Parliamentary Speeches of the *Fin de Siècle* German Political Antisemites

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ABSTRACT: Historians have used materialist and idealist arguments to attempt to explain the nature of antisemitism in Imperial Germany. An analysis of parliamentary debates from 1887 to 1898 shows antisemitic politicians' concerns reflected those of agrarian populists in other countries, such as the United States. This argues against German particularism as an explanation for Imperial antisemitism, and further suggests that the politicians' specifically anti-Jewish aims were secondary to their *Mittelstand* economic interests.

In the late-1880s, a small group of men entered the German parliament as representatives of a relatively short-lived reform movement. These politicians described their movement as antisemitic and it was indeed the most significant effort to bring anti-Jewish sentiments in to the parliamentary politics of Imperial Germany. Historians have given considerable attention to Imperial antisemitism because of its closeness in chronological terms to Nazism and its crimes. Historical monographs have often portrayed Imperial antisemitism (political, social and literary) as the product of deep, determinative, peculiarly German forces, which emerged along with industrialization in the Imperial era and came to full fruition with the rise of the Nazi party. Paul Massing named his monograph on Imperial antisemitism (the first serious scholarship on the topic in English) *Rehearsal for Destruction*,[1] a title which indicates the confidence he had in an important link between late nineteenth century German antisemitism and the Nazis. More recent literature has, however, scrutinized, revised

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and partially abandoned the notion that political antisemitism was so profoundly rooted in the nature of modern Germany. A study of the Imperial antisemites' speeches in parliament from 1887 to 1898 can further this process of revision.

Anti-Jewish attitudes were present in many spheres of nineteenth-century German society. We can find antisemitism in works of literature and in social and political polemics, by authors such as Paul de Lagarde and Heinrich von Treitschke. Although the national constitution of 1871 emancipated German Jewry, discriminatory policies persisted. The German Army was, for instance, reluctant to admit Jews into its officer corps. But the most visible forms of antisemitism were political. A Jew-baiting electoral movement, centred in Berlin around the figure of Adolf Stöcker, flourished briefly in the late 1870s. More substantial was an antisemitic campaign that emerged in the late 1880s from Hesse-Kassel, a mostly rural region. It spread to urbanized Saxony and enjoyed some real success in the elections of 1893. The antisemites collared just over three per cent of the popular vote and 16 seats in the *Reichstag*. The two main anti-Jewish organizations united under a single banner as the German Social Reform Party. Until the turn of the century, the party maintained a semblance of unity and purposefulness. Its electoral support waned steadily, however, and well before 1914 it had become clear that the force of political antisemitism was spent. The party broke into several splinters, which declined individually, their parliamentary records ungraced by legislative accomplishment.[2]

What was the nature of this political antisemitism and how can we explain its existence? What does it tell us about German society between 1871 and 1914, and what was its relation to German history after the Great War, particularly the Nazi Party? Historians have traditionally replied in two ways, each argument corresponding to a

stream of thought in German historiography, and each emphasizing either spiritual or material forces. The first interpretation can be described as "idealist." Historians such as George Mosse and Fritz Stern believed that ideas or climates of opinion determined political behaviour.[3] According to the idealist explanation of German antisemitism, *fin-de-siècle* Germans retained a distinctly romantic worldview while other parts of Europe stressed rationalism. German culture rejected classical models of reason and order; hence, Germans, preferring the sublime, organic and vital, greeted post-1871 economic and social modernization with hostility. "Antimodernist" intellectuals disliked the new mechanical, bureaucratic order, with its swelling cities and material fixations. Dissatisfaction with Imperial Germany led to the creation of a backward-looking ideology, which blended hierarchic and authoritarian corporatism, irrationalist philosophical idealism, and racial nationalism. The antimodernists found foils in the German Jews. Considered urban, satisfied and unheroic, Jews were a convenient whipping boy, sparing Germans from the lash of national self-criticism. After the Great War, romantic antisemitism became a popular doctrine and triumphed in the form of Nazism. Thus idealist historians perceive antisemitism and the Holocaust as the products of an idiosyncratic cultural tradition distilled into an antimodern ideology.

The materialist theory of German history argues that class awareness determines the spread of ideas and, ultimately, political conduct. The materialists believe that historiographical focus on the vague causal agent of "ideals" is misplaced. Instead, concrete social forces, such as class interests and relationships, should be recognized as central to our understanding of the past. Richard Evans speaks for many social historians when he dismisses works such as Mosse's as an example of the "arbitrary methods of intellectual history."[4] According to Hans-Ulrich Wehler,

who summarized the materialists' view of modern German history in *The German Empire*,[5] Germany was particular not so much for an anachronistic worldview, but because the preindustrial classes were stronger than in France and England, where the middle-classes had acquired dominion. In order to maintain its position in Germany, the land-owning aristocracy distracted the attention of the public away from real issues and toward popular causes that did not threaten established policies and which even conservatives could champion. Antisemitism was one such expedient. It was particularly useful among the other preindustrial groups, such as the artisans and small farmers, who often blamed their economic problems on Jewish finance.[6] Antisemitism was the socialism of the lower-middle class, their response to the "concentration of property."

According to Massing, an alliance was struck during the Imperial period between an aristocracy in need of political support and a leaderless and insecure lower-middle class. Antisemitism was a foundation of consensus for this class compact, which, Massing implies, grew into a mass movement of the political right as industrialization continued to push the lower-middle class towards despair and antisemitism. Thus in the Imperial period it is possible to see the origins of the class dynamics that would eventually form the social basis of the Nazi state. Works on the agrarian movement and the *Mittelstand* (urban lower-middle class) make similar points.[7]

A more discerning materialist explanation for antisemitism has recently emerged. Historians David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley have argued that it was populist politicians, not conservative aristocrats, who created antisemitic politics, and that the established right adopted antisemitism as an opportunistic response to lower-class political "mobilization."[8] They have also studied the material basis of the *Mittelstand* and shown that the class

was very diverse in terms of interest, status and outlook, that its economic challenges were more specific, and its reactions more complex and generally more successful than earlier historians had thought. The speeches of the antisemites confirm both the notion of "self-mobilization" and the discovery that there were conflicting interests within the *Mittelstand*. With their subtler handling of the *Mittelstand*, the two historians are able to explain facts as the ebb and flow of antisemitism's political fortunes or the apparent mutability of the *Mittelstand*'s electoral allegiances. Neither of these details fit easily into the arguments of Massing (or Peter Pulzer, who utilized both the idealist and materialist interpretations in his monograph)[9] that antisemitism was driven to victory by the very matrix of modernization.

