

Antisemitism and Responses

The Social Democratic response to antisemitism in Imperial Germany: The case of the Handlungsgehilfen

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We can perhaps best think of (non-Jewish) Imperial German society as being divided roughly into three groups. While the majority presumably thought of itself as not being antisemitic, there was a significant and vocal minority that publicly identified itself as antisemitic, and another rather less significant and less vocal minority that thought of itself as being opposed to antisemitism. Yet all three groups subscribed, not always in equal measure but certainly to a startling degree, to the same anti-Jewish stereotypes. Few (non-Jewish) opponents of antisemitism would have denied that the antisemites had a point. The problem with the antisemites, as they saw it, was not that their assumptions were flawed from the outset but that they took matters too far. Consequently, it is perfectly possible for somebody who was an outspoken opponent of antisemitism in Imperial Germany to be, by our standards, an antisemite.

In Imperial Germany most of the anti-Jewish stereotypes we would classify as antisemitic today were usually considered unproblematic or even legitimate unless at least one of two additional conditions was fulfilled. Those who *explicitly* held “the Jews” responsible for all that was wrong in society and *explicitly* claimed that everything could ultimately be put right if only the process of Jewish emancipation were reversed, were generally considered antisemites. What was assumed to be the crucial issue was not what people thought about Jews but what they thought should happen to them. Rather than people’s perceptions of “the Jewish Question”, it was their prescriptions for its resolution which were considered crucial when determining who was an antisemite and who was not.

The second distinction considered crucial in identifying antisemites depended not on what was said but on who was making potentially contentious remarks about whom and with what intent. Many assumed that their own critical remarks about (supposedly) genuine Jewish transgressions were entirely legitimate. But what if one’s political opponents made effectively identical anti-Jewish remarks? In that case, so the logic went, they were exploiting legitimate anti-Jewish sentiment for illegitimate political ends, and that obviously did constitute antisemitism. Hence, from the socialist point of view it was perfectly legitimate for Wilhelm Hasenclever, the erstwhile Joint Chairman of the party, to introduce “the great,

hallowed names: *Rothschild* and *Bleichröder*” to illustrate Jewish “ruthlessness in the commercial struggle” and the Jews’ “Asiatic cunning bordering on dishonesty”.¹ Socialists considered it equally self-evident, though, that *Reichskanzler* Bernhard von Bülow was being antisemitic when he drew attention to the Jewish-sounding names (Mandelstamm and Silberfarb) of leading exiled Russian student radicals active in Imperial Germany.²

These two means of determining who should be considered an antisemite were at least based on the attitudes people displayed towards Jews (real or imagined). Yet, in fact, the terms “antisemite” or “antisemitic” were probably most frequently used not to denote such attitudes but simply to point to the fact that somebody or something was affiliated or connected with the self-avowed antisemitic movement.³ Everything that an antisemite said or did was considered “antisemitic”. If a deputy had been elected to the *Reichstag* on an antisemitic ticket, for instance, anything he said, or wrote, or did, or became involved in was considered by definition “antisemitic”. This included not only all sorts of policy issues without any immediate connection to “the Jewish Question” but also private issues such as shady business dealings or adulterous affairs. Indeed, in the ongoing dispute between the Social Democratic *Zentralverband der Handlungsgehilfen und -gehilfinnen Deutschlands* and its antisemitic rival organisation, the *Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen-Verband* (DHV), the *Zentralverband* arguably scored its single most successful strike against the DHV by helping to publicise that Wilhelm Schack, one of the antisemitic leaders, had placed an advertisement for a female travel companion and then apparently suggested to a respondent that she should join him and his wife in a *ménage à trois* (the so-called “Triolen Affäre”).⁴

Consequently, the first question when assessing Social Democratic opposition to antisemitism in Imperial Germany always needs to be whether criticism directed at the antisemites actually took issue specifically with the antisemites’ anti-Jewish notions, and this can only be determined on a case-to-case basis. While the volume of criticism levelled at political antisemitism by the Social Democrats looks impressive at first sight, an altogether more modest picture emerges once one disregards those instances in which that critique in fact failed to take issue with the antisemites’ anti-Jewish attitudes.

¹ Wilhelm Revel [i.e., Wilhelm Hasenclever], *Der Wahrheit die Ehre. Ein Beitrag zur Judenfrage in Deutschland*, Nuremberg 1881, pp. 16–17. Cf. Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany*, New York—Cambridge 2007, pp. 46–53, here p. 49.

² Cf. Fischer, pp. 73, 208.

³ For a more detailed discussion of this issue, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 13–15 and 103–134.

⁴ Cf. *Handlungsgehilfen-Zeitung*, vol. 13, no. 18 (8 September 1909), p. 137 and *Sonder-Ausgabe* (15 September 1909); Daniela Kasischke-Wurm, *Antisemitismus im Spiegel der Hamburger Presse während des Kaiserreichs 1884–1914*, Hamburg 1997, pp. 400–401.

I

Debates among and between antisemites and their opponents frequently hinged not directly on matters (supposedly) Jewish but on a critique of “philosemitism”. Soon after modern political antisemitism reared its head, its proponents began to use the term “philosemitism” to discredit their opponents. The term probably first appeared in print in an article published in December 1880 by the godfather of respectable antisemitism, Heinrich von Treitschke, in which he criticised the “philosemitic zealotry of the *Fortschrittspartei*”. This suggests that the term was by then already in circulation among Treitschke’s supporters.⁵ Although not all antisemites were equally enamoured of it,⁶ its introduction was clearly a formidable success and the term very quickly established itself as a widely accepted and certainly universally understood shorthand denoting various forms of opposition to antisemitism.

That it was not the etymologically more obvious term “prosemitism” but the even more charged term “philosemitism” that took on this function and resonated so strongly with many in Imperial Germany, including especially the more educated, is telling.⁷ Many of those who did not consider themselves antisemites suggested (and subjectively may even have believed) that in voicing their opposition to both antisemitism and “philosemitism” they were taking a detached and neutral stand, allowing neither of the two “extremes” to sway them. Yet this usage really demonstrated the exact opposite, as it threw into sharp relief just how exceptionalist their position actually was. The clear implication was that there could in fact be no neutral ground, one could only be the Jews’ friend or foe, and anybody who could be bothered to actively oppose antisemitism must be their “friend” and in cahoots with them. Given these terms of reference the antisemites needed to make little effort to demonstrate that there could be no legitimate forms of opposition to antisemitism that did not derive from some unhealthy form of subservience to Jewry because this was widely accepted anyway. Those who did oppose antisemitism for the most part seem to have had a strong desire to distance themselves from the suspicion of “philosemitism”, not because they felt cornered by the antisemites, but because the possibility that others might think they were “taking the Jews’ side” genuinely embarrassed them.⁸ Hence an almost formulaic disclaimer in this respect became part and parcel of the rhetoric directed against antisemitism, and explicit opposition to “philosemitism” was considered an elementary virtue by virtually all those (non-Jews) who publicised their rejection of antisemitism.

