a single conductor whose every sign all the participants followed. One motion of the baton and in Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna, New York, and everywhere else the same singing, blowing, whistling, hissing, squeaking, yelling. And then the people act surprised when the notion of a 'syndicate' arises! When 500 papers of all descriptions in all manner of countries simultaneously strike up the same melody once or twice a day or more often still then that can surely hardly be 'pure coincidence'.²²

²¹ Ibid., 2–3.

It had been 'a monumental mistake', he continued, 'to identify Jewry's cause with that of Dreyfus'. After all, 'is Jewry guilty, then, when one Jew has perpetrated a crime? No sensible person in France or elsewhere had any intention of holding the Jews accountable for Dreyfus', he claimed. By contrast,

the involvement of Jews in the Panama swindle provided far more grist to the antisemitic mill. And lo and behold: heroes and victims of the Panama swindle stood at the helm of the movement for Dreyfus; thus the stupidity of identifying Dreyfus's cause with that of Jewry in its entirety was supplemented by the probably even greater stupidity of dragging the nasty odour of the Panama Affair into the Dreyfus Affair. [...] The consequence of the identification of Jewry with Dreyfus could only be that Dreyfus's second conviction turned into a defeat inflicted on Jewry.²³

All that, however, 'is comparatively insignificant. The political education and sense of equality are too strong in France for the antisemitic movement to become dangerous and permanent. Far more dangerous is the effect the "Campagne" has had on *militarism* in France'.²⁴ The Dreyfusard campaign had 'insulted national feelings and aroused wild protest – *and it has made the army popular and provided militarism with a triumph*. It will take a long time', Liebknecht concluded his second article, 'before the movement against militarism in France reaches the strength again that it had acquired before the "Affair"'.²⁵

Liebknecht's third article in the *Fackel* was a response to some of the objections raised against his previous line of argument. The Revisionists claimed that Dreyfus owed his retrial to their efforts. 'That is wrong', Liebknecht explained. 'I am in fact convinced that had the "Campagne" never taken place the appeal would have been *heard far sooner*'.²⁶ The campaign had been based on "'tactics" of *hysterical madness*', and

the only thing that continues to mystify me is how there could ever have been people outside of psychiatric institutions who engaged in such stupidity, approved of it, and even admired it. The *ugliest, most repulsive* feature of the 'Affair' and its *pretensions*, however, is the *inner insincerity*, the *mendacious hypocrisy of this comedy of outrage*, this *most hypocritical comedy of outrage*.²⁷

Towards the end of the third article, he then asked: 'Who is still talking about the "Affair"?' It would be 'only a few more weeks and the word Dreyfus will have been forgotten. As far as *cultural history* goes, that would be a shame', he added. After all, posterity could grant 'the "Campagne"

²² Ibid., 3. ²³ Ibid., 6–7. ²⁴ Ibid., 7 ²⁵ Ibid., 10

²⁶ Idem, 'Schlusswort,' in *Fackel* 1, 21 (26 October 1899): 1–12, here 5. Hereafter Liebknecht, 'Schlusswort'.

²⁷ Ibid., 6.

pride of place next to the Pied Piper crusades of the children, the St Vitus's dance and the mass processions of the dancing dervishes'.²⁸

As Kraus reported some weeks later, 'a nationalist fortnightly journal, *L'action Française*, edited by Maurice Barrès, has translated Liebknecht's articles *in extenso* and distributed them throughout France in more than one-hundred-thousand copies'. Numerous smaller papers, including the antisemitic flagship, *La Libre Parole*, had quoted extensively from them since. Was this not an embarrassing situation? Not according to Kraus. For those who were quoting Liebknecht actually had nothing in common with him. 'Men who swim in a tributary where the current flows backwards boast that they are swimming in parallel with Liebknecht who is struggling against the tide in the main river', he explained.²⁹ In the independent Socialists' *La Petite République*, its editor-in-chief, Alfred Lèon Gérault-Richard (born 1860), had bemoaned the fact that Liebknecht's articles provided the opponents of the Dreyfusard Socialists 'with weapons that are all the more murderous because they were welded by the hands of a friend'. Yet Gérault-Richard assumed that once Liebknecht saw how his articles were being exploited he would 'regret having laid himself open to the risk of being translated and utilized in this way'.³⁰ In fact, Kraus added, 'I know that he regrets nothing'.³¹ At the Socialist Congress in Paris, Liebknecht's stance had even 'led to an incident', Kraus continued. 'Herr Joindy, editor of the "Petite Republique" and of the *Aurore*, exclaimed: "Down with Liebknecht!" when the Dreyfus Affair came up. The man was punished accordingly'.³²

In the following edition of the *Fackel*, Kraus published a letter Liebknecht had written to the *Petite République*. In it Liebknecht retorted that 'you reprimand me for my new friends. I could reprimand you for yours'³³ (i.e., the Socialists' Dreyfusard associates). Put simply: if you accuse me of promoting antisemitism I will accuse you of promoting 'philosemitism'. Clearly, then, Liebknecht too subscribed to the logic of the 'philosemitism' discourse and assumed he could score points by making a threat of this kind.

The following summer it was reported that Dreyfus had told the correspondent of the *Secolo* (Milan), the Italian Republican, Giuseppe de Felice (1859–1920), that he hoped the propaganda associated with his name would abate soon, for only then could he hope for the due legal process that could ascertain the truth. In response to these reports, Liebknecht submitted yet another article to the *Fackel*. He was triumphant at his apparent vindication.

²⁸ Ibid., 11–12.

²⁹ Karl Kraus, 'Nachträgliches zur "Affaire",' in *Fackel* 1, 26 (1899): 8–13, here 9–10.

³⁰ Cited *ibid.*, 11. ³¹ Ibid. ³² Ibid., 13. Cf. also Silberner, *Sozialisten*, 211.

³³ Karl Kraus, 'Nachträgliches zum "Nachträgliches",' in *Fackel* 1, 27 (1899): 22–27, here 22.

He did not know whether Dreyfus had read his articles in the *Fackel*, he wrote, 'but if he has, then he has vindicated everything I said. If not, we would be looking at a correspondence [i.e., between Dreyfus's statement and Liebknecht's analysis] that is almost as miraculous as that between the 70 Alexandrian translators of the Old Testament'.³⁴ Dreyfus had clearly identified what had indeed characterised the whole Affair, namely, 'that its concern was *not* to ascertain the truth about the guilt or innocence of Captain Dreyfus but to use Dreyfus's case for a "Campagne" that could not but result in a backlash of French national feeling that would benefit militarism and antisemitism'.³⁵ The alleged hatred of the French towards Jewry

exists only in the imagination of those who claim that it exists. Until the Affair was conjured up, no antisemitic movement existed in France. [...] The fools like Drumont who railed against the Jews as the sole cause of all social maladies were loners. It took the whole ingenious clumsiness of the Dreyfus-Campagne to artificially produce an antisemitic movement.³⁶

As for Dreyfus himself, 'if he has evidence for his innocence', Liebknecht concluded, one could only hope that he received the opportunity to present it, but to do so he would 'clearly have to remember the proverb: God protect me from my friends!'³⁷

In one important respect, of course, Liebknecht's stance stood absolutely *sui generis*. It was predicated on the assumption that Dreyfus was indubitably guilty. This makes it difficult to compare the implications of his argument to the tactical prescriptions of other Socialists at the time. The crucial question presented by Jean Jaurès to prominent Socialists in 1899, whether the movement could 'without abandoning the principle of class struggle' take sides in a conflict 'among various bourgeois factions, whether to save political liberty or, as in the Dreyfus Affair, to defend humanity',³⁸ presupposed Dreyfus's firmly established innocence. Liebknecht's stance neither answered that particular question in the negative nor did those who answered it in the affirmative thereby refute Liebknecht's assessment. On the other hand, given the vehemence of Liebknecht's scorn *vis-à-vis* the Dreyfusards, one cannot help wondering whether his apodictic insistence on Dreyfus's guilt was not in fact a rationalisation and the stubbornness with which he maintained it a reflection of the unsettling effect the anti-antisemitic aspect of the Dreyfusard campaign had on him. The fact that Liebknecht had in fact

³⁴ Wilhelm Liebknecht, 'Zweierlei Nachträgliches,' in *Fackel* 2, 44 (1900): 5-15, here 6. Hereafter Liebknecht, 'Zweierlei'. The article is dated 17 June 1900. Liebknecht had previously also made some additional remarks on the Dreyfus Affair in idem, 'Das Ende einer Komödie,' in *Fackel* 2, 42 (1900): 2-10.

³⁵ Idem, 'Zweierlei,' 6-7. ³⁶ Ibid., 7. ³⁷ Ibid., 8. ³⁸ Quoted from Jacobs, *Socialists*, 15.

written to Kraus as late as 5 August 1899 that 'I neither think Dreyfus guilty nor innocent',³⁹ would seem to underscore this suggestion.

Leaving the issue of Dreyfus's guilt or innocence aside for a moment, though, the verve of Liebknecht's malicious and in part clearly delusional portrayal of the Dreyfusard campaign and the imagery he employed are surely remarkable. This testifies to rather more than the 'incredible naivety' Silberner saw in these articles and makes Silberner's conclusion that Liebknecht's anti-Dreyfusard articles 'contain not a word with as much as an antisemitic connotation'⁴⁰ rather baffling. This is in many ways a good illustration of the problems created by attempts to reach an unambiguous juxtaposition of antisemites and non-antisemites in this context. According to the logic this implies, 'a word with an antisemitic connotation' must be part of an 'antisemitic remark', which invariably renders the text in which it features an 'antisemitic text' and its author an 'antisemite'. Yet we need classify neither his anti-Dreyfusard articles nor Liebknecht himself as antisemitic in any straightforward sense of the word to maintain that his critique of the Dreyfusard campaign is highly problematic and in need of an explanation. It clearly bears testimony to an irrational approach whose dynamics we need to understand *on their own terms* in order to develop a more thorough understanding of fully fledged antisemitism and its virulence and pervasiveness in German society both in the short and the long term. If we can only either indict Liebknecht as an antisemite or give him an entirely clean bill of health, we have to disregard these dynamics that can only be properly examined if we focus on the wider set of perceptions regarding 'the Jews' whose significance I have emphasised throughout this book.

Strangely enough, the 'mitigating circumstances' that actually might help explain Liebknecht's vehemence seem to have been entirely overlooked. Throughout the articles, Liebknecht made numerous remarks indicating that his ire was in fact directed primarily against the *German* Dreyfusards. In France, he claimed, the campaign 'is nowhere near as strong as it is in Germany, even though, as the French do, they are making far more of a song and dance about it'.⁴¹ 'Was it not just totally absurd', he asked, 'to proceed with the "Campagne" for a man imprisoned for treason in that country to which he was supposed to have betrayed his fatherland? That was totally grotesque',⁴² he insisted. 'The outbursts' of the German Dreyfusards 'against the "band of forgers", "criminals", "degenerate Frenchmen" were reminiscent of the wildest orgies of war fanaticism in 1870/71', he criticised, adding that among those supporting the campaign

³⁹ Quoted in Karl Kraus, 'Briefe Wilhelm Liebknechts (Zur 100. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages, 29. März 1826),' in *Fackel* 27, 713–723 (March 1926): 6–31, here 7. Hereafter Kraus, 'Briefe Wilhelm Liebknechts'.

⁴⁰ Silberner, *Sozialisten*, 211. ⁴¹ Liebknecht, 'Nachträgliches 1,' 3. ⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

the German press sinned particularly badly. Liberal and democratic papers indulged in an orgy of anti-French chauvinism [*Franzosenfresserei*] that must have inspired envy in our most bigoted *Junker* and police patriots and was restrained only by their antisemitism. This chauvinist orgy was, after all, being enacted in honour of 'the Jew Dreyfus'.⁴³

What if the boot were on the other foot, if Dreyfus were a German officer and an organised press campaign for him transpired primarily in the French press, he asked.⁴⁴ What would those now supporting Dreyfus in Germany make of that? His critique held 'true most of all of the "Campagne" as it transpired in *Germany*',⁴⁵ he clarified. 'Charity begins at home', he wrote (in English), finally revealing his genuine concern. By way of an explanation he then added that 'the press of free countries differs from the press of unfree countries in that it uncovers the faults at home and only then deals with those abroad'.⁴⁶

Within limits, Liebknecht had a point. All other things being equal, a Dreyfus Affair admittedly could not have transpired in Germany, as has been pointed out many times, because a Jew would never have made it into the General Staff. Moreover, French society was actually torn down the middle by the convulsions of the Affair, whereas its German counterpart, confronted with a similar situation, would at best have frayed at the edges. What, then, gave parts of the German public who were either at peace with this state of affairs or incapable of altering it the legitimacy to denounce the situation in France? *Franzosenfresserei* may well have played a role among German Dreyfusards and this is an issue that would merit closer examination. Yet Liebknecht's response to the hypocrisy and complacency that may have characterised the German Dreyfusards' efforts nevertheless seems grossly disproportionate, both in form and scope. It is worth noting, though, that Liebknecht certainly did take the stipulation that 'charity begins at home' when comparing conditions at home and abroad very seriously. This was not a notion he made up on the spot to rationalise his anti-Dreyfusard animosity. He in fact took it so seriously that his adherence to it aroused open conflict within the party on at least one occasion.

Liebknecht's recollections of his journey to the United States with Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling in 1886⁴⁷ are an interesting case in point. As Jost Hermand has pointed out, these recollections offer neither an account of Liebknecht's actual activities and experiences on that trip nor an accurate portrayal of the state of affairs in the United States.⁴⁸ They offer a semi-fictional, utopian account designed to present the United States, or

⁴³ Ibid., 7. ⁴⁴ Idem, 'Nachträgliches 2,' 9. ⁴⁵ Idem, 'Schlusswort,' 6. ⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁷ Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Ein Blick in die Neue Welt* (Stuttgart: J. H. W. Dietz, 1887).

⁴⁸ Jost Hermand, 'Ein Blick in die Neue Welt (1887). Wilhelm Liebknechts Bericht über seine USA-Reise 1886,' in *Wilhelm Liebknecht. Revolutionär, Demokrat und Sozialist* (Berlin: Helle Panke, 2001) [hereafter *Liebknecht-Konferenz*], 31–45, here 37. Hereafter Hermand, 'Ein Blick in die Neue Welt'.

rather, 'his dream America', as 'a positive foil for the, to his mind, extremely negative state of affairs in Imperial Germany'. 'In the final [...] more theoretical section', Hermand suggests, 'Liebknecht develops his vision of a liberated, classless society that he indeed calls "America" but that at the same time encapsulates the vision of a different, better German *Reich*'.⁴⁹

We have already come across Liebknecht's Marx memoirs. There, to add another stone to our mosaic, Liebknecht explained that

'patriotism' is a disease by which a sensible person is only befallen abroad; at home there is such an abundance of wretchedness that anyone who does not suffer from brain paralysis and curvature of the spine is immune to the germ that carries this political dizziness also known as chauvinism or jingoism [...]. Lessing said – 'in Saxony I praise Prussia, in Prussia I praise Saxony'. And that is the most sensible patriotism, one that seeks to remedy the defects of the fatherland by pointing to the – real or ostensible – better example abroad. I have benefited from adherence to this dictum by Lessing from an early age.⁵⁰

In April 1897, finally, Schoenlank took Liebknecht to task for a report on his recent lecture tour in the Netherlands.⁵¹ Schoenlank was the founding editor-in-chief of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, the outstanding party daily even then. It was there that he aired his misgivings in an editorial.⁵² As Schoenlank noted in his diary on 5 April, he would give Liebknecht a piece of his mind for the gushing praise [*Lobhudelei*] of conditions abroad meted out 'at our expense'.⁵³ Schoenlank caused quite a stir and the ensuing controversy raged on in the party press for a full month. Liebknecht, with Kautsky's support, vigorously defended himself against Schoenlank's critique. Mehring, on the other hand, supported Schoenlank. The two had previously barely been on speaking terms. Mehring's own relationship with Liebknecht was turbulent, to say the least,⁵⁴ and Schoenlank's critique of Liebknecht thus provided a worthy opportunity for a reconciliation between them. 'That Liebknecht's writing has harmed the party for many years now', Mehring wrote to Schoenlank, 'is, after all, *communis opinio* among the sensible members of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 38, 44. ⁵⁰ Liebknecht, *Karl Marx*, 82–83.

⁵¹ Wilhelm Liebknecht, 'Acht Tage in Holland,' in *NZ* 15-II, 27–28 (24–31 March 1897): 4–9, 48–53 and *NZ* 15-II, 30 (14 April 1897): 107–115. Schoenlank's misgivings concerned specifically the second instalment. For Liebknecht's response, cf. the end of the third instalment (ibid., *nt*), quoting his initial response in *Vorwärts* 14, 87 (13 April 1897): 3.

⁵² Bruno Schoenlank, 'Ein holländisches Stilleben,' in *LVZ* 4, 83 (10 April 1897): 1–2.

⁵³ Schoenlank's diary – Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Bonn (Ältere Nachlässe: Schoenlank) – was published in Paul Mayer, *Bruno Schoenlank 1859–1901* (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschichte, 1971): 99–139, here 119. Where in doubt, I have followed Mayer's transcription. Hereafter Schoenlank, *Tagebuch*.

⁵⁴ Cf. Thomas Höhle, 'Sozialdemokraten und Intellektuelle. Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Liebknecht und Mehring in den neunziger Jahren des 19. Jahrhunderts,' in Beutin et al. (eds.), 'Gesellschaft der Freiheit': 83–97 and Thomas Höhle, 'Die wechselvollen Beziehungen zwischen Wilhelm Liebknecht und Franz Mehring,' in *Liebknecht-Konferenz*, 46–50.

the party; if you now tell it as it is and criticize his silly whitewash of conditions abroad in a reasoned manner that is, if anything, too timid, then it was the duty of the party press to support you, not to pounce on you, as most party papers have done'.⁵⁵

How much interest this dispute drew is demonstrated by the fact that Gerlach discussed it in an article he published when Liebknecht died more than three years later. 'One of his own party comrades', Gerlach explained, 'the astute deputy Schönlanck, demonstrated in a much discussed article that he [i.e., Liebknecht] still lugged the unpleasant habit from his exile along behind him of underestimating everything at home and overestimating everything abroad'.⁵⁶ Schoenlank had indeed written that the urge to exaggerate the merits of other countries at Germany's expense was 'an old and unpleasant habit of the time in exile'. This is surely a remarkable and extremely patronising suggestion. Schoenlank effectively treated Liebknecht's stance, not as a political but as a psychological issue.

Perhaps more importantly, though, this remark was not really directed against Liebknecht alone. Schoenlank's remark obviously implied that those comrades who had been in exile were generally inclined to judge the state of affairs back home with undue harshness while being more lenient in their evaluation of the countries that had offered them refuge. The main line of argument would be this: it might be (psychologically) understandable why people who were forced into exile would adopt this skewered approach, but if one returned from exile there was obviously no justification for maintaining it. In part, Schoenlank suggested that conditions had improved since. Ultimately, however, he was in fact implying that the exiled comrades' harsh perception of the situation in Germany was only ever psychologically understandable but never merited by the facts on the ground. What really dared speak its name in Schoenlank's contention was a presumably quite widespread sense of unease and resentment caused by the fact that the party's official ideology was no indigenous growth but had been developed abroad and was essentially an internationalist import. As far as I can see, this is a topic that has hardly been discussed in the literature and would merit careful examination.

That the bulk of ordinary German Social Democrats were in fact (in a fairly wide sense of the word) Lassalleans at heart rather than Marxists in any meaningful sense of the word is surely one of history's worst kept secrets. As is well known, Marx was highly critical of the programme agreed upon when the Lassallean ADAV and the 'Marxist' SDAP under the leadership of Liebknecht and Bebel merged at the Congress of Gotha in 1875.⁵⁷ At

⁵⁵ Schoenlank, *Tagebuch*, 124.

⁵⁶ Hellmut von Gerlach, 'Die Führer der deutschen Socialdemokratie,' in *Zeit* 24, 306 (11 August 1900): 83–85, here 83.

⁵⁷ Cf. *MEW* 19: 13–32.

the time, even for the leaders of the *Eisenacher* faction, 'insofar as they had understood Marx, his doctrine was', as Schorske put it, 'worth less to them than the achievement of unity in the labour movement'.⁵⁸ This not only meant that they did not act upon Marx's critique. They effectively suppressed Marx's critique until the run up to the Congress in Erfurt in 1891 when a new programme was due to be agreed. Engels 'made the most of the opportunity'⁵⁹ by persuading Kautsky finally to publish Marx's critique of the Gotha programme, now some fifteen years old, but even then had to agree to its publication in a sanitised version.⁶⁰ There is an added irony even to this publication, though. For Engels had formulated a critique of the draft for the new programme to be agreed in Erfurt. While the Social Democratic leadership was now finally brave enough to publish Marx's critique of their old programme, it nevertheless refused to publish Engels's critique of the draft of their new programme. It, in turn, was not deemed fit for publication for another decade.⁶¹ The appropriation of Marxism most certainly was no smooth process that came naturally to German Social Democracy.

It is easy to see why Lassalle caught the imagination of many German Socialists rather more easily than Marx and Engels. It took far less systematic thought and abstraction to understand what he had to say. For better or worse, the individual and his (or her) good will or bad faith played a much more straightforward role in Lassalle's scheme of things. At the same time, his belief in the inevitability of progress was essentially metaphysical and of a truly startling naivety. Progress was so inevitable that it would make no difference whether one helped it along by accumulating all the might (potentially) at the command of the democratic forces or by forming a sectarian alliance with Bismarck. His ADAV, for all its faults, had been an indigenous initiative and the focus of his political activities had been firmly German. Little wonder, then, that Lassalle's writings were continuously being reissued in sizeable editions and that Mehring owed a good deal of his popularity within the party to his defence of Lassalle. As we saw earlier, Mehring persistently maintained that Marx and Engels, for all their superiority in the lofty heights of ideological discourse, had lost touch with the realities on the ground. Yet it was for these (German) realities that Lassalle had been just the man.

To be sure, in general terms it is probably fair to say that one needs to know the ins and outs of the realities on the ground to organise political activity in a particular locality. On the other hand, *a priori* there is nothing to say that an insider is necessarily a more acute analyst than an outsider.

⁵⁸ Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905–1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955): 3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. ⁶⁰ Cf. *MEW* 19: 549 n12.

⁶¹ Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996): 2.

Intimate involvement can generate profound insight, it can also blur one's vision; sometimes it takes an outsider to put his (or her) finger on something all those directly involved can no longer see. Needless to say, though, we need to read this controversy against the more specific background of a cultural and intellectual context pervaded by notions radically privileging ethnic specificity and belonging and the need to maintain the integrity of one's ethnic identity. For most people, it would have seemed self-evident that each national group had its own essence and spirit that would never really be accessible or even genuinely comprehensible to anybody not belonging to that group. Exile, consequently, was a state of affairs defined not so much by choice, i.e., the conscious decision to maintain the locality of one's origin (rather than the locality of one's current residence) as the primary focus of one's aspirations. Exile was ultimately defined by the fact that one would never be able genuinely to come into one's own in any land other than that of one's origin. Life outside of one's fatherland could never be more than a transitory option and inevitably took its toll on those cut off from their roots. Woe betide those who for some reason were condemned never to return. In criticising matters German, the exiles were not merely out of their depth in the sense that they lacked immediate familiarity with the empirical reality on the ground. They were also out of their depth in a much more fundamental sense: they were cut off from the spirit required to interpret that empirical reality correctly. Their critique not only lacked empirical grounding, it was in an important sense spiritually inauthentic. Against this backdrop the notion that the exiles might have seen the state of affairs in the German territories more critically because the distance allowed them a more detached and objective perspective was obviously inconceivable.

Interestingly enough, it would seem that this logic applied in only one direction: Liebknecht treated Germany unjustly because he had developed the habit of doing so while in exile. Marx and Engels were altogether more uncharitable in their analysis of conditions in Germany than Lassalle because they were in exile. Few within the party, on the other hand, were as optimistic about the state of affairs in Imperial Germany as Eduard Bernstein.⁶² Yet the fact that he was in exile from 1879 until 1901 does not seem to have rendered his optimism inauthentic in the eyes of those who felt they could discard the pessimism of others who were more critical of Germany's development by blaming it on their time in exile.

⁶² Bernstein, while still in exile, apparently shared Liebknecht's notion that *charity begins at home*. 'To my mind,' he wrote on one occasion, 'rather than joining in the German chauvinists' denunciation of England [...] the Socialist journalist should alert his compatriots to the ways in which conditions abroad are more advanced' (Eduard Bernstein, 'Der Kampf der Sozialdemokratie und die Revolution der Gesellschaft,' in NZ 16-I, 16 (5 January 1898): 494-497, here 493 n2. Hereafter Bernstein, 'Kampf der Sozialdemokratie'.)

In any case, the stipulation that 'charity begins at home' was clearly one that Liebknecht did not merely conjure up to rationalise his anti-Dreyfusard rant. The position that he expressed in these articles remains highly problematic all the same, but all this was neither here nor there for Braun's line of argument in Dresden. Braun's reference to Liebknecht's articles in the *Fackel* in fact implied no criticism at all. Braun was merely pointing out that those who argued that members of the party had always been wise enough in the past not to collaborate with anti-Socialist publications were wrong. Liebknecht for one *had* collaborated with an anti-Socialist publication. Nobody had kicked up the sort of stink about Liebknecht's collaboration with Kraus that was now being made about the collaboration of Braun and his associates with Harden. Braun was utilising the precedent of Liebknecht's articles in the *Fackel* in his own defence. It would therefore be nonsensical to suggest his remarks were meant as a critique of Liebknecht. Braun did, of course, allude to the fact that Liebknecht's anti-Dreyfusard articles had created problems for the Dreyfusards among the French Socialists. From the context it is quite clear, though, that this reference was meant as an indication of the significance of Liebknecht's articles in the *Fackel*, not as a critique of their content. Not only had Liebknecht published material in an anti-Socialist publication at all, he had published substantial articles there that had an immediate political impact.