How completely Eley and Blackbourn have rejected earlier class-oriented interpretations is perhaps ambiguous. For instance, Eley has praised Massing's work because it championed the viewpoint of social history.[10] As well, both Eley and Blackbourn have continued to focus their attention on the nature of the lower-middle class and its relationship with various elites. It may be time, therefore, to look more closely at the antisemitic movement itself.[11] The antisemites' oratory allows us to see what this antisemitic mobilization was like. In their speeches, the antisemites showed themselves to be protest politicians, men most concerned to bring to the national community the sense of grievance and estrangement felt by a sub-community, the *Mittelstand* of the urban lower-middle class and small farmers.

As we will see, this description of antisemitism as a "middling" protest party helps explain the instability of antisemitic politics and leads to some modifications of the traditional arguments, especially the notion that antisemitism had a particularly deep or solid underpinning in Germany. German political antisemitism was not so much

a uniquely German ideology, nor the inevitable "projection" of a class interest caught in a specifically German class crisis. Rather, anti-Jewish sentiments formed part of a wider set of social concerns upon which the antisemites spoke. Antisemitism itself was one ingredient (by no means a necessary ingredient) of a certain political mixture that was not fixed to a rigid ideology nor to a specific national politics. The German political antisemites were representative of a supra-national political trend: grievance-based, reforming populism and agrarianism, which was often associated in Germany as elsewhere with ethnic hatred.

The following observations are based on the antisemites' speeches between 1887 and 1898, the years in which they entered the parliament and made some effort to explain what they sought. The leaders of the movement, Otto Böckel, a Ph.D. and a former librarian at the University of Marburg, and Max Hugo Liebermann von Sonnenberg, a retired army officer with lineage in the Prussian aristocracy, naturally spoke the most often. The idealist interpretation of antisemitism does little to illuminate the rhetoric of Liebermann, Böckel and their colleagues, though it may be a correct reading of a more intellectual antisemitism. Political antisemites mentioned few of the concerns that intellectual historians have associated with antimodernist or proto-fascist ideology. For instance, they did not want to make Germany more authoritarian but more democratic. They supported consistently the maintenance and extension of democratic rights and practices in Germany. As one antisemite noted, they were "children of liberalism,"[12] benefactors of the campaign for popular political rights. In their speeches in favour of universal suffrage, freedom of assembly and speech, or against aristocratic prerogative and royal profligacy, the antisemites sounded much like any other nineteenth-century proponent of democratization.[13] For example, Ludwig Werner, arguing

for parliamentary transportation allowances that would make it easier for average Germans to become deputies, noted that the reputation of a parliament depended on its ability to personify the citizenry. He envisioned a day when the unrepresentative aristocrats of the Conservative Party in the parliament would "disappear in large numbers and continually, and the smaller farmers enter more and more."[14] Yet the antisemites presented neither a full philosophy nor a comprehensive list of democratic rights. Instead, they supported specific measures, such as parliamentary allowances, by insisting on the principle that ordinary people had a right to participate in their own governance.

Indeed, the antisemites liked to claim that the practical knowledge of the ordinary man was superior to book learning,[15] since there was "more human understanding among the masses than in the heads of the highly educated."[16] The antisemites often refused to engage in debates that were complicated or "Talmudic,"[17] whether the issue was the nature of the Jewish people or the economics of public policy. Their advocation of "practical" over "theoretical" thinking reflected their democratic commitment. But perhaps it showed as well their limited intellectual capacities and lack of a strong doctrinal tradition; the likes of which the liberal parties and the Social Democrats enjoyed, and the idealist school argues drove antisemitism.

Given the lack of sophisticated or well-defined ideas in the antisemites' oratory, it is not surprising to find that antimodern concepts were generally absent as well. Although the antisemites maintained that Germany's agricultural community deserved special assistance and that municipal reform was needed to make cities more habitable, Liebermann stated that a great theme of German history was the growth of towns and cities.[18] By no means a Luddite, he also argued that electricity might allow the

artisans to use machinery and thus compete against the larger factories.[19] Neither the belief in a past golden age nor a future utopia arbitrated the antisemites' policy choices; what mattered were the practical and immediate concerns of the *Mittelstand.*

The parliamentary debates show that the antisemites did not become politicians in order to criticize modernity, chase a utopia, or articulate a refined political or cultural philosophy. They came to parliament to complain and supplicate. As professional protesters, they gave a political voice to Germany's small property holders (small farmers, civil servants, artisans and shopkeepers) who felt neglected by government as they suffered agricultural depression, excessive competition, confusing new commercial practices, and industrial change. The antisemites wanted government to pay attention to the *Mittelstand* of small enterprise and modest position. The parliamentary debates leave no doubt that the antisemites considered it their task to lobby for the *Mittelstand.* Böckel argued that every interest group in Germany, from the industrialist to the workers, had organized itself to agitate for its self-interest.[20] The *Mittelstand* could not disregard the *Zeitgeist.* The "mantra" of modern politics was, he said, "help yourself."[21] He was convinced that "Today everyone must engage in agitation; every class that values its own prosperity must defend its own."[22]

The antisemites often argued that their "mobilization" was in the national interest, because the reforms it pressed would keep the *Mittelstand* away from the revolutionary Social Democrats. In Böckel's first speech, he suggested to parliament "Believe this: Social Democracy is a product of discontent."[23] Such dissatisfaction needed to be assuaged and the antisemites were in parliament to show how the *Mittelstand* could be satisfied. Thus, antisemitism was a sectionalism: it demanded that the government recognize and favour an economic constituency within the nation.

