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Antisemitism and socialist strategy in Europe, 1880–1917: an introduction

This special issue focuses on the relationship between socialists and Jews across six European countries between 1880 and 1917. This was a period marked by a sustained cycle of protest in the course of which socialist parties began to draw increasingly significant support from their core constituency of the industrial working class. Over the course of this wave of contentious politics, union membership rose in Germany from tens of thousands in the 1870s to several millions by the dawn of the twentieth century;¹ while in Britain, significant sections of the ‘unrespectable’ working class—that great mass of unskilled and labouring poor—began to organize and, in the process, transformed trade unionism beyond its traditional constituency of craft workers.² Many of the parties that acquired their strength from this revolt of the industrial proletariat, including the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD, Social Democratic Party of Germany), came to affiliate to the Second International, an umbrella organisation formed in 1889 to further the cause of working-class emancipation around the world. By 1914, the affiliate parties of the Second International commanded a collective membership of more than four million members and a parliamentary vote of twelve million. The era of collectivist socialist politics was born.

What has been less acknowledged by socialist and labour historians of this period is how, alongside this wave of contentious class politics, there also emerged across Europe new and increasingly powerful discursive representations of racialized minorities, including, most notably, those of Jewish descent. Older, religiously inflected representations of Jews now came to be overwritten by forms of representation informed by scientific racism. This racializing antisemitism would sometimes have a significant and structural impact on working-class consciousness and political action. Neither, significantly, was the emergent socialist movement immune.

Yet, the complex and diverse ways in which socialist parties and organizations responded to this growing penetration of racist and antisemitic ideas within the working class—and also the socialist movement itself—have, until recently, been largely peripheral to the concerns of historians and social scientists working on this period. This collection of essays sets out to redress this historiographical deficit by exploring socialist responses to antisemitism. In bringing together this collection of essays, our primary question is *how did socialist formations across Europe, particularly its leading activists, respond—at the levels of both theory and practice—to the emergent forms of antisemitism that accompanied the insurgent wave of working-class revolt between 1880 and 1917?* Each of the essays in this volume explores this question and, taken together, they represent seven case

¹ John Riddell (ed.), *Lenin’s Struggle for a Revolutionary International: Documents, 1907–1916, the Preparatory Years* (New York: Monad Press 1984), 1–3.

² See Satnam Virdee, ‘Socialist antisemitism and its discontents in England, 1884–98’, in this issue.

studies, with contributions on Poland, Sweden, the Netherlands, England, France/Algeria and two on Russia.

Antisemitism and the congresses of the Second International, 1891–1914

The case studies in this volume reveal that socialists in Europe left a complex and sometimes troubling record on the question of responding to the growth in antisemitism between 1880 and 1917. This ought not to surprise us, since such unevenness at the national level was also reflected at the level of the supranational, at the congresses of the Second International. As the coordinating body of the world socialist movement, bringing together representatives of socialist parties and trade unions, the congresses of the Second International provided an important space in which socialist strategy was debated and elaborated. It was also at these periodic gatherings that the sharp growth of antisemitism and the emergence of the so-called ‘Jewish question’ were discussed and debated within the international socialist movement. Although this material has long since been covered in the existing literature,³ it is worth briefly revisiting the proceedings and resolutions of those congresses as they help to provide an overarching European context for the chapters on the individual nations that follow.

Taken as a whole, the proceedings of the congresses of the Second International between 1891 and 1914 reveal a contradictory stance on antisemitism. On the one hand, successive congresses passed resolutions condemning *Russian* antisemitism specifically. A 1901 meeting in Brussels of the International Bureau (the executive arm of the International), for example, passed a resolution protesting against the *numerus clausus* system in Russia that restricted entry for Jews in Russian universities.⁴ In the same spirit, the International Bureau also issued a strongly worded resolution condemning the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, pointing out that it would be ‘a crime’ for workers to remain silent in the face of such blatant ‘race and religious hatred’.⁵ The following year, at the 1904

³ Ezra Mendelsohn, ‘The Jewish socialist movement and the Second International, 1889–1914: the struggle for recognition’, *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1964, 131–45 (132–3); Edmund Silberner, ‘Anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism in the Socialist International’, *Judaism*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1953, 117–22 (118–19); Jack Jacobs, ‘Die Sozialistische Internationale, der Antisemitismus und die jüdisch-sozialistischen Parteien des Russischen Reiches’, in Wladislaw Hedeler, Mario Kessler and Gert Schäfer (eds), *Ausblicke auf das vergangene Jahrhundert: Die Politik der internationalen Arbeiterbewegung von 1900 bis 2000. Festschrift für Theodor Bergmann* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag 1996), 156–68.