⁵ Wolfram Kinzig, ‘Philosemitismus. Teil I: Zur Geschichte des Begriffs,’ in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 105, no. 2 (1994), pp. 202–228, here pp. 211–213. The text in question is Heinrich von Treitschke, ‘Zur inneren Lage am Jahresschlusse,’ in *Preußische Jahrbücher*, vol. 46, no. 6 (1880), pp. 639–645. Partly reprinted in Karsten Krieger (ed.), *Der “Berliner Antisemitismusstreit”: 1879–1881*, Munich 2003, pp. 711–715, here p. 712.

⁶ Kinzig, p. 214.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 211. Among the authors who did in fact use the term “prosemitism” on occasion was Treitschke’s most outspoken non-Jewish opponent in Jewish matters, the liberal historian, Theodor Mommsen.

⁸ Cf. Fischer, pp. 13, 35–36.

That anti-“philosemitic” rhetoric was used not only by the antisemites but also by their opponents has been noted by various scholars. Its significance, however, has been considerably underrated. Far from being considered integral to the critique of antisemitism in Imperial Germany, it has generally been portrayed as a marginal, not to say an obscure, curiosity. Supposedly, opposition to “philosemitism” was a preserve of some socialists and an obsession shared by a few exceptionally problematic individuals, foremost among them the prominent Social Democratic journalist and historian, Franz Mehring. Indeed, the general assumption has been that Mehring’s peers not only did not share this obsession but on occasion even took him to task for it, and publicly at that.

A number of scholars including Paul Massing, Robert Wistrich and Jack Jacobs have suggested that Mehring and Bernstein in particular became embroiled in a dispute on this issue.⁹ Mehring eventually became a founding member of the German Communist Party while Bernstein emerged as the conceptual founding father of the revisionist challenge to Marxism. Scholars have been inclined to draw a connection between Bernstein’s affinity for “democratic Socialism” and his (alleged) greater sensitivity regarding the problematic nature of the anti-“philosemitic” discourse, on the one hand, and between Mehring’s descent down the slippery slope towards Soviet “totalitarianism” and his obsession with “philosemitism” on the other. Yet intriguing as some may find this suggestion, it is simply not borne out by the evidence.

Bernstein’s discussion of “philosemitism”, far from focusing on Mehring in particular, in fact begins with the statement that the juxtaposition of antisemitism and “philosemitism” was “widely accepted in the socialist press”.¹⁰ What is more, Bernstein’s article, rather than undermining the logic that underlay the anti-“philosemitic” discourse, actually actively reinforced it. He did, it is true, suggest that by joining in the critique of “philosemitism” the Social Democrats might end up granting the antisemites’ use of the term “a certain legitimacy”.¹¹ What concerned him, however, was not the logic of the anti-“philosemitic” argument as such but merely the use of the actual term “philosemitism”. Bernstein singled out as the worst culprits “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 Jewish interests”¹² and were hence particularly acerbic in their critique of “philosemitism”. Bernstein (who was, of course, himself such a “comrade of Jewish descent”) readily acknowledged their desire to “spare the party any suspicion of aiding and abetting Jewish interests”; indeed, he expressly called this intention “very commendable”.¹³ The point he was trying to make was not that this intention

⁹The text usually cited to demonstrate this is a review article published by Bernstein in the party’s theoretical journal, the *Neue Zeit*, in May 1893: Eduard Bernstein, ‘Das Schlagwort und der Antisemitismus’ in *Neue Zeit*, vol. 11-II, no. 35 (17 May 1893), pp. 228–237.

¹⁰*ibid.*, p. 228.

¹¹*ibid.*, p. 233.

¹²*ibid.*, p. 234.

¹³*ibid.*

was somehow critique-worthy but that it could be realised “better and more effectively”¹⁴ by using a more precise terminology. The term “philosemitism” was simply wrong. If one wanted to denote the real “other extreme”, the actual threat that formed the counterpart to antisemitism, then the term one needed to deploy, he argued, was “pansemitism”.¹⁵ And to make his intention quite clear, Bernstein added for good measure that antisemitism and pansemitism were polar opposites in just the same way “as slavophobia and panslavism” were.¹⁶

In other words, Bernstein took what was objectively no more than a figment of the imagination and a construct that credited an amorphous complex of fairly feeble trends vaguely opposed to antisemitism with a unity of purpose that it sadly lacked and blew its significance out of all proportion by placing it on a par with panslavism, a real existing, self-avowed political and ideological movement; a movement, we might add, that virtually all progressives, radicals, and socialists in Europe, from its very inception, considered their sworn enemy. How, therefore, could Bernstein’s suggestion possibly do anything other than massively reinforce the logic underlying the anti-“philosemitic” argument? It is mystifying that this text by Bernstein could nevertheless have been interpreted by general consent as a “warning against the use of the catchword of philo-Semitism”¹⁷ that supposedly “cautioned the Social Democratic Party against ambiguity of language and attitude in the Jewish question”.¹⁸ Moreover, what Bernstein eventually identified in this very text as antisemitism’s single worst quality was the fact that it would be counterproductive. Rather than accelerating the process of assimilation, antisemitism would only provoke Jews into reverting to their separatist ways, “and it is here, above all,” Bernstein explained, “that the critique of antisemitism has to begin.”¹⁹

Against this background the timing of Bernstein’s article is significant. It was published six weeks after the establishment of the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*. Conceivably, it was as a result of the inauguration of this organisation that Bernstein felt compelled to sound a clear warning, now that the spectre of “philosemitism” really had brought forth an institutionalised and self-avowed movement analogous to panslavism. What is clear from Bernstein’s line of argument is that his issue was not that the thrust of his peers’ critique of “philosemitism” was misdirected or went too far but that it did not go far enough. The suggestion that they should direct their justified wrath against pansemitism rather than “philosemitism” was meant to heighten their vigilance.

Not once did Bernstein mention Mehring in all this. It is not without irony that this by no means prevented Mehring himself from suspecting what scholars have claimed ever since, namely that Bernstein did mean to target him. When he

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Paul Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction*, New York 1949, p. 188.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 267, n. 15.