The connection the antisemites made between the health of the *Mittelstand* and national survival did not change the fact that they were economic sectarians, and the argument likely seemed self-serving to most parliamentarians. Members of the other parties often criticized the antisemites for their class chauvinism in economic matters.[24] It is evident in the parliamentary debates that the antisemites were vulnerable to criticism from a perspective of the national good.

Indeed, reforming and sectionalist politicians were perhaps attracted to anti-Jewish rhetoric because they thought it offered a way around such national criticism. Establishing their patriotic credentials with invective against the Jews, they could go on to reproach the establishment and solicit for their class. Yet there was no gainsaying the fact that the antisemites were mobilizing class discontent against a German elite; nor could it be denied that they wanted to advance a sectarian interest in possible contradiction of the greater good of a German nation. Arguing that the antisemites "tilled the soil" for Social Democracy, Chancellor Leon von Caprivi accused them of turning class against class and endangering civil peace.[25] Little evidence exists in the debates to suggest that anti-Jewish harangues made the antisemites appear "loyal Germans" to parliament.

Moreover, the antisemites failed what many would have considered a conclusive test of patriotism: they often voted against augmentations to military expenditure because they did not want to burden the tax-paying *Mittelstand*.[26] Only one antisemite, Paul Förester, excepted himself completely from this *Mittelstand* objection to military spending. Förester, who seems to have seen antisemitism as a reforming and anti-Jewish version of National Liberalism, was the only antisemite who ever displayed a knowledge of global geography and international affairs, and the only one who could perorate competently on issues such as

immigration, colonization, and intercontinental trade.[27] The lone real enthusiast among the antisemites for outward-looking, "national" causes such as imperialism and navalism, he sat for just one term in parliament and quit the German Social Reform Party in 1897, noting that the antisemites lacked a national perspective and were too concerned with the *Mittelstand*.[28] In short, rather than being an aggressively nationalistic movement, imperial political antisemitism was sectarian and often at odds with those who claimed to be putting forth national policies.

Thus the antisemites were not interested in many of the "Germanic" ideals that historians such as Mosse and Stern have discussed. They wanted rather to represent the *Mittelstand* interest in parliament. But does the mundane nature of antisemitism mean that the idealists are wrong and the materialist are right? The French economist Charles Gide said of French antisemitism: "It is not an opinion but the expression of an interest."[29] Could such a cynical view of political ideals and parties, even antisemitic ones, be accurate?

Aggressive statements of the materialist thesis are wrong on a few clear points. The antisemites were not products of upper-class manipulation. Their parliamentary statements reinforce the argument of Blackbourn and Eley that antisemitism was part of a democratizing trend in German electoral conduct and a reaction against economic adversity and perceived government inaction. Indeed, the antisemites were anti-plutocrats. They decried what they considered the rapid concentration of wealth, both because it would lead to revolution and because it was a daily oppression for the *Mittelstand*. The antisemites did not explain very well how this radical concentration of property was possible, but they were certain it was happening, and that along with money enormous power was also accumulating in a few hands. The reach of the financial elite, for instance, was so comprehensive that it could play

a role in society formerly reserved for politics. Böckel claimed that the Rothschilds lived better than kings and concluded that "the stock market had more to say than the Bundesrat."[30] As he often did when he could not explain or prove something, Böckel resorted to an image to make his point, urging his colleagues in parliament to look around Berlin:

> where the banks are putting up magnificent buildings. Go to the National Bank, Dresdener Bank, Bleichröder, Deutcher Bank, Diskontogesellschaft—they are all building fantastic palaces. They show that they have found themselves in good times and that their power will continue to grow.[31]

In another rebuke of "gilded age" ostentation, Böckel played on the incongruence between the fine ornamentation on postal buildings and the low morale of the maltreated civil servants who worked inside: "I believe it is better to have satisfied workers in a simple building than unsatisfied ones in a postal palace."[32] It was the impression of want and social disquiet in the presence of plenty that motivated and guided the antisemites' politics. They spoke under the fear of an impending collapse of the *Mittelstand* into a propertyless and revolutionary class. Liebermann asserted that the *Mittelstand* was being "pulverized" into "atoms" so that "it is no longer capable of resistance or self-sufficiency."[33] They had no real explanation for the proletarianization of the lower-middle class, but there were plenty of examples of aggrieved *Mittelständler* suffering from various afflictions, such as Böckel's toiling postal assistants, whom he considerd underpaid and overworked.

In their expositions of the *Mittelstand*'s manifold tribulations, the antisemites were able to identify one other major culprit, besides the Jews—government. According to the antisemites, the *Mittelstand* was crumbling because

the authorities were deaf to its cries for help and they arrived in parliament with the anger and moral self-confidence of a group that felt it had been wronged and denied a fair hearing. They gave voice to the sensibility that is at the root of all protest politics: the feeling of frustrated representation or the indifference of authority, the belief that the community's delegates or rulers were not listening and did not care about the problems of the average person. Antisemitic rhetoric consistently focused on the apathy of governments, the unresponsiveness of parliament, and the veiled and secretive nature of the whole world of power and money. The antisemites' speeches reveal frustration with not only federal politicians but regional and local elites of officials, lawyers, even farm veterinarians.[34] For the "people," Böckel explained, the decision-makers were outsiders who lacked sympathy and understanding of their difficulties.

> We have here today lawmakers and officials who studied at the university purely theoretical matters. They are not acquainted with the practical conditions of life and have not moved among our people. I wish that they would travel through the land *incognito* and study the people, as occured in former times; then they would for the first time learn how they must rule. But who does that? The gentlemen *Landräthe* hold their luncheons and live in the narrow circle of the high bureaucracy; they care little for the life of the people.[35]

The antisemites saw themselves as a solution to this predicament. They fulfilled Böckel's requirement that lawmakers "...stand near to the life of the people."[36] Böckel had confidence in his own understanding of the little man: "I speak not for my person or party alone, but also for the people, to whom I give expression."[37] His ambition was to be the mouthpiece of the *Mittelstand* in parliament.

