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RELUCTANT KINGMAKERS

Moravian Jewish Politics in Late Imperial Austria

In November 1899, the Austrian Reichsrat debated the causes of anti-Jewish violence that had erupted throughout Moravia the previous month. A Moravian Czech deputy gave a long diatribe against the Jews, explaining the sudden outbreak of violence in terms of the “political and national situation” in the province. “The Jews of Moravia have consistently allied themselves with the Germans,” he explained.

They have passed themselves off as Germans – whether they can be considered Germans or not. Politically, they alone have sustained Germanism in Moravia. And now that the Jews of Moravia have withdrawn from their active participation in politics ... Germanism in Moravia has declined. From Lundenburg to Mährisch-Ostrau ... all the towns – with a few exceptions – once had German-dominated municipal councils. Now, one town after the other is falling [to the Czechs], and only a few remain in German hands. Why were they once in German hands, but no longer? Because the Jews used to vote exclusively for the Germans – in elections to the municipal council, the provincial diet, and the Austrian Reichsrat...¹

The sentiments expressed in this speech were nothing new. For more than twenty years, Moravia’s Jewish voters had been perceived by Czechs as the “victorious troopers of the German minority” in Moravia.² Though a mere 2% of the population in 1890, Jews were seen as the main pillar of “artificial German hegemony” in Moravia.³ According to the 1890 census, there were more than twice as many Czech-speakers as German-speakers in Moravia, yet the Germans dominated the Moravian Diet – and many other elected bodies – until 1905.⁴ As we will see, since Jewish voters frequently cast the deciding votes in municipal, provincial and imperial elections, Moravia’s Jews were often held collectively responsible for undesirable electoral outcomes.

For the Jews of Moravia, the role of political “kingmaker” was a double-edged sword. While Moravian Jewish voters could often guarantee the elec-

1 Speech in Reichsrat by Začek, 8 November 1899, *Stenographische Protokolle über die Sitzung des Hauses der Abgeordneten des österreichischen Reichsrates*, XVI. Sess., 9. Sitz., p. 533.

2 M. Nacher, ‘Mährisch-Ostrauer Brief’, *Jüdische Volksblatt*, 13 January 1905.

3 *Moravská Orlice*, 26 July 1896. Quoted in ‘Eine czechische Stimme über den Antisemitismus der Deutschen und der Czechen in Mähren’, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1896, p. 625.

4 For census data, see J. Kofalka, *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815–1914* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1991), p. 129.

tion of their desired candidate, they often suffered materially for their obstinate allegiance to German Liberalism. For most Jews, Liberalism was an anational – or supranational – ideology of rationalism, humanism and Enlightenment, but in the context of the Czech–German conflict, it became increasingly identified with its German-speaking standard-bearers. Indeed, as the nationality conflict became the dominant feature of Moravian political and economic life – reaching a feverish pitch in the 1880s and 1890s – the Jews of Moravia were placed in an increasingly difficult bind. While they could determine the outcome of certain elections, it was not always in their best interest to do so.

In order to understand why Moravia's Jews came to play such a decisive role in Moravia's elections, we must first look at an anomalous feature of the Moravian Jewish landscape: the “political Jewish community.” The political Jewish community – or *politische Judengemeinde* – was separate and distinct from the Jewish religious community – or *jüdische Kultusgemeinde*. Both of these derived from the autonomous Jewish community – or *kehilah* – that had been the locus of Jewish life from the medieval period until the age of emancipation. The autonomous Jewish community, which was often territorially interlocked with the Christian town, was viewed as a kind of “state within a state” (or “community within a community”), since it encompassed separate religious *and* political institutions. Indeed, the autonomous Jewish community was a kind of Jewish municipality with its own officials, its own police department and its own fire brigade.⁵

Moravia's fifty-two autonomous Jewish communities were supposed to be dissolved in 1849 and incorporated into the neighbouring Christian towns. Anton von Schmerling, Minister of Justice at the time, even declared the dissolution of the Jewish communities as autonomous political corporations to be a prerequisite for full legal emancipation.⁶ In their place, Jewish religious communities were to be established in order to deal with the purely confessional aspects of Jewish life. However, after a spate of anti-Jewish violence in 1850, the government permitted certain Jewish communities to continue existing as separate municipalities. While twenty-five Jewish communities were eventually incorporated into the neighbouring

5 The first and most comprehensive study of Moravia's “political Jewish communities” was published in 1898, while these unique communities were still in existence. See E. Goldmann, ‘Die politische Judengemeinden in Mähren’, *Zeitschrift für Volkswirtschaft, Sozialpolitik und Verwaltung* 17 (1898), pp. 557–95. Jacob Toury examined these “political Jewish communities,” but his work suffers from his failure to consult Goldmann's seminal article. See J. Toury, ‘Jewish Townships in the German-Speaking Parts of the Austrian Empire – Before and After the Revolution of 1848/1849’, *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 26 (1981), pp. 55–72. A. M. K. Rabinowicz authored the entry on ‘Politische Judengemeinden’ in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing Co., 1971), which he later expanded into ‘The Jewish Political Community: A Contribution to the History of the Legal Position of Jews in Moravia’, in *Ahron M. K. Rabinowicz Jubilee Volume*, ed. M. Aberbach (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1996), pp. 136–51 [English section]. Unfortunately, this article is full of factual errors.