We certainly have no reason to suspect Braun himself of having been any more sensitive or sophisticated than his peers when it came to antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question'. Braun was himself of Jewish origin and had apparently refused to convert for the sake of an academic career.⁶³ His approach was nevertheless entirely in keeping with the stance prevalent among his peers. Take, for example, the comments he made in his *Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik* on the electoral success of the antisemites in 1893. 'That antisemitism represents a strong social trend', he stated,

is as undeniable as is the fact that within it, next to the attacks on Jewry, a more general radically anti-capitalist tendency is trying to assert itself with ever greater clarity and self awareness. Thus it draws closer to Social Democracy and Reichskanzler von Caprivi is completely justified in calling it the harbinger of Social Democracy [...]. The law of social gravitation

would eventually make the antisemitic movement 'merge into the stronger and more powerful Social Democratic movement' though it was hard to say how long exactly that might take.⁶⁴

⁶³ Cf. Julie Braun-Vogelstein, *Ein Menschenleben. Heinrich Braun und sein Schicksal* (Tübingen: Rainer Wunderlich, 1932): 83.

⁶⁴ Heinrich Braun, 'Zur Lage der deutschen Sozialdemokratie,' in *Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik* 6, 3 (1893): 506–520, here 513–514.

Braun's mention of Liebknecht's collaboration with Kraus drew three responses. The first came from Kautsky. Speaking immediately after Braun, he conceded that 'it is indeed true that Liebknecht wrote for the *Fackel*'. He then inverted the sense of Braun's remark. 'I agree with Braun', he claimed, 'that Liebknecht made a mistake in doing so. I believe, however, that Braun would do well to imitate the great things Liebknecht achieved and his revolutionary fervour rather than an occasional gaffe on his part! (From the floor: Bravo!) [...] I can only think of one explanation for Liebknecht's gaffe', Kautsky added, 'namely, that the *Fackel* is published in Vienna and Liebknecht was unfamiliar with the conditions there'.⁶⁵

The second response came in the form of a personal statement by Victor Adler. As the leader of the Austrian party, he was only a guest at the Congress and would not ordinarily have intervened. He therefore apologised for having to do so in this particular instance. It was true, Adler stated, that 'Liebknecht did indeed publish a series of articles in the *Fackel* that we found disagreeable. [...] I owe it to Liebknecht, though, to diminish the force of the accusation levelled against him'. Austrian party members too had (regrettably) published articles in the *Fackel* 'under their full name' and 'Liebknecht could therefore assume that we took no exception to this periodical'.⁶⁶

In fact, both Kautsky and Adler erred in their attempts to defend Liebknecht. The third response to Braun's mention of Liebknecht's anti-Dreyfusard articles came in the form of a letter that Karl Kraus wrote to the Party Congress on 18 September. In it he clarified that 'not a single Austrian Social Democrat wrote for the *Fackel* under his name prior to Liebknecht'. That Liebknecht should have thought it unobjectionable to collaborate with the *Fackel* because other Socialists had done so before him was therefore impossible. 'The truth is, quite to the contrary, that Liebknecht knew the opposite to be true', Kraus claimed, 'and honoured the *Fackel* with his collaboration nonetheless'. By implication, Kautsky's contention 'that Liebknecht would not have written for the *Fackel* had he known it', was equally incorrect.⁶⁷ Kraus was to all intents and purposes entirely right. 'Incidentally', Liebknecht had written to Kraus on 8 November 1899, 'I made careful inquiries before writing for you and even *opponents* told me nothing that would tarnish your honour'.⁶⁸

Thus all three responses precipitated by Braun's reference to Liebknecht's anti-Dreyfusard articles contradict each other in important respects. Yet they also have something very fundamental in common: neither Kautsky nor Adler nor Kraus considered for a moment the possibility that Braun might have been interested in the stance regarding antisemitism and 'the Jews' that Liebknecht had expressed in his articles in the *Fackel*.

⁶⁵ *Parteitag 1903*, 175.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Kraus, 'Briefe Wilhelm Liebknechts,' 20–21 *nl*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

Among the articles from the *Zukunft* that Bebel cited in Dresden as evidence for its 'malicious and spiteful' attitude towards the party was Harden's editorial 'Die rothen Primadonnen' [The red prima donnas]. It had commented on the fact that the debate on antisemitism initially planned for the Party Congress of 1892 in Berlin had been put off until the following year.⁶⁹ As Bebel reminded the delegates, Harden had claimed that this decision was down to the fact that antisemitism was 'becoming more and more prevalent in the party'. According to Harden, this was a fact generally acknowledged 'not, of course, officially, but in private conversations'. Here is Harden's account:

One motion also addressed the issue of antisemitism which was supposed to be dealt with in a speech by Bebel and a subsequent discussion. [...] antisemitism has made such rapid progress among the Social Democrats that one seriously had to fear one might encounter covert or explicit Ahlwardt-style utterances [*Ahlwardtereien*] in the debate; hence this most interesting item of the agenda was carefully circumvented. Officially, of course, this is denied with the most emphatic determination, in private conversations, however, even the most enthusiastic comrades admit it with a shrug of their shoulders.⁷⁰

What did Bebel have to say about these contentions? 'We can already see here', he explained,

the way in which Maximilian Wittkowski-Harden was privy to private conversations among comrades. It is one of the saddest things that have transpired in the party that at that time on certain evenings in the week, usually Saturday night, a number of prominent comrades, I too was occasionally among them, came together for a drink. A mass of bourgeois writers from various papers would gradually come along and party issues were discussed then and there in the presence of opponents with a recklessness that disgusted me and led me to avoid the gathering.⁷¹

This is certainly no denial of Harden's claim. In fact, Bebel's statement is not actually a critique of Harden at all. It is a critique of those within the party who gave Harden access to certain forms of information. What troubled Bebel was not the content of the information obtained by Harden but the way in which he obtained it. What is more, this critique not only does not

⁶⁹ Officially, the debate was postponed because the Congress had run out of time (*Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitag der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Berlin vom 14. bis 21. November 1892* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1892): 248–249).

⁷⁰ Apostata [Maximilian Harden], 'Die rothen Primadonnen,' in *Zukunft* 9 (26 November 1892): 385–391, here 387.

⁷¹ *Parteitag 1903*, 221–222.

imply a denial of Harden's claim regarding the prevalence of antisemitism within the party. It in fact confirms it – unless Bebel's formulation that his comrades had recklessly discussed party issues in the presence of bourgeois journalists was meant to imply that they had brought false rumours into circulation, which surely makes no sense.

Not even Harden's claim that Social Democracy had been forced to postpone the debate on antisemitism by a year because of the antisemitism prevalent in its own rows merited a serious discussion, then. It too was deemed relevant only in so far as it demonstrated an instance in which leading Social Democrats had gone too far in their collaboration with the non-Socialist press and harmed the party in the process. In and of itself, this demonstration in fact did more to confirm than dispel Harden's claim.

YET ANOTHER GREAT MISUNDERSTANDING

The Congress not only repeatedly touched on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' in general terms. In one instance, Mehring's personal idiosyncrasies in this field were even raised directly. Yet just like the three examples we have just reviewed, this again stood in no connection to Hans Leuß and his stance *vis-à-vis* 'the Jews'. Had this really been the concern of Mehring's assailants, we would in any case be confronted with an altogether inexplicable omission. They had systematically combed through his past to find examples for his alleged duplicity and hypocrisy. One of the publications in which Mehring himself discussed his chequered past at length was a pamphlet we have already come across: *Kapital und Presse*. As we saw in the [first chapter](#), it was in *Kapital und Presse* that he himself related the fact that he had been accused, in 1891, of writing anti- and 'philosemitic' articles for different papers at the same time. Responding to these allegations, he had pointed out that he was responsible for at least two Jewish boycott calls against papers for which he worked. How could we possibly explain the failure of Mehring's assailants to utilise this material against him if we were to assume that their misgivings about his dealings with Leuß hinged in any way on Mehring's and/or Leuß's stance *vis-à-vis* 'the Jews'?

Rather tellingly, we find the one perfectly direct reference to Mehring's own take on these matters not in the context of the serious deliberations – but in the satirical paper that was issued on the occasion of the Congress and probably edited by Eduard Fuchs (1870–1940).⁷² As far as I can tell, Fuchs, who was a long-standing friend of Mehring's and later became his executor, was already on friendly terms with Mehring at this time.⁷³ *Inter alia*, this satirical paper juxtaposed three spoof programmatic statements designed to caricature the different camps in the party. They sought to mimic, firstly, the

⁷² Cf. Ulrich Weitz, *Salonkultur und Proletariat. Eduard Fuchs* (Stuttgart: Stöffler & Schütz, 1991): 272.

⁷³ Cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 179 n290.

radicals and specifically Mehring, secondly, Bernstein – introduced as ‘E.B. in the messianic age’ – and, thirdly, perhaps a little surprisingly, Heinrich Braun (who was represented by a drawing of an opulent money bag; this was presumably an allusion to the money Braun had recently made by selling his *Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik*). The text caricaturing Mehring contained a rant about the press publications of ‘Löb Sonnemann’ and ‘Isidor Harden’. To the public imagination, both ‘Löb’ and ‘Isidor’⁷⁴ had strong ‘Jewish’ and therefore pejorative connotations and the satirical paper’s spoof references to ‘Löb Sonnemann’ and ‘Isidor Harden’ were clearly meant as an allusion to Mehring’s predilection for these pejorative connotations.

Mehring’s quarrel with Harden was in any case on the agenda, of course, and his long-standing enmity towards Sonnemann may have been an issue at the time not least because the publication of the second edition of his *Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* [History of German Social Democracy] was imminent. In this second edition, Mehring had finally let himself be persuaded to remove the references to ‘Löb Sonnemann’ still included in the first edition. Mehring habitually liked to refer to Leopold Sonnemann (1831–1909) in this way both in public and in private.⁷⁵ He regularly called Sonnemann’s *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the undisputed flagship of liberal journalism in Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century and beyond, the paper of the ‘Frankfurt stock-exchange democracy [*Frankfurter Börsendemokratie*]’.⁷⁶ On one occasion, he also referred to Sonnemann’s colleague in the business section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* as ‘a Jewish-democratic, not Cohn,⁷⁷ but at least Cohnstädt’.⁷⁸

This did not go unnoticed and it would seem that for once Mehring really was ‘taken to task’ by at least some of his peers for his anti-Jewish jibes. Most likely they considered this a matter of good taste rather than of genuine political substance. Whatever their motives, though, it is surely telling that it was this forum they chose to take up the issue. It was the one forum that, to put it bluntly, matched the seriousness of the issue: the satirical paper produced for the Congress in Dresden; a paper, we might remind ourselves, that to the best of our knowledge was produced by one of Mehring’s closest and longest-standing personal friends, not by his opponents.

Lest anyone be tempted to read any more into this, we should add that the satirical paper contained many more relevant references. Among its

⁷⁴ On the significance and connotations of the name Isidor, cf. Bering, *Stigma*, 232–237, 294–296.

⁷⁵ Cf. his letter to Quarck of 4 May 1896 (Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn), Ältere Nachlässe: Marx Quarck 3: 69).

⁷⁶ Cf., for instance, Franz Mehring, ‘Ueber Geschäfts- und Prinzipblätter,’ in *NZ* 11-I, 11 (30 November 1892): 329–334, here 334; no less than four times in idem, ‘Und abermals Jaurès,’ in *LVZ* 10, 5 (8 January 1903): 1–2; idem, ‘Demagogisches Kauderwelsch,’ in *LVZ* 10, 35 (12 February 1903): 1–2.

⁷⁷ On the significance and connotations of the name Cohn, cf. Bering, *Stigma*, 206–211.

⁷⁸ Franz Mehring, ‘Großfinanz und Preßgewerbe,’ in *NZ* 12-I, 16 (10 January 1894): 481–485, here 482.

ostensible contributors was one 'Prof. Talmu-d'Ede' ('Ede' was Bernstein's nickname). Both Bernstein and Luxemburg were depicted throughout with monstrous crooked noses. The satirical paper also offered a spoof report by the auditor of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. In it the auditor vouched for the fact that the journal had acquired '4 new subscribers, 63 new contributors, one paid advert and 127 new opinions over the last three years' and that it also 'pulled teeth and split hairs'. The auditor's name was again an unambiguously 'Jewish' one: 'Isidor Möchteles'.

Among its spoof adverts was one for a book by 'Isidor Cohnchen, Antitheoretical Theory of the Theory. With an introduction by Eduard Granatstein' (an obvious allusion to Bernstein). It is hard to conceive of a more blatantly 'Jewish' name than Isidor Cohnchen (Cohnchen being the diminutive of Cohn). The line of association then is this: such obvious mumbo jumbo as the *Antitheoretical Theory of the Theory* would obviously be the product of a Jewish mind and just the sort of thing for which Bernstein [Granatstein] would write an introduction. Another spoof advert praised a product called 'Bernstein-Karbol' [carbolic soap]. No other product 'disinfects Socialism so thoroughly making it no longer in the least bit contagious'. This product was distributed exclusively by the 'Apotheke zur heiligen Mespoke', i.e., a pharmacy using the Yiddish term for family in its name 'The Holy Family'. Was this perhaps an allusion to Marx and Engels's *Die heilige Familie*? If so, the implication would be that it too was ultimately mumbo jumbo of a stereotypically Jewish bent. Without putting too fine a point on it this would be rather telling in the light of our earlier discussion. As we saw, the passages in *Die heilige Familie* that revisited 'the Jewish Question' are particularly helpful in establishing Marx's genuine intentions in 'Zur Judenfrage'. Mehring's *Nachlaßausgabe* had brought the virtually unknown *Die heilige Familie* back into circulation pretty exactly a year prior to the Congress in Dresden. Assuming this remark really was an allusion to it, it would give us some indication of the impression *Die heilige Familie* now managed to make when and if it was registered at all. Mehring's best efforts in the introduction and annotation of the *Nachlaßausgabe* notwithstanding, *Die heilige Familie* would seem to have come across primarily as mumbo jumbo that may have had a Young Hegelian inflection but would nevertheless have done any Jewish sophist proud.

All this was indeed meant as no more than a bit of harmless banter. This is made perfectly clear by the fact that representatives of all the camps within the party are at the receiving end of this banter: both Bernstein and Luxemburg are portrayed with 'Jewish' noses. In other words, we are definitely not looking at an attempt by one faction within the party to utilise anti-Jewish stereotypes against another. But how would and could this banter have worked in a party (and a society more generally) that was not pervaded by a wealth of anti-Jewish stereotypes? Whatever the editor's subjective intentions, we know from Bering's research that the usage of

these 'Jewish' names was anything but harmless. To the minds of the Social Democrats who produced and read this satirical paper, however, all this was indeed harmless banter – just as the reference to Mehring's habit of calling Sonnemann Löb was just a bit of harmless banter and therefore found its proper place in this satirical paper, not in the deliberations of the Congress itself. Rather appropriately the satirical paper's title was: *The Great Misunderstanding!*⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *Das große Mißverständnis!* (Dresden: Max Beyer, [1903] n.d.): 1, 8, 9, 12, 13.

The Evolution of Bernstein's Stance on Antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question'

As I indicated before, in terms of their sensitivity for the implications of antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' much of the literature has tended to place Mehring and Bernstein at opposite ends of the spectrum. Mehring's attitudes have generally been portrayed as particularly ambivalent and problematic, while Bernstein's stance has been credited with an acuity and prescience fairly singular among his peers. I made it clear at the outset that I consider this a rather questionable juxtaposition. I have argued throughout that Mehring's take on these matters, the occasional idiosyncrasy notwithstanding, was entirely in keeping with attitudes prevalent amongst leading Imperial German Social Democrats. In this [final chapter](#), I want to take another more systematic look at Bernstein's position to demonstrate that not only Mehring's approach but Bernstein's too was rather closer to the mainstream of relevant perceptions among their peers than most of the literature would have us believe.

The conventional juxtaposition of Mehring and Bernstein is underpinned by a larger conceptual and ideological issue. Mehring stood on the radical wing of the party and died a founding member of the German Communist Party (KPD). Bernstein was the conceptual father of revisionism and died a respected doyen of mainstream Social Democracy as it had emerged from the split of organised Socialist labour during and after the First World War. Neither the KPD nor the SPD managed to muster anything even approximating an adequate response to the (renewed) rise of political antisemitism in the Weimar years. Yet the KPD undoubtedly made an even greater dog's breakfast of its response to this development than did the SPD. Some within the SPD clearly displayed a greater measure of flexibility and seriousness in their attempts to grapple with the rise of antisemitism than anybody in the KPD ever did. Among the Communists, the ambivalent and starkly reductionist perceptions prevalent among Imperial German Social Democrats remained entirely unchallenged. The implication would seem to be that 'democratic' Socialism allowed for an evolution of these perceptions while the 'totalitarian' character of Communism precluded this possibility. All this became fully evident only in the inter-war period but it was prefigured, so the argument goes, by conflicts within pre-war Social Democracy, and the contrast between Mehring and Bernstein then emerges as a paradigmatic case in point. It is perhaps little wonder that this notion owes its firm place in the scholarly literature to Paul Massing who was, after all, a disenchanted

former Communist¹ writing against the backdrop of the emerging Cold War.

As we saw, Massing strongly emphasised that Bernstein had supposedly ‘cautioned’ not only Mehring but ‘the Social Democratic party against ambiguity of language and attitude in the Jewish question’. As a case in point, he introduced the ‘proof text’ we discussed in Chapter 1: the article ‘Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus’ published in the *Neue Zeit* in May 1893. As I demonstrated, this text in fact did more to cement than subvert the logic underlying the prevalent critique of ‘philosemitism’. It also revealed that Bernstein distinguished less carefully than Mehring between those who had supposedly been duped into supporting the antisemitic cause and the actual antisemitic activists and propagandists. It is therefore very hard to see how this text could possibly have ‘cautioned the Social Democratic party against ambiguity of language and attitude in the Jewish question’. Yet Massing maintained that it did, adding that this ‘protest’ on Bernstein’s part ‘anticipated the disagreement with the “orthodox” interpretation of Marxism’ that he would only formulate systematically in 1899. According to Massing, this demonstrated that ‘the leading theoretician of “revisionism” was even then [i.e., in 1893] at variance with the “radical” leadership on basic questions of capitalistic development and socialist strategy’.²

Jack Jacobs has argued along similar lines but taken the argument a step further. He too interpreted the specific nuances of Bernstein’s approach to antisemitism in the early to mid-1890s as ‘early harbingers of the revisionist controversy’. He then went on to suggest that ‘the fact that Bernstein took the anti-Semitic movement more seriously [...] may have been due to his Jewish origins’ and a resulting ‘subconscious identification on Bernstein’s part with European Jewry’.³ Consequently, one needed to consider the ‘possibility [...] that it was Bernstein’s psychological identification with the Jews that first led him to reassess an orthodox Marxist position, and that, in this way Bernstein’s Jewish origins ultimately contributed to the development of revisionism’.⁴

This certainly does not tally with Bernstein’s own account of his intellectual development. In an autobiographical account published in 1924, he identified a number of debates in the early to mid-1890s that nurtured increasing doubt in him. He expressly mentioned three substantial review articles published in the *Neue Zeit* between February 1891 and March 1893⁵

¹ Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 170–171. ² Massing, *Rehearsal*, 267 n15. ³ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 58.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 58–59.

⁵ Eduard Bernstein, ‘Carlyle und die sozialpolitische Entwicklung Englands,’ in *NZ* 90-I, 21–23 (February 1891): 665–673, 693–701, 729–736; idem, ‘Der neueste Vernichter des Sozialismus,’ in *NZ* 11-I, 16–17 (January 1893): 502–508, 534–539, *NZ* 11-I, 24 (1 March 1893): 760–768; idem, ‘Technisch-ökonomischer und sozial-ökonomischer Fortschritt,’ in *NZ* 11-I, 25–27 (March 1893): 782–790, 819–829, 850–862.

in which he had shown that the criticisms the authors under review levelled at Marx were wrong in certain respects. 'Yet even back then', he added,

I had to admit to myself that this [...] did not dispel their objections altogether. [...] Much as I tried to resist them, doubts were taking hold of me. [...] The following years repeatedly raised concerns that reinforced these doubts yet further. Particularly important among these was the debate among German Social Democrats on the agrarian question that began in 1894.⁶

The year 1894 also saw the publication of Engels's edition of the third volume of *Das Kapital* that 'questioned a number of conclusions that we pupils of Marx had drawn from the first volume'. Especially its [final chapter](#) 'made an almost tragic impression on me'.⁷ Clearly, then, if we are looking for 'early harbingers of the revisionist controversy', we hardly need turn to matters Jewish. This does not rule out that they may have been among the concerns that reinforced his doubts. If so, he may have had his reasons for not mentioning this in his later account. It does make it rather unlikely, though, that it was these particular 'Jewish' concerns that 'first [my emphasis, lf] led him to reassess an orthodox Marxist position'.⁸

Jacobs's notions regarding Bernstein's development are in any case rather tentative. Subtle expressions of a shift in emphasis 'as early as 1898'⁹ notwithstanding, Jacobs ultimately concludes that Bernstein 'did not decisively break from his earlier positions' prior to 1914. The decisive shift only occurred 'from approximately midway through World War I to the end of his life' and 'it was, above all, the rise of anti-Semitism that precipitated' it.¹⁰ For, as Jacobs points out, 'Bernstein repeatedly (and with notable prescience) insisted that the anti-Semitic movement of the 1920s was quite different from earlier anti-Jewish movements'.¹¹

Bernstein's recognition that the political antisemitism of the post-war period posed a threat of an entirely different intensity and order of magnitude was indeed prescient. On the other hand, his insistence on the fact that this later antisemitism was a very different phenomenon also allowed him to take it more seriously without having to question his earlier approach in any way that might have caused him genuine discomfort. How perceptions of antisemitism changed in the Weimar period is one of the issues I will be discussing in my next book. We need not discuss it in detail, though, to acknowledge that we surely need to keep in mind the following: the fact that quite a few people increasingly did begin to take the political antisemitism that re-emerged from the second half of the war onwards more seriously does not automatically make their response to it more adequate, precisely because this new antisemitism really did have a more vicious and

⁶ Idem, 'Entwicklungsgang,' 21. ⁷ Ibid., 22. ⁸ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 58. ⁹ Ibid., 59–60.

¹⁰ Ibid., 70. This also concurs with Mosse's assessment, cf. Mosse, 'German Socialists,' 128.

¹¹ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 68.

far more dangerous quality to it. The crucial question is therefore just how much more seriously people were prepared to take it. In other words, was the gap between their heightened awareness and the more aggressive forms of post-war antisemitism really any smaller than the previous gap between their greater indifference and the less aggressive manifestations of pre-war political antisemitism?

Clearly, then, Bernstein owes his reputation as a Socialist of unusual sensitivity for the implications of antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' predominantly to his post-war career.¹² It seems highly unlikely that we would be giving the nuances of his stance in the pre-war period a second thought were it not for our knowledge of his post-war track record. Had Bernstein died in 1915, we would still remember him as the father of revisionism. Yet we would hardly be considering the possibility that certain aspects of his position on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' in the 1890s might have been 'early harbingers of the revisionist controversy'. That does not make this line of inquiry illegitimate or implausible, of course. But it does alert us to the possibility that Bernstein's peers and contemporaries in Imperial Germany, lacking our hindsight, may have found it rather more difficult to perceive of Bernstein as being substantially at odds with the relevant discourse within the party. Consequently, the juxtaposition of Bernstein and Mehring as singularly sensitive to matters Jewish and singularly lacking in that sensitivity, respectively, might well have struck them as rather less compelling than it has seemed to the bulk of more recent scholarship on the matter.

One of my lead questions throughout this book has been this: assuming somebody socialised in Imperial Germany who had imbibed its prevalent preconceptions regarding 'the Jews' had become interested in Social Democracy, to what extent and in what ways (if any) would the encounter with Socialism most likely have challenged his (or her) preconceptions? Applied to this particular context, we need to put the question as follows: would such an individual have encountered Bernstein's stance as challenging the notions accepted in the party at large and in society more generally? Conversely, I suggested at the outset that we can gauge the virulence of prevalent perceptions regarding 'the Jews' in Imperial German society as a whole precisely by examining their impact in one of the arenas in which we would least expect them to take hold, namely, in Social Democratic discourse. In keeping with this approach, the extent to which Bernstein continued to perpetuate many of the stereotypes prevalent among his peers and contemporaries even when his emphasis really did begin to shift is similarly telling and indicative of the widespread acceptance on which these stereotypes could draw and count. Finally, we need to consider one other

¹² Mehring, of course, died in January 1919 and had no post-war career. In this respect, a direct comparison between Mehring and Bernstein is therefore impossible.

aspect that emerges rather strikingly from Jacobs's discussion of Bernstein (and this in fact applies to his account of Kautsky too). Many of the most potent expressions of his change in emphasis were made not, or at least not in the first instance, within Germany or in the context of the German party but abroad or in an international context. This obviously attenuated their likely effect on his German comrades, peers and contemporaries yet further.