The antisemites carried into parliament a formidable sense of indignation and, it seems, real anxiety from their supporters, but lacked a very clear idea of how the urban lower-middle class and the farmers could be "saved." The antisemites declared themselves against unregulated capitalism and also against Marxist social democracy. Both these ideologies, they believed, would rob the little man of his property and both opposed government intervention to help the *Mittelstand*, the policy which was generally what the antisemites wanted. They saw themselves as a *Mittelstand* version of the Social Democrats, advocates of a sectional interest and social reform, but non-internationalist, close to the people and *königstreu*.[38] Liebermann articulated a central tenet of moderate interventionism, when he said, "Our politics must approach this question: what does human nature demand from the state.... Human nature demands above all from the state not anxiety but reassurance."[39] The antisemites' expectations of government were high. One of them proclaimed, "Gentlemen, I am of the belief that the government is duty bound to maintain the well-being of its citizenry."[40] Given such a sweeping formulation of government responsibility in the economy, it is not surprising that Chancellor Caprivi considered the antisemites similar to the Social Democrats.[41]

Perhaps the parliament had room for a party that wanted to cut a new path between the dogmatic liberals and socialists. The antisemites' vision of moderate, non-revolutionary social reform certainly had a future in Germany as elsewhere. But the antisemites never showed that they really understood the socialism and capitalism that they claimed to oppose. They apparently had little interest in developing an alternative economic and political philosophy. In one sense, the antisemites were the most class-oriented party in parliament, because their loyalty was wholly towards a group and not an ideological

tradition. Their job in parliament was to sensitize the decisionmakers to *Mittelstand* needs, to censure the orthodox parties for thwarting *Mittelstand* relief, and to shake the government out of its apathy. They remained protest politicians rather than judicious legislators or ideological party builders and simply advocated measures that they thought would remove the *Mittelstand*'s grievances. The antisemites appealed for: government regulation or control of financial markets and more public credit; stronger guilds and employee associations for civil servants; progressive income tax; tariffs and price controls for farmers.[42]

They supported these and other policies that could be called socialistic, corporatist or progressive yet for the antisemites they were merely the quickest, most obvious ways to make the economy more stable and secure for the *Mittelstand*. They did not pay much attention to the economic or ideological implications of their schemes; and they even ignored the fact that many proposals (such as grain tariffs) would abet only one portion of the *Mittelstand* while doing damage to others. Without a solid foundation of coherent views or analysis, they came to be considered poor parliamentarians and demagogues by their colleagues in other parties.[43]

Like their views on politics and the economy, the antisemites' ideas about the Jews were undogmatic and ill defined. Long discussions of the Jewish question were rare since most of the parliament did not think there was in any vital sense a Jewish question. The antisemites' defamation against the Jews took the form of asides during discussions of their other social concerns. This state of affairs would have seemed reasonable to the antisemites because they thought the Jewish and social questions were linked: "Gentlemen, you will only solve the social question if you solve the Jewish question,"[44] announced the antisemite Fritz Bindewald. If antisemitism was a protest against the

pressures of the free market and against the power and misrule of elites and "outsiders," then Jews were a personification of social corruption, both capitalist and foreign. The essential distinctions in the antisemites' diatribes were, of course, between Germans and Jews, but also between "productive labour" and "parasites,"[45] that is people who became rich without doing "real work." Böckel decried the existence of Jewish grain trading firms "which have nothing to do with grain, for whom grain exists only as an object of speculation."[46] A general suspicion of people who exchanged rather than produced pervaded the antisemites' rhetoric and was most evident when they spoke about the Jews.

The parasite appeared in many guises. The antisemite Hermann Ahlwardt lamented that the wealth of the nation was being drained away "without work, by a foreign nation, unfortunately through speculation and all forms of deception."[47] The Jew was the middle-man who through market manipulation reaped what others had sown; the usurer after the land of German farmers; the dishonest commercial businessman; or the financier, puissant and deceitful, luring ordinary men into "*Schwindelen*."[48] The antisemites found it simple to enumerate examples of Jewish iniquity but more difficult to quantify Jewish influence or provide real evidence that a Jewish problem existed. In his most vituperative speech, Liebermann described the Jews as a:

> cancer that feeds on our social life and poisons its life-blood; a dry-root that has lodged itself from the foundation to the highest towers and pinnacles of our political edifices, eating away at them and making them crumble.[49]

Lacking arguments and evidence, the antisemites often used such figurative language.

The antisemites did not explain the power or unique malevolence of the Jews. It is not possible to tell from the parliamentary documents if their antisemitism was racially motivated. Most likely they did not concern themselves too much with developing a speculative basis for their prejudice. On the other hand, their antisemitism was not very practical in the sense that they put forward few anti-Jewish proposals, least of all violent or radical measures. In a party program, they called for the undoing of the emancipation of 1871 and a special law for the Jews. This was not, however, a point they pressed in parliament.[50] Indeed, parliament heard from them less and less on the subject of the Jews.

The antisemites' increasing silence resulted from the fact that the parliament recognized antisemitism as a non-issue. The strength of antisemitism was more rhetorical than real; it supplied an effigy for antiplutocratic agitation, the Jews embodying the notions of "outside" power and "unproductive" wealth. But even if one accepted that a distinction should be drawn between Jews and "native" German citizens, the fact remained that there were German plutocrats and the social question was quite obviously larger than the Jewish question. No organic tie existed, for instance, between many of the antisemites' economic concerns—such as government policy towards grain tariffs or guilds—and the Jews. One did not have to be an antisemite to support social reform or agricultural welfare; antisemitism's roots in social grievance were thus shallow.

The other parties understood that antisemitism was a simple case of scapegoating.[51] The parliament was hostile to antisemitic politics and even the Conservatives were largely silent on the "Jewish question."[52] In the face of contemptuous attacks from other deputies whenever they mentioned the Jews, the antisemites grew reticent. By 1893 one antisemite had already decided that they and the rest of parliament did not understand each other and so should

stop arguing about the Jews. Another admitted to curtailing his antisemitic comments in order to avoid provoking a debate on the Jews.[53] Such ideological retreats indicate that Imperial antisemitism was more of a failure than a "rehearsal for destruction."