6 See Toury, ‘Jewish Townships in the German-Speaking Parts of the Austrian Empire’, *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 26 (1981), pp. 65–6; A. Frankl-Grün, *Geschichte der Juden in Kremsier*, vol. 2 (Breslau, 1896–1901), p. 10.

Jewish towns, twenty-seven remained autonomous municipalities. These were the “political Jewish communities” that would help make the Jews a significant political factor in many of Moravia’s elections. How did this happen?

As Minister of State in 1861, Anton von Schmerling drafted a centralist constitution – the so-called February Patent – which set up the Austrian Reichsrat in Vienna as well as diets (*Landtage*) in each of the provinces. Schmerling sought to maintain German dominance in these elected bodies, which was particularly challenging in places like Moravia, where Czechs outnumbered Germans by a ratio of more than 2:1. He managed to accomplish his goal only through a kind of gerrymandering that was frequently derided as ‘electoral geometry.’ Schmerling’s electoral law set up four separate curiae (or electoral colleges): the curia of the great landowners, the urban curia (which also included seats for the chambers of commerce in Olmütz/Olomouc and Brünn/Brno), and the rural curia.⁷ Schmerling manipulated the urban curia, in particular, in order to ensure a German majority. This is where the political Jewish communities came into the picture. Due to their relatively small size, the political Jewish communities should have belonged to the rural curia, but it was in Schmerling’s best interest for them to vote in the urban curia. If the Germanised Jews were to vote in the Czech-dominated rural curia, their votes would have little impact. If they were to vote in the highly-contested urban curia, however, their votes might be able to tip the scales in favour of the Germans. Therefore, Schmerling permitted the political Jewish communities to vote in the same curia as the much larger Christian towns in which they were located. Thus, twenty-two of Moravia’s political Jewish communities voted in the urban curia, while only five voted in the rural curia. The Jewish vote was often decisive in close elections, and the political Jewish communities consequently came to be seen as “rotten, backward bastions of German domination” in an increasingly turbulent Czech sea.⁸

By the 1870s, the political Jewish communities were situated on the front line of the Czech–Jewish conflict. Czech leaders made repeated attempts to prevent inhabitants of these communities from voting in the urban curia. In 1876, the town of Gaya tried to strike inhabitants of the political Jewish community from its voting rosters.⁹ After elections to the Austrian Reichsrat in 1879, eleven Moravian towns contested the results on the grounds that seven political Jewish communities had illegally voted in

⁷ The chambers of commerce eventually came to constitute a fourth curia. See R. A. Kann and Z. V. David, *The Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands, 1526–1918* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1984), pp. 297–9; E. Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans: A Study of the Struggle in the Historic Provinces of Bohemia and Moravia*, second edition (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1967), pp. 29–30.

⁸ ‘Die mährische Landtagswahlreform und die Juden’, *Die Welt*, 3 December 1905, pp. 12–13.

⁹ See Toury, ‘Jewish Townships in the German-Speaking Parts of the Austrian Empire’, *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 26 (1981), pp. 69–70.

the urban curia.¹⁰ However, despite numerous protests, this aspect of Schmerling's "electoral geometry" remained in place until the first decade of the twentieth century.

Still, the political landscape shifted dramatically in the course of the 1880s and 1890s in ways that would have serious repercussions for Moravian Jewry. With the gradual expansion of the electoral franchise – first in 1882 and then in 1896 – the Jews' political influence diminished. More significantly, Liberalism began its inglorious decline, giving way to socialism, nationalism and Catholic social reform – none of which looked particularly favourably on the Jews. Some of these movements – particularly Schönerian Pan-Germanism – had blatantly antisemitic political platforms.¹¹ Others, like Czech nationalism (in its various forms), tended to view Jews through the prism of the nationality conflict, attacking them first and foremost as German lackeys.¹² The 1890s witnessed the emergence of Czech economic nationalism in the form of anti-Jewish and anti-German boycotts, which punished the Jews for their adherence to German educational, cultural and political institutions.