¹⁹ Bernstein, p. 237.

suggested this to the *de facto* editor-in-chief of the *Neue Zeit*, Karl Kautsky,²⁰ the latter immediately clarified the matter. To the best of his knowledge, Kautsky explained, Bernstein was thinking above all of the leader of the Austrian party, Victor Adler (who was also of Jewish extraction). Kautsky added that he could discern no substantial difference between the positions that Bernstein and Mehring had formulated anyway. Nor did Kautsky give any indication that he himself felt uneasy about the anti-“philosemitic” discourse. Far from it, he expressly confirmed that “philosemitism in this sense exists” and defined it as “that school of thought that regards every event and every phenomenon exclusively from the vantage point of whether it will benefit or harm the Jews.”²¹ He also added that “the antisemites use the word in a different sense to us.”²²

It is perhaps worth summing up the argument at this point. Kautsky neither accepted the notion that the positions Bernstein and Mehring had formulated differed in substance, nor did he voice any misgivings of his own regarding their stance. Bernstein’s sense of urgency in taking issue with the terminology in question arose precisely from the fact that the wrong use of the term “philosemitism” was “widely accepted in the socialist press.”²³ None of this can be reconciled with the notion that Mehring stood alone in his obsession with “philosemitism”. Far from taking him to task for his opposition to “philosemitism”, his peers not only tolerated it, but in fact subscribed to it themselves.

The rejection of “philosemitism”, then, was altogether more prevalent among Imperial German Social Democrats than has previously been acknowledged. Yet how representative was this socialist preoccupation with “philosemitism” of broader attitudes in Imperial German society more generally? Did liberals too subscribe to this sort of reasoning? This is an issue that requires further research. Even so, it is already evident that opposition to “philosemitism” was no preserve of the Social Democrats. Mehring, for instance, repeatedly shifted his political allegiance and only became a Social Democrat for good when he was forty-five. Yet he remained unwavering in his rejection of “philosemitism”.²⁴ What is more, on finally joining the Social Democrats he stated explicitly that his well-established opposition to “philosemitism” required no modification now that he had become a Marxist. Though striking in itself, this obviously only tells us how Mehring saw the matter, but his account is borne out by the fact that two liberal papers he wrote for in the 1880s became the object of Jewish boycott calls because of anti-“philosemitic” articles whose publication he was responsible for, in one case as the author, in the other as the editor. One of the papers in question stood on the right of the liberal spectrum, the other on the left. In neither case does Mehring seem to have got into trouble for

²⁰ International Institute of Social History (IISH, Amsterdam), Collection Karl Kautsky D XVII: 43.

²¹ Russian Centre for Preservation and Research of Modern Historical Documents (RCChIDNI, former IML/CPA), Fonds 201: Mehring: 50.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Bernstein, p. 228.

²⁴ For the following see Fischer, pp. 22–25.



Caricatures of Rosa Luxemburg (sitting on Georg von Vollmar's knee) and Paul Singer from a satirical publication produced for the Social Democratic party congress in Dresden in 1903, most likely under the auspices of Eduard Fuchs: *Das große Mißverständnis*. They demonstrate the ease and versatility with which Social Democrats reproduced anti-Jewish stereotypes, occasionally even for humorous purposes, while at the same time failing rather dramatically to take antisemitism seriously as a political threat. Courtesy of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.



causing these boycott calls, which would surely be inconceivable, had this critique of “philosemitism” been anathema to liberals.

The pamphlet that Wilhelm Hasenclever published under a pseudonym (Wilhelm Revel) early in 1881: *Der Wahrheit die Ehre. Ein Beitrag zur Judenfrage in Deutschland* suggests a similar picture.²⁵ As far as Hasenclever was concerned, the Jews had only themselves to blame for the recent upsurge in antisemitic activity and matters were aggravated yet further by the way in which they and their “friends” (that is, the “philosemites”) had responded to it. He criticised the Jews’ “effectively malicious touchiness”²⁶ and identified their “almost laughable touchiness” as “one of the worst characteristics of the Jews.”²⁷ In short, the pamphlet is replete with anti-Jewish stereotypes, which it presents with obvious pleasure and abandon. We might be tempted to infer from the fact that Hasenclever decided to publish this pamphlet under a pseudonym that he had a bad conscience, or at least grounds to fear he would get into difficulties with his peers for not criticising the antisemites stringently enough. Yet apparently it is more likely that he used the pseudonym because he feared his comrades would find his critique of the antisemites *too* outspoken.²⁸ Hasenclever’s pamphlet in fact consists of a series of slightly revised articles that had previously been published in December 1880, not in a socialist paper but “in einer freisinnigen Zeitung”,²⁹ that is, a left-liberal paper. As in Mehring’s case, in and of itself this need not indicate that the editors of this left-liberal paper agreed with Hasenclever’s views. What it does at the very least rule out, though, is that they considered these views unacceptable.

One final example of this anti-“philosemitic” sentiment can be seen in the book *Friede der Judenfrage!*³⁰ It was published in 1896, under a pseudonym (Johannes Menzinger), by Hans Schmidkunz, a progressive theoretician of art and pioneering campaigner for the application of pedagogical principles in university education. None other than Eduard Bernstein found this book “very perceptive” and warmly recommended it to the readers of the *Neue Zeit* in 1898.³¹ It too is replete with anti-Jewish stereotypes and Menzinger/Schmidkunz emphatically maintained how important it was to insist on the Jews’ negative qualities, “especially *vis-à-vis* the blindness of philosemitic rhetoric.”³²

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 46–53.

²⁶ Revel, p. 29.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁸ This is the suggestion of Ludger Heid, the scholar currently on most intimate terms with Hasenclever’s work. Ludger Heid, “. . . gehört notorisch zu den hervorragenden Leitern der Sozialdemokratischen Partei”, in *idem*, Klaus-Dieter Vinschen, Elisabeth Heid (eds.), *Wilhelm Hasenclever. Reden und Schriften*, Bonn 1989, pp. 15–68, here p. 55.

²⁹ Revel, p. iii.

³⁰ Cf. Fischer, pp. 188–193.

³¹ Eduard Bernstein, ‘Eleanor Marx. Erinnerungen’, in *Neue Zeit*, vol. 16-II, no. 30 (13 April 1898), pp. 118–123, here p. 122.

³² Johannes Menzinger, *Friede der Judenfrage!*, Berlin: 1896, p. 71.