⁴ ‘The first meeting of the new International’, *International Socialist Review*, vol. 2, no. 8, February 1902, 596–602 (600); see also Jacobs, ‘Die Sozialistische Internationale, der Antisemitismus und die jüdisch-sozialistischen Parteien des Russischen Reiches’.

⁵ V. Serwy, ‘The Kischiniff massacres’, *International Socialist Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, July 1903, 46; see also Jacobs, ‘Die Sozialistische Internationale, der Antisemitismus und die jüdisch-sozialistischen Parteien des Russischen Reiches’.

Amsterdam congress, the International passed a further resolution against antisemitism in Russia.⁶ Finally, a decade later, when the **Beilis Affair** erupted in 1913, the International Bureau sent a special circular to all members of the International calling on socialist parties to organize protests against the Russian government. Most carried out the request, although it was notable that Austrian Social Democrats refused.⁷

It seems, then, that during the early 1900s the Second International was perfectly capable of challenging antisemitism in Russia, at least at the level of rhetoric and policy formation. Its capacity to undertake such action was facilitated by two factors. First, Jewish socialists played a crucial role in raising awareness of the plight of Russian Jews within the International. For example, the question of antisemitism was raised in the International for the first time at the 1891 congress in Brussels by Abraham Cahan, a delegate from the United Hebrew Trades. Moreover, the aforementioned resolution passed at the 1904 congress protesting against Russian antisemitism was advanced by the delegates of the Russian Bund.⁸ Indeed, the catalytic role played by Jews in elaborating a socialist response to antisemitism is a theme that will be returned to in a number of the contributions in this volume. Second was the place that Russia occupied in the socialist imaginary during this period. Marx, in a series of well-known texts produced at the time of the Crimean War, had famously identified Russia as a bulwark of reaction. As Engels put it, Russia was ‘the last great centre of support for all reactionary forces in Western Europe’.⁹ Such sentiment was shared across much of the European left, and for many socialists the reactionary nature of the tsarist state appeared most manifestly in a state-driven antisemitism that included not just blood libel, but successive waves of violent pogroms.¹⁰ It

⁶ Mendelsohn, ‘The Jewish socialist movement and the Second International’, 132–3. The resolution was proposed by August Bebel, Eduard Bernstein, Karl Hjalmar Branting, Keir Hardie and a certain Henri H. van Kol, who later in the congress would put forward a motion calling for racist restrictions on immigration (see discussion below).

⁷ Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and ‘the Jewish Question’ after Marx* (New York: New York University Press 1992), 101.

⁸ Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1972), 280.

⁹ Friedrich Engels, ‘Russia and the social revolution’ [1875], in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe: A Collection of Articles, Speeches, Letters and News Dispatches*, ed. Paul W. Blackstock and Bert F. Hoselitz (London: **George Allen and Unwin** 1953), 203–5 (203). For Marx’s writings on Russia during the mid-1850s, see Karl Marx, *The Eastern Question* (London: Swan Sonnenschein 1897). See also K. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2010), 42–50.

¹⁰ The once widely held belief that the 1881, 1903 and 1905 pogroms were ‘organized’ by the Russian state has been challenged in the secondary literature. See John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (eds), *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1992); and Hans

was axiomatic for all socialists to oppose the reactionary Russian government and, for many, such opposition entailed a critique of the antisemitism of the tsarist state. This critique was further enabled by the broad consensus within the socialist movement that antisemitism was an index, not of Russia's modernity, but its lack thereof: in so far as Russia progressed into a modern democratic state, its antisemitism would inevitably recede. Although this perspective enabled a sharp critique of *tsarist* antisemitism, it also facilitated an underestimation of the distinct modernity of this ascendant antisemitism in other parts of the world, particularly in Western Europe.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is certainly clear that a socialist response to Russian antisemitism was enacted in the congresses of the Second International on a number of occasions.