Worst of all, even the German Liberals began to abandon the Jews. Though the German Liberals died a slower death in Moravia than elsewhere in the Empire – largely thanks to the Jewish vote – in the 1890s they began to form political alliances with other German parties, some of them avowedly antisemitic.

As the German Liberals in Moravia began to ally themselves with the Pan-Germanists, some Moravian Jews began questioning their own knee-jerk

10 The towns of Nikolsburg/Mikulov, Auspitz/Hustopeče, Göding/Hodonin, Austerlitz/Slavkov, Kanitz/Dolní Kounice, Butschowitz/Bučovice, Gaya/Kyjov, Wischau/Vyškov, Strassnitz/Stražnice, Lundenburg/Břeclav, and Pohrlitz/Pohrellice contested the election of Rudolf Auspitz, a Jewish deputy for the Nikolsburg electoral district, on grounds that the political Jewish communities were illegally incorporated into the urban curia. See 'Bericht des Legitimationsausschusses über die am 3. Juli 1879 vorgenommene Wahl des Reichsrathsabgeordneten Rudolf Auspitz für die Städtegruppe Nikolsburg, Auspitz, Göding, Austerlitz, Kanitz, Butschowitz, Gaya, Wischau, Strassnitz, Lundenburg, Pohrlitz', in *Stenographische Protokolle über die Sitzung des Hauses der Abgeordneten des österreichischen Reichsrates*, IX. Sess., no. 151 der Beilagen, 27 February 1880. In the 1890 elections, these towns again tried to exclude the political Jewish communities from the urban curia. See *Die Neuzeit*, 19 September 1890, p. 371. Rudolf Auspitz (1837–1906) served in the Austrian Reichsrat from 1873 until 1890, first as a member of the Constitutional Party (1873–79), then as a member of the Liberal Club (1879–85), and finally as a member of the German-Austrian Club (1885–90). See S. Raphael Landau, *Fort mit den Hausjuden!* (Vienna, 1907), 37–9. He also served in the Moravian Diet from 1871 to 1900, first as a representative of the urban district comprising Butschowitz/Bučovice, Gaya/Kyjov, Wischau/Vyškov (1871–84), then as a representative for the Brünn chamber of commerce (1884–1900).

11 See P. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 142–54.

12 Kořalka, *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815–1914*, p. 133; W. Iggers, 'Juden zwischen Tschechen und Deutschen', *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 37 (1988), 429–42; R. Kestenberg-Gladstein, 'The Jews between Czechs and Germans in the Historic Lands, 1848–1918', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, vol. 1, by The Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews (Philadelphia: JPS, 1968), pp. 21–71.

support of a party that was increasingly abandoning its most loyal supporters. In the spring of 1895, delegates to the general assembly of the Moravian Jewish Land Mass Fund used their annual meeting to address this issue in particular.¹³ Never before had the delegates to the general assembly dealt with such a blatantly political matter. The Moravian Jewish Land Mass Fund was set up in 1787 under Emperor Joseph II in order to help Moravia's perpetually impoverished Jewish communities cover the salaries of their rabbis and teachers, the costs of building schools and synagogues, as well as other necessary expenditures.¹⁴ The fund had been financed by special Jewish taxes (which were repealed in 1848), but it was administered until 1869 by government officials. In 1869, the fund – with approximately one million florins in capital – was officially given to Moravian Jewry as a collectivity. From that point onward, Moravia's Jewish communities sent delegates to a tri-annual general assembly in Brünn. These delegates then elected eleven curators, who were charged with distributing money to needy individuals and communities.

At the 1895 general assembly, the delegates did more than just elect the fund's eleven curators. They used the opportunity to present Moravia's German Liberals with a kind of ultimatum. The delegates unanimously voted to send 'threatening letters' (*Drohnote*) to the German deputies in the seven electoral districts where Jews were potential swing voters.¹⁵ The letters demanded "in a very decisive manner" that the German deputies adopt a "different stance" towards antisemitism. If these deputies refused to make the requisite about-face, the Jews would abstain from voting in upcoming elections – and thereby guarantee a Czech victory.

The threat came to a test sooner than expected. In the summer of 1895, by-elections were held to replace Dr. August Weber, the recently-deceased Reichsrat deputy for the Olmütz/Olomouc-Prossnitz/Prostějov electoral district. In seeking a new candidate, the German Liberals apparently took heed of the threatening letters. They nominated Dr. Joseph von Engel, the mayor of Olmütz and "a German Liberal of the old school, who is supported by the Jews in particular."¹⁶ However, there was clearly division in the ranks of Jewish voters in Olmütz-Prossnitz. Contemporary observers detected three different factions. One faction, conforming to traditional Jewish voting patterns, threw its unconditional support behind Dr. Engel. Another faction supported him only conditionally, insisting that he first

13 'Die Juden in Mähren und die liberale Partei', *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1895, pp. 382-3.