II

How prevalent anti-Jewish sentiments and stereotypes were in Imperial German society as a whole can be gauged rather well by looking both at those socialists who had distanced themselves the most and at those who had distanced themselves the least from mainstream society. Unless one suggests that they acquired their problematic attitudes towards Jews only after and because they had become socialists (and we have no reason to assume this), the case of the former is instructive because it tells us how strong the hold of widespread perceptions regarding matters (supposedly) Jewish remained even over those who made a systematic and sustained effort to transcend the outlook and values they had internalised in the course of their socialisation. The case of the latter is telling because it offers us a glimpse of the sort of mindset that prevailed where socialist ideology had barely made inroads and it therefore definitely cannot be held responsible, not even hypothetically, for problematic attitudes towards Jews. The stance taken *vis-à-vis* the antisemites between the turn of the century and the First World War in the publications of the *Zentralverband der Handlungsgehilfen und -gehilfinnen Deutschlands*, the union of shop assistants and commercial employees, provides an example of the attitudes of those least influenced by socialist ideas.³³

As is well known, by far the single largest organisation in this field was the *Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen-Verband* (DHV), an openly *völkisch* and antisemitic organisation that propagated the exclusion of both Jewish and female *Handlungsgehilfen* from the profession and admitted neither as members. The *Zentralverband* that organised both male and female *Handlungsgehilfen*, by contrast, had great difficulties in establishing itself and gaining a substantial following among the *Handlungsgehilfen*. While the DHV boasted 40,205 members in 1900, the *Zentralverband* of 1899 had only 500 members and although this number had risen to 11,523 by 1910, the DHV's membership had grown to over 100,000 in the meantime.³⁴ Even allowing for the fact that these figures may not be altogether exact, given that both organisations were presumably inclined to exaggerate their membership, they nevertheless provide eloquent testimony to the superiority of the DHV in terms of its ability to recruit among the *Handlungsgehilfen*. Iris Hamel, whose monograph on the DHV remains unsurpassed, offers the following assessment of the DHV:

The DHV was not only an interest group, but also—and in the opinion of its members particularly so—a community of shared convictions [*Gesinnungsgemeinschaft*].

³³ The following discussion is based on research undertaken at the International Institute of Social History (IISH). I acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude the grants awarded by the School of Humanities at King's College London and the University of London's Central Research Fund that made this research possible and, as ever, the support of the colleagues at the IISH who make every stay there an unusually pleasant and productive experience.

³⁴ Carole E. Adams, 'Anti-Semitism and the Case of White Collar Workers,' in John Milfull (ed.), *Why Germany? National Socialist Anti-Semitism and the European Context*, Oxford 1993, pp. 61–74, here p. 68; Dieter Fricke, *Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung 1869–1917*, Berlin 1987, vol. II, p. 955.

Its founders had already perceived of the Jew not only as the representative of capitalism, but also as the destroyer of national unity. [...] They combined antisemitic notions with nationalist and All-German claims and fused these with contemporary Social Darwinist trends and racial doctrines. Thus the DHV played a significant role in the evolution of *völkisch* ideology. [...] Since the DHV formed its members to a much higher degree than the other antisemitic groups, it influenced the mindset of substantial strata within the *Mittelstand*.

[It] communicated to its members an ideology to which they held fast no matter how the circumstances of the day changed. The “Jew paragraph” in its statutes and the ideological foundations of the community of shared convictions were never questioned. They were considered self-evident.³⁵

Clearly, then, although matters (supposedly) Jewish were not its only concern, far from being incidental to the DHV’s success in organising the *Handlungsgehilfen*, antisemitism formed an integral part of its attraction. Needless to say, its anti-feminist and anti-proletarian profile were also important in securing wide support among the *Handlungsgehilfen* and on all three counts the *Zentralverband* stood no chance of competing; it wanted the *Handlungsgehilfen* to consider themselves workers, propagated equal rights for women, and considered itself an organisation standing in strict opposition to antisemitism.

The focus on the *Zentralverband* and the DHV thus extends our understanding in another intriguing direction. Party-political, and especially parliamentary party-political, antisemitism was in decline by the turn of the century and certainly after 1903. Party-political opposition to party-political antisemitism thus moved (even further) down the list of Social Democratic priorities. Yet the *Zentralverband* presents us with an organisation within the Social Democratic orbit that really had no choice in setting its priorities since it had to contend on a daily basis with a far stronger competitor that was self-avowedly antisemitic. Arguably, this raises the intriguing possibility that the constant confrontation with the DHV could have rendered the *Zentralverband* both more circumspect and more forthright in its approach (and opposition) to antisemitism.

Prima facie the following might seem to suggest that this was indeed the case. Tucked away among the papers in the Kautsky Family Archive held by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam are a number of manuscripts by third parties, some of them by (hitherto) unidentified authors. Among the latter is a short typescript about the significance of antisemitism for the unionisation of the *Handlungsgehilfen*. In it, its author complains about the fact that fellow Social Democrats had repeatedly sung the praises of the antisemitic DHV and advertised its activities while ignoring or denigrating the *Zentralverband*. Of course, the author suggested, none of those responsible for these misguided comments had acted out of bad faith. They had inadvertently done the DHV’s bidding which showed how cunning its propaganda was and illustrated how important it was to

³⁵ Iris Hamel, *Völkischer Verband und nationale Gewerkschaft. Der Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen-Verband, 1893–1933*, Frankfurt am Main 1967, pp. 268–269; cf. also Peter Pulzer, “Third Thoughts on German and Austrian Antisemitism,” in *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2005), pp. 137–178, here pp. 143–144.

remain vigilant.³⁶ It is evident that this typescript is not a stand-alone text but an excerpt. It comes, in fact, from an article by the *Zentralverband's* leading publicist, Paul Lange, published in the *Neue Zeit* in March 1912.³⁷ The editors of the *Neue Zeit* had decided not to publish this part of Lange's article and therefore quite literally cut it out before passing the rest of the typescript on to the typesetter.

All this would easily lend itself to the interpretation that the *Zentralverband*, given the special circumstances of its constant competition with the DHV, was indeed particularly pronounced in its opposition to antisemitism but was stifled in this opposition by the ignorance and complacency of the socialist (trade union) movement at large. But the devil is as ever in the detail. Given that its main competitor was an antisemitic organisation, the *Zentralverband* had no choice but to actively oppose the antisemites. Yet while this opposition hinged on a whole array of concerns, what it rarely took issue with, and increasingly less so over time, was the DHV's anti-Jewish position. In this respect the *Zentralverband's* stance *vis-à-vis* the antisemites was in fact well in keeping with that of Social Democracy in general. For the *Zentralverband* the crucial dividing line ran between organisations that belonged to the socialist spectrum and those that did not, and its strongest competitor outside the socialist spectrum was inevitably its principal opponent. It just so happened that this opponent was the DHV, a self-avowedly antisemitic organisation. Yet the *Zentralverband* would have been no less preoccupied with the DHV had it been a liberal and "philosemitic" organisation rather than a *völkisch* and antisemitic one.

If one looks at the passage from Lange's text that the *Neue Zeit* refused to print and the examples he introduced there to illustrate the problem it is quite clear what his chief concern was: part of the socialist press, instead of backing the *Zentralverband's* claim to be the only legitimate representative of the *Handlungsgehilfen* had granted legitimacy to its leading competitor outside the Social Democratic orbit.³⁸ To the extent that this competitor was part of the antisemitic movement, opposing it implied an opposition to antisemitism but none of this had anything to do

³⁶ IISH Kautsky Family Archive: 2288.