The overall record of the Second International on the question of antisemitism, however, was more ambiguous. At the 1891 Brussels congress, when the aforementioned Abraham Cahan appealed to the International to adopt a resolution condemning all attempts to 'stir-up' disunity among Christian and Jewish workers in the United States, he was met with a number of objections. Belgian socialist Jean Volders, chair of the session, rejected out of hand the suggestion that socialists should produce a resolution against antisemitism, insisting that the passing of such a resolution would serve only to divert attention away from the real struggle, the fight against capitalism.¹² Next to contribute to the debate was Albert Regnard, a Blanquist, who gave his own views on what he termed 'the Semitic question', arguing that 'Jewish bankers' represent a threat to 'all of us'. French delegate Paul Argryiades added weight to Regnard's position by suggesting that, in so far as the congress opposes antisemitism, it ought also to come out against the 'provocations of certain semites'.¹³ Significantly, Victor Adler and Paul Singer—both socialist activists of Jewish descent, and who would later be signatories to the International's 1903 resolution against the Kishinev pogrom—privately appealed to Cahan to withdraw his resolution for fear that it would confirm the antisemitic stereotype that socialism was a 'Jewish' endeavour. Such a response indicates how fearful some European Jewish socialists were of challenging antisemitism on the grounds that it would delegitimize socialism as a political project. In the end, the congress rejected Cahan's proposed resolution and in its place was passed a resolution denouncing *both* antisemitic and philosemitic 'incitement' in equal measure.¹⁴ A

Rogger, *Jewish Politics and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1986).

¹¹ For a broader discussion of this point, see Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question: The History of a Debate, 1843–1943*, trans. from the French by Bernard Gibbons (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press 1994).

¹² Mendelsohn, 'The Jewish socialist movement and the Second International', 133.

¹³ Silberner, 'Anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism in the socialist International', 118–19.

¹⁴ Mendelsohn, 'The Jewish socialist movement and the Second International', 133–4; James Joll, *The Second International 1889–1914*, 2nd edn (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1968), 68.

British delegate later publically stated that there was a ‘strong feeling against the Jews in the Congress’.¹⁵

The passing of this resolution revealed two key areas of tension regarding the question of antisemitism and the International. First, for some Jewish socialists in Eastern Europe, and for future leaders of the Bund in particular, the resolution brought to the fore doubts about the extent to which the international socialist movement could be relied on to combat antisemitism.¹⁶ Indeed, at future congresses of the International, the Bund would press to ensure that the 1891 resolution would be overturned and that an explicit statement opposing antisemitism would be adopted in its place.¹⁷ Second, the 1891 resolution also reflected a more general unease regarding the so-called ‘Jewish question’ among certain leading members of the International in Central and Western Europe. For socialists like Victor Adler and Paul Singer, being seen to be against antisemitism risked confirming the antisemitic stereotype that socialism was a ‘Jewish’ project. Such concerns were far from confined to the supranational level of the International’s congresses. As Lars Fischer has persuasively shown, the socialist response to antisemitism in late imperial Germany was similarly defined by a preoccupation with the question of ‘philosemitism’. Having ostensibly rejected antisemitism, German socialists frequently went out of their way to disprove any guilt in ‘defending the Jews’, meaning in practice that it was ‘philosemitism’ that often became their real target over and above actually subjecting antisemitism to any serious criticism.¹⁸ Equally problematic was the response in the Austrian context, where ‘philosemitism’ was often viewed by Social Democrats as an unacceptable defence of ‘capitalist Jewry’.¹⁹

As is clear, within the crucible of the congresses of the Second International, the socialist response to antisemitism was marked by a deep sense of ambivalence. On the one hand, antisemitism in Russia could be opposed without hesitation during the early 1900s; yet, just a few years earlier, the International failed to come out against antisemitism at a more generalized level. Moreover, the existing secondary literature on Germany and Austria points to a deeply problematic preoccupation with opposing antisemitism and ‘philosemitism’ in equal measure, a tendency that also surfaced at the 1891 congress of the International.

¹⁵ Quoted in the newspaper of the British Social Democratic Federation (SDF), *Justice*, 22 August 1891, 4.

¹⁶ Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1981), 195.

¹⁷ Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, 280.

¹⁸ Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007), 21–36.