Now, it is by no means my intention to deny the existence of a connection between the revisionist cause and a more flexible approach to 'the Jewish Question'. The nexus is rather obvious and ultimately quite banal. As George Mosse put it rather aptly in his assessment of the Weimar years, the shift in emphasis was 'part of a more general revisionism which tended towards gradualism, while those who moved further to the left put their faith in revolution and in the idea of the new man'.¹³ To a considerable degree, this was effectively a conceptual zero sum game. As we saw, the initial Marxian vision assumed that revolution would eventually spell a radical new beginning for Jews and non-Jews alike. Admittedly, Jewry as a distinct entity would cease to exist in the process but so would any distinct non-Jewish identity. The concept of assimilation would lose its sense because there would be no prefigured, alternative identity to which the Jews could (be expected to) assimilate.

This vision may now strike many as problematic or naïve, but it did offer a promise and a perspective that was logically consistent within the given conceptual framework and that many radicals of Jewish origin found plausible and attractive. If one substituted evolution for revolution, however, and questioned whether any such radical new beginning for Jews and non-Jews alike would ever occur, one obviously had to suggest or offer something in its stead. Given that their emancipation, even where it had made substantial progress, was still incomplete and contested, the loss of the grand vision invariably left Jews in greater conceptual limbo than non-Jews. Consequently, it went without saying that the revisionists had to strike a new balance in their evaluation of the relationship between emancipation and assimilation. It took no unusual sensitivity or prescience to acknowledge this necessity. Given the prominence of 'the Jewish Question' in public discourse and the centrality of 'the Jew' for non-Jewish identity formation, it would have taken a miracle for the revisionists to be oblivious to this particular implication of their ideological project. The rather more interesting question is this: to what extent did this shift in emphasis genuinely transform or challenge the underlying terms of reference? After all, the revisionists rarely bothered to question, let alone did they openly negate, the merits or desirability of the original Marxian project. For the most part they simply historicised it. The world was no longer the same as it had been

¹³ Mosse, 'German Socialists,' 131.

when Marx and Engels formulated their predictions and prescriptions, they argued, and Socialists had to adapt their strategies accordingly. It is against this backdrop that we need to assess what exactly the revisionist or gradualist shift in emphasis regarding 'the Jewish Question' did and did not challenge. The revisionist position clearly implied a denial of the suggestion that the disappearance of Jewry as a distinct entity would transpire in the way in which Marx had foreseen it. It did not, however, automatically question the assumption that the disappearance of Jewry as a distinct entity would eventually occur nor that this was desirable and in the interest of society at large.

It certainly is true that the revisionist project implied greater leniency towards Jewish self-defence and self-organisation. But that is only half the story. For this, in turn, rendered all the more important the need to define the necessary limits of that leniency and reassert the underlying assimilationist *consensus communis*. In this sense, the revisionist shift in emphasis by no means necessarily challenged the generally accepted terms of reference and in fact led to their active reaffirmation. Consequently, we need to approach expressions of this greater leniency as we would the proverbial glass of which we need to determine whether it is half full or half empty. After all, the acknowledgement that under the given circumstances one realistically had little choice but to concede some right to limited forms of Jewish self-defence and self-organisation, just as long as they adhered to a whole catalogue of caveats, barely amounted to an affirmation of Jewry's right to exist indefinitely as a distinct entity.

Rather than attributing the evolution of Bernstein's position to a particular sensitivity most likely born of his own Jewish origin, a more plausible interpretation would be this: Bernstein took his responsibility as the conceptual father of revisionism seriously. The revisionist project necessitated a more flexible approach to Jewish self-defence and self-organisation. Consequently, it also had to take responsibility for this shift by ensuring that it did not go too far. It made sense to address the requisite warnings not to throw the child out with the bath water both to his fellow Socialists and to the more credible forces within organised Jewry. As we saw, Bernstein had argued in 1893 that antisemitism needed to be criticised 'above all' because it might provoke the Jews into maintaining or reaffirming their distinct identity. If one no longer assumed that the inevitable course of historical development would soon sweep away antisemitism and Jewry alike, this obviously became a far less transient and consequently all the more important problem. With antisemitism on the rise and no comprehensive solution in the wings the likely result was a massive inflation of increasingly established Jewish separatism. Against this backdrop, the Jews both needed and deserved to be told where the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate forms of Jewish self-defence and self-organization lay. I would suggest that this is the main motivation at the root of Bernstein's increasing engagement of the Zionist labour movement.

At the same time, we should recall that one of the general planks of Bernstein's revisionist challenge was in any case the suggestion that Social Democracy needed to engage society far more widely than it habitually did. Rather than merely relying on its 'natural' allies, it needed to be considerably more imaginative in seeking out strategic alliances. If the working class really was the true representative of the interests of humanity as a whole, it needed to be far more circumspect and open-minded in its response to the legitimate aspirations of those who did not themselves belong to the working class. Why should Bernstein have excluded what were, to his mind, the more credible forces within organised Jewry from this wider horizon that he felt Social Democracy needed to engage? It would have required a particular anti-Jewish animus to exclude them in this context, but their inclusion does not therefore automatically vouch for particular pro-Jewish sympathies.

In this chapter, I want to address these questions and flesh out some of my contentions by focusing primarily on what Jack Jacobs has called the 'middle period of Bernstein's career – that is, the period extending roughly from the revisionist controversy to World War I'.¹⁴ The first part of the chapter will review a number of Bernstein's relevant utterances clustered around three junctures: the beginning of this 'middle period', its middle and the first half of the war. I will suggest that a rather more complex picture questioning the current consensus on Bernstein's exceptional sensitivity and prescience emerges if we interpret these utterances in their respective contexts. The final part of the chapter then presents a rather bizarre but intensely telling episode in which none other than Mehring publicly accused Bernstein of antisemitism. This episode is particularly instructive not least because Bernstein, in his attempt to refute Mehring's accusation, pointed his readers to a text of which we today would have not the slightest cause to suspect that it deals with anything 'Jewish' had Bernstein himself not told us so on this occasion.

BERNSTEIN'S DISPUTE WITH BAX (1898/99)

I have argued that Bernstein's article 'Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus' did more to cement than subvert the logic underlying the prevalent critique of 'philosemitism'. This contention formed part of my argument that the critique of 'philosemitism' was no pet obsession of Mehring's but in fact widely subscribed to by Mehring's peers (including both Bernstein and Kautsky). Those in the know may have been a little miffed at that juncture that I did not discuss the two later instances in which Bernstein made an affirmative reference of sorts to 'philosemitism'.

¹⁴ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 61.

I alluded earlier to Jack Jacobs's suggestion that Bernstein's beginning 'dramatic revision' of his stance found its public expression 'as early as 1898'. This was in fact a direct reference to the first of these two instances. 'As early as 1898', Jacobs wrote, 'Bernstein demonstrated that his position [...] was now somewhat different. For the first time he openly declared, "It is for me a categorical imperative under the present conditions to be a philo-Semite in the face of any anti-Semitism"''.¹⁵

In what context did Bernstein make this remark? He made it in a footnote attached to an article that he published in the *Neue Zeit* in April 1898 to refute a critique by the English Socialist Ernest Belfort Bax (1854–1925). The main issue between Bax and Bernstein concerned the merits of colonialism as a means of spreading civilisational values and hastening the process by which capitalism transformed the world in its image and hence propelled it towards revolutionary transformation. Bax maintained that the proliferation of capitalism beyond the developed European states and the US would not hasten the revolutionary process but only subject more and more of the planet's population to the misery of life under capitalism. The primary target of Bax's ire was 'Anglo-Saxondom' [*Angelsachsentum*], by which he meant primarily British Imperialism but also US-American expansion both in North America and beyond. To his mind, the world was threatened by an unhealthy preponderance of the 'Anglo-Saxon race'.

'We are at risk of seeing the predominance of a single race', Bax wrote in the *Neue Zeit* in December 1897. Yet 'on the European continent one has so far been so preoccupied with the Jewish Question that one has given little consideration to this other race question and yet its significance for the future is in some respects much greater'.¹⁶ Bax then developed this analogy at some length. Inevitably, his line of argument was profoundly ambivalent. This entire study has hinged on the suggestion that a careful analysis of the various shades of grey will do more to enhance our understanding of the dynamics at play here than any attempt to achieve some sort of seemingly unambiguous juxtaposition of antisemites and non-antisemites. Bax's role in this dispute with Bernstein is another particularly instructive case in point. It is beyond doubt that his remarks are highly problematic and require an explanation. Made today they would clearly be antisemitic. Yet in their immediate context, any attempt to qualify Bax's remarks in so unambiguous a fashion hinders rather than promotes our understanding of this dispute. Once again, Silberner provides us with a telling illustration of the consequences. In Chapter 6, we saw how Silberner could find 'not a word with as much as an antisemitic connotation'¹⁷ in Liebknecht's sustained

¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶ Ernest Belfort Bax, 'Kolonialpolitik und Chauvinismus,' in NZ 16-I, 14 (21 December 1897): 420–427, here 426. Hereafter Bax, 'Kolonialpolitik'.

¹⁷ Silberner, *Sozialisten*, 211.

anti-Dreyfusard rant. His conclusion regarding Bernstein's dispute with Bax was similarly clear-cut and concise. He flatly stated that on this occasion 'Bernstein unjustly accused a Socialist of antisemitism'.¹⁸

Let us take a closer look, then, and try to give the shades of grey their due. From what we have already heard, the fundamental ambiguity of Bax's line of argument is evident enough. The suggestion that 'this other [i.e., the 'Anglo-Saxon'] race question' was so much more menacing than 'the Jewish Question' might seem to ridicule the paranoia of the antisemites. Yet throwing the threat of 'Anglo-Saxondom' into relief by portraying it as more dangerous than the threat posed by Jewry was a strategy that could only work if the latter too really was a genuine threat. 'To the continental zealot', Bax continued, 'who raves about the alleged advances of Jewry but sees no significant danger in the advances of Anglo-Saxondom I say: In the Anglo-Saxon you are up against ten Jews'. Now, if I may be forgiven a gross oversimplification to illustrate the point: ten times zero is zero. Much as it may be Bax's primary intention to portray 'Anglo-Saxondom' as the greater threat, using this analogy he can only maintain that it is a threat at all if the Jews really are a threat too.

'Any sensibly reasoning human being', Bax explained, 'should acknowledge [...] that the predominance of a particular ethnic group will be detrimental because it will also lend prominence to the weak and bad qualities of the ethnic group in question'. Again the main butt of his critique was 'Anglo-Saxondom' but how did he illustrate the general undesirability of the 'predominance of a particular ethnic group'? By referring back to 'the Jews': 'The Jews too have many great qualities but too much Jewry has never done mankind any good', he went on. 'This much one will surely be able to say without being considered an antisemite. I for my part cannot find the idea terribly gratifying that control of the world should be divided between two strongly superior ethnic groups like, for instance, the Anglo-Saxons and the Jews'.¹⁹ Perhaps these remarks were meant ironically but whatever Bax's intentions, this line of argument clearly played to and reaffirmed the widely accepted notion that 'the Jews' did hold an undue measure of influence. Was there any conceivable sense in which one could suggest even a rough equation between the influence and impact of Jewry on the planet to that of British Imperialism, let alone of British and US-American Imperialism combined? Why introduce this hapless analogy into his critique of Bernstein in the first place, then? For Bernstein the answer was clear: this was an attempt to discredit him by referring implicitly to his Jewish origin.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 218. ¹⁹ Bax, 'Kolonialpolitik,' 426–427.

²⁰ Why references to his Jewish extraction, in and of themselves, should be a means of discrediting him, is a question Bernstein does not seem to have asked himself. This would be an interesting issue in its own right but it is one that we cannot discuss here.

In his rejoinder Bernstein made no big deal of all this. He mocked the drastic colours in which Bax had portrayed 'the threat of the Anglicization of the whole world', adding simply that Bax had embellished his description 'so very tastefully with moderately antisemitic remarks'.²¹ He really did not understand, Bax now retorted, 'how anyone could interpret the fact that I, as an Anglo-Saxon, emphasize that there might be too much Anglo-Saxondom in the world, as well as, perhaps, too much Jewry, "as a moderately antisemitic remark". *I am no antisemite and hate the antisemites*'. He then added: 'It goes without saying that I would have thought twice about making these, to my mind, perfectly harmless remarks had I known that Herr Bernstein was [...] so damn touchy'.²² Bernstein now felt in the defensive. 'I made the accusation of moderate antisemitism', he explained,

because during an earlier polemic Bax already drew Jewry into the debate in a manner that was not merited by the matter at hand and could thus be interpreted as antisemitic. Consequently, I had to interpret this repetition as an inappropriate attempt to utilize the fact that I am of Jewish extraction against me.²³

What exactly had transpired during this earlier polemic? Their first dispute back in 1896 had resulted from Bernstein's support for the Armenian cause. The underlying more general issue had been the same: for Bernstein the Armenians were more advanced than the other ethnic groups among whom they lived. Hence, it would serve progress if they gained the ascendancy in the areas they populated. From Bax's point of view anything that weakened the Ottoman empire only rendered it more susceptible to western Imperialism and was therefore undesirable. Turning specifically to the Armenians, Bax paraphrased the logic of Bernstein's argument as follows: 'Armenia, being a nation of usurers, and therefore *Kulturfähig* [in possession of cultural aptitude] must, of course, be backed in its national agitation'.²⁴ The implication was plain enough: Jews are the paradigmatic usurers. Bernstein is a Jew. Little wonder that Bernstein would entertain particular sympathies for a 'nation of usurers'.²⁵

²¹ Bernstein, 'Kampf der Sozialdemokratie,' 493.

²² Ernest Belfort Bax, 'Der Sozialismus eines gewöhnlichen Menschenkinde gegenüber dem Sozialismus des Herrn Bernstein,' in *NZ* 16-I, 26 (26 March 1898): 824–829, here 826.

²³ Eduard Bernstein, 'Das realistische und das ideologische Moment im Sozialismus. Probleme des Sozialismus, 2 Serie II,' in *NZ* 16-II, 34 (11 May 1898): 225–232, here 232 *nt*. Hereafter Bernstein, 'Probleme'.

²⁴ Idem, 'Our German Fabian Convert: Or Socialism According to Bernstein,' in *Justice* 13, 669 (7 November 1896): 6.

²⁵ Whether Bax would have been inclined to stereotype the Armenians in this blatant but nevertheless fairly conventional manner anyway, had he not needed to do so to introduce Bernstein's Jewish origin into the debate, is hard to say.

Bernstein did not take up the gauntlet, though, at least not directly. 'Bax', Bernstein explained in his rejoinder, 'called them [the Armenians] a "nation of usurers"'. In reality they are a nation of peasants and artisans, surrounded by semi-barbaric pastoral tribes'. In the past these tribes had been 'only violent', now they were 'extortionists of the worst type. They, too, have come under the spell of the money system, and, as Bax again can read in Marx, no worse atrocities than those practised there where semi-barbaric races are drawn inside the circle of the world-market'.²⁶ Unimpressed, Bax maintained that, contrary to Bernstein's spurious claims, 'Socialists, I repeat, are by no means unanimous in wishing to see an Armenian nationality grow up in which the successful Armenian moneylender may disport himself as a ministerial big-wig for the honour and glory of his "country"'.²⁷

It is hard not to interpret Bax's persistent references to the Armenians as usurers and moneylenders as an attempt to draw a connection between Bernstein's Jewish origin and his sympathies for the Armenians. Even so, Bax had made no explicit reference to matters Jewish nor did he do so during the rest of this initial dispute. Measured by the standards that Bernstein and his peers ordinarily applied to distinguish between problematic and unproblematic references regarding 'the Jews' this was surely harmless stuff. Perhaps Bernstein was in fact conflating his recollection of this dispute with Bax with that of a slightly later confrontation with the editors of *Justice*. On 5 June 1897, Henry M. Hyndman (1842–1921), the leader of the Social Democratic Federation, published a rant against Bernstein ('Herr Bernstein's Exposure of Himself'), which was again occasioned by Bernstein's position on the Armenian issue. In the same edition of *Justice*, there was also an unsigned article under the title 'Bernstein Again'. It is entirely possible, of course, that Bax was its author and that Bernstein knew or at least suspected this. It took issue with both Bernstein and Kautsky. 'In this matter', it argued,

Bernstein and Kautsky are not followers of Marx and Engels [...] It is no use for Bernstein-Kautsky to think they can carry on the firm Marx-Engels in their own personalities. You have, of course, the outward conditions, the Semite and the Aryan and the exact echoing of each other's thought, but 'there I swear all likeness ends betwixt the pair'.²⁸

Now, this really was a direct reference to Bernstein's Jewish origins. Yet Bernstein would have been hard pressed to explain how or why this reference should constitute 'an inappropriate attempt to utilize the fact that I am

²⁶ Eduard Bernstein, 'Amongst the philistines. A Rejoinder to Belfort Bax,' in *Justice* 13, 670 (14 November 1896): 6.

²⁷ Ernest Belfort Bax, 'Letters to Editor: The Socialism of Bernstein,' in *Justice* 13, 671 (21 November 1896): 6.

²⁸ *Justice* 14, 699 (5 June 1897): 3, 4.

of Jewish extraction against me'. In any case, as Bernstein saw it, Bax had made such an inappropriate attempt back then. Hence, he was perfectly justified in suspecting Bax of antisemitism when he drew matters Jewish into the dispute again this time round. Touchiness did not come into it. 'Those who are more intimately familiar with me know that I am by no means touchy in this respect', he clarified. It was at this juncture that he made his affirmative remark about 'philosemitism': 'but I consider it a categorical imperative to be a "philosemite" in the face of any antisemitism'.²⁹

How much of a shift in emphasis this remark signified must surely be determined by evaluating it in its context. This context was, firstly, a footnote to an article whose main focus lay elsewhere. While in 1893 Bernstein had made his case for use of the term 'pansemitism' (rather than 'philosemitism') in a lengthy review article dealing specifically with the matter at hand, this was a remark made more or less in passing. Many, if not most, of Bernstein's readers will have passed over this footnote anyway, seeing it merely as an expression of petty bickering that was ultimately neither here nor there for the issue discussed in the main article.

Secondly, the thrust of this remark was fundamentally defensive. Bernstein not only felt compelled to defend himself for falsely accusing Bax of 'moderate antisemitism'. Even worse, Bax had publicly attributed this alleged overreaction on Bernstein's part to the fact that he was excessively touchy. The cause of this excessive touchiness went without saying: Bernstein was overly touchy in this respect because he was a Jew. What is truly remarkable is this. As we saw, Bernstein claimed he had only ever suspected Bax of 'moderate antisemitism' in the first place because he felt that Bax had undertaken 'an inappropriate attempt to utilize the fact that I am of Jewish extraction against me'. This accusation surely held more true of this most recent dismissal of Bernstein's misgivings on the grounds that they merely resulted from his excessive touchiness as a Jew than it did of any of Bax's earlier remarks. Yet far from taking this as evidence that his suspicions had been right all along, Bernstein now beat a hasty retreat. For all the stick that Bernstein was perfectly happy to take, the suggestion that his Jewish origin made him excessively touchy was apparently one that he could not stomach. How could he dispel this suspicion? By insisting that it was not personal touchiness that motivated his remarks but reasoned anti-antisemitism or, to put a generally recognisable label on it, 'philosemitism'.

Thirdly, there is no compelling reason why those who did bother to read the footnote should have found this remark in any way at odds with Bernstein's earlier position. As we saw, Bernstein had previously maintained that there were two forms of 'philosemitism'. It could amount to no more than 'merely a certain sympathy for the Jews that rules out neither a condemnation of notorious mistakes nor a repudiation of their presumptuousness

²⁹ Bernstein, 'Probleme,' loc cit.

where it shows itself. This was entirely legitimate. Alternatively, it could imply 'obsequiousness towards capitalist money-Jewry, support of a Jewish chauvinism, glossing over injustices perpetrated by Jews and loathsome characteristics developed by Jews'.³⁰ The latter was obviously unacceptable. To be sure, back in 1893 Bernstein had suggested emphatically that the Socialists should refrain from using the term 'philosemitism'. In this sense, we might infer that he was now trying to reclaim the term for the anti-antisemitic cause by speaking of 'a categorical imperative to be a "philosemite" in the face of any antisemitism'. Yet one could equally well conclude that Bernstein was placing the term in inverted commas because he still had misgivings about the term but otherwise nothing had changed. As long as 'philosemitism' did not go beyond 'merely a certain sympathy for the Jews that rules out neither a condemnation of notorious mistakes nor a repudiation of their presumptuousness where it shows itself, Bernstein found it no less legitimate now than he had done five years earlier.

This, in turn, is also the backdrop for Bernstein's own reference to this remark a year later in his interview with the *Jewish Chronicle*.³¹ As Jack Jacobs rightly pointed out, 'the fact that Bernstein allowed himself to be interviewed by a representative of this periodical was in itself a political act, because it meant cooperating with a nonsocialist organ even though there were Jewish socialist periodicals in existence at that time'.³² In short, Bernstein's cooperation with the *Jewish Chronicle* was a political act because it was a bourgeois paper, not because it was a Jewish paper. The interview concluded as follows:

My parting question was, 'what do you think of the anti-Jewish attacks of some Socialists?' The reply was short and decisive: 'Apart from any agitation in this country, where my opinion might be resented, I have stated a year ago in the *Neue Zeit*, that, *although in no way connected with any Jewish movement as such*, I think it is my duty to be a "philo-Semite" in all cases where I meet anti-Semitism. As a Social Democrat I fight for all political reforms Jews can reasonably demand'.

Presumably Bernstein gave this interview in English. Hence he was moving in a slightly different linguistic frame of reference when he used the term 'philosemite' here and this makes it difficult to determine definitively his most likely exact intentions. On the other hand, had he meant his usage of the term in this context as a deliberate attempt to reclaim the term for anti-antisemitism and thus place himself radically at odds with the conventions of his peers within the German party, an interview with

³⁰ Idem, 'Schlagwort,' 233.

³¹ 'Evolutionary Socialism. Interview with Herr Eduard Bernstein,' in *Jewish Chronicle* 1, 599 (24 November 1899–22 Kislev 5660): 21.

³² Jacobs, *Socialists*, 60.

the *Jewish Chronicle* would surely have been a rather odd occasion for such an initiative. In any case, the term appeared yet again in inverted commas. Moreover, we need to register where the immediate emphasis lies. Italicised is not the affirmative statement about 'philosemitism' but the disclaimer stating that Bernstein was '*in no way connected with any Jewish movement as such*'. Unless offset by this disclaimer, even this meek profession of 'philosemitism' in inverted commas was apparently a step too far. Finally, his declaration of solidarity remained dependent on his own judgement as to what Jews 'reasonably' could and could not demand. If we understand Bernstein's interview with the *Jewish Chronicle* against the backdrop of his call for a wider involvement of Social Democracy with society at large, this all makes perfect sense. He assured his interviewer that he was an anti-antisemite but clarified that he had not fallen into the trap of Jewish separatism. He assured his interviewer that Jewry could count on Social Democratic support – provided, that is, that it remained reasonable in its demands.

Why should Bernstein have bothered to refer back to his own earlier remark in the *Neue Zeit*? Do we have any grounds on which to assume that this was an attempt on his part to say: here is my distinct take on the matter that I already put out there a year ago? Let us take another look at the passage in question. It actually reads rather oddly. The interviewer states that Bernstein's reply was 'short and decisive', yet it begins with a rather long-winded prefatory clause. Bernstein explained that 'apart from any agitation in this country, where my opinion might be resented', he had taken a stand on the matter elsewhere, namely a year earlier in the *Neue Zeit*. I would suggest that this prefatory clause is the real key to a correct interpretation of Bernstein's intentions. What transpired was most likely something roughly along the following lines: the interviewer would presumably have been most familiar with anti-Jewish remarks made by British Socialists. Alternatively, he may have known of Bernstein's run-in with Bax. Either way, he tried to press Bernstein for a response. Bernstein was initially evasive, claiming that it was not his place to comment on transgressions in the British labour movement. Pressed further, he then proffered the remark in question. Given that he had made it in the *Neue Zeit*, it could not be interpreted as an attempt on his part to step on British toes. Given that he was (presumably) speaking in English to a bourgeois English interviewer who was hardly likely to be aware of Bernstein's earlier recommendation to call the target of one's justified ire not 'philosemitism' but 'pansemitism', this was certainly not the time and the place to dwell on terminological niceties. Whatever the actual scenario and whatever Bernstein's subjective intentions may have been, though, it seems fairly evident to me that his peers and contemporaries could not possibly have been expected to interpret these remarks as running contrary to the *consensus communis* and thus representing a challenge to their own preconceptions.

Bernstein's obituary for Eleanor Marx placed great emphasis on her pride in her Jewish ancestry and her sympathies with the Jewish labour movement and (other) Jews who had become the victims of discrimination or oppression. Bernstein's central and best known contention regarding Eleanor Marx was this: 'Where the Jew was oppressed as a Jew she did not let her deeply ingrained proletarian sense of class mislead her but meted out her compassion to the oppressed irrespective of [his/her] class position'.³³ Bernstein offered Eleanor Marx's support of the Dreyfusard cause as a case in point.