14 For a history of the Moravian Jewish Land Mass Fund, see H. Meissner, 'Der mährisch-jüdische Landesmassafond', in Gold, *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Brünn: Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag, 1929), pp. 67-71.

15 'Die Juden in Mähren und die liberale Partei', *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1895, pp. 382-3; S. Mayer, *Ein jüdischer Kaufmann 1831 bis 1911* (Leipzig: Dunker & Humblot, 1911), p. 320.

16 'Die Demarche der mährischen Judenschaft und die Reichsratswahl im Städtebezirke Olmütz-Prossnitz', *Die Neuzeit*, 1895, pp. 272-3.

make satisfactory assurances against antisemitism. A third faction, consisting largely of petty shopkeepers in Prossnitz, saw complete abstention as the only alternative. These shopkeepers had lost their Czech customers by voting for German candidates in past elections, receiving no concessions from the Germans in return. In the current election, the Czech press demanded that the Jews abstain from voting – under threat of further economic boycotts; the Jewish shopkeepers were ready to comply.¹⁷

While some Jews certainly abstained, enough of them voted in the by-election to have a decisive impact on the outcome. As *Die Neuzeit* reported, “Engel was elected with a respectable majority. The Jewish voters of the district have the satisfaction [of knowing] that their vote was decisive ... Engel can thank the Jewish voters for his mandate.”¹⁸ However, as the *Neuzeit* report added, the Jews had already paid a considerable price for the victory of the German Liberal candidate. Indeed, Jewish voters, who “observed solid party discipline,” had once again sacrificed their social and material interests for the sake of the German Liberal Party. But was it worth it? *Die Neuzeit* was not so sure. “Only time will tell if the German Liberals will express their gratitude and thanks by speaking up for rights of the Jews, taking a stance against antisemitism in particular. One should not be overly optimistic...”¹⁹

The scepticism of the *Neuzeit* proved to be well founded. Not long after the 1895 election, Dr. Adolf Promber, the leader of the German Liberal Party in the Moravian Diet, entered into an electoral alliance with candidates from the antisemitic German National Party.²⁰ This trend also found an ironic expression in one of Moravia’s foremost bastions of Liberalism: the German House in Brünn. As one Jewish contemporary pointed out, the German House, which some circles considered to be thoroughly “judaised,” had hosted an antisemitic speaker from the German National Party. Adding insult to injury, the speech was held in the German House’s Engelmann Hall – named after a benefactor of Jewish origin.²¹

Not surprisingly, the gradual abandonment of the Jews by Moravia’s German Liberals led to a reevaluation of the Jews’ traditional role in electoral politics. A lead article in the Viennese-Jewish *Österreichische Wochenschrift* advised the Jews of Moravia to break with their deeply-ingrained tradition of voting for German candidates, especially since these candidates had brazenly forsaken their loyal Jewish supporters.²² The Jews could no longer support German Liberals in Moravia, another article insisted, because there were no longer any German Liberals in

17 ‘Zur Reichsratswahl in Städtebezirk Olmütz-Prossnitz’, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1895, pp. 441–2; *Die Neuzeit*, 1895, pp. 272–3.

18 ‘Brünn. Nachklänge zur Reichsratswahl in Olmütz-Prossnitz’, *Die Neuzeit*, 1895, p. 310.
19 *Die Neuzeit*, 1895, p. 310.

20 Mayer, Ein jüdischer Kaufmann, p. 321.

21 ‘Liberalen Philosemitismus in Mähren’, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1895, p. 835.

22 ‘Zur Lage in Mähren’, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1896, pp. 603–4.

Moravia.²³ Instead the Jews were advised to vote for “truly free-thinking, fair-minded men” (“*wirklich freisinnigen, gerecht denkenden Männern*”), regardless of their nationality. If there were no such candidates, the Jews had best abstain from voting entirely.