¹⁹ Robert S. Wistrich, ‘Social democracy, the Jews, and antisemitism in *fin-de-Siècle* Vienna’, in Jehuda Reinharz (ed.), *Living with Antisemitism: Modern Jewish Responses* (Hanover, NH and London: Brandeis University Press 1987), 193–209 (205).

More than half a century ago, historian Edmund Silberner argued that the resolution of the 1891 congress showed that the Socialist International *as a whole* was generally hostile to Jews.²⁰ However, this claim is difficult to sustain if the aforementioned resolutions against Russian antisemitism are taken into account.²¹ Indeed, it is complexity, not uniformity, that characterizes the record of the Second International on antisemitism. For example, shortly after the 1891 congress, the Russian Marxist Georgii Plekhanov—who himself was not immune to making antisemitic statements²²—wrote a strongly worded article in the Russian periodical *Sotsial Demokrat* denouncing the 1891 resolution: ‘*philo*-Semitism can in no way be equated with *anti*-Semitism’, he argued; it is the latter, not the former, that represents ‘the great political danger’. Plekhanov forcefully challenged the arguments of the Blanquist Albert Regnard who had invoked the antisemitic stereotype of the ‘Jewish banker’ at the congress: ‘if Jewish banks really do harm “us”’, Plekhanov reasoned, ‘then they do so as *banks*, not *Jewish* banks. The question is *economic*, in no way is it a *racial* [*plemnoi*] one.’ To underline the serious error of the International’s resolution, Plekhanov further added that future congresses should revisit the question of antisemitism and, significantly, that Russian Jews should lead the way in formulating a more satisfactory position.²³ This, indeed, is precisely what happened.

What this brief discussion highlights is that the Second International response to antisemitism was complex, contingent, and evades easy analytic categorization. Indeed, the very fact that the International had such a contradictory record on antisemitism is reason enough to warrant a closer examination of how socialist parties addressed this question at the level of national states. There were certainly currents in the International that sought to build an explicitly socialist critique of antisemitism: one that did not keep out of view the specificity of antisemitism, but instead sought to instil it as a central tenet of socialist politics. Such currents are evident in the Jewish socialism of Abraham Cahan, but they are evident also in the intervention of the distinctly Russian Marxist Plekhanov. The task, then, of reconstructing a more comprehensive understanding of the socialist

²⁰ Silberner, ‘Anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism in the socialist International’.

²¹ For a strong rebuttal of Silberner’s claims, see Jacobs, ‘Die Sozialistische Internationale, der Antisemitismus und die jüdisch-sozialistische Parteien des Russischen Reiches’.

²² In a meeting following the founding of *Iskra* in September 1900, Plekhanov apparently complained to Lenin about the ‘serpent-tribe’ like nature of the Bund, adding that the Jews were ‘chauvinists and nationalists’, and that a Russian Marxist party ought not to allow itself to be ruled by them. V. I. Lenin, ‘Kak chut’ ne potukhla “Iskra”?’, in V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, ed. K. A. Ostroukhova and B.Ia. Zevm, vol. 4 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury 1959), 311. For a discussion in English, see Joseph Nedava, *Trotsky and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America 1971), 50–1.

²³ Georgii Plekhanov, ‘Rabochee dvizhenie v 1891 g.’, *Sotsial Demokrat*, 1892, 107–8 (emphasis in the original). Plekhanov’s article is mentioned in passing in Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 582. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are by the authors.

response to antisemitism means resisting the appeal of totalizing conclusions, and instead remaining alive to the complexity and messiness of the historical record. A series of questions inevitably flow from this: from where did those currents that challenged antisemitism stem? Were the main social actors who challenged antisemitism involved in a specifically *Jewish* socialist politics, or were there stratum within the broader (that is, 'non-Jewish') movement that elaborated a genuinely anti-racist socialist politics? The contributions in this volume, we hope, will go some way towards addressing these crucial questions.

Antisemitism and other modalities of racism within the Second International

While the essays in this volume focus on the socialist response to antisemitism, it is important to emphasize that far from being a singular, stand-alone question, antisemitism was frequently bound up in discussions of other modalities of racism when debated within the socialist movement.