There is more to this formulation than meets the eye. The claim that Eleanor Marx 'did not let her deeply ingrained proletarian sense of class mislead her' into refusing oppressed Jews her solidarity surely implies that this 'deeply ingrained proletarian sense of class' ordinarily would stand in the way of an anti-antisemitic stand and that it was only by abandoning or at least radically subordinating class analysis as her main standard that she could take this stand. This was certainly not how Eleanor Marx saw things. On 14 January 1898, she wrote (in English, her first language) to Natalie Liebknecht:

What *do* you say to the infamous Dreyfus business? It is not a pleasant fact that the one clear, honest note has been struck not by one of our party, but by Zola! The whole thing is utterly sickening. What *does* it matter if Dreyfus is "sympathique" or not! Did we, in America, stop to ask if the Anarchists³⁴ were so? – no. We said: brutal injustice has been done, and though these men were our *opponents* we *pleaded that they shall have a fair trial*. And, it is a disgrace that *not one* of our French 'Socialists' has *dared* to do what Library [Wilhelm Liebknecht], Edward [Aveling] and I did in America³⁵ – i.e. demand bare justice, even though we demanded it for opponents. What *does* it matter if Dreyfus is 'sympathique' or not; honest or not? The only question is: was he – even according to accepted standards, *fairly tried*.³⁶

Two aspects are conspicuously absent from these remarks: the fact that Dreyfus was a Jew and the issue of class. Bernstein's interpretation would imply the following line of argument: although Dreyfus was a bourgeois, the fact that he was being oppressed as a Jew weighed more heavily for Eleanor Marx than the fact that he belonged to the 'wrong' class. Yet Eleanor Marx

³³ Eduard Bernstein, 'Eleanor Marx. Erinnerungen,' in NZ 16-II, 30 (13 April 1898): 118–123, here 122.

³⁴ The 'Chicago Anarchists' implicated in the Haymarket Affair.

³⁵ On their lecture and fund raising tour in the US in 1896, Liebknecht, Marx and Aveling spoke at a number of rallies in Chicago and visited the 'Chicago Anarchists' on death row. Cf. Hermand, 'Ein Blick in die Neue Welt,' 31–37, esp. 34–36.

³⁶ Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963): 460.

makes no reference to Dreyfus's Jewishness nor is her outrage predicated on the assumption that he was being oppressed specifically as a Jew. This may be a rationalisation on her part, of course, but taken at face value her remarks would boil down simply to the contention that despite lacking charm and honesty, Dreyfus deserved a fair trial.

Nor is Bernstein's interpretation borne out by what may have gone without saying. The analogy Eleanor Marx drew between the 'Chicago Anarchists' and Dreyfus clearly rules this out. For despite being politically opposed to Social Democracy, the 'Chicago Anarchists' did come from the 'right' class. What might have suggested that the Social Democrats should refuse the 'Chicago Anarchists' their solidarity was their political position, not their class status. In the same way, Dreyfus deserved solidarity not despite his class status but despite his (supposedly) questionable personal qualities. In both cases, class was neither here nor there not in the sense that it was considered but then discarded as a criterion, as Bernstein implied. It simply never entered into the equation in the first place. For Eleanor Marx, no conflict existed between the sense of justice at stake in these instances and the centrality of class analysis for the Marxist project.

Bernstein's fairly extensive discussion of Eleanor Marx's Jewish concerns was in any case extraordinarily muddle-headed and bordered on the scurrilous. Take his reference to a letter he had recently written to her about the Dreyfus Affair. 'The events in Paris', he had suggested to Eleanor Marx, 'confirmed the notion articulated by Johann Menzinger in his so very perceptive book *Friede der Judenfrage* [Peace to the Jewish Question] that a populace living for pleasure usually inclines more towards antisemitism than one that really works'. Now, I dare my readers to make head or tail of this suggestion without consulting the book to which Bernstein himself referred his readers at this point! Yet strangely enough, none of the scholars hitherto working in the field seem to have done so. Let us take a look, then, at this 'so very perceptive book', at Johannes Menzinger's *Friede der Judenfrage*.³⁷

Menzinger began by pointing out (speaking of himself in the third person) that he had previously been 'an antisemite himself, albeit one of the famous or infamous class of "moderate antisemites"'. While he now rejected 'this school of thought', he nevertheless felt 'equally justified in maintaining some of the many judgements the antisemitic idea entails'.³⁸ And that he most

³⁷ Johannes Menzinger, *Friede der Judenfrage!* (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1896). Hereafter Menzinger, *Friede*. 'Johannes Menzinger' was in fact a pseudonym. The author would seem to have been Hans Schmidkunz (1863–1934), a theoretician of art and pioneering campaigner for the application of pedagogical principles in university education. He was forced out of academe in the mid-1890s on (spurious) disciplinary grounds arising from the marriage to his second (presumably Jewish) wife, Caecilie Nathanson. Schmidkunz lived in the Munich suburb of Obermenzing, hence the choice of pseudonym. Cf. Richard Schumak, *Pädagogik in Bayern* (Hamburg: Dr Kovac, 2005), 1: 306–308, 2: 70–72; telephone and email communication with Dr Schumak, November 2005. I am grateful to Dr Schumak for sharing this information with me.

³⁸ Menzinger, *Friede*, 5.

certainly did. One of Menzinger's preferred sources was none other than the Viennese Orientalist Adolf Wahrmund (1827–1913) and his *Das Gesetz des Nomadenthums und die heutige Judenherrschaft* [The Law of Nomadism and the Current Dominance of the Jews] (1887). That Menzinger was not labouring under some mysterious misapprehension here is demonstrated by his own reference to 'the antisemite Wahrmund'.³⁹

Consequently, Menzinger's entire discussion reeked of ambivalence, to say the very least. Rarely did his objections to the antisemitic claims even begin to scratch the underlying terms of reference. Like so many self-professed anti-antisemites, he frequently reaffirmed those terms of reference. Menzinger spoils us for choice when it comes to glaring examples for this ambivalence. Take the following contention, perhaps his most startling:

Even assuming that the legends of ritual murder [i.e., the blood libel] do have a certain factual basis, we only need to recall that the universal [compulsory] military service of our modern states along with the duty of military obedience compels even the unwilling to commit murder. This murder is portrayed as a holy task in the service of the nation's ideals and is not all that different from ritual murder.⁴⁰

One can just about discern the good intention but could there ever be a point worth scoring at the expense of conceding the slightest measure of credibility to the blood libel, even for argument's sake alone?

I want to focus on the main line of Menzinger's argument, though, rather than listing his particularly crass statements on individual aspects of the debate. After all, for Bernstein's evaluation of this book, individual problematic remarks are unlikely to have had much bearing either way and his positive judgement will have hinged primarily on its general character and orientation. The most obvious affinity between Bernstein and Menzinger lay in the line of argument that Menzinger began by explaining that the 'hermetically self-contained Jewry that the antisemitic critique portrays' was increasingly becoming a thing of the past. Yet, not only was this 'no merit of the antisemites'. Far from it: 'to the extent that this progress is being reverted again it is primarily the antisemites who are to blame'.⁴¹ Antisemitism, in other words, was provoking the Jews into maintaining and reaffirming their separate identity. 'You can do them no bigger favour', Menzinger reproached the antisemites, 'than weld them together again to a concrete power. Your fuss and frenzy will grant them a renewed advantage [...] Just go on with your foolish endeavours that are doing everything to aggravate the Jewish Question and with it Jewry's exclusiveness'.⁴²

If antisemitism only reproduced and aggravated 'the Jewish Question', what was its likely or desirable solution? If one let 'the steady progress of modern development' run its course, then 'this Ahasver, i.e., the Jewish nation, will finally die a gentle death; it is precisely such a euthanasia of

³⁹ Ibid., 56. ⁴⁰ Ibid., 61. ⁴¹ Ibid., 80–81. ⁴² Ibid., 123.

Jewry into Germanism and other nationalities that should be the “solution of the Jewish Question””.⁴³ As Menzinger saw it, it was beyond doubt ‘that the infiltration of a national sphere by alien characteristics can cause harm’. This

is borne out not least by the fact that a Jewish Question exists. The much-used term ‘alien body’ is no mere phrase. Whether to reject, maintain [i.e., as a distinct entity], or absorb the alien body – that is the ‘question’. [...] the answer can only be: ‘absorption’ but this implies a substantial and grave burden of duties for both parties.⁴⁴

The magnitude of this challenge resulted not least from ‘the Jew’s lack of concreteness in his intellectual pursuits that is so conspicuous [...] Indeed’, and now Menzinger set in motion a whole barrage of stereotypes,

we surely know from our own experience how inhibiting these differences are and how they stand between ourselves and a Jew. His (discursive) intellect is less graphic but eagerly runs to and fro, the acrobatic finesse of his thinking, the sophistry with which he will suddenly interpret what was said in the first instance in a manner that entirely confounds us and yet cannot easily be denied – all this makes intercourse even with the noblest Jew difficult for us. Connected to this is a character trait of Jewry and the Jews that is particularly alienating: as a short hand one might call it their formalistic inclination. The Jewish religion is mainly based on a reciprocal contract with God. The strictest adherence to this contract determines the activities and aspirations of the Jew. In the same way we know the Jew in other respects too as somebody who will not budge and insists on his ‘entitlement’ (e.g. regarding the ‘pound of flesh’) and on the letter of a promise even when its spirit is being transgressed [...] None too surprisingly this leaves little room for religiosity, for spiritual edification, for an intimate reception of the ethical calling, for what the German circumscribes with the much-used term ‘*Gemüt*’ [soul].⁴⁵

Menzinger seemed determined to leave nothing out. ‘The Aryan, and the Germanic individual in particular’, he explained, had a ‘strong positive, affirmative and offensive’ disposition, while ‘the Jew is characterised by a spirit of negation and an inclination to be defensive’.⁴⁶ Needless to say, ‘Jewish work lacks thoroughness’ and this needed to be maintained ‘especially *vis-à-vis* the blindness of philosemitic rhetoric’.⁴⁷ Menzinger summed up his findings as follows:

We now know the Jew *qua* Jew from three interconnected sides; from the *exclusive* side that establishes him as someone superior to other human beings and compels him to isolate himself; from the *subjective* side in terms of the

⁴³ Ibid., 94. ⁴⁴ Ibid., 65. ⁴⁵ Ibid., 66–67. ⁴⁶ Ibid., 62. ⁴⁷ Ibid., 71.

arbitrariness that lets him place statute before nature in his relationship to God and the world; and from the '*decomposing*' side that, in short, removes him from the 'social' sphere. To the extent that Jewry conforms to this characterization,

he went on, antisemitism 'is surely justified. The only remaining question is: to what extent?'⁴⁸ Where the Jews were in fact assimilating and antisemitism could only slow down or reverse this process, antisemitism was obviously harmful and unjustified. But 'there are certain spheres, cultures, peoples, areas where it [i.e., antisemitism] is justified',⁴⁹ namely those

where the Jews are more Jewish than elsewhere, i.e., other characteristics and relationships have subordinated their Jewishness to a far lesser degree. Under these circumstances I find antisemitism not only entirely comprehensible but also in the interest of the people and thus more or less justified. Provided, that is, that it stays within the bounds of ethically appropriate defence and does not become an aggressor and criminal. There is actually one such country in our proximity: Russia.⁵⁰

Now, Bernstein introduced us to Menzinger's 'so very perceptive book' in the first place because he was so intrigued by Menzinger's 'notion [...] that a populace living for pleasure usually inclines more towards antisemitism than one that really works'. As we saw, Bernstein considered this a good explanation of goings-on in Paris as the Dreyfus Affair unfolded and told Eleanor Marx so in a letter. Here is the relevant passage from Menzinger's book in full:⁵¹

The less and the more monotonously people work the more intense the national contrasts are and arguably the political bustle is too. For a long time now the Jews have been a people of work. They love work more than holidays and politicking. Little wonder, that peoples of a different disposition are their enemies! As long as national life finds a particularly large measure of its expression in so-called customs, in festivals and political rhetoric it predisposes towards a 'barbaric' perception of the rest of the world. Were one to let the German people indulge for a rather protracted period of time its pleasure in national costume and its proclivity for loud and opulent festivities and for the much cited 'reflecting upon one's past' and the like – an attempt to kill the Jews would follow on the foot. In diligent London hardly anyone gives antisemitism a second thought, in 'cosy' cities like Vienna almost everyone does and the monotonous Russian circumstances that are so replete with festivals make for a particularly conducive seed bed for enmity towards Jews – though again less so for the peasant performing hard labour than for others. The more a people concerns itself with club insignia and political propaganda, as the German people does, the more difficult it will find it to

⁴⁸ Ibid., 101. ⁴⁹ Ibid., 123. ⁵⁰ Ibid., 124. ⁵¹ Ibid., 68–69.

get along with a people that limits itself to a few quiet and homely festivals as the Jews do. It will become easier, the more it accustoms itself to the division of labour that will soon explode national boundaries in the same way that science does.

Bernstein was presumably attracted to the materialist core of Menzinger's argument. As capitalism transformed the world more and more in its image, an increasingly sophisticated division of labour would emerge. The levelling effect of this process would render people increasingly indifferent to ethnic distinctions. This was a highly deterministic line of reasoning that deduced people's attitudes from the nature of their livelihood and their status within the division of labour. In short, it was a distinctly class-based interpretation – one that would be well in keeping with the 'deeply ingrained proletarian sense of class' that Eleanor Marx for one, according to Bernstein, had to suppress to take an anti-antisemitic stand. It is evident from her response to Bernstein that this was certainly Eleanor Marx's understanding. Bernstein paraphrased and eventually quoted from her letter of 11 March 1898. Knowing only what Bernstein had told her about Menzinger's position, she stated that

this idea had never struck her before but that she found it very interesting. 'An anti-Jewish campaign in East London', she went on, 'would (without putting too fine a point on things) be more excusable than it is in Paris. But – and I know the people of the East End very well – there of all places no real antisemitic sentiment exists. They may hate the "bloody foreigner" – although they hate him far less today than they did ten years ago. But it is the "foreigner", not the Jew, who is generally their enemy'.

To be sure, her reference to the East End sprang from the fact that it was the single most important site of Jewish immigration into Britain and all the friction that accompanied it. Yet the East End was also in a diverse but unambiguous way distinctly proletarian. Hence, her implication that 'the people of the East End' – and by this she obviously meant the non-Jewish inhabitants of the East End – were the sort of people who supposedly lacked antisemitic predilections because they 'really worked' was very much a manifestation of 'her deeply ingrained proletarian sense of class'.

She clearly thought she was confirming Menzinger's assumptions. Little did she know that she was in fact contradicting them. For Menzinger argued that the levelling effect of the increasingly sophisticated division of labour would render people oblivious to the significance of all ethnic distinctions. The distinction between non-Jews and Jews was his top priority but ultimately it was just a case in point for his general argument. Consequently, Eleanor Marx's contention that the people of the East End might hate the Jews because they were 'bloody foreigners' but not because they were Jews flatly contradicted Menzinger's contention.

Bernstein presumably thought that the levelling effect of the increasingly complex division of labour would ease class tensions too. But for our argument here, what Bernstein may or may not have thought is quite irrelevant. Eleanor Marx obviously did not pick up on what may have been going on in Bernstein's head and thought she was responding positively to his comments by automatically reading them through the prism of 'her deeply ingrained proletarian sense of class'. Bernstein, in turn, related her response to the readers of the *Neue Zeit* without suggesting that she had in fact misunderstood his intentions (and the thrust of Menzinger's argument). Now, if Eleanor Marx had suspected nothing and Bernstein himself now sanctioned her unsuspecting response, how could we possibly expect the poor readers of the *Neue Zeit* to suspect that they were in effect witnessing the birth of a distinct new take on the causes of antisemitism? What those who read Bernstein's obituary for Eleanor Marx could well be forgiven for taking away with them, though, was the suggestion that Menzinger's book was recommended reading for Social Democrats interested in 'the Jewish Question'. Consequently, whatever hints of a shift in emphasis Bernstein's obituary for Eleanor Marx may suggest, they were surely offset by the notions that Bernstein was effectively sanctioning by recommending Menzinger's book to the readership of the *Neue Zeit*.

The tragic death of Eleanor Marx touched very many of the party's members and supporters and it did so across all the emergent or already existing ideological and personal divides within Social Democracy. Her obituary would therefore have drawn an exceptionally wide readership. Many who were ordinarily disinclined to read the *Neue Zeit* because it was too theoretical for their liking may well have made an exception in this case. Moreover, in his obituary Bernstein made (his interpretation of) Eleanor Marx's Jewish concerns a major issue. His implicit recommendation of Menzinger's book was therefore made to an unusually wide audience and as part of a discussion that explicitly dealt with 'Jewish' issues. Consequently, its impact must have been inordinately greater than that of his meek affirmation of 'philosemitism' (in inverted commas) made in a footnote attached to a theoretical text dealing with an altogether different issue and its repetition a year later, proffered upon some prodding to an interviewer from the *Jewish Chronicle*.

'THE JEWISH QUESTION' IN REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA (1906)

In March 1906, Bernstein published a discussion of revolutionary Russia in the revisionist flagship, the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*.⁵² It offers an interesting glimpse of his attitudes roughly halfway through his 'middle period'. He

⁵² Eduard Bernstein, 'Fragen der Taktik in Russland,' in *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 10-I, 3 (March 1906): 208-217. Hereafter Bernstein, 'Fragen der Taktik'.

was commenting on the deliberations among Russian Socialists regarding the pending elections to the First Duma. Should the elections merely be boycotted or should Socialists actively seek to sabotage the elections and shame those who participated? 'Especially parts of the Bund'⁵³ had opted for the latter, which he considered the wrong decision. To Bernstein's mind, 'two essential features' set the Russian Revolution apart from the revolutions of 1848/1849. Firstly, there was the relationship between the centre and the periphery. The centres of sustained revolutionary activity had been mainly at the western periphery and neither Moscow nor Petersburg had functioned 'as a Russian Paris'. Without firm control of these two centres any hope of defeating the tsarist regime for good was illusory. The second distinguishing 'feature' Bernstein then immediately introduced as a 'problem'. This 'second problem' was 'the Jewish Question'.⁵⁴

This was no unreasonable suggestion. The Jewish experience in 1848 had been more ambiguous than Bernstein would presumably have cared to admit. Yet the problems faced by Russian Jewry in the revolutionary era were of an entirely different order of magnitude. Nor indeed were these problems merely their concern. The revolution was accompanied by an appalling wave of pogroms and antisemitism emerged more forcefully than ever as part and parcel of the counter-revolutionary rallying cry both from above and below. Moreover, as Shmuel Galai has recently pointed out,⁵⁵ the First Duma's deliberations on 'the Jewish Question' would in fact play a crucial role in precipitating its dissolution.

Yet none of this was what concerned Bernstein. His worry sprang from the participation of Jews in the revolution. In numerous localities, Jews not only belonged to the proletariat but *were* the proletariat. Moreover, they were doubly discriminated both as proletarians and as Jews. Little wonder that Jews played such an active role in the revolutionary movement. Within a relatively short time, the *Bund* had managed to acquire a membership far exceeding that of all other Socialist organisations in Russia and one had to acknowledge that it was by far the most effective revolutionary force. It is statements like these that have generally been taken as evidence for the fundamental shift in Bernstein's outlook and emphasis and they are indeed noteworthy, as far as they go.

Let us not forget, though, that this article was primarily a critique of a specific policy suggested by the *Bund*. Bernstein's acknowledgement of the *Bund*'s merits was designed to pave the way for a significant 'but'. Yet even his praise of the *Bund* was ultimately of a defensive nature. 'The Russian Jew' had no ambitions to take charge of any particular territory, he merely wanted 'the right to be equally at home throughout the empire', Bernstein

⁵³ Ibid., 212. ⁵⁴ Ibid., 213.

⁵⁵ Shmuel Galai, 'The Jewish Question as a Russian Problem: The Debates in the First State Duma,' in *Revolutionary Russia* 17, 1 (2004): 31–68.

claimed. Hence mobility was his foremost political aspiration and where he achieved it he tended to become a Russifying factor. 'As a revolutionary he primarily leans towards centralization'.⁵⁶ It would be unfair, in other words, to suspect Russian Jewry in general, and those Jews involved in the revolutionary struggle in particular, of Jewish separatism. Bernstein acknowledged the merits of the *Bund* and the Jewish revolutionaries more generally not although their goals questioned the assimilationist consensus but because, as he saw it, they were perfectly compatible with it.

So far so good. 'But there is a flip side to this disposition that can easily prove fatal to the Revolution [*der Revolution leicht verhängnisvoll werden kann*]'. To explain this potentially lethal threat, Bernstein enlisted one of his favourite philosophers, the German Idealist, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814). Fichte had pointed out that the German people, 'since it has no history of its own, is called upon to construct its *Reich* from pure intellect'. Now, 'the Russian Jew' had even less of a history of his own than 'the German' in Fichte's day and was therefore all the more compelled to develop his politics relying purely on his intellect. Max Weber had recently pointed out how prominently epistemological issues and 'the hunger for principles' featured in the periodicals of the Russian Socialists. 'Among those so hungry for principles the Socialists of Jewish extraction are more often than not the hungriest'. The Russian Socialist, 'and especially the Jewish-Russian Socialist has the quest for the *absolute* in his blood'. This, Bernstein concluded, explained why the *Bund* took such an ultra-radical position *vis-à-vis* the Duma elections.⁵⁷

In short, Bernstein discussed what was, to his mind, the *Bund's* mistaken stance on a particular issue not by taking that stance seriously on its own terms but by explaining it as an outflow of a more general disposition that was supposedly specifically Jewish. All its relative sophistication notwithstanding, the way in which Bernstein introduced and characterised this disposition played very neatly to the popular stereotypes of 'the Jews' as rootless intellectuals, as a collective that is far too given to theory and hence inept in practical matters and capable only of nihilistic negation but not of constructive criticism. Moreover, Bernstein made it quite clear that this disposition was far more than a mere nuisance factor. As we saw, he introduced it as an issue that 'can easily prove fatal to the Revolution'. None of this precludes us from assuming that the thought processes underlying this article were a stepping stone in the long-term transformation of Bernstein's stance. Yet contemporary readers of this article would surely have needed to be extraordinarily prescient to perceive of these and similar remarks as a serious challenge to the fundamental consensus on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' within the party.

⁵⁶ Bernstein, 'Fragen der Taktik,' loc cit. ⁵⁷ Ibid., 214.

In the second volume of his history of the labour movement in Berlin, published in 1907, Bernstein discussed the Social Democratic response to the initial upsurge in political antisemitism in the early 1880s. This discussion allows us to examine to what extent (if any) his gradual shift in emphasis had led him to reassess his own earlier position. Social Democratic anti-antisemitism in Berlin took off in earnest with a workers' assembly on 11 January 1881. As Bernstein reported, the lead speaker at this rally 'harshly characterised' the 'dissimulation' inherent in the antisemitic propaganda. Nobody was suggesting that the Social Democrats should 'whitewash [*beschönigen*] the Jews' faults', he had clarified. They should feel compelled, though, to oppose a form of propaganda that was reactionary and 'medieval' in character. Bernstein added that virtually all the following speakers argued in the same vein.⁵⁸ Thus far, Bernstein's remarks had merely been descriptive, of course. Yet the anti-antisemitic response he was describing clearly still struck him as an unmitigated success story when writing this account more than twenty-five years later. This particular assembly had been a 'great success', he went on. It had been an 'unmistakable manifestation of the Social Democratic orientation'. As such it had been 'echoed most enthusiastically' and served as an example for Social Democrats across the country.⁵⁹ In Berlin itself, the Social Democrats had kept up their opposition to the antisemitic movement. Repeatedly they attended and then took control of assemblies initially convened by the antisemites. On 6 September 1881, for instance, they heckled an antisemite declaring his candidacy for the *Reichstag*. 'When the antisemitic chieftain indulged in a number of denunciatory attacks on Social Democracy, there was so much pandemonium' that the antisemitic speaker decided to cut his losses and abort his speech voluntarily.⁶⁰ Note the clear emphasis Bernstein's report places on the fact that this Social Democratic anti-antisemitism took issue with the antisemites' anti-Socialism rather than their stance regarding 'the Jews'. As late as 1907, Bernstein was perfectly happy to relate all this in an utterly uncritical fashion.

THE SHIFT IN BERNSTEIN'S EMPHASIS DURING THE WAR

A major shift in Bernstein's perceptions regarding antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' clearly did occur around the middle of the First World War. The best part of a year into the war (in June 1915) he had still published an article in the *Friedens-Warte* in which he subsumed Jewry under the 'over-rated forces for peace'.⁶¹ Prior to the war, Bernstein explained, many in the

⁵⁸ Bernstein, *Geschichte*, 2: 60. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2: 61. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2: 67–68.

⁶¹ Eduard Bernstein, 'Überschätzte Friedensmächte,' in *Friedens-Warte* 17 (1915): 127–133. Reprint in Ludger Heid (ed.), *Eduard Bernstein. "Ich bin der Letzte, der dazu schweigt"* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2004): 187–197.

peace movement had assumed that certain groups would oppose or at least refuse to support the war. The actual course of events had brought a number of surprises and disappointments in this respect. It was an exaggeration to declare the Second International dead, but it had certainly failed to muster the sort of strong opposition to the war one would have expected. What, Bernstein continued, 'of the other Internationals? What of the Black and the Golden International [i.e., Catholicism and Jewry]? What of Jewry that has so often been described as a major International [...]?'⁶² On occasions like this it is hard to decide whether we should admire Bernstein's bravery in trying to appropriate the terminology of his political opponents or be more concerned about the way in which the use of that terminology in effect acknowledges his opponents' terms of reference. In any case, many had assumed, Bernstein went on, that the cosmopolitanism to which the Jews were predestined by their history would allow them to stand above national prejudice and propagate reconciliation between the belligerent powers. Yet the war had shown this assumption to be erroneous, 'it has shown that most Jews have no sense or understanding for what follows from the fate of their people'.⁶³ The simple truth of the matter was that Jewry had been 'totally de-internationalized and thus eradicated as a peace factor'.⁶⁴

Yet within a year Bernstein had changed his tune entirely. Now Jewish cosmopolitanism featured prominently as a live force in his discussion of the war and its implications. Bernstein's reconsideration of the issue found its most comprehensive expression in a pamphlet published in the spring of 1917 under the title *Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkriege* [The Jews' Tasks during the World War]. As he explained in its preface, the main impulse for his decision to revisit the issue had been an invitation to do so from the editors of *der yidisher kempfer* [The Jewish Militant], a Labour Zionist periodical based in New York.⁶⁵ The bulk of the discussion published as *Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkriege* the following spring was first published in *der yidisher kempfer* in three instalments in late September and early October 1916. Presumably while he was preparing his piece for *der yidisher kempfer* he also formulated a first, already fairly complete outline of his emerging new approach for the August/September 1916 edition of the *Friedens-Warte*.⁶⁶ Almost half of this article was actually an extremely detailed (and almost entirely affirmative) paraphrase of an unsigned article 'On Jewish Patriotism' published in *The Nation* on 8 July 1916.⁶⁷ The latter offered a fairly subtle discussion of the various ways in which Europe's Jewries might position themselves *vis-à-vis* the situation created by the war. It was clearly a major

⁶² Ibid., 188. ⁶³ Ibid., 190. ⁶⁴ Ibid., 191.