Meanwhile, Moravian Jewry’s reputation as an agent of Germanisation was increasingly becoming a liability. The more the Jews were seen as pillars of support for the “artificial German hegemony” over the Czechs, the more they suffered the brunt of Czech antisemitism. The *Moravská Orlice* went so far as to claim that Czech hatred of the Jews was rooted solely in the latter’s political and economic abuses. “We Czechs in Moravia are neither racial nor confessional anti-Semites,” began an article from 1896.²⁴ “We oppose the Jews only in so far as they injure our people politically and economically; and the longer the Jews preserve the artificial German hegemony over us, the more our defence against them ... will strengthen and grow.” The *Moravská Orlice* provided statistical data to support its case against the Jews. The Czechs, it pointed out, constituted 70.6% of Moravia’s total population, while the Germans (including Moravia’s 45,324 Jews), constituted only 29.4%. “And these 45,324,” it claimed, “decide [...] the political make-up of the entire province, and without them, the remaining Germans [...] would constitute an insignificant minority.”²⁵

When the Czech–German conflict reached a violent crescendo in the last years of the nineteenth century, the Jews paid dearly for their allegiance to the Germans. In Moravia, a three-month wave of anti-Jewish violence erupted at the end of 1899, following the repeal of the controversial Badeni language ordinance. In 1897, Minister-President Count Kasimir Badeni had promulgated a new language law, placing Czech and German on a par as official languages in Bohemia and Moravia, even in regions where only German was spoken.²⁶ Since the law required all civil servants to be proficient in the Czech language, this meant, for all intents and purposes, that German-speakers would be fired or forced into early retirement. This apparent victory for the Czechs drove the Germans in Bohemia, Moravia and Vienna into the streets, where unruly protests became the order of the day. When the Badeni language ordinances were finally repealed in October 1899, the Czechs took out their anger on the German population, targeting the Jews in particular. Between October and December 1899, 265 incidents were reported in the Czech Lands, 200 of them in Moravia.²⁷ The

23 ‘Nur Keine Hundetreue. Betrachtungen über die Lage der Juden in Mähren’, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1895, pp. 709–10.

24 Quoted in ‘Eine czechische Stimme über den Antisemitismus der Deutschen und der Czechen in Mähren’, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1896, p. 625.

25 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 1896, p. 625.

26 See B. Sutter, *Die Badenischen Sprachenverordnungen von 1897*, 2 vols. (Graz: Böhlau Nachf., 1960–65).

27 H. Krejčová and A. Míšková, ‘Anmerkungen zur Frage des Antisemitismus in den Böhmisches Ländern Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts’, in *Judenemanzipation – Antisemitismus – Verfolgung in Deutschland, Österreich-Ungarn, den Böhmisches Ländern und in der Slowakei*, ed. J. K. Hoensch et al. (Essen: Klartext, 1999), p. 57.

majority were overtly anti-Jewish, particularly in the Moravian towns of Holleschau/Holešov, Wsetin/Vsetín and Prerau/Prerov.

Since the Jews had become the whipping boy of both Czechs and Germans, one might assume that they had the most to gain from a peace settlement between the warring national camps. However, when Moravia's Czechs and Germans reached a landmark agreement in 1905, the Jews found themselves in a new kind of bind. The Moravian Compromise (*Moravský Pakt/Der Mährische Ausgleich*) of 1905 was intended to defuse the nationality conflict in Moravia, but it threatened, in the process, to eliminate the Jews as a political factor.²⁸ The Compromise retained the basic curial system that had been in place since 1861, but it reorganised the urban and rural curiae (and a new general curia) in national terms. In these national curiae, which represented nearly three-fourths of the Moravian Diet, seats were allocated to Czechs and Germans in a ratio of 73 to 40. Voters were registered in national voting lists (cadastres) and allowed to vote only in their own national curia. Thus, voters registered in the Czech cadastre could vote only for Czech candidates; voters registered in the German cadastre could vote only for German candidates. Where did this leave the Jewish voters?

The Moravian Compromise contained a rather elliptical reference to the Jews. Paragraph 30 stated that "eligible voters who belong to neither the Czech nor the German nationality ... are to be placed on the voting list of the majority of the voters in a given town."²⁹ Thus, where Czechs were a majority, Jews would be registered as Czechs. Where Germans were a majority, they would be registered as Germans. However, the matter did not end here. Jews, like the rest of Moravia's voters, were allowed to switch voting lists if they could show that they had been registered on the wrong one. Thus, the decision was not entirely passive. A Jew could actively identify his nationality as Czech or German.

Some German Liberals, such as Dr. Stephan von Licht, a converted Jew from Brünn and a Reichsrat deputy for the German Progressive Party, hoped that forcing the Jews to choose between the two national camps would solve the Jewish question in Moravia once and for all. Dr. Licht was convinced that the national cadastres would lead to the recognition of Jews as "a constituent element of the German or Czech people (*Volkstum*)."³⁰ If

28 For further details on the Moravian Compromise, see J. Kolečka, "Moravský pakt" z roku 1905', *Československý časopis historický* 4 (1956), 590-615; A. von Skene, *Der nationale Ausgleich in Mähren 1905* (Vienna: Carl Konegan, 1910); R. A. Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848-1918*, vol. 1 (New York: Octagon Books, 1983), pp. 207-9; R. Luft, 'Die Mittelpartei des mährischen Grossgrundbesitzes 1879 bis 1918. Zur Problematik des Ausgleichs in Mähren und Böhmen', in *Die Chance der Verständigung. Absichten und Ansätze zur übernationaler Zusammenarbeit in den böhmischen Ländern 1848-1918: Vorträge der Tagung des Collegium Carolinum in Bad Wiessee vom 22. bis 24. November 1985*, ed. F. Seibt (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1987), pp. 187-243.