A particular case in point is the Second International debate on 'immigration' during the 1904 and 1907 congresses.²⁴ Given that a significant proportion of Jewish workers in Western European states during this period were recently arrived migrants (or their descendants) from the Pale of Settlement, the politics of antisemitism overlapped with broader questions of 'immigration' and national belonging. For example, at the Amsterdam congress in 1904, Dutch delegate Henri van Koll submitted a proposal calling for restrictions on 'inferior races', warning that the immigration of such 'backward races (Chinese, Negroes, etc.)' would lower the wages of the 'native workingmen'.²⁵ One of the most striking aspects of this resolution, however, concerns not its content but its author: earlier, at the very same congress, van Koll had co-authored a resolution calling for an *end* to the persecution of Jews in Russia. Van Koll, therefore, saw no contradiction in simultaneously denouncing antisemitism and calling for immigration controls. The fact that these were not mutually exclusive political standpoints, that a socialist could be both racist against non-European Others and against

²⁴ For a discussion of the socialist support for racist immigration controls at the 1904 Amsterdam congress, see Daniel De Leon, *Flashlights of the Amsterdam International Socialist Congress, 1904* (New York: New York Labor News Company 1904), 70–2, 101–2. For the proceedings of the debate on 'immigration' at the 1907 Stuttgart congress, see Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International*, 17–20. The motion for immigration controls at the 1907 congress was moved by the US socialist Morris Hillquit. For more on racism on the socialist left in the United States more broadly during this period, see Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870–1920* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press 1993), 167–86. Hillquit's 1907 motion was strongly challenged by delegates of the Bund. For more on this debate, see Mendelsohn, 'The Jewish socialist movement and the Second International', 138; and Frankel *Prophecy and Politics*, 481.

²⁵ The resolution gathered the support of six delegates: H. Von Koll (Netherlands), Morris Hillquit (United States), Claude Thompson (Australia), H. Schlueter (United States), A. Lee (United States) and P. Verdorst (Netherlands). De Leon *Flashlights of the Amsterdam International Socialist Congress*, 70–2, 101–2.

antisemitism, is illustrative of the complex ways in which the so-called ‘Jewish question’ could articulate with other social questions. Put differently, the combination of racism against the colonial Other and opposition to antisemitism was perhaps less a contradiction, and more a product of the integration of socialists into an exclusionary national imaginary. Opposing antisemitism ‘over there’ was therefore compatible with closing the door to colonial Others over ‘here’.

Indeed, similar positions would emerge in socialist debates on colonialism. The early years of the Second International had been accompanied by an imperialist spread across the globe, and this brought into sharp relief the accommodation of certain currents of the International to colonial and racializing politics. During the first decade of the twentieth century, many socialists in the International proved unwilling to extend their solidarity to the millions living under colonization, and were only too eager to cooperate with their ‘own’ national governments.²⁶ Indeed, the famous ‘revisionist debate’ of the late 1890s had already revealed just how racialized some conceptions of socialism were among particular currents of the movement. Eduard Bernstein typified this strand of thinking when he argued, in an 1896 article in *Die Neue Zeit*, that ‘races who are hostile to or incapable of civilisation cannot claim our sympathy when they revolt against civilisation’. Such ‘savages’, he continued, ‘[must] be subjugated and made to conform to the rules of higher civilisation’.²⁷ Bernstein’s racism didn’t go unchallenged, with Ernest Belfort Bax, formerly of the Socialist League in England, insisting that the struggle of racialized Others in Africa against the ‘white man’ was ‘our fight’.²⁸

And yet, opposing the socialist defence of colonialism did not necessarily predispose one to rejecting antisemitism. One of the most vocal opponents of Bernstein was the SDF leader Harry Hyndman who, while opposed to British imperialism in southern Africa,²⁹ could still articulate a distinctly *antisemitic* anti-imperialism that blamed ‘Jewish bankers’ and ‘imperialist Judaism’ as the cause of the Anglo-Boer War.³⁰ To add yet further complexity, it ought not to go unmentioned that

²⁶ Riddell, *Lenin’s Struggle for a Revolutionary International*, xi.

²⁷ Eduard Bernstein, ‘German Social Democracy and the Turkish troubles’ [1896], in H. Tudor and J. M. Tudor (eds), *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896–1898* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press 1988), 51–61 (52–3); see also Richard D. Day and Daniel Gaido (eds), *Discovering Imperialism: Social Democracy to World War I* (Chicago: Haymarket 2012), 11.