Indeed, given the antisemites' stress on social reform and the small space allotted to antisemitism itself, it is likely that anti-Jewish sentiments were an ancillary motive for their reforming activism. The Jewish question was almost certainly a subordinate issue for most of their constituents, whose brief, inconsistent support for declared antisemites, and more steady engagement in interest and protest politics,[54] indicates that they were primarily concerned with economic fairness and protest.

An interesting point emerges here. In works such as Massing's or even Levy's more empirical work, anti-Jewish legislation appeared to be the Holy Grail of the antisemitic movement. Their *Mittelstand* concerns, where they were given much mention at all, were represented as a veiled sub-text. The sub-text was important for the historian, however, because it helped to reveal the deep social origins of anti-Jewish politics. The problem with this notion is that it is inaccurate and leads to an overestimate of the strength of anti-Jewish sentiments as the "superstructure" of the *Mittelstand* "false-consciousness." Anti-Jewish legislation was not the lone or even paramount goal of the antisemite and *Mittelstandpolitik* was much more than a sub-text in the antisemites' oratory. In fact, the antisemites openly fixed themselves to interest politics. Class representation was the root, trunk and branch of "antisemitic" protest. For the antisemitic reformers, anti-Jewish goals were secondary. Indeed, political antisemitism, which is a much more revealing artifact of popular antisemitism than books by antimodernists, was too concerned with other issues, economic and political, to be a pure sample of the extent or intensity of anti-Jewish

prejudice itself. In short, parliamentary Jew-baiting was not the sole or main political manifestation of the *Mittelstand*, but one issue among other, more fundamental matters of social distress that the antisemitic reformers presented to the parliament.

With this description of Imperial antisemitism in mind, we can say that the movement was less particularly German than some historians would have us believe, and that it was, in one sense, also less of a "class" phenomenon than we may think on early consideration. Here, contemporary controversy about the political antisemites can be provocative. The Social Democrats argued that antisemitism was a unique national disease, caused by the fact that the concentration of property had not proceeded as far as it had in Britain and France.[55] But the antisemites replied correctly that antisemitism was recurrent and international.[56] A more accurate understanding of German antisemitism came from Ernst Hasse, a pan-German National Liberal. Hasse said that antisemitism was an example of "nativism." He explained that nativism existed everywhere immigration caused economic adjustments or where the majority blamed a minority for prevailing economic hardships. Thus the French resented Italian, German and Belgian guest workers and Americans and Australians agitated against the Chinese.[57]

Hasse's explication of antisemitism recognized that it was similar to other forms of nativist agitation throughout the Western world. His view directly contradicted the Social Democratic notion of a German *Sonderweg* (peculiar development). As well, it supplanted the materialist school's accent on class with an emphasis on communal loyalties. People became antisemites not just to defend their own economic interest but to ensure "fairness" for the whole of society; they agitated not just because they belonged to a certain class, but to "protect" those with whom they felt a national fellowship from those

they considered alien.[58] Thus "community" helps explain why people who did not belong to the lower-middle class were active in antisemitic politics. Antisemitism was not just the projection of a specific class at a certain point in history, but an opinion that could cross class barriers precisely because it touched on the idea of community.

Hasse's concept is strengthened by the fact that the antisemites' battles in parliament were usually rearguard actions against exterior threats: against the "foreign" ownership of land confiscated by usurious Jews;[59] against free international trade, national specialization (and thus national dependence) and the sovereignty of the global market; against the exchange within Germany of foreign currencies, stocks and bonds; against the international ideologies of Social Democracy and the Manchester school; and against the potency of American plutocrats and their transcontinental companies.[60] At their most sophisticated, the antisemites expressed a desire to extend the political sovereignty of the community over the marketplace, so the government, not the rich or foreigners, least of all the Jews (seen as rich and foreign), could decide the economic future of the country. Insecurity, poverty, competition and economic fluctuations could be regulated or outlawed. German political antisemitism wanted government to protect the national economy and tailor it to the needs of the ordinary man.

The antisemites' inclinations were protectionist, statist and antiplutocartic, though they rejected the complete economic egalitarianism of Marxist socialism. As the Social Democrats said, the antisemites' socialism was low-brow;[61] nevertheless, political antisemitism must have profited from some of the emotional and idealistic strengths of nineteenth-century socialism. Despite its shallowness and nativism, antisemitism possessed a humanistic nexus that made political capital of basic emotions, such as indignation, sympathy for the forlorn, suspicion of the rich,

and disapproval of greed. All were mustered behind the antisemites' demands for relief and, indeed, provided the bulk of their rhetorical resources. Rather than being a materialistic movement, antisemitism was a rejection of materialistic or economic thinking. Despite the concentration on public policy, the antisemites were economic illiterates and seemed hostile to basic economic ideas, such as the notion that wants are unlimited but means finite. Lacking a fluency with precise economic reasoning, they tended to defend their social proposals by presenting to parliament examples—drawn from articles, petitions and personal experience—of the distress of the *Mittelstand* and by harping on the moral responsibility that governments and individuals had towards the poor.[62] Friedrick Nietzsche was likely thinking of this homeletic rhetoric when he wrote that the antisemites "endeavour to stir up all the bovine elements of the population by an exasperating abuse of that cheapest of agitational tricks, a moral attitude."[63] He neatly described the German antisemites as "speculators in idealism."[64]

The orthodox parties had little difficulty responding to the antisemites' moralizing. Instead, they were able to justify many of the misfortunes that the antisemites bemoaned.[65] The traditional parties all possessed a secular theodicy, an answer to the problem of pain, which rationalized why some people had to be poorer than others or some classes had to disappear into the "dust bin of history." Their theodicy vindicated a degree of acquiescence in the face of grievance and poverty. The orthodox parties and government ministers employed rational justification adroitly to deflate emotionalism and airy social enthusiasm. Antisemites typically countered this theodicy not with points of economic theory but issues of moral character. When a Progressive politician, arguing against an antisemitic proposal for more government spending on disabled veterans, lectured Hermann Ahlwardt

about the principles of public finance, Ahlwardt replied that the man was "cold-hearted."[66]

Indeed, the political antisemitic movement was largely a rejection of the ideological or "Talmudic" reasons that bridled the generosity of government. It was a spontaneous ethical protest against what Samuel Taylor Coleridge had called the "heart-petrifying Self-conceit of our Political Economists,"[67] and an attempt to base politics not on reflective notions of economic or social mechanics but on compassionate sensitivity to human need. However, the antisemites could do little for the poor precisely because they were so unintellectual. Their no-nonsense approach must have been originally a source of strength among an electorate disgruntled with elites and government, but it left the antisemites with little sensible to say in parliament. Perhaps the inability to think and argue in refined and economically informed terms was their core weakness (as in most protest politics) just as their facility for expressing indignation was their distinctive talent.