³⁷ Paul Lange, 'Die Privatangestellten und die Sozialdemokratie,' in *Neue Zeit*, vol. 30-I, no. 23 (8 March 1912), pp. 822–826.

³⁸ Lange offered several examples in the passage cut from the original article. In 1902, for instance, the *Korrespondent für Deutschlands Buchdrucker*, the organ of the book printers' union, had reviewed the DHV favourably. Cf. 'Aus der Arbeiterbewegung: Der Buchdrucker-"Correspondent"', in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 7, no. 143 (1 June 1903), p. 5. Taken to task for this by the *Korrespondenzblatt der Generalkommission*, the central organ of the socialist trade union movement, the book printers' *Korrespondent* had expressly repeated and elaborated on its positive assessment of the DHV. In 1903, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, the party's most prestigious daily (and the undisputed flagship of the anti-revisionist left wing within the party), had called upon its readers to attend a DHV assembly. Cf. 'Leipziger Angelegenheiten: Die Organisation aller Handlungsgehilfen eine Notwendigkeit!' in *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, vol. 10, no. 44 (23 February 1903), 1. Beilage, p. 3. For the reaction of the *Zentralverband* to this cf. 'Aus der Handlungsgehilfen-Bewegung: Mitschuldig der Verbreitung antisemitischer Lügen,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 7, no. 137 (1 March 1903), p. 6. Here too, as in so many other cases, the "antisemitic lies" in whose proliferation the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* was accused of having become complicit were not lies about Jews but lies about the status of the DHV as a supposedly legitimate representative of the *Handlungsgehilfen*. These lies were *antisemitic* lies simply because they worked in the DHV's favour. Since the DHV was antisemitic, any lie working in its favour was automatically considered an antisemitic lie, irrespective of its specific content.

specifically with the stance that any of the organisations or publications involved took *vis-à-vis* matters (supposedly) Jewish.

The letter that Paul Lange wrote on 20 February 1912 to Emanuel Wurm, one of the editors of the *Neue Zeit*, to complain about the decision not to print this part of his article makes this even clearer. An experienced editor himself, the irony of the situation was not lost on Lange. “This time I find myself in the role of the authors who reprimand the editor for cutting precisely the best and most important part”, he wrote. Wurm would hardly find this an original claim, Lange conceded, “but in this case it is true.” He then tried to convince Wurm of the need to print at least some of the material that had now been cut (though to no avail).³⁹ Not unreasonably, Lange seems to have assumed he might be able to convince Wurm of the need to include the contentious passage if he could demonstrate how acute the problem continued to be. He therefore offered new examples of very recent “hair-raising” utterances in the socialist press. They showed, he argued, that “in *this* respect our press has *not* improved in the meantime.”⁴⁰ In other words, these examples reflect exactly the problem he had wanted to raise in the part of his article that had been cut. What they indeed illustrate is the inability of socialist journalists to tell apart who was who in the murky world of organisations claiming to represent the *Handlungsgehilfen*. Yet in this letter to Wurm, Lange no longer uses the label “antisemitic” to identify the DHV, not even in the purely technical, party-political sense of the word.

What expression, then, did the *Zentralverband*'s opposition to the antisemitism of the DHV find in its publications between the end of the century and the First World War? Around the turn of the century we do occasionally find direct critical references to the DHV's anti-Jewish stance in the organ of the *Zentralverband*, the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* (succeeded in 1909 by the *Handlungsgehilfen-Zeitung*). For the most part, this critique consisted simply of the statement that one of the things that set the DHV apart was its determination to exclude a significant share of the *Handlungsgehilfen* from its membership “simply because they were born Jewish, because they have a different religion.”⁴¹ The formulation is instructive because it betrays a lack of genuine appreciation for the extent to which the brand of modern political antisemitism to which the DHV subscribed had moved beyond the juxtaposition of Jews and non-Jews along religious lines. That even this explicit critique of the DHV's refusal to admit Jews was somewhat ambivalent in nature is borne out by the fact that it could also be combined with a denunciation of the DHV's “superficial and ignorant treatment of the Women's and Jewish Question”,⁴² a formulation that surely implies that the DHV had got the answers wrong but the questions right.

³⁹ IISH Kautsky Family Archive: 424.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ ‘Theorie und Praxis des Deutschnationalen Handlungsgehilfen-Verbandes,’ in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 3, no. 49 (1 July 1899), pp. 3–5, here p. 4. Cf. also, for example, ‘Aus der Arbeiterbewegung: Der Buchdrucker-“Correspondent”’, in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 7, no. 143 (1 June 1903), p. 5.

⁴² ‘Aus der Handlungsgehilfen-Bewegung: Brandenburg a. d. H.,’ in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 5, no. 103 (1 October 1901), pp. 3–4, here p. 3.

Beyond this straightforward critique of the DHV's refusal to admit Jews, the *Zentralverband* never seems to have formulated a programmatic position of its own regarding the anti-Jewish dimension of the antisemites' ideological orientation. However, in the autumn of 1898, the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* did reprint an article from the Austrian Social Democratic party organ, the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Vienna), and there can be no doubt that the editors did so because they thought this article said rather well what needed to be said. In an important sense this is telling in itself for one of the few basics that scholars working in this field have always been able to agree upon is the fact that the Austrian socialists' response to antisemitism was even cruder and even more ambivalent than that of their German comrades. The article in question, 'Zur Naturgeschichte des Antisemitismus', is fairly jocular in tone and simplistic in its explanation of the causes and inevitable demise of antisemitism: the worker stands in constant confrontation with the capitalist and therefore recognises that capitalism is the root cause of his problems. Between the petty bourgeois and the capitalist, however, stands a middleman. The horizon of the petty bourgeois is defined by the sphere of intermediate trade which lies "in the hands of the Jews".⁴³ Thus he becomes antisemitic. "He is the victim of a twofold error. First he confuses cause and effect (capitalism and intermediate trade) and then content and form (intermediate trade and Jews)."⁴⁴ This formulation in fact offers a good illustration of the care with which we need to read texts of this kind.⁴⁵ On its own terms, it could be read to imply that antisemitism is indeed no more than a form of projection for which Jews merely provide the foil. Yet as we just saw, it is in fact predicated on the notion that the phenomenon of intermediate trade as a whole actually was in Jewish ownership. The formulation clearly states not that Jews played a more or less prominent role in this sphere but that it was "in the hands of *the Jews*" [emphasis added]. The issue, then, was not that the antisemitic analysis was wrong; the Jews (supposedly) did play exactly the social role the antisemites ascribed to them. Contentious was how this fact should be interpreted and what consequences ought or needed to be drawn from it. To return to the text, "Antisemitism is a historical comedy of errors. Consequently, antisemitism is a lost cause."⁴⁶ It could provide no basis for serious party politics and would therefore attract only activists whose overriding interest it was to gain personal advantages and enrich themselves and whom the lack of political substance and the mendacity and political futility of the whole endeavour would not therefore irk.