²⁸ Ernest Belfort Bax, ‘Our German Fabian Convert; or, Socialism According to Bernstein’ [*Justice*, 7 November 1896], in Tudor and Tudor (eds), *Marxism and Social Democracy*, 61–5 (63) (emphasis added); see also Day and Gaido (eds), *Discovering Imperialism*, 13.

²⁹ Julius Braunthal, *History of the International, 1864–1914*, trans. from the German by Henry Collins and Kenneth Mitchell (London: Thomas Nelson 1966), 318.

³⁰ See, for example, *Justice*, 25 April 1896, and *Justice*, 26 August 1899. In addition to Satnam Virdee’s contribution in this volume, see Claire Hirshfield, ‘The Anglo-Boer War and the issue of Jewish culpability’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1980, 619–31.

Bernstein—perhaps the chief architect of a racialized politics of socialist colonialism—intervened on a number of occasions to challenge antisemitism in the socialist movement.³¹ This underlines the elasticity of antisemitism and its ability to combine in curious and unexpected ways with other modalities of racism. Antisemitism, colonialism and racialization cut across political loyalties in the socialist movement. Being opposed to one did not entail an in-built opposition to the others.

Antisemitism and Socialist Strategy, 1880-1917: an overview of the essays

The preceding discussion of the early congresses of the Second International illustrates that the Socialist International was far from immune to the wider racializing politics circulating across Europe at that time. Antisemitism and racism more generally were not issues external to the socialist project: they were organically finding a place within sections of the movement itself. The socialist response to antisemitism was therefore, in part, a response to *socialist* antisemitism.

The seven essays in this volume attempt to get to grips with this complex history by offering detailed case studies of socialist responses to antisemitism in different national contexts. Taken together, they provide insights into the long-known yet vastly under-researched problem of antisemitism *within* the *fin-de-siècle* international socialist movement. The contributions demonstrate that antisemitism found multiple routes of entry into European socialist politics, and here we would like to draw out four themes in particular.

Antisemitism and its links to an anti-capitalist politics

First, it seems that the anti-capitalist vision generated by socialists could often overlap and combine with antisemitism. A key feature of the racialized projection of Jewishness during this period was a representation of ‘the Jew’ as a holder of power, a bearer of a distinctly exploitative class position. As Moishe Postone has noted, in moments of crisis antisemitism can ‘appear to be anti-hegemonic’. Its particular danger for socialists and anti-capitalists, he suggests, lies in its unique configuration as a ‘fetishized form of oppositional consciousness, the expression of a movement of the little people against an intangible, global form of domination’.³² Indeed, most of the chapters in this collection reveal precisely this very problematic: in the socialist imaginary, apparently ‘class’ based critiques of capitalism were often overdetermined by antisemitism. For example, in Jan Willem Stutje’s contribution we find a journalist working for the Dutch socialist newspaper *Recht voor Allen* arguing in 1893 that **‘the Jew is the incarnation of the capitalism we despise’**. As Stutje further shows, this

³¹ For example, Bernstein helped shape Engels’s thinking on antisemitism when, in 1881, he wrote to inform him of the growth in the antisemitic movement. See Jack Jacobs, ‘Friedrich Engels and the “Jewish question” reconsidered’, *MEGA Studien*, no. 2, 1998, 8.

³² Moishe Postone, ‘History and helplessness: mass mobilization and contemporary forms of anticapitalism’, *Public Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2006, 99.

antisemitism had profound consequences for the Dutch labour movement. First, it imposed barriers for Jewish participation in the organised class struggle: the Amsterdam branch of the most important Dutch socialist party, the Social Democratic Union, was almost entirely free of Jewish workers despite the significant presence of the Jewish proletariat in the city and in the diamond industry in particular. Second, the antisemitism of Dutch socialists had a lasting imprint on working class politics. Far from being the preserve of socialist intellectuals, such antisemitism shaped working class consciousness in the city, according to Stutje. It was thus damaging for Jews and damaging for socialist politics. Similarly, Satnam Virdee's essay shows how in the dominant socialist imaginary of English society advanced by many of the leaders of the Social Democratic Federation, Jews were caught in a double-bind which discursively represented them simultaneously as capitalist exploiters *par excellence* and sweated labour—both antithetical to working class interests, and therefore the socialist project of progressive social change in England.