In any case, for the historiography the important point is this: if antisemitism developed out of something material, such as class interest, it was also generated by moral feelings and ideals of communal responsibility and fairness. *Mittelstand*, antisemitic politics was not so much a philosophical position, least of all a critique of modernity, nor simply an "expression of interest," but a burgeoning of moral emotion, tangled and uncultivated, rooted in a compost of crude feelings, such as resentment and even hate, but stretching up to higher longings for equity and progress.

In addition, because *Mittelstand* politics was a collection of feelings and general inclinations, and was not tied down to a specific ideology or a strong party organization, it was unpredictable and malleable, and there was no reason that anti-Jewish ambitions had to participate in all its manifestations. Blackbourn and Eley have noted how the

protest impulse that brought the antisemites to parliament waxed and waned and became grist for the mills of many different political parties and organizations of economic interest, new or old, radical or accommodating, antisemitic or otherwise. The antisemites and the idea of political antisemitism did not have a monopolistic grip on the *Mittelstand* false-consciousness but a precarious foothold in *Mittelstandpoltik*, perhaps the slipperiest slope on the German political landscape.

As well, viewed from Hasse's wide perspective, political antisemitism appears to be a German manifestation of certain supranational political phenomena in the age 1871-1945, which combined agrarian and middling protest, nativism and social reforming populism into what the antisemites described as *Mittelstandpolitik* and we might call "little man's politics." The German antisemites acknowledged a fraternity with "little man's" protest in other countries. One foreign politician they mentioned was William Jennings Bryan, whom Ahlwardt lauded as a very "significant man."[68] Bryan, with his blend of conservative and generous liberal impulses, evangelical in his pursuit of egalitarian values but defensive about the survival of small town America and the community's spiritual heritage, was perhaps the archetypal populist of the age. Like the antisemites, he touted exotic economic ideas (both he and the antisemites were bi-metallists),[69] defended the farming interest, and gained fame during an agricultural depression. Bryan advocated democratization, government regulation and income tax. Politics was for Bryan a prime means to better the economic situation of the common person, as it was for the antisemites.

Leafing through the history of agrarian protest and progressivism in North America, it is hard to miss the resemblances to European non-orthodox socialism and agrarianism. On both continents there was the same appreciation for the independent man and the same

distinction between "productive" and "non-productive" or "parasitical" occupations. European and North American populists promoted enthusiastic, often visionary proposals for reform, defined with foggy moralism—an intellectual inadequacy that left them both vulnerable to economcially articulate conservatives. Although Bryan's oratory contained some nativistic sentiments (for example, it was English bankers who were pressing the "crown of thorns" on labour in his famous 1896 speech), he was not as radical and hardly as concerned with race as some of his allies in the Populist party. In addition to the scapegoating of Wall Street and international finance, populist rhetoric did contain antisemitism. Bryan's running mate in the 1896 election was the southern Populist Tom Watson. Watson was by no means a bumpkin or opportunist; he even defended vulnerable minorities, including the Jews, during most of his career. Yet he came openly to describe American Jews as a plutocratic hand pushing down on the poor.[70] Antisemitism was a temptation for any "little man's" politician.

Hence, the materialist formula can be qualified on five points. First, Blackbourn's and Eley's views about the German elite (that it was more opportunistic than creative) are superior to Wehler's. The parliamentary documents show that in its origins *Mittelstand* antiemitism was a protest against elites. The parliamentary debates, however, neither verify nor refute the argument of the two historians that the political elites were eventually able to "accommodate" protest politics within the traditional political parties. Second, late nineteenth century antisemitism does not mean that Germany was peculiar; nativistic "little man's" politics was international. Third, in one sense, the antisemites were more of a *Mittelstand* movement than even materialist historians have argued. Concern with the *Mittelstand* was not the hidden, unconscious social "base" of the movement but its most

prominent aspect. The anti-Jewish purpose did not form the fixed "superstructure" of the *Mittelstand*, but was one weak issue among matters more relevant to the lower-middle class. The antisemites likely came to understand the problem of trying to stand a political movement on the rickety legs of antisemitism. As their party crumbled and lost support, many antisemites began to cooperate with other parties and organizations which were interested in reform and agrarianism but not antisemitism.[71]

Fourth, the concentration on material politics does not mean that antisemitic protest was merely rapacious: it was also fiercely moralistic, which is the reason Nietzsche, immoralist, elitist and perhaps cultural antisemite, detested political antisemitism (much as H.L. Mencken loathed the revivalist ethics of American populism). Reading the antisemites' exhortations, one senses little reason to place unadorned material interest before ideas of community, fairness and equality (or emotions such as vexation, resentment and apprehension), and declare that the first is the more real or fundamental cause of antisemitism. Nor is it particularly accurate to describe Jew-baiting itself as an "expression of an interest" or as the *Mittelstand* political projection. Antisemitism was a crude conviction, which usually surfaced in politics only with the other attitudes and inclinations of "little man's" politics, and which had a special appeal for the *Mittelständer*, but no strangle-hold on their minds.

