

# Report by the Prussian District Government in Koblenz on the Civic Condition of the Jews (1820)

## Abstract

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This report by the Prussian district government in Koblenz from January 25, 1820, establishes normative criteria for the granting of equal citizenship rights, including adherence to a particular faith, gainful employment, and the practice of certain cultural traditions. The author's hostile account abounds with anti-Jewish prejudices and includes accusations of unproductive profiteering, bribery, anti-nationalism, and religious fanaticism, etc., thus trying to show why Jews should be denied citizenship rights.

## Source

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§ 1 [...] ad 1. In our administrative district [...] the legislation of the Jews is sharply divided into two parts: A) into those on the left bank and B) those on the right bank of the Rhine.

ad A). The French Revolution [...] produced splendid results for the Jews, in that they acquired full citizenship according to the prevailing principle of equality. [...] This equality of rights, however far removed from causing the Jews to merge with the rest of the citizens, could not even lead them to strive toward rapprochement. Now as ever a nation of their own, completely isolated by religious customs, ways of thinking and acting, their effect on the whole of society has become greater and more unfavorable as they have become less receptive to the advantages afforded to them by the Revolution and its accompanying spirit. The sickness was, in the meantime, [...] very quickly recognized, quite rightly did one seek the malady in religion and try to take hold of it by the root, to influence it with as much cleansing and ennobling power as possible. [...]

§ 2-20. ad B) [...] Until recent times the Jews were [...] everywhere viewed as people merely to be tolerated. [...] From the concept of toleration it follows that the Jews cannot enjoy any complete citizenship, but rather those native to a place may only enjoy certain indigenous civil rights, sometimes more restricted, sometimes less so, depending on whether they have a residence and marriage permit, i.e., are provided with a letter of protection or not. [...] Since Jews without these permits may neither marry nor engage in commerce on their own account, they are obliged to enter into the service of those who have them. Following strict principles, if they are neither in the care of their parents nor in the service of a Jew with a permit, they should be viewed as vagabonds and transported over the border. Since no other state is obliged to admit them, however, it became all the more necessary in recent times to deviate again from that strict norm, and, as already mentioned, to enlist the Jews into military service, so that there is now a class of indigenous Jews who, when they are not able to enter into the service of Jews for reasons of age or illness, may be allowed to reside in the country without marrying or engaging in commerce. As far as the foreign Jews are concerned, it deserves above all to be mentioned that they were subject to the same body tax<sup>[1]</sup> that was just abolished by the Nassau Ordinance of August 13, 1806. Their admittance into sovereign protection depended on the state governments. Their permission granted them the same rights as the other Jews with residence permits, yet among Jewish men it was dependent upon the possession of assets of 1500 guilders, and among Jewish women upon the possession of assets of 1000 guilders. Both the one and the other also had to pay 15 ducats in reception fees. [...]

§ 21. After we flattered ourselves for having developed the essential features of the legislation on the Jews in those parts of the country on both banks of the Rhine, we leave with the observation that in the

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year 1818, incoming protection money on the right bank of the Rhine amounted to the not inconsiderable sum of 3112 Reichsthaler Prussian Courant,

ad 2. on the expert statement concerning citizen conditions of the same with respect to the Royal Edict of January 11, 1812.

The earlier and more recent history of the Israelites has convinced us that they—both as an independent nation at the time of the flourishing of their political life, and after their subjugation and dissolution—have preserved and maintained their peculiarity at every point on the globe, under every influence affecting [their] situation; a peculiarity that is sought and found in the interweaving of their religious and ceremonial aims and teachings with political and civic ones. [...] Dispersed among all the nations of the earth, the Jews constitute not merely the members of an ecclesiastical sect, but a nation of their own, a state within a state, firmly and imperturbably clinging to the laws of the religion, which is also the foundation of their political institutions. [...] Oriented toward Palestine, the land of promised bliss, they plead incessantly to God for their return there and simultaneously for revenge on the heads of their enemies, who are all non-Jews; for this high self-esteem, already conceived with the foundation of the state [...], the [feeling of] being the Lord's chosen and alone assured of his protection, [...] turned, at the fall of their kingdom, into arrogance, disparagement and contempt for all nations who do not worship and revere the highest Being according to Israelite custom.

[...] If foreigners were barbarians to the Greeks and Romans, to the Jews they are goyim, i.e., heathens, impure slaves, enemies, with whom association is dishonorable. The Talmud—far from suppressing their egoistic, [other] nation-hating views or even just giving them a more humanitarian direction, has rather acknowledged and fortified them anew; and thus the Jews, even today, are antagonistic to all other—and most of all to the Christian—nations. Jewry is in a necessarily eternal struggle with Christianity. This consideration alone does not allow us to favor the spread of Jewry among us, least of all, though, to grant it the kind of expansion that would give its adherents the same influence as Christians on the different institutions of the state, which, after all, are more or less in touch with the religion to which they go back or from which they proceed. If one casts a searching glance at their moral tendency, at the actions and conduct of the Jews in civic life, one runs across the same particularism that is a characteristic and consequence of their religion. Every kind of work seems like a punishment to them, farming is declared by the Talmud to be a contemptuous trade and stockbreeding a depraved business, similar to a robber's way of life. [...] Indifferent to honor and shame, wherever profit lures, we see them sly and cunning, wherever there has to be cheating, deceiving, and doing things behind one's back. Beyond anyone's reach in the art of bribery, they always find the ends to justify the means. Never, or seldom, does a band of robbers exist without some connection to them.