Antisemitism and the nation in the socialist imagination

A second thread running through a number of the contributions in this volume is the articulation between antisemitism and nationalism within the European socialist movement. That certain currents within European socialism were infused by nationalism will not, of course, be a surprise to readers familiar with the role of the Second International in the lead-in to the outbreak of war in 1914. However, essays by Stutje, Blomqvist and Virdee show that socialist attachments to exclusionary nationalisms were in place long before the Great War, and moreover, that such nationalisms were frequently expressed within an antisemitic conception of the nation. Håkan Blomqvist, in particular, challenges neat and categorical distinctions between nationalism and internationalism, and finds that socialist appeals to the latter were in fact frequently predicated on profoundly exclusionary bases. Socialist visions of the nation were not identical with those crafted by political elites; socialist understandings of national belonging tended to be more inclusive in so far as they wanted to include the working class in the nation. Tragically, however, this took place at the expense of those other parts of the working class who could not be imagined as belonging to the nation. There is a contradiction at the heart of these socialist nationalist projects: the democratic impulse to expand the nation was accompanied by the exclusion of racialized minorities, and Jews in particular.

Antisemitism and racialization

A third route into socialist politics found by antisemitism was racialization. Indeed, a core finding of the volume is that both class-based antisemitic representations of Jewishness and exclusionary definitions of the nation had an extraordinary capacity to become racialized. Essays by Virdee, Stutje, Vance and Blomqvist illustrate that in Western Europe, the introduction of scientific racism by elites found traction within the socialist movement and the working class itself. This history shows that sections of the international socialist movement had clearly accommodated to a racialized world view,

a socialism in which only particular sections of humanity were to be afforded a place within the new society. For example, according to Blomqvist, by the outbreak of the First World War certain leaders of Swedish social democracy had been educated with the worldview that humanity was composed of distinct races and nations, each with different capacities for culture and civilisation. ‘The Jews’ did not fare well in this racist imaginary. Furthermore, among socialist intellectuals in France, argues Vance, the racialized terminology of ‘blood’ was interwoven with longstanding antisemitic representations of Jewishness predicated on alleged occupational locations within the class structure.

Socialist responses to antisemitism

A fourth important feature of this collection of essays is a focus on understanding how, despite the presence of antisemitic currents within the socialist movement, there were individuals and groups of socialists who attempted, sometimes against great odds, to articulate a more expansive anti-racist vision of socialist politics. Like other contributors in this volume, McGeever finds that in Russia in 1917 antisemitism and revolutionary consciousness could be overlapping as well as competing worldviews. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik party, according to McGeever, took part in helping to elaborate a broad cross-party socialist response to this antisemitism. The political expression of this united front was the newly formed soviets of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies, which took a number of measures to combat antisemitism within the socialist movement and working class in mid-late 1917.

Contributions by Virdee and Surh set out to further disaggregate the socialist response to antisemitism, and in doing so they highlight the significance of the agency of Jewish socialists. The essay by Virdee on England, for example, illustrates that socialist Jews like Aron Liberman and Morris Winchevsky played a catalytic role in helping to challenge the dominant strand of antisemitism within the emergent English socialist movement. Significantly, the organisational infrastructure they created helped to build a bridgehead with that minority of English socialist internationalists, including most notably Eleanor Marx. She, more than other socialist in England, was responsible for stretching the concept of class amid the new unionism to form a fragile but nevertheless important multiethnic solidarity. And this, we should note, was in a context where antisemitism scarred the socialist movement from within. Similarly, in his contribution on late-imperial Russia (1903–17), Gerald Surh explores the role played by socialist Jews in elaborating a response to antisemitism within Russian Social Democracy. Reading this moment through the lens of Russian-Jewish socialist Grigorii Aronson—a revolutionary who joined the Bolsheviks in 1905 and then later the General Jewish Workers’ Union (more commonly known as the Bund)—Suhr unpacks a chapter in the history of Jewish self-defence squads during the 1903 and 1905 pogroms. In doing so, he reveals compelling evidence of the dilemmas of confronting antisemitism ‘as a Jew’ within late-imperial Russian socialism.