29 See *Die mährischen Ausgleichsgesetze* (Brünn, 1910), p. 55.

30 Originally published in *Der Weg* (Vienna). Quoted in *Monatschrift der Österreichisch-Israelitischen Union* 17 (December 1905), no. 12, p. 1.

individual Jews were finally forced to identify themselves as either German or Czech, he reasoned, the Jews of Moravia would no longer occupy the ambiguous – and increasingly precarious – middle ground between two belligerent nationalities.

Contemporary Jewish newspapers – particularly those with a Zionist or Jewish nationalist program – did not share Dr. Licht's optimism. A correspondent to *Die Welt*, the official organ of the World Zionist Organisation, feared that the Moravian Compromise – which treated the Jews as “non-existent” – would actually lead to a worsening of Moravian Jewry's plight.³¹ “It would be a fatal mistake,” wrote the correspondent, “to believe that the national battle-hatchet is finally buried and the Jews are henceforth removed ... from the nationality conflict.”³² As he pointed out, the national voting lists were introduced solely for elections to the Moravian Diet, not for the myriad other elections – such as those to the chambers of commerce and municipal councils – that perpetually served as flashpoints in the Czech–German conflict. To make matters worse, the voting lists could be used as blacklists (*Proskriptionsliste*) in the economic boycotts against the Jews. Thus, far from “neutralising” the Jews, the Moravian Compromise actually threatened to make their situation more precarious by “jerking” them into “nationally foreign” voting lists.³³

Worst of all, the Moravian Compromise failed to recognise the Jews as a separate nationality. Consequently, the Zionist *Jüdisches Volksblatt* characterised it as a victory for assimilationists and a severe defeat for Jewish nationalists. As a lead article from November 1905 observed, now that the Jews were forced by law to declare themselves members of a foreign tribe (*Volksstamm*), they would soon feel themselves to be members of only that tribe.³⁴ Thus, while the “assimilationists could celebrate,” Jewish nationalists viewed the Moravian Compromise as the sounding of their own death knell. As the *Jüdisches Volksblatt* put it, the “keystone of the peace edifice” built by Czechs and Germans might become the “gravestone for the Jewish *Volkstum* in Austria.”³⁵

Initially, however, the fact that the Compromise was founded on the principle of national autonomy provided a glimmer of hope for the empire's Zionists and Jewish nationalists. Members of both movements viewed it as a possible stepping-stone towards the eventual recognition of Jews as a separate nationality. Indeed, in late 1905 and early 1906, Zionists and Jewish nationalists tried to muster up support among government officials – and among other Jews as well – for a separate Jewish curia in Moravia.³⁶

31 *Die Welt* (Vienna), 1 December 1905.

32 *Die Welt* (Vienna), 1 December 1905.

33 *Die Welt* (Vienna), 1 December 1905.

34 *Jüdisches Volksblatt* (Vienna), 24 November 1905.

35 *Jüdisches Volksblatt* (Vienna), 24 November 1905.

36 For a brief discussion of these and similar efforts, see A. Rachamimov, ‘Diaspora Nationalism's Pyrrhic Victory: The Controversy Regarding the Electoral Reform of 1909 in Bukovina’, in *State and Nation Building in East Central Europe: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. J. S. Micgiel (New York: Institute on East Central Europe, Columbia University, 1996), pp. 1–16.

Viennese Zionists played a particularly important role. Dr. Hermann Kadisch, one of Theodor Herzl's earliest and closest supporters, was sent to Moravia at the end of 1905 to promote the idea of Jewish national autonomy among the local Jewish population.³⁷ A number of Moravian Zionists sent letters to Minister-President Gautsch, asking for the establishment of a separate curia. However, the idea was not embraced by the Minister-President.³⁸

The idea of a separate Jewish curia does not seem to have resonated with most of Moravia's Jews either. While some did view such a curia in positive terms, hoping it would not only remove the Jews from the Czech-German conflict but also guarantee a fixed number of Jewish deputies in the Moravian Diet, others feared that a Jewish curia would inevitably become a "pariah curia."³⁹ Above all, they feared that a Jewish curia would render the Jews politically superfluous in the eyes of both the Czechs and the Germans, thereby making them even more vulnerable to anti-Jewish economic boycotts. In other words, although the Jews had suffered under the old electoral system because of their disproportionate political influence, they now stood to suffer even more if that influence suddenly disappeared.