These comments apart, the few remarks in the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* that did make explicit references to Jews or Jewish concerns (real or imagined) generally criticised Jews and featured in the context of discussions that made no claim to take issue with antisemitism. An example is the article on Sunday work published on

⁴³ 'Zur Naturgeschichte des Antisemitismus', in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 2, no. 31 (5 October 1898), p. 3.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ For my discussion on a short utterance by Karl Liebknecht that illustrates the same point, see Fischer, pp. 11–12.

⁴⁶ 'Zur Naturgeschichte des Antisemitismus'.

15 December 1898. This article was in fact in large part taken from the Social Democratic paper in Frankfurt am Main, the *Volksstimme*. The *Volksstimme* claimed that Germany's foremost liberal daily, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, whose publisher was the prominent Jewish liberal, Leopold Sonnemann, had on different occasions made both favourable and unfavourable noises regarding the issue of a total ban on Sunday work for *Handlungsgehilfen*. On the one hand, the article suggested, this was typical of the often contradictory attitude displayed by the *Frankfurter Zeitung* towards more radical measures of social reform. The thrust of this critique would seem to be directed against liberalism as a political orientation inherently incapable of taking a clear stance on the decisive issues of the day. Yet strangely enough the article in fact culminates in the contention that Sonnemann's real motivation in opposing a total ban was due to his acting "on the behest of a number of orthodox Jewish enterprises who, because they celebrate their Sabbath, want all the more work done on Sunday".⁴⁷ Sonnemann should have admitted as much but was presumably scared of the antisemites' critique which "in this case" was "not unjustified".⁴⁸ What Sonnemann's motives may or may not have been in this particular case need hardly concern us. The point of genuine interest here is that it was apparently possible to construe—among Social Democrats—a whole discourse around the conviction that the real reason why a total ban on Sunday work for *Handlungsgehilfen* could not be pushed through lay not in the economic interests of the *Mittelstand* but in the deeply felt desire of those who held responsibility and power in Germany to respect Jewish Sabbath observance and accommodate its implications.

As we saw, the *Zentralverband's* determination to denounce the DHV as "antisemitic" hinged primarily on the DHV's intimate affiliation with party-political antisemitism. Just as the *Zentralverband* initially claimed that it was not officially affiliated with the Social Democratic party, the DHV persistently emphasised that whatever its ideological affinities its remit was of a social, not of a party-political nature. The *Zentralverband* invested considerable energies in unmasking the mythical nature of this claim. Far from representing the interests of the *Handlungsgehilfen*, so their argument went, the DHV was an appendage of party-political antisemitism designed to pull the wool over the eyes of the *Handlungsgehilfen* and mobilise them as voters for the antisemitic parties. While their membership dues were in large part siphoned off to finance party-political work, the *Handlungsgehilfen* received precious little in return and the antisemitic deputies whose election campaigns they effectively financed repeatedly voted against their interests.⁴⁹ All this was

⁴⁷ 'Die Sonnemann-Demokratie und die Sonntagsruhe-Bestrebungen der Handlungsgehilfen,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 2, no. 36 (15 December 1898), p. 3.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Cf., for instance, 'Deutsch-nationaler Wagemuth,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 3, no. 47 (1 June 1899), p. 2; 'Theorie und Praxis des Deutschnationalen Handlungsgehilfen-Verbandes,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 3, no. 49 (1 July 1899), pp. 3–5; 'Zur Handlungsgehilfen-Bewegung: Dresden,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 3, no. 51 (1 August 1899), pp. 3–4, here p. 4; 'Unter falscher Flagge!' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 5, no. 93 (1 May 1901), pp. 6–7, here p. 6; 'Antisemitische Kleinhändler und deutschnationale Gehilfen,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 5, no. 99 (1 August 1901), pp. 1–3, here p. 1; 'In einer solennen Keilerei,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 7, no. 152 (15 October 1903), p. 5;

essentially true but it would, of course, also have held true to varying degrees for any other union not affiliated with Social Democracy. That the particular brand of party politics to which the DHV sought to tie the *Handlungsgehilfen* happened to be party-political antisemitism was quite irrelevant to the *Zentralverband's* argument which would have been just the same had the DHV been affiliated to another party-political camp. The *Zentralverband's* pre-occupation with the “antisemites” resulted from the fact that the DHV was its strongest competitor when it came to the unionisation of *Handlungsgehilfen*, not from the fact that it considered antisemitism a particularly critique-worthy ideological orientation.

Ordinarily, then, the publications of the *Zentralverband*, like most socialist publications, used the term “antisemitic” primarily to signify party-political affiliation. Take the headline ‘Antisemitic Forgers and Fraudsters.’⁵⁰ Surely with our current sensitivities we would expect an article with this title to show how antisemites falsify information about Jews to arrive at their bizarre claims. Yet if we look at the two articles published under this heading in the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* in the spring of 1904, a rather different picture emerges. Here the emphasis lay on the fact that the DHV had publicly misquoted a statement in Hamburg’s socialist paper, the *Hamburger Echo*, about the displacement of small shops by large department stores. Why was the DHV’s misrepresentation of the paper’s stance an *antisemitic* forgery? The DHV was a self-avowedly antisemitic organisation. Hence everything it did or said was antisemitic. Neither real nor imagined Jews had the first thing to do with it. On another occasion the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* accused one of the founding fathers and leaders of the DHV, Friedrich Raab, of being an antisemitic chameleon [*Verwandlungskünstler*, literally: quick-change artist].⁵¹ He regularly presented himself to different audiences in different guises, sometimes as a small entrepreneur, sometimes as an artisan, sometimes as a “Christian-national worker” and so on.⁵² Why does this make him an *antisemitic* chameleon? Because he was a leading antisemite. In the summer of 1913—and by this time references to anything antisemitic had in fact become much rarer in the publications of the *Zentralverband*—the *Handlungsgehilfen-Zeitung* had a case of “antisemitic depravity” to report.⁵³ What had transpired? A majority of employees’ representatives on the council of the local branch of the *Angestelltenversicherung* (the recently created public pension scheme for white-collar workers) in Düsseldorf had elected an employers’ representative as the council’s chairman. The depravity, then, lay in the fact that instead of using their majority to assert their interests, the employees’ representatives had compromised with the minority of employers’ representatives. Why was this an

‘Aus der Handlungsgehilfen-Bewegung: Eine Radauversammlung,’ in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 8, no. 159 (1 February 1904), p. 22; ‘Neutralität,’ in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 11, no. 3 (30 January 1907), p. 517.