In a contribution that makes the case for Polish exceptionalism, Wiktor Marzec suggests that Polish socialists took a uniformly internationalist stand against antisemitism. Adopting a diachronic

discourse analysis of socialist leaflets against antisemitism during the 1905–7 revolution in Poland, Marzec argues that antisemitism was effectively ‘blocked’ within the socialist movement. This, he suggests, was in large part to the nature of the political identities and ideological positions forged within socialist propaganda. In stressing the centrality of a multiethnic working class subjectivity, Polish socialists rejected the ‘economic Jew’ stereotype and, according to Marzec, simultaneously resisted the overlap between antisemitic and revolutionary politics discussed in other case studies in this volume.

Conclusion

Taken together, the seven essays in this volume show that both antisemitism and opposition to it were unevenly embedded within the European socialist movement during the period. Most of the contributions demonstrate how significant elements within the international socialist movement accommodated to an racializing antisemitic world view in which only particular sections of European humanity were to be afforded a place in the new socialist society. Antisemitism, therefore, was not a set of discursive representations and political practices that were external to socialist politics; they were, to varying degrees, an organic element within the socialist movement itself. How could it be otherwise, given that the parties of the Second International were born in a historic moment when elite racisms had portioned the world and then hierarchically ordered it with those from Northern Europe at the top? The socialist confrontation with antisemitism, therefore, was a confrontation with an antisemitism within its own ranks and its own working-class public. Yet if socialism was not uniformly antisemitic, neither was it uniformly anti-racist: socialist parties were places of political contestation where differing currents sought to shape the form and content of the socialist movement.

In stressing heterogeneity rather than uniformity, this volume intellectually moves beyond the two longstanding traditions within the literature on this subject. First, it rejects the attempt to reduce *all* Marxist interventions in this area to antisemitism, a tendency most readily identifiable in the work of Edmund Silberner and (to a lesser extent) Robert Wistrich. In an important and widely cited article in 1953, Silberner claimed that virtually all Marxists of the classical period had a shared ‘contempt for the Jews’, and that there was therefore ‘an old antisemitic tradition within modern socialism’.³³ On the other hand, there is another school of thought that has more or less argued the case that Social Democracy in Germany, Russia and elsewhere has a relatively unblemished record on combating antisemitism.³⁴ In departing from both of these traditions, we endorse Jacob’s important judgement

³³ Silberner, ‘Anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism in the socialist International’, 122.

³⁴ See, for example, D. Niewyk, *Socialist, Anti-Semite and Jew: German Social Democracy Confronts the Problem of Anti-Semitism, 1918–1933* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1971); and P. Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction* (New York: Harper Brothers 1949).

that ‘socialists were neither naturally inclined toward anti-Semitism, nor immune from anti-Semitic sentiments’.³⁵

Finally, we believe that the volume makes a unique contribution to the literature on antisemitism and the socialist left in Europe during this period. Indeed, from the mid-1940s to the 1980s there was a quite extensive debate about the relationship between socialism and antisemitism, a debate perhaps most lucidly captured in the English literature in the work of Jack Jacobs,³⁶ and Enzo Traverso.³⁷ Within this broad literature, the German and Austrian contexts have arguably (and quite justifiably) received the most attention.³⁸ What the present volume does is bring together a set of case studies that have received comparatively less attention, and in some cases, little coverage whatsoever in the English literature. The uniqueness of the volume therefore lies in its capacity to bring together a range of case studies from Eastern, Central and Western Europe, thus giving the publication an important comparative dimension. The empirically based comparative perspective offered in the volume further affords the reader the opportunity to identify both recurring features of antisemitism across nation states and those elements which might be said to have been exceptional. This, we believe, provides an important foundation to build more sophisticated theoretical understandings of the conditions for the emergence of antisemitism within the socialist movement, and the resources for challenging it from within.

Brendan McGeever

Satnam Virdee

³⁵ Jacobs, *On Socialists and the ‘Jewish Question’ after Marx*, 3.

³⁶ Jacobs, *On Socialists and the ‘Jewish Question’ after Marx*.

³⁷ Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question*.

³⁸ Robert Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews: The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and Austria-Hungary* (London: Associated University Presses 1982); Wistrich, ‘Social democracy, the Jews, and antisemitism in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna’; Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany*.