The Vienna-based Austrian Israelite Union, in particular, opposed the idea of a separate Jewish curia. Established in 1886, the Austrian Israelite Union (*Österreichisch-Israelitische Union*) was the first Jewish defence organisation in Central Europe. Founded by Joseph Samuel Bloch, the Galician-born rabbi of the Viennese suburb of Floridsdorf and editor of the *Österreichisches Wochenschrift*, the Union set out to fight the double scourge of antisemitism and assimilation in the Habsburg Empire.⁴⁰ Led by Wilhelm Anninger at the time of the Moravian Compromise, the Union viewed the creation of a Jewish curia as detrimental to Jewish interests. As Sigmund Meyer, who was active in the Union at the time, explained in his memoirs:

A political arrangement, which would not only result in the intensification and deepening of the already existing chasm between Jews and Christians, but also in the legal stabilisation and petrification of the chasm - with the severest of economic perils for the Jews - contravened the political tendency of the Union... It was immediately clear to us what position the Moravian Jews had to adopt vis-à-

37 'Ung-Broder Brief', *Jüdische Volksstimme* (Brünn), 15 January 1906, p. 5; *Jüdisches Volksblatt* (Vienna), 29 December 1905.

38 *Jüdisches Volksblatt* (Vienna), 29 December 1905.

39 *Monatschrift der Österreichisch-Israelitischen Union* 17 (December 1905), no. 12, p. 3.

40 On Joseph Samuel Bloch, the *Österreichisches Wochenschrift* and the Austrian Israelite Union, see R. S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 270-343; J. Toury, 'Troubled Beginnings; the emergence of the *Österreichisch-Israelitische Union*', *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 30 (1985), pp. 457-75, and 'Joseph Samuel Bloch und die jüdische Identität im österreichischen Kaiserreich', *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte*, Beiheft 6 (1984), 41-63; R. Burstyn, 'Joseph Samuel Bloch (1860-1923) - ein Lebensbild; Kämpfer für Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit', *Kairos* 29, 1-2 (1987), pp. 104-15.

vis the German and Czech cadastres: in light of the well-known fact that [Moravian Jewish] interests were not protected in the slightest by either the Germans or the Czechs, this question had to be decided based on purely tactical motives.⁴¹

In other words, the Union was prepared to play *Realpolitik*. In mid-December 1905, the Austrian Israelite Union invited leaders of Moravian Jewry to Vienna in order to devise a political strategy that would best protect Jewish interests in light of the changes wrought by the Moravian Compromise.

Advocating “Jewish pressure-group politics” (*Jüdische Interessenpolitik*), the Union sought a means by which Jewish voters could become a political factor in as many electoral districts as possible.⁴² It recognised that in “majority districts” – i.e. discrete electoral districts, such as Prossnitz/Prostějov, where one nationality (Czechs) constituted the overwhelming majority of the population – Jewish voters had no prospect of affecting the electoral outcome. However, in some of the “minority districts” the situation was different. “Minority districts” were non-contiguous electoral districts that encompassed small pockets of Germans (or Czechs) amidst a majority Czech (or German) population. For example, the small German minority in Prossnitz/Prostějov was grouped together with the German minorities in other overwhelmingly Czech towns (Prerau/Přerov, Kojetein/Kojetin, Wischau/Vyškov, Austerlitz/Slavkov) to form a single electoral district. As the Austrian Israelite Union pointed out, Jewish voters had the potential to wield considerable influence in a number of the German minority districts where Jews constituted a significant percentage of the electorate.

As the November 1906 elections to the Moravian Diet approached, the newly-formed Moravian Jewish Political Executive Committee identified three urban electoral districts – Göding/Hodonin, Auspitz/Hustopeče, and Mährisch-Weisskirchen/Hranice – where Jews could retain political influence if they registered in the German cadastre in large enough numbers.⁴³ The Göding district seemed to present the greatest opportunity. If all eligible voters were to register in the German cadastre (and not the Czech cadastre), Jews would constitute 48% of the entire electorate. The percentages were smaller in the Auspitz and Mährisch-Weisskirchen districts (35% and 30%, respectively), but possibly large enough to have an impact on the electoral outcome.⁴⁴

41 Mayer, *Ein jüdischer Kaufmann*, p. 347.

42 ‘Der mährische Ausgleich und die Juden’, *Monatschrift der Österreichisch-Israelitischen Union* 17 (December 1905), no. 12, pp. 1–6.

