

Antisemites' Petition (1880–81)

Abstract

Leading German antisemites launched a petition campaign in the summer of 1880 to rally public awareness of what they identified as the “Jewish problem” and to demand legislative action. Among this group was the schoolteacher Bernhard Förster (1843–1889). The following text is the second draft of this petition. It demands that the legal emancipation of the Jews (1869) be rescinded; indeed, it claims that the German nation itself must be “emancipated” from the Jews’ “alien domination.” It also demands the curtailment or limitation of Jewish immigration and the expulsion of Jews from positions as judges, teachers, and other civil service posts. Signatures were collected from many high-ranking figures, although some people listed had refused to sign or later denied that they had done so. The published list includes the well-known antisemites Adolf Stöcker (1835–1909) and Ernst Henrici (1854–1915); Ernst Schmeitzner (1851–1895), an editor and publisher in Chemnitz; and Carl Wilmanns, who served as the German Conservative Party’s first general secretary and who had authored *Die “goldene” Internationale und die Nothwendigkeit einer sozialen Reformpartei* [*The “Golden” International and the Necessity of a Social Reform Party*] in 1876. Other signatories were antisemites working at this time to expand the Conservative Party’s appeal in southern Germany. Approximately 265,000 adult males signed the petition, but this was not a great success in terms of numbers: antisemitic leaders actually decided not to try the same tactic again. It did, however, occasion a two-day debate on the “Jewish Question” in the Prussian House of Deputies on November 20 and 22, 1880, during which a government spokesman gave only a lukewarm defense of Jewish emancipation. In April 1881, the petition was presented to Bismarck, but he refused to respond to it.

Source

The Jewish hypertrophy conceals within itself the most serious dangers to our national way of life. This belief has spread throughout all the regions of Germany. Wherever Christian and Jew enter into social relations, we see the Jew as master and the native-born Christian population in a servile position. The Jew takes only a vanishingly small part in the hard work of the great mass of our people; in field and workshop, in mines and on scaffolding, in swamps and canals—everywhere it is only the calloused hand of the Christian that is active. But it is above all the Jew who harvests the fruits of this labor. By far the greatest portion of capital produced by national labor is concentrated in Jewish hands. Jewish real estate keeps pace with the growth of mobile capital. Not only the proudest palaces of our cities belong to the Jewish masters (whose fathers or grandfathers crossed the borders of our fatherland as peddlers and hawkers), but the rural estate—this highly significant and conserving basis of our state structure—is falling into Jewish hands with ever greater frequency.

Truly, in view of these conditions and because of the massive penetration of the Semitic element into all positions affording power and influence, the following question seems justified on an ethical as well as national standpoint: *what future is left our fatherland if the Semitic element is allowed to make a conquest of our home ground for another generation as it has been allowed to do in the last two decades?* If the concept of “fatherland” is not to be stripped of its ideal content, if the idea that it was our fathers who tore this land from the wilderness and fertilized it with their blood in a thousand battles is not to be lost, if the inward connection between German custom and morality and the Christian outlook and tradition is to be maintained, then an alien tribe may never, ever rise to rule on German soil. This tribe, to whom our humane legislation extended the rights of hospitality and the rights of the native, stands further from us in thought and feeling than any other people in the entire Aryan world.

The danger to our national way of life must naturally mount not only when the Jews succeed in not only encroaching upon the national and religious consciousness of our people by means of the *press*, but also when they succeed in obtaining state offices, the bearers of which are obliged to guard over the idealistic goods of our nation. We think above all of the professions of *teacher* and *judge*. Both were inaccessible to Jews until very recently, and both must again be closed if the concept of authority, the feeling for legality and fatherland, are not to become confused and doubted by the nation. Even now the Germanic ideals of honor, loyalty, and genuine piety begin to be displaced to make room for a cosmopolitan pseudoideal.

If our nation is not to be consigned to economic servitude under the pressure of Jewish money power, if it is not to be consigned to national decadence one step at a time under the influence of Jewry's materialistic outlook, then measures to halt the Jewish hypertrophy are imperative. Nothing lies further from us than the desire to bring forth any kind of oppression of the Jewish nation. What we strive for is actually the emancipation of the German nation from a kind of alien domination that it cannot long tolerate. There is danger in delay.^[1] Therefore, have we decided to approach Your Excellency with the most respectful petition:

Your Excellency, may your mighty influence in Prussia and Germany urge:

1. that the immigration of alien Jews be at least limited, if not completely prevented;
2. that the Jews be excluded from all positions of authority; that their employment in the judiciary—namely as autonomous judges—receive appropriate limitation;
3. that the Christian character of the primary school—even when attended by Jewish pupils—be strictly protected; that only Christian teachers be allowed in these schools and that in all other schools Jewish teachers be placed only in special and exceptional cases;
4. that a special census of the Jewish population be reinstituted.