⁶⁵ Eduard Bernstein, *Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkriege* (Berlin: Erich Reiss, 1917): 7. Hereafter Bernstein, *Aufgaben*.

⁶⁶ Idem, 'Vom Patriotismus der Juden,' [On the Patriotism of the Jews] in *Die Friedens-Warte* 18, 8/9 (August/September 1916): 243–248. Hereafter Bernstein, 'Patriotismus'.

⁶⁷ *The Nation* 19, 15 (8 July 1916): 432–434.

impulse giver for Bernstein's reconsideration of his position and it also featured prominently in *Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkriege*.⁶⁸

In April 1917, the *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte* provided Bernstein with an opportunity to plug his pamphlet.⁶⁹ This was no coincidence, of course. Like Buber's *Der Jude*, the *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte* was a project 'brought into existence by the *Ostjudenfrage*'.⁷⁰ As is well known, the German occupation of vast swathes of Eastern Europe, including substantial areas of dense Jewish settlement, fundamentally modified perceptions of Eastern Jewry among Jews and non-Jews alike and thus transformed the terms of reference for debates on 'the Jewish Question'.⁷¹ In this respect, Bernstein was no exception. As he pointed out at the beginning of his second article in the *Friedens-Warte*, his earlier discussion had failed to exhaust the issue 'above all because one cannot consider the political stance of the Jewish citizens of central and western Europe the norm and treat the stance of east European Jewry as coincidental and a mere deviation from Jewish political thought'.⁷²

Antisemitism barely features in these texts and Bernstein gave no indication that it was a determining factor in his change of tack at this particular juncture. To be sure, it invariably formed part of the backdrop to Bernstein's shift in emphasis. For the issue of eastern Jewry was central to the doomsday scenarios that helped pave the way for the resurgence of political antisemitism. On the other hand, between Bernstein's initial presentation of his new ideas in the summer and early autumn of 1916 and the publication of *Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkriege* in the spring of 1917 lay the Prussian War Ministry's infamous *Juden-zählung* (Jew Census) of November 1916 and the antisemitic campaign that precipitated and accompanied it. For many Jews this was a crucial and traumatic watershed, yet in *Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkriege* Bernstein did not address this development. On the contrary, he in fact placed considerable emphasis on the responsibilities Jewry needed to face up to if it wished to be treated with compassion and respect. This makes it all the more evident that Bernstein's increased sensitivity for the greater threat posed by resurgent political antisemitism really was fundamentally a post-war development.

Bernstein's line of argument now went as follows.⁷³ For 'extremely worthy' reasons many Jews were trying to shed all ties to their Jewish background. They saw these ties as a constraint that infringed on their identity as a citizen and their cosmopolitan inclinations. Yet their assumption that they therefore ought to cut those ties altogether was predicated on a notion that

⁶⁸ Cf. Bernstein, *Aufgaben*, 25–30.

⁶⁹ Idem, 'Selbstanzeige: Vom Mittlerberuf der Juden,' in *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte* 1, 14 (25 April 1917): 397–401. Hereafter Bernstein, 'Selbstanzeige'.

⁷⁰ Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press [2nd edition], 1999): 169.

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 139–184. ⁷² Bernstein, 'Patriotismus', 244. ⁷³ Idem, 'Selbstanzeige,' 399–400.

the historical development had proved wrong. Initially it had been possible to believe that the naturalisation of the Jews and their full participation in the life of the established nations would also allow them to acquire a cosmopolitan orientation. Yet more recently a tidal wave of nationalist and imperialist propaganda had inundated these established nations and the national idea had been redefined in a way that increasingly rendered it incompatible with cosmopolitan notions. Where this new trend became dominant, Jewish integration into the established nations obviously implicated them in this trend and precluded progress towards a cosmopolitan orientation.

Bernstein was not claiming that the conventional assimilationist stance had been wrong all along. He was arguing that it was no longer a fully adequate solution because the circumstances had changed. Nor was there any suggestion that the assimilationist solution struck him as any less desirable now than it had done before or that he now considered it theoretically impossible. Consequently, Bernstein's change in tack did not require Socialists to question their preconceptions regarding 'the Jewish Question' nor did it imply the need to give up the vision of a world in which Jewry no longer existed as a distinct entity.

Fortunately, Bernstein explained, the Jew could protect himself against becoming infected with the dominant nationalist and imperialist trend. He could do so by focusing on the fact that he originated in a people whose descendents formed no nation of their own. Consequently, the Jews were the guests of the family of nations and their approach to the nationalities issue could not but be cosmopolitan. The Jew was in fact under a twofold obligation [*für den Juden unter zweifachem Gesichtspunkt Pflicht*] to make this his frame of reference. This obligation resulted from his duty towards the nation whose citizen he was, on the one hand, and from this duty towards the ethnic community he originated in, on the other.

Duty and obligation were indeed Bernstein's lead concepts in this entire discussion. God forbid that anyone let the horrific cataclysm of war provoke him or her into throwing the claims of their nation or ethnic group back in its face with a sense of defiance, lust or abandon! Bernstein distinguished between national sentiments and nationalist thought.⁷⁴ National sentiment he considered a mere extension of people's sense of mutual belonging in a tribal or ethnic group.⁷⁵ To Bernstein's mind, people developed this sound sense of national belonging by default. On the other hand, it could be perverted, transforming it into nationalistic chauvinism and hyperbole. Yet anyone who wanted to question, let alone abandon, this sense of national belonging needed to fulfil certain criteria to pass muster with Eduard Bernstein.⁷⁶

He had no time for those who disregarded the obligations towards their nation merely out of idleness or in order to attain pleasure or profit [*Wer aus*

⁷⁴ Idem, *Aufgaben*, 15. ⁷⁵ Ibid., 16–17. ⁷⁶ Ibid., 19.

Genuss- oder Gewinnsucht, anders ausgedrückt: aus Bequemlichkeit vaterlandslos ist]. Yet again, Bernstein resorted to the accepted polemical terminology, in this case by using the adjective 'vaterlandslos'. Again we might speculate that Bernstein was perhaps trying to reclaim for positive purposes a concept that others used pejoratively. Yet in this case Bernstein was in fact using the term he may have wanted to reclaim to denote a phenomenon of which he himself disapproved. These idle hedonists or profiteers, then, were not citizens of the world but simply exploiters of the world. For all citizenship, including citizenship of the world, hinged on a sense of duty. Only those who acted constructively in the world's interest could claim to be genuine cosmopolitans. All such activity depended on mediation and compromise and who should know this better than the Jews? Jewry as a whole was a citizen or compatriot [*Mitbürger*] of all peoples and thus duty-bound to initiate and precipitate mediation and compromise.⁷⁷

Bernstein then went on to distinguish more systematically between three forms of Jewish patriotism. This entire line of argument was already fully developed in his second article for the *Friedens-Warte*. These three forms of Jewish patriotism hinged on the Jews' respective country of residence (*Landespatriotismus*), the Jewish community itself (*Stammes-patriotismus*) and, finally, a cosmopolitan orientation (*weltbürgerlicher Patriotismus*). To be sure, Bernstein's ideal was ultimately a balanced combination of all three types of patriotism. Yet if we take a detailed look at his line of argument a more nuanced picture emerges. For his exposition by no means placed all three forms of patriotism on a par. It was in fact an essentially defensive and indeed negative approach that led him to emphasise Jewry's supposedly natural propensity for cosmopolitan patriotism.

For the most part, *Landespatriotismus* and *Stammes-patriotismus* were perfectly compatible, Bernstein explained, provided neither was taken too far. Yet even then these two forms of patriotism could cause conflicts of conscience and the current World War offered ample proof for this.⁷⁸ How did Bernstein's argument move from these possible conflicts of interest between *Landespatriotismus* and *Stammes-patriotismus* to cosmopolitan patriotism? It essentially did so by stealth. One can only assume that Bernstein considered it a foregone conclusion that when in doubt Jewry would privilege *Stammes-patriotismus* over *Landespatriotismus*. Bernstein did not say so, let alone did he in any way address how and why this would, could, or should be the case. Yet without this underlying assumption his line of argument would break. For he conceded that the Jews would be entirely justified in making *Stammes-patriotismus* their priority if the fate of Jewry were all that was at stake in this war. Yet the outcome of the war would in fact have massive ramifications far beyond the concerns of the Jews.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 33. ⁷⁸ *Idem*, 'Patriotismus,' 244.

Hence, if a substantial proportion of Jewry wanted to determine its stance in this catastrophic conflict exclusively by asking: what will secure immediate gratification for myself and my brethren? without showing the slightest concern as to whether this gratification might be inextricably linked to the ruin of others – then it could easily happen that history in conjunction with those others would confront these sections of Jewry with the words that the great playwright has the Doge address to Shylock's conscience in the Merchant of Venice: 'How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?'⁷⁹

This was the highly undesirable likely outcome if *Landespatriotismus* and *Stammespatritismus* were all we had up our sleeves. Fortunately, though, this outcome can be averted. The name of the antidote is cosmopolitanism. 'Clearly, then', Bernstein added at this juncture in *Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkrieg*, 'there is another perspective at stake here that allows us to speak of a third kind of patriotism, namely the already mentioned cosmopolitan perspective or, to use a better term, the perspective of the citizen of the world'. While no preserve of the Jews, given their own status in history this perspective was in particular measure part of their heritage. Hence, 'the Jew who does not take assimilation to the point of treating his origin with contempt [...] must know and feel cosmopolitan patriotism'.⁸⁰ Cosmopolitanism, Bernstein then reiterated for good measure, was not grounded in 'national or ethnic rootlessness'. Instead, it grew from

the conjunction of a specific sense of duty with the sense of belonging to the great family of peoples that constitutes the cosmos of our planet. And since this cosmos consists not of amorphous chaos but of an orderly system in which peoples and nation states live next to and with each other cosmopolitan patriotism does not contradict national and ethnic patriotism but is its legitimate complement and, as the peoples draw closer, its *necessary* complement. Nobody needs to be more aware of this than the Jew and the descendent of Jews.⁸¹

From all this it is more than evident that Bernstein's enthusiasm for the Jewish propensity to cosmopolitanism that now featured so prominently in his discussion was fundamentally defensive in nature. His whole discussion amounted to an ingenuous attempt to salvage the assimilationist goal. How could one uphold the assimilationist claim if the nations one was asking the Jews to assimilate to were capable of unleashing such carnage and wreaking such havoc on the well being of mankind? Clearly, the war had discredited the conventional and straightforward model of assimilation. Most likely to benefit from this development were those who had nailed their flag to the mast of Jewish separatism in one guise or another. Bernstein did not deny that this was an understandable response but he was as convinced as ever

⁷⁹ Ibid., 247. ⁸⁰ Idem, *Aufgaben*, 46–47. ⁸¹ Idem, 'Patriotismus,' 248.

that it was an undesirable one that would cause more problems than it could possibly hope to solve.

Now a group of Labour Zionists had asked him to comment on the issue and he did so with his usual sense of seriousness and conviction. He acknowledged that the war had discredited the nations to which the Jews were being asked to assimilate and hence, to some extent, the conventional concept of assimilation itself. Yet he also made it perfectly clear that Zionism was not only a futile response to this development but in fact a mere mirror image of the iniquity that it claimed to tackle. Salvation and the true Jewish calling lay elsewhere altogether, namely, in Jewry's propensity for cosmopolitanism. The fact that Bernstein had emphatically denied the very existence of this propensity only a year earlier already indicates that his new-found enthusiasm hardly sprouted spontaneously. Yet it was apparently the only strategy he could think of to stop the war whose catastrophic implications he acknowledged from wreaking even more havoc on humanity by becoming an excuse for Jewish separatism. Consequently his approach to Jewish cosmopolitanism was negative twice over. His interest in it sprang from the need to contain Jewish separatism in the first place and he in fact spent more time and effort explaining its necessary limits than expounding its merits. To be sure, Bernstein made his case with quite a measure of subtlety and sensitivity. To use a Lutheran concept for a moment, Bernstein took good care to condemn the sin but not the sinner. Because he wanted the sinner to repent, he tried his level best not to alienate him. That does not, however, change the fact that he continued to condemn the sin of Jewish separatism as he always had done.

It is conceivable, of course, that Bernstein's affection for some of the sinners did eventually begin to wear down his misgivings about the sin. Yet whatever may have transpired in this direction is clearly part of Bernstein's post-war biography. Throughout the pre-war period his peers and contemporaries would have been hard-pressed to perceive of Bernstein's stance on antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' as diverging from the general consensus in the party. Indeed, even when his position did begin to shift seriously from the middle of the war onwards, few would have found it a major challenge to reconcile Bernstein's new emphases with their well-established preconceptions and ultimate dream of a future without Jews.

MEHRING VS. BERNSTEIN (1904)

Just how fluid and fickle Bernstein's position remained throughout the pre-war period is also borne out by an extremely telling conflict between Mehring and Bernstein in 1904 in the course of which Mehring publicly accused Bernstein of antisemitism. The conflict leading to this rather remarkable incident that seems to have gone almost entirely unnoticed in

the literature⁸² was in an important sense actually a sequel to the events in Dresden the year before.⁸³

We have an interesting account of the background to this conflict by Kautsky. As we saw, Kautsky had been among Mehring's staunchest defenders at the Party Congress in Dresden. Even at the best of times relations between them were far from smooth, though, and as the conflict between radicals and centrists in the party escalated over the following decade their relationship deteriorated dramatically. By the spring of 1912, Kautsky was convinced that Mehring really was deranged but no less dangerous a political opponent for it. A year later he effectively managed to sack Mehring from the *Neue Zeit* but on the whole he was reluctant to express the full extent of his misgivings about Mehring in public. This changed in June 1918 when Mehring publicly declared his support for the Bolsheviks (and they in turn made him a member of the Russian Academy of Social Sciences.) Kautsky felt it was now his duty finally to denounce Mehring to all and sundry as the maniac and foe that he was. Before publishing his all-out attack on Mehring, though, he had the manuscript printed and circulated it among his associates.⁸⁴ When they advised him against publishing it he followed their advice and abandoned the project.

In his planned pamphlet, Kautsky also discussed the goings-on at the Party Congress of 1903 in Dresden. Back then 'Mehring's position in the party hung by a thread', Kautsky now claimed. This thread 'would perhaps have torn if Bernstein had presented the letters Mehring wrote to him in 1901 and 1902'. In these letters Mehring expressed his sympathies for Bernstein while criticising Kautsky. They therefore demonstrated, Kautsky implied, that one by no means needed to hark back to conflicts that transpired decades earlier to demonstrate how Mehring's personal vendettas led him to adopt and abandon political opinions and allegiances in an utterly erratic fashion. Yet unfortunately Bernstein had kept quiet in 1903. 'Only a year later', Kautsky added, 'on the occasion of a new conflict', had Bernstein made the letters public, 'but by then the psychological momentum had abated', and the publication of the letters failed to turn the situation around.⁸⁵ It is doubly ironic that Kautsky was among Mehring's staunchest defenders not only in 1903 but also when Bernstein launched his belated attack on Mehring in 1904. He could explain his behaviour in 1903 by claiming he would have acted differently, had he known then what Bernstein only made public a year later. Yet this hardly explained why he stood by Mehring even when Bernstein did then publish the (supposedly) incriminating material.

⁸² The only scholar to have picked up on this astounding occurrence is to my knowledge Lambrecht who does not, however, discuss it (Lambrecht, *Subjektivität*, 272 n190.)

⁸³ For a more detailed discussion of this dispute, cf. Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 181–193.

⁸⁴ Karl Kautsky, *Franz Mehring und die deutsche Sozialdemokratie* (Dessau: Buchdruckerei H. Franke, [1918] n.d.).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

Bernstein may indeed have missed a singularly good opportunity to break Mehring's neck in Dresden. On the other hand, in 1904 he had a prerequisite for a sustained assault on Mehring at his disposal that he had lacked the year before. He now stood at the helm of a political periodical of his own, the weekly *Das Neue Montagsblatt* [New Monday Paper], of which thirty editions were published between 2 May and 21 November 1904. *Montagsblatt* and *Leipziger Volkszeitung* were persistently at loggerheads and the gloves were clearly off between the two battling editors-in-chief. There can be no doubt that Bernstein meant his attack on Mehring in the autumn of 1904 as an extremely serious attempt to see Mehring banished to the fringes of the party and its press. From Mehring's point of view, conversely, Bernstein was a renegade for whom there was ultimately no legitimate place within the party.

The conflict began during the Party Congress in Bremen in September 1904 when one of the delegates alluded to Bebel's remark in Dresden the year before that Mehring was a 'psychological enigma'. Mehring's deputy, Gustav Jaechh (1866–1907), who was effectively in charge of the day-to-day running of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* during Mehring's tenure as editor-in-chief, published a rather disproportionate response to this allusion. As a result, a substantial number of delegates suggested the Congress should censure the paper for its inappropriate intervention. The Congress subsequently discussed this motion even though the paper had already publicly retracted Jaechh's contentious remarks. When Mehring published an editorial rebuking the delegates for this, to his mind, outrageous behaviour, a party assembly in Leipzig in turn censured him for his criticism of the delegates. Thereupon, both Mehring and Jaechh resigned, only to be reinstated by a far larger assembly a week later. This would presumably have been the end of the matter, had it not been for Bernstein's decision to intervene.

For four consecutive weeks following the Party Congress, the *Montagsblatt* fired a barrage of criticisms, accusations, and insults at Mehring and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* responded in kind. Eventually both sides appealed to the *Parteivorstand* to resolve the conflict but this did not prevent them from escalating the conflict yet further while the *Parteivorstand* deliberated. In the 24 October edition of his *Montagsblatt*, Bernstein published a long article under the title 'The Mehring Case. Settling the Score'. Much as he welcomed the fact that the *Parteivorstand* would resolve the matter, he wrote, he nevertheless felt duty-bound to unmask Mehring's specific brand of 'Steglitz-style historiography [*Steglitzer Geschichtsschreibung*]' in public too.⁸⁶

'You will have read Bernstein's most recent gossip', Mehring wrote to Kautsky the following day (25 October). 'In my initial outrage about his

⁸⁶ Eduard Bernstein, 'Der Fall Mehring. Eine Abrechnung,' in *Das neue Montagsblatt* [hereafter *Montagsblatt*] 1, 26 (24 October 1904): 2–3. Steglitz was the suburb of Berlin in which Mehring lived.

perfidious mendacity I wrote a long rejoinder but then, upon more reasoned consideration, withdrew it and merely had a few copies made which I've had sent to the *Parteivorstand* [. . .] I enclose two copies, one for you and one for Wurm'.⁸⁷ On 26 October, Bebel, in turn, wrote to Mehring, informing him that the *Vorstand* had reached its decision (without, however, hinting at the outcome which would be made public at the end of the week). Bebel acknowledged Mehring's 'statement which we received from the editorial office of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* yesterday evening'.⁸⁸ [. . .] I for my person', Bebel continued,

would like to add that I welcome it as an act of self-denial if you refrain from publishing your response to Bernstein's article [. . .] I doubt that many readers of the *Neue Montagsblatt* will have been interested in his statement and very few will have read it all the way through. As far as I can see the hostile press has taken no notice of it either, the best indicator that it has made no impression.⁸⁹

On 28 October, the *Parteivorstand* issued its decision. It ruled that the *Montagsblatt* had made the first inappropriate move but apportioned the blame for the subsequent escalation of the conflict to both parties in fairly equal measure. For Mehring, 'self-denial' was now no longer an option. He extensively revised the response he had initially decided to hold back and published it in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* under the title 'The Ultimate Lesson'.

One of the issues that had reverberated throughout this conflict was the following. Mehring had initially acknowledged Bernstein as an authority on Lassalle but later dismissed him as incompetent. Mehring maintained that he changed his opinion because more recent comments by Bernstein questioned his earlier, more positive assessment. Bernstein denied this and claimed that Mehring's changed assessment was merely part and parcel of his personally motivated vendetta against him. Out to teach Bernstein his 'ultimate lesson', Mehring now returned to this point and used it to launch a most astounding attack on Bernstein:

Does Eduard Bernstein not know that his opinions on Lassalle and mine are 'totally different', so that I can also dismiss an opinion of his on Lassalle for other reasons than the dishonest ones he attributes to me? Does Eduard Bernstein not realize that he hardly qualifies as an infallible authority on

⁸⁷ IISH Karl Kautsky D XVII: 236. Kautsky's copy of the galleys of the article, originally entitled 'Revolverjournalisten [gutter press journalists]' (hereafter Mehring, 'Revolverjournalisten'), is in his 'Mehring Dossier' [IISH Karl Kautsky G7: 195]; I came across a second copy among Motteler's papers [IISH Motteler: 2134].

⁸⁸ This obviously refers to the proofs of the 'Revolverjournalisten' draft and not to Mehring's comments in the 27 October edition of the *LVZ* as Beske and Müller suggest (*ABARS* 9: 398 *n1128*, *1128a*).

⁸⁹ Fonds 201: 739; published in *ABARS* 9: 79–80.

Lassalle, if for no other reason, then simply because he denigrates the very Lassalle whose admiring biographer and editor he plays in public all the more maliciously in private? Oh, Eduard Bernstein knows that full well. For in a letter he wrote me and the original of which I have before me, he says, in these exact words (I have added only the emphasis):

‘Finally I have to come back to our conversation about Lassalle. We would be fooling ourselves were we to deny that we simply look at Lassalle *from totally different perspectives*. Here each of us is apparently affected by personal motives. [...] *for me he epitomizes – and the more so, the more I concern myself with him – several exceptionally unsympathetic qualities of German Jewry* [*der Typus einiger ganz besonders unsympathischer Eigenschaften der deutschen Juden*]. His great talent, as well as the sincerity of his efforts I acknowledge as you do. *But the way in which he proceeds, his literary manner, is often almost repulsively histrionic*. His examples, if one looks into them more closely, as I was, of course, compelled to do, *are often the meanest advocate’s tricks*. I have often made the *worst experiences* with him’.⁹⁰

In the initial version he then decided not to publish, Mehring continued at this point as follows: ‘How could I admire a party comrade who honours me with such fair professions as anything other than an infallible authority on Lassalle’. He then referred to an earlier attempt on his part to break off relations with Bernstein by simply not responding to his advances, assuming that Bernstein would take his hint. Giving his attack on Bernstein a rather dizzying turn, he finally added: ‘The “exceptionally unsympathetic quality” by no means of “German Jewry” [as a whole] but of the Berlin *Mühlendammer*, not to understand when one shows them the door politely’, had not been one he previously associated with Bernstein. ‘Perhaps I was wrong’.⁹¹

This was a breathtaking achievement, even by Mehring’s standards. First he implicitly accused Bernstein of antisemitism because of his remarks about Lassalle. Now he deployed a well-established anti-Jewish stereotype (‘*Mühlendammer*’) against Bernstein virtually in the same breath. Yet he deployed it in an extremely clever manner. On the one hand, he characterised Bernstein’s own behaviour as typically Jewish. On the other hand, Mehring’s reference to the fact that the pushiness of the *Mühlendammer* was typical of some but not all Jews allowed him to contrast his own differentiated position to Bernstein’s sweeping claims about German Jewry as a whole. Mehring’s initial formulation effectively criticised Bernstein for being an antisemite and for being a Jew in one breath.

⁹⁰ Franz Mehring, ‘Die letzte Lektion,’ in *LVZ* 11, 253 (29 October 1904): 2. Hereafter Mehring, ‘Letzte Lektion’.

⁹¹ Idem, ‘Revolverjournalisten’.

When he revised his draft for publication it seems to have dawned on Mehring that this double whammy was perhaps a little too convoluted. For effect, if nothing else, he would need to restrict himself to one or the other – he could take on either Bernstein the Jew or Bernstein the antisemite but not both in one sweep. In the event, he opted for the latter. He dropped the issue of the *Mühlendammer* and their pushiness. Instead, he now explicitly called Bernstein an antisemite. Following the quote from Bernstein's letter, the published version of the article concluded as follows:

And this Eduard Bernstein, who makes me a confidant of his antisemitic resentment of the 'Jew' Lassalle accuses me of 'gutter journalism' because I cannot approve of his publicly advertised 'Neo-Lassalleanism'! One will understand that after all this I can have no further dealings with Eduard Bernstein. I would willingly have spared him this ultimate lesson, but I have explained at the outset why I had to defend myself. Now, however, I am through with this man and shall let his mud volcano spew forth of a Monday whatever it will.⁹²

Thus Mehring opted for an outright anti-antisemitic attack, bravely disregarding the risks and vagaries of 'philosemitism' he had spent so many years so emphatically warning his fellow Social Democrats about! Yet what was Mehring actually taking issue with? Are we to assume that Mehring objected, as a matter of principle, to the generalisation that lay in Bernstein's imputation of faults to German Jewry in its entirety? That is surely an implausible suggestion, given how fond Mehring was of such generalisations himself. As Mehring's reference to 'the "Jew" Lassalle' indicates, it was not Bernstein's stereotyping as such nor its specific content that Mehring rejected. Mehring's judgement in this instance hinged not so much on what was being said about Jews but rather on who was saying it about whom. The person making the remarks was Bernstein, a political opponent whose good faith Mehring fundamentally questioned. The person about whom the remarks were being made was an individual whom Mehring revered and who, as Mehring saw it, had transcended his Jewishness. What really outraged Mehring was the fact that Bernstein dared call Lassalle a Jew.⁹³ Why calling someone a Jew effectively implied a denunciation of that person was an issue that troubled neither Mehring nor, as we saw earlier, Bernstein. What did trouble him was the fact that in this instance that denunciation had hit the wrong man. Not the stereotyping itself made Bernstein an antisemite but its misapplication.