⁵⁰ ‘Antisemitische Fälscher und Schwindler,’ in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 8, no. 164 (15 April 1904), pp. 59–60 and vol. 8, no. 165 (1 May 1904), p. 68.

⁵¹ ‘Ein antisemitischer Verwandlungskünstler,’ in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 8, no. 176 (15 October 1904), p. 159.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ ‘Antisemitische Würdelosigkeit,’ in *Handlungsgehilfen-Zeitung*, vol. 17, no. 17 (20 August 1913), pp. 129–130.

antisemitic depravity? Because the chairman had been nominated by an employees' representative who belonged to the DHV. One could add many more examples to illustrate this kind of reasoning.

A strategy that was particularly popular among the opponents of antisemitism in Imperial Germany was that of unmasking the antisemites as disingenuous by demonstrating that they themselves displayed "Jewish" qualities while decrying them in others or that they cooperated with Jews while calling upon others to boycott them. The *Zentralverband* was no exception. In terms of possible examples we are again spoilt for choice. For instance, the DHV frequently denounced the Jewish-sounding names of numerous *Zentralverband* officials to which the publications of the *Zentralverband* liked to respond in kind by alerting their readers to the Jewish-sounding names of some of the DHV's officials.⁵⁴ The *Zentralverband* also sought to capitalise on conflicts within the DHV, most dramatically in the case of the subsequent defector from the DHV, Franz Schneider. Even while he was still a DHV official, the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* cited at length from critical statements about the development of the DHV that Schneider published in antisemitic periodicals. At no point did the editors give the slightest indication that they considered these statements in any way problematic. One of Schneider's criticisms was, for instance, that the DHV's rejection of female *Handlungsgehilfen* was based on "accusations and exaggerations" that were "more indecent and crude" than any of the derogatory remarks "regarding our German daughters and sisters" that he had ever heard from Jews.⁵⁵ Since Jews notoriously spent much of their time denigrating "our German daughters and sisters", this was obviously saying quite something. In February 1905, the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* reported that the DHV in Mannheim had persuaded non-members to run as its candidates for a professional body. As the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* saw it, the DHV had essentially enlisted these non-members to render itself more attractive and rewarded them with quango seats. In short, the DHV had engaged in political horse trading or, to be more precise in "haggling over seats. Usually the DHV calls haggling a Jewish quality; yet when it suits it the DHV is better at it than any crafty Manichaeon."⁵⁶

Just how tricky this line of argument could occasionally become is demonstrated by a particularly curious critique levelled at the DHV at the beginning of the period under review. "Having preached day in and day out that one wanted no dealings either with Jews and their associates [*Judengenossen*] or with women [*Weibern*]", the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* reported in March 1899, the DHV's leader, Wilhelm Schack, had now started a mass petition to limit the working hours of the *Handlungsgehilfen*, that is, a petition that would presumably have needed to be signed by Jewish and female *Handlungsgehilfen* as well in order to have real clout. How had Schack publicised this petition? He had presented it in an editorial

⁵⁴ Cf., for instance, 'Von unseren Gegnern: Posen,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 5, no. 85 (1 January 1901), p. 4; 'Verschiedenes: Antisemitisches,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 5, no. 98 (15 July 1901), p. 6.

⁵⁵ 'Aus der Handlungsgehilfen-Bewegung: In der "Kaufmännischen Sozial-Reform",' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 7, no. 142 (15 May 1903), p. 5.

⁵⁶ 'Meister der Lüge,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 9, no. 183 (1 February 1905), p. 22.

characterised by “genuinely Oriental pathos”. However, while it was one thing for the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* to accuse Schack of hypocrisy that did not, of course, in and of itself invalidate the petition. For this purpose the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* had another trick up its sleeve. It seemed fairly evident, the paper argued, that the petition had been made to order. “We have the dark suspicion that our cunning antisemites, who can match the slyness of any Jew”, had initiated the petition so that they could subsequently distance themselves from its demands and say: “It is only the Jews and their associates who want this.”⁵⁷

On the whole, references to the connection between antisemitism and matters Jewish (real or imagined) become even rarer after 1908 than they already were in the previous decade or so and from 1909 onwards, while the DHV and its associates are still referred to with some regularity as “antisemites”, the label “antisemitic” is used less and less frequently to describe their activities and qualities. This trend, far from simply emerging by default, was presumably down to none other than Paul Lange who took over the editorship of the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* in September 1906 and bore overall responsibility for the *Zentralverband's* publicity from 1 October 1907.⁵⁸ Thus the programmatic pamphlet *Deutschnational oder Centralverband?*,⁵⁹ produced in 1907 by the publishing enterprise of the *Zentralverband's* long-standing uncontested leader (until his resignation in June 1911), Max Josephsohn,⁶⁰ was presumably prepared by Lange and certainly under his auspices. This pamphlet contained a whole section on *Die antisemitische Tendenz des Deutschnationalen Handlungsgehilfen-Verbandes*,⁶¹ yet its references to Jews or Jewish concerns (real or imagined) are few and far between.

In one instance, we are told that “the antisemitic aspirations increasingly came to the fore” in the DHV – namely, in the form of a decision to allow managerial staff to become members too. Why was this an indication of antisemitism? Because the antisemites were opposed to class struggle and saw the DHV as a recruiting ground to win over (as voters) not only the *Handlungsgehilfen* but the managerial staff too. Hence the DHV’s conciliatory attitude *vis-à-vis* the managers and employers was an expression of its antisemitism.⁶² The section dealing specifically with the DHV’s “antisemitic tendency” begins with the explanation that “the DHV indeed was and is antisemitic through and through, not only in terms of its enmity *vis-à-vis* the Jews [*judenfeindlich*] but in the sense that its economic and social orientation is guild-orientated [*zünftlerisch*] and antiquated.”⁶³ This statement is repeated almost verbatim a little later on.⁶⁴ Yet this is the last we ever hear of the DHV’s

⁵⁷ ‘Berlin,’ in *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 3, no. 41 (1 March 1899), p. 4.

⁵⁸ Cf. Rüdiger Zimmermann (ed.), *Biographisches Lexikon der ÖTV und ihrer Vorläuferorganisationen* [Electronic edition], Bonn 1998, here <http://library.fes.de/fulltext/bibliothek/tit00205/00205g14.htm> LOCE9E102

⁵⁹ *Deutschnational oder Centralverband? Eine Flugschrift für denkende Handlungsgehilfen*, Hamburg 1907.

⁶⁰ *Biographisches Lexikon*, <http://library.fes.de/fulltext/bibliothek/tit00205/00205e19.htm> LOCE9E77

⁶¹ *Deutschnational oder Centralverband?*, pp. 13–16.