[Petition Signatories:]

To the Imperial Chancellor, Prince von Bismarck, Your Excellency in Berlin

Dr. von Biarowsky, Dean, Erlangen.

Professor Dr. Brecher, Teacher at the War Academy in Berlin.

Otto Count Bredow-Görne, Appellate Legal Counsel, retired, and manor lord.

Breyther, Minister in Klein-Jena at Naumburg.

Baron Dr. Hans von Bülow, Director of the Ducal Court Chapel, Meiningen.

Dreyhaupt, Pastor in Saaleck.

Council of the Consistory Dr. A. Ebrard, Erlangen.

Gotthold Erhardt, Bookseller in Nuremberg.

Professor Dr. H. Fechner, Head Teacher at the Johannes Grammar School in Breslau.

Dr. Bernhard Förster, Charlottenburg.

Hapke, Preacher, Berlin.

Dr. Hans Jungfer, Grammar School Teacher, Berlin.

Kindermann, Royal Court Gardener, Babelsberg Palace.

Albert Knauer, Merchant, Berlin, Köpnickert Street 123. at the Kröcher-Vogtsbrügge.

Dr. of Medicine Krug, Court Counselor, Chemnitz.

I. Kühne, Master Bookbinder, Berlin, Kraut Street 7.

Ernst Lumpe, Locksmith, Berlin, Wilhelm Street 144 a.

Otto March, Government Master Builder, Charlottenburg.

Milde, Official Legal Counselor, Lublinitz.

Richard Müller, Engineer, Berlin, Eichendorff Street 8.

Professor Dr. Pfaff, Erlangen.

Hermann von Pfister, Major at Philippseich Palace in Darmstadt.

Max von Poncet, Manor Lord and Glassmaker, Friedrichshain.
R. L. C. Count von Recke-Volmerstein, Major, retired, at Höschen-Kommende.
Dr. Rapprecht, Healthcare Counselor, Hettstädt.
Rudolph Meyer von Schauensee, Nuremberg.
Schirmer, Manor Leaseholder and Head Official, Neuhaus at Delitzsch.
Ernst Schmeitzner, Publisher, Chemnitz.
Count von Schulenburg, Major, retired, Member of the Manor House, Beetzendorf.
Von Selchow, Manor Lord, Rudnik at Ratibor.
Seydel, Manor Lord and Factory Owner, Guben.
Stöcker, Court Preacher, Berlin.
Stromberger, Parochial Vicar, Biebesheim at Darmstadt.
Imperial Baron Carl von Thüngen-Roßbach.
Ways, District Court Judge, Alsfeld in Hessen.
C. von Watzdorff-Wiesenburg.
H. Weber, Printer, Berlin S., Fürsten Street 12.
Dr. Camillus Wendeler, Steglitz at Berlin.
H. Widemann, Lawyer and Notary, Chemnitz.
Widemann, Jeweler, Dresden-Neustadt.
C. Wilmanns, Official Legal Counsel, Berlin.
Baron Hans Paul von Wolzogen, Bayreuth.
Von Wulffen, General Lieutenant, Breslau.
Professor Friedrich Zöllner, University of Leipzig.

NOTES

[1] This line was meant to convey special importance to Bismarck. It is an exact translation from the Latin—*Periculum in mora*—which comprised the despatch summoning him to become prime minister of Prussia in 1862. [Footnote from Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism in the Modern World. An Anthology of Texts.*]

Source of English translation: Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism in the Modern World. An Anthology of Texts.* Lexington, MA, and Toronto: D. C. Heath, 1991, pp. 125–27. Republished with kind permission from Richard S. Levy.

Source of original German text: The “second version” of the Antisemites’ Petition (“Antisemitenpetition”) appeared in the *Reichsbote*, no. 269, November 16, 1880; it was reprinted in Karsten Krieger, ed., *Der “Berliner Antisemitismusstreit” 1879–1881. Eine Kontroverse um die Zugehörigkeit der deutschen Juden zur Nation. Kommentierte Quellenedition*, 2 parts. Munich: K. G. Saur, 2003–2004, part 2, pp. 579–83. Krieger is also the source of the list of signatories, which were translated by GHI staff. These names do not appear in Levy (1991).

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