[...] Without productive effort and genuine activity, feeding themselves only by spying and lurking, they constitute, as has been correctly asserted, a caste of small shopkeepers, junk dealers, and stockbrokers—held together by theocratic despotism, duty, belief, language, and inclination—which, as a closed society, has an even more pernicious influence. No wonder, therefore, that commercial capital almost everywhere is found primarily in their hands, that they set the exchange price, and that, especially when it comes to major money transactions, no Christian merchant can compete with them. The general belief in their immorality has even entered the language. Jewish is the predicate for a dirty, contemptuous deed; he is a Jew, it is said by the Christian, who practices usury or common haggling. [...] Laudable or praiseworthy actions (of the Israelites) [...] constitute [...] only isolated symptoms, exceptions, which as such only confirm the rule and therefore prove nothing. Those Jews, however, who move away from the positive regulations of their religion, who do not visit the synagogues, who put themselves on an equal footing with Christians in the enjoyment of meals, are far more dangerous and more damaging to the state than the true adherents of Judaism themselves.

That the lower stage of culture in which [the Jews] find themselves, that their ugly character traits and

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their pernicious influence on the nations in which they live might have developed under the pressure and persecutions of fanaticism—and not from the spirit of their religion and its accompanying institutions—is disproved both by the present and the past.

In Poland, but also in Spain, they enjoyed the greatest privileges; [...] only their entire energy and activity was dedicated exclusively to commerce, [...] soon all money transactions played into their hands, they became the financiers of the great and left it up to the Christians to cultivate their fields under the harshest conditions.

In Germany, too, the Jews, even in earlier times, did not experience treatment as terrible as their representatives [...] so insistently accuse the Christians of; for the most part, rather, they enjoyed that consideration that corresponded with their circumstances and the demands of humaneness; instances of mistreatment here and there were partly the result of the deeply turbulent era, partly of the raw eruptions of the irritable crowd, which, although provoked by the intrigues and deceit of the Christian-haters, were nonetheless met with strict disciplinary action. Later, when the period of philanthropy in our fatherland began, where humanity was viewed as a duty, [...] most everything affording the enjoyment of human rights occurred for the Jews in most states. The Jews are free people, like the Christians, are regulated by the same laws, can practice their religion unhindered, dispose of their property among the living, as in case of death, and, like everyone else, participate in public educational institutions.

On the left bank of the Rhine they have [...] acquired full citizenship; only here, too, as in all other parts of Germany, not a single step toward improvement has emanated from the Jewish people as a whole.

The granting of citizenship has not reshaped them into citizens. Freedom of trade did not lead them into the practice of noble handicrafts. Permission to purchase landed estates did not encourage them to farm, in that they viewed the acquisition of demesnes simply as a commercial matter [...]; and thus they have remained—when under the pressure of restrictive laws and in the possession of all liberties—everywhere the same dirty hagglers whose pernicious influence produced a bitterness against them that, from time to time, turned into riots, which, like the recent ones in Würzburg, Frankfurt, and several other cities, threatened their lives and property.

If the [...] peculiarity of the Jews [...] rests [...] only on the most intimate interweaving of their civic and religious constitution, then their immutability [...] vis-à-vis all other nations is surely to be sought in this circumstance. How should a people be won over to civil society as long as it has its own calendar, a special Sabbath [...] and, moreover, celebrates many [...] religious festivals, whose very effectiveness is certainly crippled by the regulations of the religion itself. How can it come into approximate contact with Christians when its law prohibits the enjoyment of foods that constitute ordinary fare in the households of Christian families [...]; and, aside from that, how should it associate with the Christians in cheerful public spirit [...] for the common good, since its religion obligates it to the opposite, a religion that maintains itself in the hope and longing for a distant land and perceives in all other nations impure goyim – born to servility – whose temples it should destroy, whose idols it should smash, and whose names it should blot out?

All attempts to fuse the Jews with the Christians into a civic association, therefore, are bound to fail as long as their moral teaching and their religious opinions are given no other direction. Both are thoroughly incompatible with the well-being and tendency of Christian states; and so we agree completely with those who want to grant the Jews only human rights but not societal rights—up to the point where they have truly renounced the nation-hating principles of the ritual law and rabbinism and have proven themselves to be loyal, honest fellow citizens—and consequently view them as foreigners, as a merely tolerated people. [...]

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## NOTES

[1] The body tax or *Leibzoll* was a tax of the old regime levied on Jews who temporarily came into a city in which they were not permitted to reside – ed.

Source: Bericht der Regierung Koblenz an den Oberpräsidenten des Großherzogtums Niederrhein, Staatsminister Karl H. Ludwig Freiherrn von Ingersleben, über die bürgerlichen Verhältnisse der Juden. – 25. Januar 1820, Koblenz. LHA Koblenz, Best. 403. Nr. 15227, pp. 145–218 (excerpt); reprinted in Anton Doll, Hans-Josef Schmidt, and Manfred Wilmanns, eds., *Der Weg zur Gleichberechtigung der Juden, Dokumentation zur Geschichte der jüdischen Bevölkerung in Rheinland-Pfalz und im Saarland von 1800 bis 1945*, vol. 2, Koblenz 1979, Veröffentlichung der Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz 13, pp. 82–86.

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