⁶² *ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 19.

antisemitism, if by that we mean its anti-Jewish stance. For the actual focus of the section on the DHV's antisemitism and the pamphlet in general is again on the DHV's party-political affiliation with the antisemitic movement and the fact that the interests of this movement are not genuinely compatible with those of the *Handlungsgehilfen*.⁶⁵

Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with the suggestion that modern political antisemitism is best understood not simply in terms of its anti-Jewish orientation but in terms of an ideological package deal of which anti-Jewish resentment is an integral part. Yet opponents of antisemitism can surely only claim that their critique of antisemitism encompasses more than the antisemites' anti-Jewish stance if their critique actually ever hinges on this stance in some substantial and demonstrable fashion in the first place. As we saw, the *Zentralverband's* critique of the DHV in fact failed to do so almost from the outset and its interest in its antisemitic opponents' anti-Jewish position only decreased over time. Far from being about more than just the antisemites' anti-Jewish perceptions and prescriptions, the *Zentralverband's* opposition to antisemitism simply did not hinge on this issue at all. What is more, when the *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt* massively plugged *Deutschnational oder Zentralverband?* in the autumn and winter of 1907 with several double-page spreads,⁶⁶ even these remaining references to the fact that antisemitism was also in some way directed against Jews disappeared altogether.

By 1914, then, the antisemites' anti-Jewish stance hardly ever featured in the publications of the *Zentralverband*. Even when it did, the *Zentralverband's* approach was, as we saw, jocular or flippant rather than genuinely critical in any meaningful sense of the word. The antisemites were accused of displaying "Jewish" qualities and engaging in "Jewish" practices themselves. Against this background it is all the more startling that the *Handlungsgehilfen-Zeitung* published a comparatively long article by one Martin Hirschfeld in the spring of 1914 under the title 'Sonntagsruhe und Juden'.⁶⁷ This would seem to be by far the most detailed discussion of any issue to do with actual Jews that the organ of the *Zentralverband* published in the entire fifteen-year period under review. Throughout this period, the *Zentralverband* campaigned for legislation to outlaw Sunday work for all *Handlungsgehilfen* without exception. Indeed, this was a major bone of contention between the *Zentralverband* and the DHV. As the *Zentralverband* saw it, the preparedness of the DHV to sell out to the employers was demonstrated not least by the fact that it was willing to concede the legitimacy of Sunday work under certain exceptional circumstances, for instance in very small localities and enterprises. Needless to say, the needs of observant Jewish employees were not among the exceptions the DHV had in mind. Indeed they could not be, not even hypothetically, given that there would have

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 14, 19–20.

⁶⁶ *Handlungsgehilfen-Blatt*, vol. 11, no. 20 (25 September 1907), pp. 155–158; vol. 11, no. 22 (23 October 1907), p. 173; vol. 11, no. 23 (6 November 1907), p. 177; vol. 11, no. 24 (20 November 1907), pp. 186–189; vol. 11, no. 25 (4 December 1907), pp. 194–197.

⁶⁷ Martin Hirschfeld, 'Sonntagsruhe und Juden,' in *Handlungsgehilfen-Zeitung*, vol. 18, no. 5 (4 March 1914), p. 36.

been no Jewish *Handlungsgehilfen* had the DHV had its way. Writing in the *Handlungsgehilfen-Zeitung* in March 1914, Hirschfeld vehemently defended a total ban on Sunday work as a measure elemental to civilised life [*Kulturforderung*]. Consequently, the demand that an exception be made to accommodate Jewish religious observance was unacceptable and ran counter to civilisational progress [*kulturwidrig*]. In fact, he suggested, only a very small minority among the Jews wanted this anyway, a minority “on whom one would be bestowing far too much honour by calling it Orthodox”. It could be much more aptly described simply as “Jewish-clerical”. The overwhelming majority of Berlin’s Orthodox Jews, he claimed, were in fact perfectly happy to attend synagogue on Sunday. Hirschfeld’s main concern was that concessions to Jewish Sabbath observance would reinforce something that was “extremely *kulturwidrig*”, namely, Jewish separatism. To the uninitiated this might seem like a concern more likely to preoccupy an antisemite than an opponent of antisemitism. Yet, as we already saw in Bernstein’s case, Hirschfeld was well in keeping here with another line of argument that was extremely popular among the opponents of antisemitism. Far from helping to eradicate Jewish otherness, it was suggested, antisemitism would only provoke Jewry into maintaining and reinforcing its separatist tendencies. Why would concessions to Jewish Sabbath observance reinforce Jewish segregation? The Jewish employers who would rely on this exception, Hirschfeld suggested, would most likely only employ Jewish employees. Equally *kulturwidrig* was the prospect that Jewish *Handlungsgehilfen* who might otherwise be inclined to send their children to a state school, would in turn be under pressure to send them to Jewish schools that stayed closed on Saturdays and so on. Though one might wonder about the slightly menacing vehemence of his tone, thus far Hirschfeld had made an argument that was perhaps contentious but certainly not altogether unreasonable. But at this point he felt the urge to say just one more thing (“*Zum Schluß noch eins*”) and the remarkable outburst that follows renders the entire article rather more sinister in character:

The Sabbath instruction of the great lawgiver of the Jews demands the following: on this day you shall not do any work, you and your servant and your maid etc. *and the stranger who is within your gates*.⁶⁸ The golden recklessness with which the *benefit* of the unitary Jewish Sabbath is imposed upon the non-Jew who happens to be in Palestine is truly splendid.

How is any of this conceivably relevant to the actual significance and status of Jewish Sabbath observance and Jewry more generally in Imperial Germany? Hirschfeld’s comments are clearly indicative of a negative fixation predicated on a notion of Jewish dominance and hubris that is in no way anchored in reality. The negative energy dissipated so liberally and with such relish on an occasion like this consequently throws the *Zentralverband’s* general lack of any genuine concern about their antisemitic competitors’ anti-Jewish orientation all the more sharply into relief.

⁶⁸ Given the deviations from the original (Devarim/Deuteronomy 5:14), Hirschfeld was presumably paraphrasing this passage from memory.

Well in keeping with the Social Democratic response to antisemitism in Imperial Germany more generally, the rhetoric the *Zentralverband* directed against its antisemitic opponents displays virtually no genuine concern regarding the antisemites' anti-Jewish orientation and its impact on Jewry. It should be noted, though, that its publications also did very little to warn its readers about the dangers of "philosemitism". Yet this by no means indicates that "philosemitism" was now considered a less serious threat when and if it reared its ugly head. It merely demonstrates just how confident the publicists of the *Zentralverband* were that they had succeeded in comprehensively immunising their constituency against this risk. The source of their self-assuredness lay in the fact that they had developed the fine art of opposing antisemitism without ever really concerning themselves, critically or otherwise, with the antisemites' anti-Jewish stance in the first place to such perfection that they were well and truly beyond all suspicion of being "philosemites".