Thus the fifth qualification is that the relationship between antisemitism and *Mittelstandpolitik* was not a necessary one. A nativistic version of antiplutocracy, antisemitism must have had a certain allure for some *Mittelständer*; and though there is little evidence that they gained much from it, antisemitism was a possibility or temptation for antiplutocratic, anticapitalist or agrarian politicians. But a politician or voter did not have to be a nativist to back protectionism or an antisemite to support

bank reform. The parliamentary documents show that there were social questions in Germany upon which each party felt obliged to take a position; but few considered the Jewish question worthy of even discussion. A secondary issue if an issue at all, antisemitism was a poor basis for a political party.

What then was the historical significance of political antisemitism and how does the above description of the movement affect the issue of continuity? Political antisemitism cannot be used to show that an antimodern cultural tradition existed in Germany, for these antisemites were not preoccupied with the novelty or antiquity of things, or with aesthetic or psychological culture. The expression of protest, the desire for a *Mittelstand* policy—these were the well-springs. The antisemites urged a political course that conformed to their sense of *Mittelstand* rights, whether that meant endorsing modern policies, such as democratic rights, or medieval practices, such as strong guilds.

Political antisemitism does not indicate, as both materialist and idealist historians have suggested, that Imperial Germany was drifting towards a fascist state based on antisemitism. It was not sufficiently popular for that argument to have merit. Moreover, antisemitism most likely contributed little to the popularity that the Nazis were eventually able to establish.[72]

Yet the antisemites, being protest politicians, were active campaigners and publicists. They may have left behind a heritage of bigotry that would help to explain why Hitler found men to assist him to murder Europe's Jews and why German resistance to Hitler's racial policies was so seldom seen. The parliamentary documents shed little light on these questions. We should note, however, that no malicious word in the antisemites' parlance was as terrible even in intention as was Hitler's smallest act of violence towards the Jews.

Finally the populist nature of the antisemites' parliamentary speeches indicates that they may have helped to create sectional protest traditions. The Nazis no doubt turned these grievance-based political legacies to their advantage. However, National Socialism was a national party. It drew members and votes from many segments of society, not just the lower-middle class or farmers, and it had to maintain independence from *Mittelstandpolitik*.[73] An extraordinary feature of Nazism was its ability to appeal to diverse sectional grievances and yet over them as well, binding different groups into a sense of collective purpose and offering an escape from corrosive economic partisanship.[74] Indeed, when Hitler achieved totalitarian power, he subordinated class objectives to the "national good" and silenced opposition. The Nazi regime marked the end, not the culmination of the tradition of electoral protest that the antisemites of the Imperial era had helped to found.

Hence, Imperial political antisemitism cannot be a direct link to the great, hidden cause of Nazism. At most it was one thread in the complex mesh of causality that stretched forward to the Holocaust.

NOTES

[1] Paul Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949).

[2] The best narrative history of political antisemitism in Germany is Richard Levy's *The Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties in Imperial Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

[3] Significant works of the "German mind" school include: Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Political Cultural Despair* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1961); Hans Kohn, *The Mind of Germany* (New York: Scribner, 1960); George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).

[4] Richard Evans, *Rethinking German History* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 37.

[5] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* (Dover, N.H.: Berg Publishers, 1985).

[6] Ibid., 105-9.

[7] Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und Preußischer Konservatismus* (Hanover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1966); H.A. Winkler, *Liberalismus und Antiliberalismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoech und Ruprecht, 1979); Hans Rosenberg, *Große Depression und Bismarckzeit* (Berlin, 1967); Shulamit Volkov, *The Rise of Popular Antimodernism in Germany: The Urban Master Artisans 1873-1896* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[8] See essays in: David Blackbourn, *Populists and Patricians* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987); Geoff Eley, "Anti-Semitism, Agrarian Mobilization and the Conservative Party," in *Between Reform, Reaction and Resistance* ed. L.E. Jones and J. Retallack (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993).

[9] Peter Pulzer, *Rise of Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[10] Geoff Eley, "Reviews of Works on Anti-Semitism by Poliakov, Rürup, Tal, Levy and Whiteside," *Social History* 2 (1977): 694.

[11] Richard Levy began this reorientation with his *Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties*, which is, in contrast with the books by Massing and Pulzer, a political history. It throws light on the antisemites' efforts to organize themselves into a political movement. Levy misses, however, the degree to which the antisemites were concerned about issues other than the Jews, a fact that the parliamentary documents make very clear, as we will see.

[12] *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlung des Reichstages* (Berlin: Reichsdrucherei 1887-1888); Sitting 43, 18 February 1896, 1052. Translations are by the author.

[13] Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3582; Sitting 201, 23 March 1892, 4858; Sitting 58, 4 March 1893, 1427; Sitting 62, 9 March 1893, 1529; Sitting 26, 29 January 1896, 612; Sitting 43, 18 February 1896, 1052-53.

[14] Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3582.

[15] Sitting 84, 27 April 1893, 2044; Sitting 5, 25 November 1893, 85.

[16] Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3582.

[17] Sitting 84, 27 April 1893, 2042: Sitting 47, 12 February 1894, 1160.

[18] Ibid., 3990.

[19] Sitting 7, 6 December 1892, 177.

[20] Sitting 5, 25 November 1893, 83.

[21] Sitting 22, 20 July 1890, 469.

[22] Sitting 5, 25 November 1893, 83.

[23] Sitting 8, 14 March 1887, 118.

[24] Sitting 142, 16 December 1891, 3502; Sitting 144, 18 Decomber 1891, 3555.

[25] Sitting 13, 12 December 1892, 258, 273; Sitting 6, 30 November 1893, 192.

[26] Sitting 91, 6 May 1893, 2213; Siting 67, 9 March 1894, 1700, 1704-05, 1478; Siting 138, 2 December 1896, 3668; Sitting 6 9 December1897, 99; Sitting 71, 28 March 1898, 1827-30.

[27] Sitting 215, 5 May 1897, 5748.

[28] Levy, *Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties*, 191.

[29] Stephen Wilson, *Ideologue and Experience: Anti-Semitism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Toronto: Associated University Press, 1982), 248.

[30] Sitting 11, 8 November 1888, 24.

[31] Ibid., 24.

[32] Sitting 8, 14 March 1887, 118.

[33] Sitting 29, 28 June 1890, 671.