43 ‘Konferenz des mähr.-jüd. politischen Exekutivkomitees’, *Jüdische Volksstimme*, 15 October 1906, p. 2; ‘Vor den mährischen Landtagswahlen (Brünn)’, *Neue Zeitung* (Vienna), 26 October 1906.

44 These figures are taken from ‘Die jüdische Volksversammlung in Prossnitz’, *Jüdische Volksstimme*, 15 May 1906, pp. 3–4.

The Executive Committee initially hoped that the Jews in one of these electoral districts might be able to field a candidate of their own, preferably an “independent, nationally-conscious Jew.” However, the exigencies of *Lokalpolitik* prevented the Jews from realising their potential strength, as many Jews were forced to register in the Czech cadastre in order to protect their economic interests. This was particularly evident in the Göding electoral district, where most of the Jews in Ungarisch-Hradisch/Ukerské Hradiště, Holleschau/Holešov, Kremsier/Kroměříž, and Gaya/Kyjov registered as Czechs, thereby reducing the number of Jews in the German cadastre.⁴⁵ As a result, the Executive Committee decided not to nominate a separate Jewish candidate, but chose instead to endorse Dr. Joseph Redlich, the candidate for the German Progressive Party. With the help of the Jewish vote, Dr. Redlich did manage to win the election, but it turned out to be a rather hollow victory in the eyes of many Moravian Jews.⁴⁶ Dr. Redlich was not exactly the “nationally-conscious Jew” they had hoped for. Though born a Jew, he had converted to Christianity in 1903.⁴⁷

Although Redlich was not the ideal candidate, Jewish voters in the Göding electoral district at least managed to get a Liberal candidate elected. In many other cases, Jewish voters watched helplessly as German voters supported one antisemitic candidate after another. For example, in the fifth district of the general curia, German voters put their support behind the Pan-Germanist Dr. Wilhelm Freisler, despite vocal protests from Jewish voters.⁴⁸ The organ of the Austrian Israelite Union viewed this as an “act of excessive ingratitude, yes the most abominable felony against the Jewish voters,” since the German electorate had completely abandoned its most loyal constituents once and for all.⁴⁹ As one Jewish nationalist observed, the Moravian Compromise had made Jews “expendable” in the eyes of German

45 ‘Die mährische Landtagswahlen’, *Monatschrift der Österreichisch-Israelitischen Union* 18 (October 1906), no. 10, pp. 1–4.

46 ‘Zum Delegiertentage der mährischen Juden’, *Jüdische Volksstimme*, 15 March 1907, p. 5. The author of this article lamented the fact that no Jewish candidate had been nominated in the two electoral districts (Göding and Auspitz) where “a Jewish candidate had chances of success if the other parties had split the vote.” Even if an electoral victory could not be guaranteed, it should have been “a matter of honor for Moravian Jewry” to finally promote a Jewish candidate. When Redlich ran for a seat in the Austrian Reichstag in 1907, the *Österreichische Wochenschrift* declared that “Jewish voters should deny Redlich any votes and fight him with all means!” See ‘Nikolsburg’, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 15 March 1907, p. 189.

47 Born in Göding/Hodonin, Joseph Redlich (1869–1936) was a prominent constitutional lawyer and politician in the last decades of the Habsburg Monarchy. In 1905, he was appointed professor at the University of Vienna. Between 1906 and 1918, he served as a Liberal member of the Moravian Diet and the Austrian Reichsrat; he was appointed minister of finance in 1918. In the 1920s, he taught law at various universities in the United States, including Harvard, where he taught from 1929 until 1931. He returned to Austria in 1931, serving as minister of finance until Dolfuss came to power in 1934. For further biographical details, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), pp. 13–14.

48 ‘Mähr. Ostrau. Zu den Landtagswahlen’, *Die Neue Freie Presse* (Vienna), 11 October 1906.

49 ‘Die mährische Landtagswahlen’, *Monatschrift der Österreichisch-Israelitischen Union* 18 (October 1906), no. 10, pp. 1–4.

voters, allowing *völkisch* antisemitism to take centre stage in Moravia's German political scene.⁵⁰

Indeed, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jews of Moravia had lost their kingmaker status in all but a few places. While few mourned the loss, the Jews faced a new political role: irrelevance. For even if the Jews of Moravia had been reluctant kingmakers, their new situation was even more precarious: caught between two warring camps with no political capital whatsoever.

⁵⁰ B. Singer, 'Was haben wir von der neuen mährischen Landtagswahlordnung zu erwarten?' *Neue Zeitung* (Vienna), 2 November 1906.