⁹² Idem, 'Letzte Lektion'.

⁹³ At this time, neither Mehring nor Bernstein were familiar with the pejorative remarks referring to Lassalle's Jewishness in the correspondence between Marx and Engels to which they only became privy in 1910.

Mehring's denunciation of Bernstein as an antisemite on this occasion was, of course, little more than a freak occurrence. Take as an illustration the following slightly later exchange. As we saw, Bernstein accused Mehring in 1904 of having developed his own particular brand of 'Steglitz-style historiography'. In the autumn of 1909 he accused him of relying on his own particular brand of 'outer Pomeranian historiography' (Mehring grew up in outer Pomerania). To this Mehring responded as follows: 'What an excellent habit to mock someone's stance by reproaching him for his place of birth! Was comrade Bernstein not then born in Jerusalem?'⁹⁴ In the light of our sensitivities, it seems rather remarkable that one should be able to enlist references to antisemitism and matters Jewish in so arbitrary a fashion to denounce one and the same political opponent in mutually attenuating ways. Yet we saw that even when devising his 'ultimate lesson' for Bernstein in 1904, Mehring had initially found it difficult to decide which would be the preferred option. Should he accuse Bernstein of typically Jewish qualities or of antisemitism? In the first instance he tried to do both. This suggests that quite irrespective of the actual implications or thrust of one's argument, there was some sort of fundamental buzz to all references or allusions to 'Jewish' issues. Making such references was somehow titillating in its own right and this sense of titillation seems to have been shared widely across all divides. Whether one accused somebody of antisemitism or of typically Jewish qualities, whether one did so to support or oppose the cause of Jewish integration made precious little difference to the thrill many apparently felt when touching upon the issue in whatever capacity and for whatever reason. This also helps explain why antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' were frequently drawn into debates even when only the most tenuous of connections to them could possibly be construed.

Remarkably enough, Mehring's indictment of Bernstein as an antisemite was not in fact his first anti-antisemitic pronouncement in 1904. He had also taken *Reichskanzler* von Bülow to task for his remarks about 'Mandelstamm and Silberfarb'.⁹⁵ We touched upon this incident in Chapter 3 when discussing Bebel's position. *A priori* there was no reason why Bülow's reference to 'Mandelstamm and Silberfarb' should be any less legitimate than Social Democratic references to 'the great, hallowed names' Rothschild und Bleichröder. Again it was not the stereotyping as such that was at stake but the identity and status of the person who was doing the stereotyping and those against whom his remarks were specifically directed. In this case, the *Reichskanzler* was doing the stereotyping and exiled Russian radicals were at the receiving end. That *was* antisemitism.

⁹⁴ Idem, 'Die öffentliche Meinung,' in NZ 28-I, 7 (12 November 1909): 225. Cf. also Fischer, *Social Democratic Responses*, 197 n63.

⁹⁵ Franz Mehring, 'Eine verhüllte Fremdherrschaft,' in NZ 22-I, 23 (2 March 1904): 713–716, here 714–715.

On this occasion a severe bout of embarrassment of anti-antisemitism followed promptly. A fortnight later, Mehring hastened to point out that 'even the Jewish papers' had sanctioned Bülow's inappropriate remarks. Their desire to please Bülow was just as strong as Bülow's desire to please the tsarist regime by expelling exiled Russian radicals.⁹⁶ On the same day, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* led with an editorial under the title 'Mandelstamm und Feige'⁹⁷ presumably written by Mehring. It juxtaposed Mandelshtam's revolutionary heroism with the case of a Jewish legal official from Breslau called Feige who had complained to the *Kaiser* because his son had not been made an officer of the reserve. It is interesting, of course, that the editorial singled out Mandelshtam but had nothing to say about Zilberfarb. As we saw, Bebel subsequently identified him in the *Reichstag* as a Zionist and *therefore* an 'orthodox Jew'. Since he was no revolutionary hero, the fact that Bülow had denounced him and Mandelshtam in one breath did not suit the polemical purposes of this editorial. For the point the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* wanted to make was this: while the bourgeois press had expressed no misgivings about the denunciation of Mandelshtam, Feige's case had precipitated "the most widespread indignation". The argument that followed offered yet another variation on the 'conflation of right and morality' theme. The word 'feige', as an adjective, means cowardly, of course, hence 'the name of this Maccabee from Breslau is telling', the editorial commented. It was incidents like this that helped explain why antisemitism, its utter political futility notwithstanding, simply would not die out. 'A Jewry that emancipates itself by joining forces with the oppressed classes fighting for their emancipation is as respectable and sympathetic as that other Jewry is repulsive and contemptible that seeks to swap the role of the oppressed for the role of the oppressor', the editorial concluded.

How did Bernstein react to the accusation of antisemitism levelled at him by Mehring in the autumn of 1904? Mehring's 'ultimate lesson' was published in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on Saturday, 29 October. Bernstein gave a first, short response in the *Montagsblatt* published on 31 October. Clearly, this was very much a spontaneous response composed under considerable time pressure. 'Once again', Bernstein exclaimed, Mehring had

resorted to the lowest of polemical tricks: the capricious imputation of motives and forgery of opinions.⁹⁸ Thus he uses a passage from a letter I wrote him, in which I speak of Jewish faults on Lassalle's part [*jüdischen Fehlern Lassalles*] to brand me an antisemite and someone who plays 'Lassalle's admirer' in public but 'denigrates' Lassalle 'all the more maliciously in private'. As if I had not spoken quite unreservedly of Lassalle's mistakes in *all* my publications *right up to the present*; as if the recognition of an individual's or an ethnic group's

⁹⁶ Idem, 'Außerhalb der Kultur,' in NZ 22-I, 25 (16 March 1904): 778-780, here 779.

⁹⁷ 'Mandelstamm und Feige,' in LVZ 11, 62 (16 March 1904): 1.

⁹⁸ The underlined words were printed in spaced and bold type.

faults implied a failure to appreciate their positive aspects or merits. So base an interpretation reveals only one thing: impotent rage.⁹⁹

Most striking in this spontaneous response is Bernstein's explicit reference to 'Jewish faults on Lassalle's part'. He explicitly maintained that Lassalle's critique-worthy characteristics were indeed specifically 'Jewish faults'. Bernstein's real concern lay elsewhere: Mehring had accused him of judging Lassalle differently in public than he did in private. It was this point, and this point only, that he bothered to deny: he had 'quite unreservedly' put the finger on Lassalle's 'Jewish faults' in all his writings.

A week later Bernstein published a more detailed response to Mehring's 'ultimate lesson' as a whole. Returning to this particular issue he now stated that

Anyone who reads my just published work *Lassalle und seine Bedeutung für die Arbeiterklasse* [Lassalle and his Significance for the Working Class] will find pronounced there on page 69 materially exactly the same things about Lassalle's literary-polemical bad habits that Mehring has announced full of relish and in bold type as a revelation of my allegedly secret thoughts about Lassalle.

I do not have the slightest cause to conceal the fact that a number of Lassalle's faults repelled me for a good many years. They never prevented me, however, from appreciating Lassalle's positive traits, and the repeated study of Lassalle's letters eventually even taught me to love him.¹⁰⁰

This added nothing substantial to his spontaneous response but it did provide evidence for his claim by pointing his readers to his most recent publication on Lassalle. There, on the page mentioned by Lassalle, we find a discussion of Lassalle's major polemic against the liberal economist and politician, Franz Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch (1808–1883).¹⁰¹ The passage in question is the second of the two texts whose 'Jewish connection' I asked the readers to ponder at the beginning of the introduction to this book. Lassalle's polemic against Schulze, Bernstein argued,

epitomizes Lassalle's merits and Lassalle's faults. In this publication, to begin with the latter, Lassalle frequently indulges in the most ugly quibbling that tends towards a distortion of his opponent's notions. His inclination, professed by himself in his diary, to take refuge in shouting down where arguments fail, shows itself here too: on several occasions the polemic no longer refutes, but merely shouts down. Lassalle is not content with the demonstration of his opponent's inadequacy in terms of his scholarly aptitude and the nature of his

⁹⁹ *Montagsblatt* 1, 27 (31 October 1904): 3.

¹⁰⁰ Eduard Bernstein, 'Und noch einmal Mehring,' in *Montagsblatt* 1, 28 (7 November 1904): 2.

¹⁰¹ Ferdinand Lassalle, *Herr Bastiat-Schulze von Delitzsch, der ökonomische Julian, oder: Capital und Arbeit* (Berlin: Schlingmann, 1864).

suggestions, ultimately he also questions his opponent's motives excessively, while passing over Schulze's factual objections to the idea of state-financed production co-operatives with a few unproven assertions.

However, 'these and other faults of the book', Bernstein then went on to explain, were ultimately offset by its 'brilliant merits'.¹⁰² Now, had Bernstein not told us so, we would have no reason to suspect that he considered the faults he was describing in this particular passage to be in any way specifically 'Jewish faults'. It is worth recalling for a moment the letter by Bernstein on which Mehring based his accusation of antisemitism. There Bernstein had singled out Lassalle's bad 'literary manner' as a case in point for those 'several exceptionally unsympathetic qualities of German Jewry' that Lassalle supposedly epitomised. 'Bad literary manners', then, is essentially a coded reference to 'Jewish faults' which we have no way of identifying without additional evidence that allows us to decode it. Yet Bernstein quite obviously assumed that it went without saying for most of his contemporaries that 'bad literary manners' were a 'Jewish fault'.

To be sure, the notion that the Jews were incapable of genuine literary creativity and instead placed what literary talent they had at the disposal of the market, thus profaning the sanctity of true literature and subverting its artistic and spiritual substance and facilitating its increasing commercialisation and commodification, all this was a long-standing trope in nineteenth-century German intellectual discourse. A Jew could be a *Literat* but no *Dichter*, no serious writer, he could indulge in *Literatentum* but hardly produce genuine *Dichtung*. We have already seen that Bernstein was far from impervious to this discourse. In 'Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus' he suggested that even 'the shallowest Viennese *Judenliterat* could not have worked less conscientiously' than the antisemitic author he was reviewing.¹⁰³ In the term *Judenliterat* (Jewish *Literat*) the 'Jewish' was essentially redundant. Most contemporaries would automatically have added the 'Jewish' in their mind, even if Bernstein had simply written *Literat*.

Had Bernstein called Lassalle a *Literat* or criticised his *Literatentum*, we would have had every reason to assume that this critique implied a reference to Lassalle's Jewish background. Yet in this exchange with Mehring, Bernstein spoke not of Lassalle's *Literatentum* but of his 'literary manners [*literarisches Gebaren*]' and of his 'literary-polemical bad habits'. In the published text to which he referred his readers not even the term 'literary' features. It is the absence of the buzz words *Literat* or *Literatentum* that makes it so remarkable and worrying that Bernstein nevertheless considered these remarks a patently clear expression of his misgivings about Lassalle's 'Jewish faults'.

¹⁰² Eduard Bernstein, *Ferdinand Lassalle und seine Bedeutung für die Arbeiterklasse* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1904): 69–70.

¹⁰³ Idem, 'Schlagwort,' 229.

Our attempts to understand how Imperial German Social Democrats and their peers and contemporaries talked about antisemitism and ‘the Jewish Question’ obviously have one absolutely fundamental prerequisite: we need to know when they actually were talking about these issues. Bernstein has kindly provided us with a paper trail that allows us to decode one particular reference to ‘Jewish faults’ whose ‘Jewish connection’ we would otherwise have stood no chance of recognising. The implications are rather chastening. No matter how carefully we gauge the discourse that is recognisable to us as pertaining to antisemitism and ‘the Jewish Question’ – it would seem that there was yet another spectrum of grey tones out there, an even murkier underbelly to this discourse that is largely beyond our grasp altogether. We may occasionally catch a glimpse of its unwritten codebook, as in this case, but for the most part it is irretrievably lost to us.

Conclusion

As coincidence would have it, one of the first examples alerting us to the vagaries of anti-antisemitic discourse among Imperial German Socialists sprung from an incident in 1898 that involved Rosa Luxemburg. It is by no means a coincidence, though, that our discussion concludes with a slightly more systematic glance at her stance on antisemitism and ‘the Jewish Question’. Luxemburg was a staunch assimilationist and in large measure shared in the *consensus communis* of the bulk of her peers, comrades and contemporaries. Yet, on at least one occasion, she discussed these issues in a manner that clearly questioned and transcended this *consensus communis* and, in so doing, set herself apart from most of her peers. Luxemburg made the relevant remarks not in the context of her work within the German party but against the backdrop of a dispute involving the Polish party among whose leaders she was, the SDKPiL [Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania].

Our lead question throughout this book has been this: assuming somebody socialised in Imperial Germany who had imbibed the prevalent preconceptions regarding ‘the Jews’ had become interested in Social Democracy, to what extent and in what ways (if any) would the encounter with Socialism have challenged those preconceptions? For this issue, Luxemburg’s comments in the autumn of 1910, made in a Polish context and for a Polish audience, are obviously neither here nor there. While they do challenge the *consensus communis* in important ways, this challenge would barely have registered on the radar of (potential) German Socialists at the time.¹ Consequently, the exceptional nature of her remarks on

¹ The *Vorwärts* did report on the dispute, though. Cf. ‘Freidenkertum und Sozialdemokratie,’ in *Vorwärts* 27, 226 (27 September 1910): 1–2; ‘Ein literarischer Bravo,’ in *Vorwärts* 27, 274 (23 November 1910): 2. These articles may well have been written by Luxemburg or at least based on material circulated by Luxemburg and her associates. Although they do not offer as sophisticated and intriguing a discussion as Luxemburg’s Polish contributions, there is an extremely interesting and noteworthy formulation in the *Vorwärts* article of 27 September. It stated that the SDKPiL’s opponents had claimed that the party was “‘judaized” [*verjudet*] and that this was a disgrace and an outrage’. Note that the term *verjudet* was set in inverted commas here, in contrast, say, to the way in which Bebel, in the 1906 reprint of the speech he had held at the Party Congress of 1893 in Cologne, attributed to Marx the notion that society as a whole was *verjudet*. Moreover, to say that the SDKPiL’s opponents had claimed that the party was “‘judaized” and that this was a disgrace and an outrage’ obviously only made sense if one did not assume that the latter automatically followed from the former. A rejoinder by the initiator of this dispute (dated 6 October) was published in the Frankfurt-based German Freethinker journal,

this particular occasion can hardly mitigate the rather bleak overall picture of Imperial German Social Democracy's fundamental failure to challenge prevalent anti-Jewish preconceptions that has emerged from our discussion throughout this book. The real significance of Luxemburg's remarks lies elsewhere. They offer us a tantalising glimpse of the fact that it was obviously not objectively impossible for a Marxist of Luxemburg's generation, at least on occasion, to transcend the conceptual *consensus communis* on antisemitism.

ROSA LUXEMBURG'S POLISH-JEWISH PEER GROUP

The most instructive accounts of Luxemburg's take on these issues are those by Hannah Arendt² and Jack Jacobs.³ 'Mr. Nettl is right', Hannah Arendt wrote in her intriguing review of Peter Nettl's Luxemburg biography:⁴ "'Her ideas belong where the history of political ideas is seriously taught'".⁵ Arendt characterised Luxemburg as 'the most controversial and least understood figure in the German Left movement'.⁶ Indeed, as she saw it, Luxemburg's true 'errors' sprung from 'the few crucial instances in which Rosa Luxemburg was not out of step, but appeared instead to be in agreement with the official powers in the German Social Democratic Party. These were her real mistakes, and there was none she did not finally recognize and bitterly regret'.⁷ Murdered in January 1919 'under the eyes and probably with the connivance of the Socialist regime then in power',⁸ Luxemburg 'was and remained a Polish Jew in a country she disliked and a party she came soon to despise'.⁹ Consequently, 'Mr Nettl's greatest and most original achievement' was his 'discovery' of Luxemburg's 'Polish-Jewish "peer group"'.¹⁰ Arendt's remarks about this 'milieu' are less well known than one would expect and therefore worth quoting at some length:

This milieu, which even in the twenties had lost all public relevance, has now completely disappeared. Its nucleus consisted of assimilated Jews from middle-class families whose cultural background was German¹¹ [...], whose political formation was Russian, and whose moral standards in both private

Das Freie Wort. Cf. Andrzej Niemojewski, 'An die Adresse des "Vorwärts"', in *Das Freie Wort* 10, 15 (November 1910): 586–588.

² Hannah Arendt, 'Rosa Luxemburg: 1871–1919,' in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace, 1968): 33–56. Hereafter Arendt, 'Rosa Luxemburg'.

³ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 71–85.

⁴ J P Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* 1–2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966). As Arendt rather aptly pointed out, it was 'as if she [Luxemburg] had found her last admirer' in Peter Nettl (Arendt, 'Rosa Luxemburg,' 44.)

⁵ Arendt, 'Rosa Luxemburg,' 56. ⁶ *Ibid.*, 34. ⁷ *Ibid.*, 47. ⁸ *Ibid.*, 35. ⁹ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40

¹¹ In Luxemburg's case, her family's strong affinity to Polish culture also ought to be mentioned.

and public life were uniquely their own. These Jews, an extremely small minority in the East, an even smaller percentage of assimilated Jewry in the West, stood outside all social ranks, Jewish or non-Jewish, hence had no conventional prejudices whatsoever, and had developed, in this truly splendid isolation, their own code of honour – which then attracted a number of non-Jews, among them Julian Marchlewski and Feliks Dzierzhynski.

[...] [Without] this unique Jewish family background [...] the emergence of the ethical code of the peer group would be nearly incomprehensible [...] What the members of the peer group had in common was what can only be called moral taste, which is so different from ‘moral principles’; [...] This gave them their ‘rare self-confidence’, so unsettling to the world into which they then came, and so bitterly resented as arrogance and conceit. This milieu, and never the German Party, was and remained Rosa Luxemburg’s home. The home was movable up to a point, and since it was predominantly Jewish it did not coincide with any ‘fatherland’.¹²

Just how highly idealised Arendt’s conceptualisation of this milieu was becomes all the more evident from the way in which she characterised the peer group’s ‘unique Jewish family background’:

The hidden equalizer of those who always treated one another as equals – and hardly anybody else – was the essentially simple experience of a childhood world in which mutual respect and unconditional trust, a universal humanity and a genuine, almost naïve contempt for social and ethnic distinctions were taken for granted. [...] the authenticity of their morality they owed to having grown up in a world that was not out of joint.

As Arendt saw it, Luxemburg and her immediate peer group owed their ‘almost naïve contempt for social and ethnic distinctions’ not so much to a sense of marginalisation as Jews in a predominantly non-Jewish society but to the fact that they had grown up in a veritable Jewish counterculture with its very own values and ‘moral taste’. To Arendt’s mind, this peer group did not develop what we with our current sensibilities might call a fundamental scepticism *vis-à-vis* all identity politics. Instead, its members had been socialised into a superior counter-identity that was more self-critical and self-reflective than the average run-of-the-mill identity. This identity was too far removed from its point of departure to still be Jewish in any meaningful sense of the word, yet it had also stopped short of abandoning the identity-centred frame of reference altogether. Rather than exploring the paradoxes and tensions inherent in this constellation, as she understood it, Arendt ultimately opted for a rather facile resolution by simply declaring that the members of the peer group had been among ‘those whom Nietzsche

¹² Ibid., 40–41

had called the “good Europeans”’.¹³ Thus she was able to allot an identity to them that was sufficiently indeterminate to accommodate their ‘almost naïve contempt for social and ethnic distinctions’ and therefore allowed her to avoid having to dispense with the concept of identity altogether.

For Jacobs, on the other hand, ‘Rosa Luxemburg’s own views on the Jewish question bear a marked familial resemblance to those of Polish maskilim of her father’s era’.¹⁴ Taking recourse to a concept introduced by Ezra Mendelsohn,¹⁵ Jacobs identified Luxemburg’s father as a ‘Pole of the Mosaic persuasion’. As opposed to those Jews who were ‘ideologically committed to assimilationism and who supported the revolutionary movement for Polish independence’,¹⁶ Mendelsohn characterised the ‘Poles of the Mosaic persuasion’ as follows. They

were less inclined to make an ideology of their assimilation. They did not proclaim that Jewish history had played itself out [. . .] They had left behind the confines of the ghetto and now regarded themselves as Poles [. . .] Strongly opposed to Jewish nationalism and hostile toward Yiddish, they had no clear program as to the future of the Jewish people. Nonetheless, the ‘Poles of the Mosaic persuasion’ played a prominent role in Jewish life. [. . .] They supported [. . .] the struggle for Jewish enlightenment and for the polonization of Polish Jewry.¹⁷

It was an orientation along these lines that Luxemburg’s father would have tried to impress on his children and, to Jacobs’s mind, this ‘specifically Polish variant of maskilish ideology’ formed probably the main root of Luxemburg’s own position *vis-à-vis* ‘the Jewish Question’. Moreover, ‘most of Luxemburg’s closest friends and trusted comrades [. . .] were of Jewish origin’. Jacobs was not just thinking of Luxemburg’s East European associates here, but also of the people she grew close to in Germany. ‘Luxemburg generally felt far more at ease with people with backgrounds comparable to her own, that is, with socialists who had grown up in Jewish families but who were not themselves directly tied to the Jewish community’.¹⁸

Now, in at least one respect Luxemburg certainly was quite exceptional: her rejection of Jewish nationalism really was predicated on a radical negation of nationalism more generally. Many of her peers claimed that their rejection of Jewish nationalism was only part and parcel of their critical attitude towards nationalism more generally. Yet it is more than evident that the bulk of them tended to be altogether more lenient in their dealings with most, if not all, other forms of nationalism while they liked to see Jewish

¹³ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 76. Maskilim were proponents of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment.

¹⁵ Cf. Ezra Mendelsohn, ‘A Note on Jewish Assimilation in the Polish Lands,’ in Bela Vago (ed.), *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times* (Boulder: Westview, 1981): 141–149.

¹⁶ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 73. ¹⁷ Cited *ibid.* ¹⁸ Ibid., 83.

nationalism as the epitome of all that was problematic about nationalism.¹⁹ Rosa Luxemburg, by contrast, was critical of nationalism on principle and even rejected the form of nationalism most likely, given her background, to come to her ‘naturally’ as her ‘own’: Polish nationalism. It was not least as a result of this rejection that she and her immediate peer group established the SDKPiL in opposition to the mainstream Socialists who propagated Polish independence, the PPS. Nevertheless, as Jack Jacobs has rightly pointed out: ‘To say that Luxemburg’s attitude towards the Zionist movement paralleled her attitude towards the movement for Polish independence is not to say that her attitude towards Jews and Jewish culture paralleled her attitude towards Poles and Polish culture’.²⁰ While she was genuinely fond of Polish culture, it is quite clear, not least from her private correspondence, that ‘she found unassimilated East European Jews distasteful, and [...] was uncomfortable in the presence of such people’.²¹

Luxemburg generally defended herself publicly when subjected to anti-semitic slurs but she did not ordinarily use these instances to comment on the political significance of antisemitism more generally. In political rather than merely personal terms, to use Jack Jacobs’s formulation, she ‘studiously avoided commenting on German anti-Semitism’.²² Yet in the autumn of 1910, she and her Polish party, the SDKPiL, found themselves at the receiving end of a massive wave of ‘Progressive Antisemitism’²³ unleashed by the prominent Freethinker, Andrzej Niemojewski (1864–1921), in his journal, *Mysl Niepodlegla* [Independent Thought]. In this instance, she was not only ‘sufficiently provoked’²⁴ to formulate several emphatic responses to this ‘intellectual pogrom’ herself; she also helped solicit public declarations of solidarity from prominent figures throughout the Second International in support of a short but hefty anti-antisemitic campaign.²⁵ On 8 October 1910, she wrote a letter to Emil Vandervelde (1866–1938), the head of the Second International’s International Socialist Bureau, that her comrade, Julian Marchlewski (Karski), delivered on his round trip mobilising support for the SDKPiL. ‘As you can see’, she wrote, ‘it is a Dreyfus Affair *en miniature* [...] Hence we need the moral support of the International’.²⁶

¹⁹ There is an obvious parallel here to the way in which many critics of religion claimed that their negative attitudes towards Judaism were merely an expression of their critical approach to religion more generally. Yet in this context too, as we saw earlier, Judaism tended to emerge as the irredeemable paradigm for all that was bad about religion while Christianity, for the most part, all its defects notwithstanding, was portrayed as being capable of reform or at least of forming the ideal bridge to atheism.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 82. ²¹ *Ibid.*, 83. ²² *Ibid.*, 209 n71.

²³ Cf. Theodore R. Weeks, ‘Polish “Progressive Antisemitism,” 1905–1914,’ in *East European Jewish Affairs* 25, 2 (1995): 49–68.

²⁴ Jacobs, *Socialists*, 84.

²⁵ On this episode, cf. George Haupt, Pawel Korzec, ‘Les socialistes et la campagne antisémite en Pologne en 1910: un épisode inédit,’ in *Revue du Nord* 57, 225 (1975): 185–194.