[34] Sitting 162, 3 February 1892, 3986; Sitting 79, 20 April 1893, 1942; Sitting 84, 27 April 1893, 2444; Sitting 77, 9 April 1894, 2010.

[35] Sitting 2, 17 November 1893, 82.

[36] Sitting 84, 27 April 1893, 2444.

[37] Sitting 2, 17 November 1893, 85.

[38] Sitting 9, 30 November 1893, 195; Sitting 72, 15 May 1894, 1882; Sitting 18, 17 January 1896, 409. The Social Democrats agreed that their were affinities between the parties, concluding that antisemitism was socialism of the "dumb fellow": Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3587; Sitting 9 30 November 1893, 180-82.

[39] Ibid., 3988.

[40] Sitting 82, 14 April 1894, 2134.

[41] Sitting 6, 30 November 1893, 192.

[42] On financial matters see: Sitting 13, 12 November 1889, 251; Sitting 29, 28 June 1890, 671; Sitting 34, 1 February 1893, 795. Civil servants and employee associations: Sitting 8, 14 March 1887, 117; Sitting 47, 14 April 1894, 2129. Taxes: Sitting 38, 30 January 1894, 939; Sitting 76, 7 April 1894, 1982. Price support and tariffs: Sitting 194, 18 December 1891, 3559; Sitting 82, 14 April 1894, 2128.

[43] For criticism of the antisemites, see: Sitting 111, 30 April 1891, 2650; Sitting 71, 20 March 1893, 1765; Sitting 79, 20 April 1893, 1942; Sitting 84, 27 April 1893, 2042; Sitting 85, 28 April 1893, 2059; Sitting 47, 27 February 1895, 1148; Sitting 53, 6 March 1895, 1287-90; Sitting 98, 6 June 1896, 2437-39.

[44] Sitting 47, 27 February 1895, 1148.

[45] Sitting 8, 5 December 1888, 124; Sitting 47, 27 February 1895, 1146; Sitting 53, 6 March 1895, 1297.
[46] Sitting 111, 30 April 1891, 2648.
[47] Sitting 71, 20 March 1893, 1746.
[48] Sitting 8, 5 December 1888, 124-6; Sitting 11, 8 November 1889, 211-13; Sitting 31, 1 July 1890, 735; Sitting 111, 30 April 1891, 2646-50; Sitting 62, 9 March 1893, 1530; Sitting 9, 30 November 1893, 179; Sitting 147, 27 February 1895, 1145-46.
[49] Sitting 111, 30 April 1891, 2648.
[50] In an early speech, Böckel alluded to reversal of emancipation as a general goal: Sitting 23, 5 May 1887, 435.
[51] Sitting 111, 30 April 1891, 2650-52; Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3578; Sitting 47, 27 February 1895, 1152.
[52] During the apex of the popularity of political antisemitism, at a disorganized convention, the Conservatives did put an antisemitic plank in the Tivoli platform of 1892. But the party's ambiguous attitude towards antisemitism was typified when the influential agrarian Conservative Julius Mirbach repudiated this plank in parliament. Liebermann and Böckel agreed with Mirbach that the Conservatives' conversion to populist antisemitsm was shallow. Sitting 13, 12 December 1892, 272, 283; Sitting 26, 13 January 1894, 640.
[53] Sitting 9, 30 November 1893, 194; Sitting 83, 3 May 1895, 2058.
[54] This is a point that Blackbourn and Eley have established: David Blackbourn, *Populists and Patricians*, 124-32; Geoff Eley, "Anti-Semitism, Agrarian Mobilization and the Conservative Party," 217, *passim*.
[55] Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3587; Sitting 9, 29 November 1893, 180-82.
[56] Ibid., 194.
[57] Sitting 53, 6 March 1895, 1277-80.
[58] Stöcker sometimes defined antisemitism in terms similar to these. See, Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3584-86.
[59] Sitting 47, 27 February 1895, 1147.
[60] Like populist anti-plutocrats in the United States, the antisemites found that Rockefeller and his Standard Oil Company, as much as the Rothschilds and Bleichröders, epitomized what was wrong with the world, since he wanted to create a "new feudalism" at the expense of the independent person. Sitting 83, 3 May 1895, 2056-57.
[61] Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3587; Sitting 9, 30 November 1893, 180-82.
[62] Sitting 42, 21 February 1888, 1038, 1040; Sitting 11, 8 November 1888, 211; Sitting 1444, 18 December 1891, 3559; Sitting 207, 30 March 1892, 5150; Sitting 79, 20 April 1893, 1942.

[63] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (Leipzig: Helm &Prieß, 1923), 474.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Sitting 5, 13 May 1890, 175; Sitting 111, 30 April 1891, 2561, 2568; Sitting 145, 12 January 1892, 3587; Sitting 9, 30 November 1893, 180-82; Sitting 8, 14 December 1895, 149.

[66] Sitting 70, 18 March, 1735. See also: Sitting 22, 20 July 1890, 469; Sitting 47, 12 February 1894, 1160; Sitting 8, 14 December 1895, 148.

[67] The Source of the quote is Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern* (Harper Collins, 1991), 722.

[68] Sitting 213, 3 May 1897, 5725.

[69] Sitting 13, 12 December 1892, 283.

[70] For Watson and a general discussion of antisemitism and progressivism in the United States, see: Albert Lindemann, *The Jew Accused* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 220, *passim*. Other useful works include: Stanley L. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); *William Jennings Bryan and the Campaign of 1896* ed. George F. Whicher (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Health and Company, 1953); Paul W.Glad, *McKinley, Bryan and the People* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1964).

[71] Levy, *Downfall of the Antisemitic Political Parties*, 198, *passim*.

[72] Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans and the Jewish Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 45, 47-49, 309); Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 239-52.

[73] On the Nazi party's relations to *Mittelstandpolitik* and class-based politics in general, see: Robert Gellately, *The Politics of Economic Despair* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1974), 197-208; Dietrich Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1969), 77, 86; Conan Fischer, *Rise of the Nazis* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 92, *passim*.

[74] Fischer, *Rise of the Nazis*, 99.