²⁶ *RLGB* 6: 173.

Among those who provided declarations of solidarity was the leading French Socialist Jean Jaurès (1859–1914), as were Bebel and Mehring.

Admittedly, her own contributions to this dispute were published anonymously,²⁷ but that was hardly unusual in the Socialist press, let alone in Eastern Europe where a publication that was legal one day (as the SDKPiL's official organ, *Młot* [Hammer], was at the time of this dispute) could very promptly find itself outlawed again the next. Both *Młot* and its predecessor, *Trybuna*, were subject to persistent repression²⁸ and *Młot* was finally suppressed in December 1910.²⁹ On the other hand, it was hardly a secret that Luxemburg was intimately involved with *Młot* and many would also have recognised her characteristic prose. Yet what made her contributions to this dispute so remarkable was in any case not so much the fact that she responded to antisemitic attacks levelled at her personally. Far more importantly, she (rightly) considered these slurs against her part and parcel of a larger campaign directed against the SDKPiL. To her mind, this campaign epitomised the inevitability with which the quest for Polish independence ultimately rendered virtually all progressive Polish politics reactionary. Her main focus was not on the slurs against her personally but on the significance of antisemitism in the wider political context, and on this issue she indeed had a few things to say that set her fundamentally apart from most of her peers and comrades. As far as I can see, Luxemburg's own contributions to this dispute in the autumn of 1910 have never been published nor even extensively cited in English. They therefore deserve to be discussed at some length.³⁰

AN UNRESERVEDLY POSITIVE ACCOUNT OF ANTI-ANTISEMITISM

The first of Luxemburg's contributions, 'After the Pogrom', was published in *Młot* on 8 October 1910.³¹ Pogroms were by now a familiar occurrence yet in this case, Luxemburg explained, the news of the pogrom had come not from 'Balta or some other miserable Bessarabian one-horse town' but from "'the Polish intellectual sphere" in Warsaw'. Turning the issue against the cause of Polish independence, she remarked ironically that this intellectual pogrom 'once again provided irrefutable evidence for the superiority

²⁷ Cf. Jacobs, *Socialists*, 84.

²⁸ Cf. 'Befremdende Kampfmethoden,' in *Vorwärts* 27, 292 (14 December 1910): 3.

²⁹ Cf. 'Die Unterdrückung des "Młot",' in *Vorwärts* 27, 297 (20 December 1910): 3.

³⁰ I embark on this discussion with some trepidation because I will be relying on the German translations of Luxemburg's texts prepared by Valentina-Maria Stefanski for Iring Fetscher (ed.), *Marxisten gegen Antisemitismus* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1974): 127–150. Hereafter Fetscher (ed.), *Marxisten*. Given that much of my argument will hinge on details of formulation this is obviously somewhat problematic. I am currently trying to organise a reliable and annotated scholarly edition of these and other relevant texts for publication in *East European Jewish Affairs*.

³¹ German translation in Fetscher (ed.), *Marxisten*, 127–135.

of our society's culture over that of barbaric Russia'.³² Somewhat irritated by the applause they had received from unmitigated reactionaries, the Progressive pogromists claimed it had all been a big misunderstanding but their credibility was now irredeemably in tatters. Had there been any genuine substance left in Progressivism, then 'the hooliganism of the buffoon' Niemojewski would have precipitated an instant negative response from the entire Progressive press. Such a response would by no means have been without precedent, Luxemburg suggested, but one had to turn not to the bourgeois radicals and Progressives but to the workers to find it:

It was in 1905. On the streets of Warsaw, in the midst of a large crowd of workers, in the thick of the din of the ordinary working people an unknown man was noticed who began to ruminate about 'Jews'. God knows where he came from or what he hoped to achieve. But he ruminated about 'Jews'. And all of a sudden the crowd closed in on him, so much so, that he could hardly breathe. A moment later he felt several coarse, forceful workers' hands on his ribs, he suddenly found himself in a horizontal position, and the talk of 'Jews' stuck in his throat along with his breath and he was swept away so rudely and promptly that he had no opportunity to refer to his many years of 'public service' or to explain which Jews exactly he was concerned about. In that moment Polish culture was rescued on the streets of Warsaw by workers' fists.³³

To be sure, this is an idealised account yet its exactitude, even its fundamental veracity, is ultimately neither here nor there. Far more important for our discussion here is the attitude on Rosa Luxemburg's part that it reflects. For starters, she placed the term 'Jews' in inverted commas. This surely implies that, to her mind, there was no immediate identity between the perceptions of 'the Jews' that lend themselves to antisemitic propaganda, on the one hand, and empirical Jewry, on the other. It was actually 'Jews' that the unknown man was ruminating about, though. Luxemburg did not introduce him as an antisemite who began to ruminate – thus leaving us to guess what the exact nature of his ruminations was and whether he provoked the workers specifically by making anti-Jewish remarks rather than anti-democratic or anti-Socialist ones. In Luxemburg's account, the matter is quite unambiguous: the workers removed the man because he 'ruminated about "Jews"'.

Her account of this instance of anti-antisemitic activism was unreservedly positive. She related this incident without feeling compelled to attach any sort of warning about the pitfalls of 'philosemitism'. She expressly emphasised that the unknown man who 'ruminated about "Jews"' was forcibly removed by the workers without being given the opportunity either 'to explain which Jews exactly he was concerned about' or 'to refer to his

³² *Ibid.*, 127. ³³ *Ibid.*, 130.

many years of “public service”. She clearly considered this the right course of action, which means that she simply discarded out of hand two basic assumptions. Firstly, she dismissed the suggestion that the man’s attempt to mobilise the workers against ‘the Jews’ might be justified by legitimate grievances of some kind against certain Jews or, to put it slightly differently: that his ruminations contained a relevant kernel of truth. Secondly, she paid no heed to the notion that a progressive political track record might somehow place him beyond suspicion.

In all these respects, Luxemburg’s strongly affirmative account of this anti-antisemitic ‘incident’ is therefore radically at odds with virtually everything we have encountered throughout this book. Most of her peers clearly did (and many on the political Left continue to this day to) assume that progressively minded people cannot by definition be antisemites because they are, after all, progressively minded. Before contemplating any outright condemnation of such ‘ruminations about “Jews”’, most Socialists would have been inclined to ask a variety of questions: against what Jews specifically were these ruminations directed and on what grounds? What was the ruminator suggesting should actually be done about the Jews? The threshold for an outright condemnation would be relatively high and even if the anti-Jewish remarks in question ultimately took the hurdle, the Socialist critics would most likely first try to salvage the ruminations’ supposedly valid and legitimate core that had now been skewered because the ruminator had overshot the mark. In varying combinations we have seen all these responses in action time and again throughout this book. Yet Luxemburg has time for none of them and in this respect her account of this particular incident is truly remarkable.

So far so good. Back in 1905, the workers of Warsaw had given the anti-semitic stirrers who had tried to infiltrate them the response they deserved. Yet, now that the call ‘Beat the Jew!’ had emanated from among the Polish intellectuals, no such reaction had occurred. ‘Polish culture was debased, the Progressive camp smashed, the barrier between “Progress” and reaction was torn down. And suddenly bourgeois society in its entirety stood in one camp’. Why this rapprochement? Because they all considered Polish independence their top priority and the revolutionary struggle of the workers a threat to national unity. Why had the Progressives now suddenly outed themselves in this way? Because of the recent resurgence in labour activism, including the SDKPiL’s own activities. It was their rage about these activities that had led the Progressives to reveal their true priorities and align themselves with the political Right. As a result, they had brought ‘the shame of this “intellectual” Jewish pogrom on our land’.³⁴

³⁴ Ibid., 134.

ROSA LUXEMBURG RE-READS 'ZUR JUDENFRAGE'

On 5 November 1910, *Młot* published yet another contribution by Luxemburg ('Discussion')³⁵ that was obviously meant to draw a line beneath the whole issue. She began by summing up what had occurred. 'A certifiable individual put forward the call "Give it to the Jews!" in the Free Thinking press. Yet what then transpired in the Polish Progressive camp was – not the court martial of the hooligan that the whole world expected but an "intellectual" pogrom'. This had revealed the miserable and desperate state of the Polish Progressives, but instead of 'liquidating the bankrupt Free Thinkers' estate' parts of the left-wing press had begun a 'serious and objective discussion – on the Jewish Question!'³⁶ As a case in point, Luxemburg singled out the radical-democratic journal *Spoleczenstwo* [Society]. It had criticised 'the "nasty tone"', of the debate, '– and in this respect "both parties" have allegedly sinned'.³⁷ Hence the proposal to abandon the 'nasty tone' and lead a 'serious and objective' debate instead.

Luxemburg then turned to Niemojewski again, citing his most recent comments at length. Here are two of the excerpts she quoted:

'Before all else one has to realize what Jewry means. Semitism, Jewishness [...] is synonymous with mesquinerie [meanness], corruption, servility, prostration and perversion'. (*Mysl Niepodlegla*, No. 150, p. 1462)

'*Vis-à-vis* Mosaism and Semitism Polish democracy and Polish patriotism are the same as culture and civilization are *vis-à-vis* backwardness and barbarism, as freedom and justice are *vis-à-vis* slavery and despotism, as rationalism and free thought are *vis-à-vis* revelation and dogma.

Hence being a Polish democrat means being an enemy of Jewry – it means being an antisemite'. (p. 1463)

Rather startlingly, Luxemburg continued, Niemojewski claimed that he had 'inherited this entire credo from the masters of international Socialism', from '*Marx* and *Lassalle* as well as their students: Kautsky, Mehring and others'. This, she mocked, certainly was an 'extraordinarily interesting' notion worthy of 'serious and objective discussion'. In fact, she clarified,

it was precisely Karl Marx who in his treatise of 1843 against the Hegelians Bauer and Feuerbach led the Jewish Question away from the *religious* and *racial* sphere to its *social* root for the first time by demonstrating that what is generally called 'Jewishness' is *nothing other than the huckstering and fraudulent spirit* that transpires in *every* society in which exploitation prevails, a spirit that blossoms perfectly in modern 'Christian' societies. Hence Jewish emancipation will

³⁵ German translation in Fetscher (ed.), *Marxisten*, 141–150. ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 141. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

primarily be an emancipation of society from *this* 'Jewishness', in other words, the *abolition of exploitation*.³⁸

On the face of it, this is fairly standard fare. Yet in fact her account offers a significant variation on the general theme. Firstly, Marx indeed strongly emphasised the need to shift the focus of 'the Jewish Question' from the religious to the social sphere. With the issue of race, by contrast, Luxemburg was placing an anachronistic cuckoo's egg in Marx's nest. It would be hard to fault her suggestion that Marx would have been as dismissive of a racial focus on 'the Jewish Question' as he was of Bauer's ultimately religious perspective. But Marx really would have needed to be even more extraordinarily prescient than he often was to foresee and pre-empt in 1843/1844 the significance that racial discourse would take on half a century later.

Rather more importantly, though, Luxemburg made absolutely explicit in her discussion of 'Zur Judenfrage' what in most other cases we can only surmise hypothetically from the context: she placed 'Jewishness' in inverted commas and expressly stated that she was referring to 'what is generally called "Jewishness"'. To be sure, her formulations remained problematic enough even so. Nevertheless, they established an explicit and unambiguous differentiation between perception and reality and in so doing she radically transcended the conceptual *consensus communis* unquestioned among virtually all her peers and contemporaries. Marx's concern, she insisted, was not with 'the Jews' but with a set of characteristics or a 'spirit' that 'is generally called "Jewishness"' and that in fact 'blossoms perfectly in modern "Christian" societies'.

This was well in keeping with Marx's own argument in the second part of 'Zur Judenfrage'. To be sure, Marx indeed took great pleasure there in fleshing out his opulent offering of anti-Jewish stereotypes, but his argument would nevertheless collapse were it not for the crucial contention that modern society had itself become 'Jewish'. The Jews had already 'emancipated themselves to the extent that the Christians have become Jews',³⁹ he explained. The

practical-Jewish spirit, Jewry/Judaism, has not only persevered in Christian society but has even found its consummation in it. [...] Bourgeois society persistently reproduces the Jew from its own entrails.⁴⁰ [...]

Jewry/Judaism reaches its apex with the completion of bourgeois society; but bourgeois society only reaches its completion in the *Christian* world [...]
 Only now could Jewry/Judaism attain general domination.⁴¹

This rather ambiguously formulated line of thought is ultimately the heart piece of Marx's argument. Rather perversely, the stench emanating from

³⁸ Ibid., 144. ³⁹ MEW I: 373. ⁴⁰ Ibid., 374. ⁴¹ Ibid., 376.

the anti-Jewish stereotyping in which he indulges with such abandon tends to leave the reader with the impression that all this is no more than a rather ambivalent undercurrent to the main line of argument. Luxemburg, by contrast, put Marx's argument on its feet. Certain qualities and attitudes of society as a whole are generally perceived of as 'Jewish' and her Marx focused quite unequivocally on these qualities and attitudes, not on Jewry itself. Her paraphrase of the infamously ambiguous final contention of 'Zur Judenfrage' that 'the *social* emancipation of the Jew is the *emancipation of society from Judaism/Jewry [Judentum]*' underscored this yet further. 'Jewish emancipation', she stated, 'will primarily be an emancipation of society from this "Jewishness", in other words, the *abolition of exploitation*'.⁴² The issue here is not the abolition of empirical Jewry or Jewishness in any shape, size or form but the abolition of 'this "Jewishness"' – i.e., of the spirit that 'is generally called "Jewishness"'.

Clearly, then, she was not just suggesting that the antisemites drew wrong consequences from an essentially valid analysis. She was fundamentally questioning their analysis too. Having introduced a distinction between perceptions and reality what now set her apart from her opponents was no longer just a difference in degree but one of principle. What actually needed to be addressed were characteristics and attitudes that were generally perceived of as being 'Jewish' but were in fact characteristic of society as a whole. By obsessing about empirical Jewry in the way they did her opponents had already got the question completely wrong, never mind the answer. She continued to spell out the implications of their fallacious approach throughout her discussion. 'In fact', she went on, contrary to Niemojewski's claims,

the whole essence of the theory of Marx and Lassalle and their outstanding interpreters like Kautsky and Mehring is based on the eradication of the notion that 'races' or 'nations' are undifferentiated 'anthropological groups'. [...]

In fact, all those sections of international Social Democracy that are pervaded by the spirit of Marx and Lassalle, and especially the German party, really know 'only *two nations*' in the entire present-day world – that of the *exploiters* and that of the *exploited* – and only *two religions* – the *religion of capital* and the gospel of the *emancipation of labour*.

In fact, all German Jew eaters – from the former imperial preacher and perjurer Stoecker to Pückler,⁴³ the mad scrounger from Berlin cast in the same mould as Niemojewski – persistently denounce [...] German Social

⁴² Fetscher (ed.), *Marxisten*, 144.

⁴³ Walter von Pückler (1860–1924) 'from 1899 to 1907 [...] inherited Hermann Ahlwardt's mantle as Germany's most outrageous agitator'. He was sectioned in 1908. Cf. Christoph Jahr's article in Richard S. Levy (ed.), *Antisemitism* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2005): 574–575.

Democracy as 'judaized' and 'antinational', precisely because its founders were the 'Jew-Cosmopolitans Marx and Lassalle'.

But in *Mysl Niepodległa* things transpire as they do in the 'topsy-turvy world' of *Gulliver's Travels* where horses ride men. Here the world is told that Marx and Lassalle were antisemites. Hence German Social Democracy with Bebel, Liebknecht, Singer, Auer at the helm, who have combated antisemitism as a barbaric and reactionary pest, has betrayed its masters and creators,

while Marx and Lassalle had supposedly found their direct and true descendants in the likes of Niemojewski.⁴⁴

In the face of such 'intellectual waywardness' it surely took a mind-boggling degree of 'intellectual authority and political reasoning', she mocked, to respond by declaring: "It is time to examine the accusations raised by Niemojewski *sine ira et studio*; if they are justified one must acknowledge them and change things; if they are unjustified, though, one must reveal where his reasoning is erroneous and explain the causes of these errors." How profound an insight into the matter', she went on, 'is reflected by this mentality that seeks to "convince" with rational argument where it is dealing with a straightforward eruption of blind zoological instincts'. Again it becomes evident that for Luxemburg a fundamental rupture set the antisemites apart. Rather than there being a bridge between the legitimate critique of Jewry and its antisemitic exaggeration that one could easily pass in either direction, she was drawing a far more radical distinction. According to the prevalent view, 'rational argument' could persuade people to come back over the bridge and limit themselves to a legitimate, unexaggerated critique of Jewry. To Luxemburg's mind, this suggestion was clearly quaint at best.

She then raised another, perhaps even more remarkable, point. 'And – let us add – how much personal dignity on the part of "earnest left-wingers" is reflected in this "objective" chat between persecutors and the victims of the pogrom'. She did not really develop this thought and instead immediately went on to rationalise it. Even so, we catch a glimpse of compassion here that is highly unusual in the light of everything we have seen throughout this book. Let us not forget that she was commenting here on an 'intellectual pogrom', not a physical one. She was not speaking out for the victims of direct and open violence but raising the issue of 'personal dignity' in the context of polemical debate. For her, the 'two parties' in this debate were by no means on a par. Nor, for that matter, did she suggest that the impact of the intellectual pogrom was in some way attenuated or dwarfed, let alone outdone, by the sins of some imaginary 'philosemitism'. The notion that 'both parties' could simply come together for an 'objective chat' amounted to a denial of the fact that one side had wronged the other

⁴⁴ Fetscher (ed.), *Marxisten*, 145.

unilaterally, and thus the very suggestion itself violated the dignity of those who had been wronged yet again. All this is fundamentally at odds with the routine response that the antisemites had taken things too far, but one could see their point. 'Well', Luxemburg now suggested to drive home the point, 'how about we begin an "objective and serious discussion"' about the political future of Poland with the Black Hundreds and the tsarist authorities and police. 'Is this not the time, then', she mocked, 'to examine their "accusations" *sine ira et studio* [...]?'⁴⁵ It was all very well to lament the 'nasty tone' of the dispute. Yet those who thought they could resolve the issue by making 'the Jewish Question' the object of a 'serious "discussion"' rather than a nasty and polemical one needed to realise that simply by raising this issue as an ostensibly serious one 'they inadvertently play a very very nasty political role'.⁴⁶

Luxemburg then returned to Marx and 'Zur Judenfrage'. With 'Zur Judenfrage', she explained, Marx had brought the discussion of 'the Jewish Question' 'to a close by dragging it [...] onto the social plain', something he had accomplished 'by pointing out that the ultimate Jewish emancipation is the emancipation of humanity from capitalist exploitation'. Consequently, 'for the supporters of Marx and the working class *the Jewish Question as such does not exist*, just like for them the "Negro Question" or the issue of the "Yellow Peril" on the part of the Chinese does not exist'. At this juncture, Luxemburg again distinguished between perception and reality but she also went a decisive step further. Let us recall an observation we made in our earlier discussion of Karl Marx's 'Zur Judenfrage'. Taken to its logical consequence, Marx's line of argument implied the following: the characteristics many thought of as 'Jewish' were in fact increasingly becoming characteristic of society as a whole. Jews would therefore increasingly display supposedly Jewish characteristics not because they happened to be of Jewish origin but because of their sensitivity to social trends. Far from maintaining supposedly Jewish traits as a result of their stubborn desire to stand apart, Jews would do so as a result of their desire to integrate into society – a society that was, as long as exploitation continued, becoming more and more 'Jewish' in its entirety. Hence Jews and non-Jews alike could only be emancipated from these supposedly Jewish traits if society as a whole underwent a process of radical revolutionary transformation that abolished all exploitation.

Now, to the best of my knowledge, nobody has ever suggested that capitalist society as a whole was in some way becoming increasingly 'Negro' or 'Yellow'. Conversely, if we follow the logic of Marx's line of argument, African and Chinese Americans too (to take the most obvious example), if they were integrated fully into US society, would consequently become increasingly 'Jewish'. To this extent, the 'Negro Question' and the 'Yellow

⁴⁵ Ibid., 146. ⁴⁶ Ibid., 147.

Peril' would seem to defy easy comparison with the 'Jewish Question'. On the other hand, while full integration would imply that African and Chinese Americans took on the supposedly Jewish traits characteristic of capitalist society as a whole, they would not therefore cease to be of African or of Chinese origin. In other words, their full assimilation would not spell the demise of all their differentiating features. Yet even so, although at least some degree of difference and otherness would inevitably remain, Luxemburg insisted that there was no 'Question' here, no problematic issue – just as there was no 'Jewish Question'. The parallel she drew between these alleged but in actual fact non-existent 'Questions' therefore implies that she really did draw a radical distinction between socially constructed group characteristics, on the one hand, and supposedly 'ethnic' ones, on the other, and that she genuinely denied any significance to the latter. Once integrated, Jews would be 'Jewish' for the same reason that anybody else fully integrated into modern society was 'Jewish'. If they really were still 'Jewish' because of the coincidence of their origin and not because they had accommodated themselves to the 'Jewishness' of society as a whole then the failure lay with society and not with the Jews it had failed to integrate. For Luxemburg, the essentialist perception that this failure resulted from the immutability of ethnic identities rather than social constraints was no more than a form of false consciousness. 'From the point of view of the working class', she explained,

the Jewish Question is, on the one hand, a question of *racial hatred* as a symptom of societal *reaction*, a hatred that is, up to a point, inextricably linked to all societies built on the class antagonism – of the hatred that *erupts most forcefully in the democratic-bourgeois states*. The working class knows that only a thorough reorganization of the capitalist system can eliminate the racial attacks against 'Jewishness'. On the other hand, the Jewish Question is not least a *question of the civil equality of the Jews* and hence in our circumstances *one of a thousand social tasks* whose solution one can only seek out elsewhere.⁴⁷

Luxemburg's rather starry-eyed assessment of 'the working class' need not concern us here. After all, our focus is on the normative rather than the descriptive aspect of her discussion. What she thought was the right approach remains the same, quite irrespective of whether others actually subscribed to that approach or not.

The *working* class has recognized that bad harvests here and in Russia are a matter of the political system, that industrial progress is a matter of the political system, that the school system is a matter of the political system, that the nationality question is a matter of the political system, that the Senatorial franchise is a matter of the political system, that the autonomy of the land is

⁴⁷ Ibid., 148.

a matter of the political system, that the Jewish Question is a matter of the political system. For the working class all social questions have merged into one [...]

For the aware workers, there exists today no 'Jewish Question' on the racial or religious plane. There is only one question: the socio-political one, and only one solution that all social problems require most urgently. The aware proletariat knows that the eruption of antisemitism in our land is only another link in the chain of the Polish bourgeoisie's counterrevolutionary disgrace. [...] it knows that the only 'objective and serious' way to deal with this disgrace is a radical decision of the question that the year 1905 put on the agenda,⁴⁸

namely: outright and comprehensive revolution.

Throughout this dispute the rigour and conviction of Luxemburg's 'almost naïve contempt for social and ethnic distinctions' and her insistence on the need to distinguish between perception and reality when dealing with antisemitism allowed her to transcend the conceptual constraints of most of her peers in a number of significant ways. Yet it is no coincidence that the one person who managed to do so, at least in this instance, was, to return to Arendt's formulations once more, 'the most controversial and least understood figure in the German Left movement'. It was somebody who always got it wrong when she was 'not out of step, but appeared instead to be in agreement with the official powers in the German Social Democratic Party', and who consequently 'was and remained a Polish Jew in a country she disliked and a party she came soon to despise'. Rosa Luxemburg was well and truly the exception that proves the rule.

To be sure, all the Socialists we have met throughout this book brought a variety of emphases, nuances, and idiosyncrasies to the ways in which they approached antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question'. But these varying emphases, nuances, and idiosyncrasies ultimately only throw a number of fundamental underlying commonalities between them all the more sharply into relief. Perhaps most startlingly, like most of their contemporaries who did not consider themselves antisemites, what set them apart from the self-avowed antisemites was not so much what they thought about 'the Jews' but what they thought should be done about them. It was not their perceptions of 'the Jewish Question' but their prescriptions for its resolution that really set them apart. What primarily concerned the Imperial German Social Democrats was the possibility that supposedly legitimate anti-Jewish resentment might be illegitimately exploited in support of reactionary politics. Consequently, where anti-Jewish resentment did not find its expression in overtly reactionary political demands it was not considered problematic. While standing firm in their party-political opposition

⁴⁸ Ibid., 148–149.

to party-political antisemitism, Social Democrats thus helped maintain and extend an increasingly universal consensus throughout German society that a significant 'Jewish Question' existed and they generally shared the dream of a future without Jews. They did not anticipate that a Germany (or Europe) strewn with the victims of physical annihilation would be the only way of attaining that future without Jews, let alone would they have condoned a 'solution' along these lines. Yet this solution would never have become a viable option, had the dream of a future without Jews not been so pervasive and well established in German society. To the extent that Social Democrats shared this dream they also share the responsibility for rendering German society susceptible to Nazi antisemitism and preparing the ideological seedbed from which the Shoah could grow. That is not to say, that they should have been able to foresee this development. But neither are we doing them a favour by portraying them as more sophisticated and prescient in their approach to antisemitism and 'the Jewish Question' than they actually were. The conventional Socialist response to modern political antisemitism was woefully inadequate. To suggest otherwise not only implies callous disregard for the victims of modern antisemitism in general and the Shoah in particular but also risks precluding the sort of discussion within the political Left that might allow it to genuinely transcend the shortcomings exemplified by the Socialist response to antisemitism. Antisemitism is not a form of protest that goes in the right direction but fails to go far enough; it is an ideological orientation that is diametrically opposed to any notion of human emancipation and therefore categorically incompatible with any form of emancipatory politics.

Any constructive reflection on these issues needs to begin with the analyses of the Frankfurt School, Sartre and Postone. It will definitely falter if it takes the sort of response we have reviewed throughout this book as its point of departure. We may recall Shlomo Na'aman's discussion of the possible influence of Moses Heß's manuscript 'Ueber das Geldwesen' on Karl Marx's 'Zur Judenfrage'. Taking 'Ueber das Geldwesen' as one's point of departure, he concluded, one 'can never find the way to an analysis of the capitalist mode of production'. Reading 'Zur Judenfrage', by contrast, 'one can imagine how the same Marx will think later'. Analogously we could perhaps say: anyone interested in emancipatory politics who takes the *consensus communis* among Imperial German Socialists as his or her point of departure will never find the way to the analyses of Horkheimer and Adorno, Sartre, and Postone or beyond. Examining Rosa Luxemburg's discussion in the autumn of 1910, by contrast, one can imagine how the distinction between perception and reality and a radical critique of the very notion that a 'Jewish Question' exists will emerge as the key to any genuinely critical understanding of antisemitism and thus as a *sine qua non* for any effective anti-antisemitic strategy and emancipatory politics more generally.

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Index

- Abwehrverein*, 112
 ADAV, 46, 57, 59, 163–164
 Adler, Victor (1852–1918), 22, 34, 152, 167
 Adorno, Theodor W. (1903–1969), viii, 8–9, 228
 Ahlwardt, Hermann (1846–1914), 75–79, 153
 Allgemeiner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln, un Rusland, *See* *Bund*
Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, 99
 Anti-antisemitism, 13–17, 88
 embarrassment of anti-antisemitism, 13, 35–36, 209
 not necessarily directed against antisemites’ anti-Jewish stance, 13–15, 52, 128, 196
 Social Democratic arguments, 14–15, 16–17, 29, 52, 73–74, 78
 use of irony, 29, 72, 144
 Anti-Jewish stereotypes, 15
 (world) domination/undue influence, 24, 92, 181
 acquired and hereditary (racial) qualities, 49, 71–72
 Bleichröder, 49, 208
 chauvinism/clannishness, 16, 30, 33, 50, 53–54, 190, 200
 cheap showmanship, 29
 commercial domination/superiority/ruthlessness, 30, 33, 48–49, 75, 91, 112, 114, 142–143
 cultural ineptitude/inferiority, 49, 92–94
 exploiters, 16, 18, 26, 49, 51, 71
 haggling, 52
 huckstering, 61, 80
 hyper-intellectualism and sophistry, 171, 190, 195
 immutability/heteronomy of Judaism, formalism/legalism, 95–96, 190–191
 incapable of manual labour, 190
 ‘Jewish’ nose, 50, 72, 171
 Jewish/‘philosemitic’ domination of the (liberal) press, 24, 48, 112, 156
Judenliterat, *See* *Literat*, *Literatentum*
 lacking soul/spirituality, 190
Literat, *Literatentum*, 211
 manipulation/domination/undue influence on the legal system, 29–30, 111
Mühlendammer, 57, 206
 nihilistic/subversive/radical, 73, 111, 190–191, 195
 Panama scandal, 153, 157
 physical inferiority, 49
 presumptuousness/arrogance, 30, 50, 215
 rich, 18, 50–51
 rootless, anti-national, *vaterlandslos*, 18, 195
 Rothschild, 41, 49, 208
 shirking (military service), 143
 translation into ‘empirical knowledge’, 61
 usury, 24, 78, 92, 98, 102, 182–183
 ‘war of annihilation against history’ (Bruno Bauer), 93
 war profiteering, 142–143
 Anti-Jewish unrest in Pomerania (1881), 24
 Anti-‘philosemitism’, 18–19, 35–36, 43, 54, 91, 92, 105, 158, 190
 no Socialist preserve, 25, 47
 Antisemitism
 acknowledged Social Democratic susceptibility to, 51, 53, 168–169
 and anti-capitalism, 11–12, 16–17, 18–19, 21, 22, 26, 43, 83, 166
 and empirical verifiability, 7–8, 61, 75, 80–81, 93
 and Jewish agency, 10–11
 and stereotyping, 6–11, 141–142, 224
 as a form of applied irrationality, 8
 as a precursor of Socialism, 32–33, 75, 166
 as an overestimation of Jewry, 16, 29, 141
 as the illegitimate exploitation of legitimate anti-Jewish grievances, 35, 143–144, 227
 beneficial for Jewry, 145
 change in perceptions during/after World War I, 135, 147–148, 175–176
 demise of its prerequisites, 21
 distinction between activists and supporters, 26, 32–33, 77, 115
 epistemological background, 8–10
 guilty of promoting Jewish separatism, 16, 33–34, 189
 Jewish/‘philosemitic’ responsibility, 24, 47, 153, 159
 kernel-of-truth approach, 6–11, 13, 71, 74, 141–142, 220
 political vs. merely emotive, 137–138

- Antisemitism (*Continued*)
 post-emancipatory obsession with the
 invisibility of 'the Jew', 8, 150
 problematic attitudes no Socialist preserve, 25,
 47
 radical disjunction between perceptions and
 reality, 10, 219, 222–223, 228
 Social Democratic criteria, 35, 207–208, 227
 transmission from Imperial to Weimar
 Germany and beyond, xiii–xiv, 3
 Antisemitism, 'philosemitism', and false
 consciousness, 81–85
Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik, 166,
 170
 Arendt, Hannah
 on Rosa Luxemburg, 214–216
 Armenians, 49, 182–183
 Assimilation, *See* *Emancipation and assimilation*
 Auer, Ignaz (1846–1907), 120, 224
Aufhebung, 87, 93
Aus der Waffenkammer des Sozialismus, 63
 Avineri, Shlomo, 42n16, 85

 'Bad literary manners' as a code word for 'Jewish
 fault(s)', 211
 Bamberger, Ludwig (1823–1899), 111
 Barrès, Maurice (1862–1923), 158
 Bauer, Bruno (1809–1882), 85, 88, 91, 92, 93–95
 and the emergence of modern political
 antisemitism, 88, 98–100
 Die Judenfrage, 37, 54–55, 93–95
 Jewish 'war of annihilation against history', 93
 Bax, Ernest Belfort (1854–1925), 180–184
 Bebel, August (1840–1913), 27, 51–52, 70–75,
 126–131, 205, 218, 224
 and the Party Congress in Dresden (1903),
 107–108
 and 'Zur Judenfrage', 79–81
 negotiations with Ahlwardt, 78–79
 on Harden's Jewish background, 149–152
 Speech on antisemitism, Party Congress 1893
 (Cologne), 70–75, 79–80
 Becker, Hermann Heinrich (1820–1885), 86
 Belfort Bax, *See* Bax
 Bering, Dietz, 171
Berliner Tageblatt, 117
Berliner Volksblatt, 60, 68–69
Berliner Völk-Zeitung, 23–25, 51n52
 Bernhard, Georg (1875–1944), 106
 Bernstein, Aaron (1812–1884), 51
 Bernstein, Eduard (1850–1932), 6, 27–28, 51–52,
 57–60, 61, 135, 170–171, 173–208, 211–
 212
 and Eleanor Marx, 187–188, 191–193
 antisemitism as a precursor of Socialism,
 32–33
 'bad literary manners' as a code word for
 'Jewish fault(s)', 211
 conventional juxtaposition to Mehring, 19,
 173
 'Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus',
 28–35, 174, 179
 interview with the *Jewish Chronicle*, 185–186
 on Jews and the legal system, 29–30
 on Lassalle's 'Jewish faults', 206, 209
 on 'several exceptionally unsympathetic qualities of
 German Jewry', 206
 opposition to Jewish separatism, 33–34,
 185–186, 201–202
 'philosemitism' and 'pansemitism', 30–32
 shift in emphasis during World War I, 196–202
 'The Jewish Question' in revolutionary Russia
 (1906), 193–195
 Bleichröder, Gerson von (1881–1954), *See*
 Anti-Jewish stereotypes,
 Blood Libel, 189
 Bloß, Wilhelm (1849–1927), 122n55
 Blumenberg, Werner, 78
 Böckel, Otto (1859–1923), 78, 153
 Braun, Heinrich (1854–1927), 107, 152, 166, 170

 Bülow, Reichskanzler Bernhard von (1849–1929),
 73, 208
 Bund, 194–195

 Cahan, Abraham (1860–1951), 22
 Capitalism and Jewry, 11–12, 39–44
 Caprivi, Reichskanzler Leo von (1831–1899), 105,
 166
 Carlebach, Julius, 42, 54, 61, 85–86
*Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen
 Glaubens*, 32–33
 'Chicago Anarchists', 187–188
 Collaboration with the non-Socialist press,
 104–105, 116–118
 Colonialism, 64, 180
 Communist insurrection in Berlin (January
 1919), 139

*Das Gesetz des Nomadentums und die heutige
 Judenherrschaft*, 189
Das Judentum in der Fremde, 99n144
Das Judentum und der Staat, 99
Das Judentum und sein Recht, 29n25
Das Kapital, 175
Das Neue Montagsblatt, 204, 209
 'Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus', 28–35,
 174, 179
 Daumer, Georg Friedrich (1800–1875), 97
 de Felice, Giuseppe (1859–1920), 158
Demokratische Blätter, 51n53
Demokratische Partei, 51n53
Der Arme Teufel aus der Oberlausitz, 103, 109, 118
*Der Wahrheit die Ehre. Ein Beitrag zur Judenfrage in
 Deutschland*, 46–51
der yidisher kempfer, 197

- Deutsche Wacht*, 14
Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, 37–38, 42, 56–57, 67, 69
Deutschsoziale Reformpartei, 14
Dialectics of Enlightenment, 9
Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkrieg, 197–201
Die Fackel, 152–153, 166–167
Die heilige Familie, 85–91, 171
Die Juden und die deutsche Kriminalstatistik, 29n25
Die Judenfrage, 37, 54–55, 92–95
 Dietz, Johann Heinrich Wilhelm (1843–1922), 56n2
 Drahn, Ernst, 56n2
 Dreyfus Affair, 152–161, 187–188
 Dzerzhynski, Feliks (1877–1926), 215
- East End (London), 192
 Eisenmenger, Johann Andreas (1654–1704), 94
 Eisner, Kurt (1867–1919), 120–126
 ‘Elements of Antisemitism’, 9
 Emancipation and assimilation, x–xi, 44–45, 216, 226
 ‘conflation of right and morality’, 54–55, 83, 91, 209
 disjunction of, 44, 83
 emancipation, free labour, and commodification, 44–45
 human emancipation as a radical new beginning for Jews and non-Jews alike, 45, 82–83, 89, 177
 Jewish emancipation as a measure of modernity (Marx), 87
 Engels, Friedrich (1820–1895), 41, 51, 57–58, 69, 78, 84, 100, 164, 175
 Enlightenment discourse on Judaism, 95–96
 Ethnic identity politics, xiii, 150, 165, 225–226
 Ethnically homogeneous community vs. pluralist society, xiii
 European context, xii
 Exile, 163–165
- Feuerbach, Ludwig (1804–1872), 82, 97
 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1762–1814), 195
 First Duma (1906), 194
 Fischer, Edmund (1864–1925), 103, 109–110, 119
 Frank, Ludwig (1874–1914), 141
Frankfurter Volksstimme, 63
Frankfurter Zeitung, 170
Friede der Judenfrage!, 188–193
Friedens-Warte, 196–197, 200
 Fuchs, Eduard (1870–1940), 169
 Funkenstein, Amos, 44–45
- ‘conversion narratives’, 135, 146
 on Hans Leuß, 114–115, 139
 Giese, Wilhelm, 29n25
 Goldhagen, Daniel J., viii–x
 Gosche, Richard (1824–1889), 25n12
 Gradnauer, Georg (1866–1946), 120–126
Grenzboten, 25
 Großmann, Stefan (1875–1935), 56
 Grunow, Johannes, 25
- Hammerstein, Wilhelm von (1838–1904), 137–138
Hannoverscher Courier, 127
 Harden, Maximilian (1861–1927), 105, 107–108, 110, 169, 170
 Jewish background, 149–152
 Hasenclever, Wilhelm (1837–1889), 46–53
 Hasselmann, Wilhelm (1844–1916), 57, 58–60
 Haymarket Affair (Chicago), 187–188
 Hegel on Jewish emancipation, 95n134
 Hegelianism, 87, 93–95, 97
 Heine, Wolfgang (1861–1944), 132
 Hermand, Jost, 161
 Heß, Moses (1812–1875), 41–43
 Historical materialism, 5
 Hitler, Adolf (1889–1945), xi, 138
 Höhle, Thomas, 23
Homo economicus judaicus, 43
 Horkheimer, Max (1895–1973), 9, 228
Human emancipation, See *Emancipation and assimilation*
 Hyndman, Henry M. (1842–1921), 154n16, 183
- Identity politics, xiii, 150, 165, 215–216, 225–226
 Ideology and false consciousness, 81–85
 Imperialism, 64, 180
 International Socialist Congress (Brussels 1891), 22
- Jacobs, Jack, 6, 20, 71, 174–175, 179–180, 185, 216–217
 Jaekch, Gustav (1866–1907), 204
 Jaurès, Jean (1859–1914), 159, 218
Jewish Chronicle, 185
 Jewish History
 and antisemitism, 10–11
 ‘Jewish’ names, 149–150, 170–172
 Jewish reform movement, 96
 Jewish ‘touchiness’, 50–51, 57, 98, 112, 145, 182, 184
 Jewry and capitalism, 11–12, 39–44
 Jews in Germany
 are they Germans?, 50–51
 Jodko-Narkiewicz, Witold (1864–1924), 61n23
Judenliterat, See *anti-Jewish stereotypes*
Judentum
 linguistic problem with the term, 87
- Gérault-Richard, Alfred Lèon, 158
 Gerlach, Hellmut von (1861–1935), 110, 116, 132, 139, 145, 163

- Juden-zählung* (Jew Census), 198
Jüdisches Erwerbsleben, 29n25
Justice, 183
- Kautsky, Karl (1854–1938), 20, 27–28, 51, 61, 65, 67, 100, 106, 127, 128–129, 154n16, 162, 164, 167, 183, 203–204
 and Hans Leuß, 117, 129–131, 135
 and ‘Zur Judenfrage’, 58, 66
 on ‘philosemitism’, 35
- Kautsky, Karl Jr. (1892–1978), 131–132
 KPD (German Communist Party), 6, 56n2, 173
 Kraus, Karl (1874–1936), 152, 158, 167
Kulturkampf, 46, 48, 50, 111
- L’action Française*, 158
La Libre Parole, 158
La Petite République, 158
- Lafargue, Laura (1846–1911), 65–66
 Lasker, Eduard (1829–1884), 111
 Lassalle, Ferdinand (1825–1864), 101, 151, 205, 221, 223–224
 Lassalleanism, 163–164
 Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1646–1716), 66
Leipziger Volkszeitung, 77n93, 106, 109, 162, 204, 209
- Lenin, Vladimir I. (1870–1924), 62
 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1729–1781), 92
 on patriotism, 162
- Leuschen-Seppel, Rosemarie, 3, 46, 70–71, 79, 102
- Leuß, Hans (1861–1920), 19, 103, 133–148
 and the *Neue Zeit*, 114–121, 126, 128–131
 as a case in point for collaboration with non-Socialist publications/journalists, 116–118
 as an antisemitic deputy, 110–114
 collaboration with the *Vonwärts*, 120–125, 129
 from antisemitic deputy to former antisemite, 135–140
 intervention of the *Reichstagsfraktion*, 116–117, 120–121, 123, 133
 on ‘War Antisemitism’, 140–145
 post-war career, 145–146
 turns to Mehring after his release from prison, 114–116
- Liberal attitudes, 25, 47
 Lichtheim, George, 2
 Liebermann von Sonnenberg, Max (1848–1911), 78, 153
- Liebkecht, Karl (1871–1919), 11–12
 Liebkecht, Natalie (1835–1909), 77, 187
 Liebkecht, Wilhelm (1826–1900), 51–52, 77, 224
 and Hans Leuß, 129
 and ‘Zur Judenfrage’, 64–70
 anti-Dreyfusard articles, 152–161, 166–167
 anti-‘philosemitism’, 158
- appropriation of his anti-Dreyfusard comments by French antisemites, 158
charity begins at home, 160–162
 Dreyfus’s guilt, 153–155
 USA trip (1896), 187
- Literat*, *Literatentum*. See anti-Jewish stereotypes. See ‘bad literary manners’
- Locke, John (1632–1704), 66
- Luxemburg, Rosa (1871–1919), 6, 101, 171, 213–228
 an unreservedly positive account of anti-antisemitism, 219–220
 anti-antisemitic campaign of 1910, 20, 213–227
 first female editor-in-chief of a Socialist daily in Germany, 14
 on the ‘Negro Question’ and the ‘Yellow Peril’, 225–226
 on ‘Zur Judenfrage’, 221–223, 225
 response to antisemitic slur (1898), 13–14
- Mandelstam, Martyn Nikolaevich (Liadov) (1872–1947), 73. See ‘Mandelstamm und Silberfarb’
- ‘Mandelstamm und Silberfarb’, 73, 208–209
- Marchlewski, Julian (Karski) (1866–1925), 215, 217
- Marx family
 conversion of, 64–66
- Marx, Eleanor (1855–1898), 64, 161, 193
 and Eduard Bernstein, 187–188, 191–193
 and the Dreyfus Affair, 187–188
 USA trip (1896), 187
- Marx, Heinrich (1782–1838), 64
- Marx, Henriette, née Preßburg (1787–1863), 64n33
- Marx, Karl (1818–1883), 58–59, 100, 223–224
Critique of the Gotha Programme, 163
Das Kapital, 175
Die heilige Familie, 85–91
 ‘Zur Judenfrage’, 19, 56–102, 221–223, 225
- Marx, Paul, 25–26
- Marxism, 5
 and Lassalleanism, 59–60, 163–164
 determinism and human agency, 84
- Massing, Paul, 3, 173–174
- Mayer, Gustav (1871–1948), 56n2
- Mehring, Franz (1846–1919), 6, 21, 35, 65–67, 79, 84, 103–110, 130, 162, 202–210, 218, 221, 223
 a satirical take on his stance regarding antisemitism and ‘the Jews’, 169–170
 and Hans Leuß, 103, 109–110, 114–116, 118, 127–129, 135. See *Meine Rechtfertigung*
 and Harden, 105, 151
 and ‘Zur Judenfrage’, 19, 53–54, 60–63, 90–94, 102
 anti-‘philosemitism’, 19, 22–28, 54, 92, 98

- as a 'psychological enigma' (Bebel), 107, 204
- as an anti-Socialist, 23
- as cause of Jewish boycott calls, 23, 169
- conventional juxtaposition to Bernstein, 19, 173
- Meine Rechtfertigung*, 109, 119–121, 122–124, 131
- on Ahlwardt, 76–78
- twisted path to Socialism, 23n4
- Meister, Heinrich (1842–1906), 120, 126, 130
- Mendelsohn, Ezra, 216
- Mendelsohn, Moses (1729–1786), 45, 93
- Menzinger, Johannes (Hans Schmidkunz) (1863–1934), 188–193
- justified antisemitism, 191
- Merchant of Venice*, 190, 201
- Meyer, Ernst (1887–1930), 56n2
- Mlot*, 218, 221
- Mommsen, Hans, viii
- Mommsen, Theodor (1817–1903), 50
- Mosse, George L., 56n2, 175n10, 177
- Mühlendammer*, See anti-Jewish stereotypes
- Münchner Post*, 120
- Mysl Niepodległa*, 217, 224
- Na'aman, Shlomo, 2, 31, 42, 47, 52, 61, 87
- Nachlaßausgabe*, 60, 62, 66–67, 90, 171
- Lenin's use of, 62
- Negotiations between Socialists and Antisemites, 51–52, 78–79
- Nettl, Peter, 4, 214
- Neue Jüdische Monatshefte*, 198
- Neue Zeit*, 25–27, 64, 100–102, 106, 109, 114–117, 120–121, 126, 128–131, 174, 180, 185–186, 193, 203
- Neuer Social-Demokrat*, 57, 59
- Newton, Isaac (1642–1727), 66
- Niemojewski, Andrzej (1864–1921), 217, 221, 223–224
- Ostjudenfrage*, 198
- 'Pansemitism', See Bernstein, Eduard
- Panslavism, 31
- Parteivorstand* (Party Executive), 106, 109, 204–205
- Penslar, Derek J., 43
- Philipps, Adolf, 51
- Philippson, Ludwig (1811–1889), 99
- 'Philosemitism', 18. See anti-'philosemitism'
- Pichler, Adolf, 69–70
- Pluralist society vs. ethnically homogeneous community, xiii
- Pohlmann, Walter, 29n25, 33
- 'Pole(s) of the Mosaic persuasion', 216
- Polish independence, 101, 216–218, 220
- Polish maskilim, 216
- Political prisoners, 156
- Postone, Moishe, 12, 228
- PPS (Polish Socialist Party), 217
- Foreign Committee, 62
- 'Progressive Antisemitism' (Poland), 217
- Pückler, Walter von (1860–1924),
- Quarck, Max (1860–1930), 63
- Radauantisemitismus*, 138
- Reform Judaism, 96
- Reichstagsfraktion*, *Social Democratic [parliamentary party]*, 77, 116–117, 120–121, 123, 133
- Religion, See ideology and false consciousness
- Revel, Wilhelm, See Hasenclever, Wilhelm
- Revisionism, 6, 104, 106–107, 117–118, 120 and 'the Jewish Question', 63–64, 174–175, 177–179
- Revisionists, See revisionism
- 'Revolutionary attentism', 4
- Riazanov, David Borisovich (Goldenbach) (1870–1938), 67
- Roma and Sinti, 72
- Rotenstreich, Nathan, 99
- Rothschild, See anti-Jewish stereotypes
- Rürup, Reinhard, 70–71
- Saale-Zeitung*, 23–25
- Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 14, 103, 116, 120, 122–123
- Scheidemann, Philipp (1865–1939), 102
- Schippel, Max (1859–1928), 100
- Schmeitzner's Internationale Monatsschrift*, 99
- Schmidkunz, Hans (1863–1934), See Menzinger, Johannes
- Schoenlank, Bruno (1859–1901), 77, 162–163
- Schoeps, Hans Joachim, 17
- Schulze-Delitzsch, Franz Hermann (1808–1883), 210
- Schweitzer, Johann Baptist (1833–1875), 46, 59, 101
- SDKPiL (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania), 213, 217–218, 220
- Secolo* (Milan), 158
- Shoah, viii–xiv, 10, 74, 113, 228
- intentionalism, functionalism, viii–ix
- Shylock, 190, 201
- Silberner, Edmund, 2, 38, 56, 160
- Singer, Paul (1844–1911), 22, 224
- Social democracy
- as a subculture, 4
- rank-and-file, 4–5, 47, 51
- Social Democratic Party Congress
- Berlin (1892), 169
- Bremen (1904), 204
- Cologne (1893), 70–75, 79–80
- Dresden (1903), 104–109, 203

Social Democratic Party Congress (*Continued*)

- Erfurt (1891), 164
 Gotha (1875), 46, 163
Social-Demokrat, 59
 Sonnemann, Leopold (1831–1909), 170
Sozialdemokrat, 57, 61
Sozialistengesetz, 27, 46, 50
Sozialistische Monatshefte, 64, 103, 171, 193
 Spargo, John (1876–1966), 66
Spoleczenstwo,
 Stalin, Iosif V. (1879–1953), 2
 Stampfer, Friedrich (1874–1957), 132–133
 Stoecker, Adolf (1835–1909), 24, 47–48, 50,
 110–112, 138, 223
 Südekum, Albert (1871–1944), 120, 122–123
The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, 84
 ‘The Jewish Question’
 centrality of ‘the Jew’ for non-Jewish identity
 formation, xii, 177
 denial of its existence (Rosa Luxemburg),
 225
 existence conceded by both antisemites and
 anti-antisemites, xii–xiii, 227–228
 need to deny its existence, 228
The Nation, 197
 ‘Touchiness’ of the Jews, 50, 51, 57, 98, 112, 145,
 182, 184
 Treitschke, Heinrich von (1834–1896), x, 138
Trybuna, 218
Tsukunft, 58

‘Ueber das Geldwesen’, 42–43

- Vandervelde, Emil (1866–1938), 217
Vergangenheitsbewältigung, ix, 18
 ‘*verjudet*’ (Judaized), 80–81, 213n1
 Volkov, Shulamit, xiii, 3, 7
Volks-Zeitung (Berlin), *See Berliner Volks-Zeitung*
 Voltaire, François Marie Arouet de (1694–1778),
 66
Vorstand, *See Parteivorstand*
Vorwärts, 77, 116
 and Hans Leuß, 120–126
Vossische Zeitung, 25, 106n3
 Wagener, Hermann (1815–1889), 99
Wagener’s Staats- und Gesellschafts-Lexikon, 99
 Warhmund, Adolf (1827–1913), 189
 Waldhausen, Robert, 29n25
 Weber, Max (1864–1920), 195
Welt am Montag, 116–117, 132, 139
 Wistrich, Robert S., 2, 54, 59–60, 79, 100
 Wurm, Emanuel (1857–1920), 120, 130, 205
 Young Hegelian critique of religion, 82, 97
 Zilberfarb, Moshe (1876–1933), 73. *See*
 ‘Mandelstamm und Silberfarb’
 Zionism, 64, 73, 136, 197, 202, 217
 Zola, Emile (1840–1902), 187
Zukunft, 105–106, 108, 110
 ‘Zur Judenfrage’, 19, 56–102, 221–223, 225