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Nationalism at the Edge: The *Jüdische Volksrat* of Habsburg Bukovina

Abstract:

The *Jüdische Volksrat* was the final expression of a distinctive brand of Jewish *Volkspolitik* that flourished in the final decades of Habsburg Austria. The article is a case study of a political culture that derived from two related contexts: Jewish nationalism – in its east central European variation – and the larger framework of Habsburg ethnic and nationalist politics. The *Volksrat* was the centerpiece of an attempt to put the Zionist house in Bukovina in order, and the article is also a first foray into the history of Bukovina Zionism. It is a story of famous success and infamous failure and conflict. If the stage was parochial, the issues at stake were not: power, autonomy, democracy, Zionism and Jewish nationalism — all were at play and all had local, regional and imperial implications.

A great deal of sometimes fanciful commentary has grown up around Czernowitz and Bukovina Jewry during the Habsburg era (1775–1918), blending myth and nostalgia to create an image that owes more to wishful thinking than careful analysis. Czernowitz, for example, has been called an »Austrian Jerusalem«, a Jewish success story made possible by one hundred and fifty years of »relative peace and quiet« under Habsburg rule; both the city and the province of which it was the capital were a »paradise« for Jews.¹ The First World War, according to one recent history of Czernowitz Jewry, »put an end to the unbroken tranquility and prosperity that characterised the second half of Austrian rule in Bukovina.«² This has not been merely a matter of rose-

¹ See MARKUS KRÄMER: Die Stimme [Neue Folge] 3 (1949), 3. Dezember, pp. 3–5; A. ZAHAVI-GOLDHAMMER: Tshernovits. In: Arim ve-imahot be-yisrael (Hebrew). Ed. by Y. L. HA-COHEN MIMUN. Jerusalem 1950, pp. 89–90; AVRAHAM KAVISH: Tachanot (Hebrew). Tel Aviv 1960, pp. 11, 43.

² DAVID SHA'ARI: The Jewish Community of Czernowitz under Habsburg and Romanian Rule. In: Shvut 6 (1997), p. 178. This approach has a long pedigree. The Austrian folklorist LUDWIG ADOLF SIMIGINOWICZ-STAUFE described Bukovina as a »second Canaan« in his: Die Völkerguppen der Bukowina. Ethnographische Culturhistorische Skizzen. Czernowitz 1884, p. 183. See also YOSEF KISMAN: Di yidishe sotsyal-demokratishe bavegung in Galitsie un Bukovine (Yiddish). In: Di geshikhte fun Bund, vol. 3. Ed. by G. ARONSON.

tinted hindsight. Contemporaries were equally effusive: in 1907, a Zionist correspondent noted that, such was the degree of independence and respect that Jews enjoyed in Bukovina, the province was sometimes called »Palestine«. ³ Jewish influence dominated much of public life, observed a prominent Czernowitz journalist: »in no other large city in Austria, in Europe, or even across the Atlantic, do the Jews enjoy anything like the same social, economic, and political status«. This was, he proclaimed, the »El-Dorado of diaspora Jewry«, a sentiment echoed by the writer and folklorist S. An-ski. ⁴

Underpinning these extravagant claims are some impressive demographic facts. Bukovina had the highest proportion of Jewish population of any Austrian crownland – almost 13 percent, numbering a little over 100,000 just prior to the First World War. At the same time, Czernowitz had the highest proportion of Jewish population of any of the larger Austrian cities, with its nearly 30,000 Jews making up approximately 33 percent of the city's residents; this made it the fourth largest Jewish city in Austria, after Vienna, Lemberg (L'viv) and Cracow. This was not, though, solely a matter of numbers. The role of Jews, whether in the professional and commercial classes, the economy, politics, civic society or the cultural sphere, was disproportionately prominent in the region as a whole, and was critical to the emergence and development of Czernowitz as an urban success story in the second half of the nineteenth century. ⁵

The rhetoric regarding Jewish success is in turn part of a larger discourse about Czernowitz and Bukovina exceptionalism. Here was »tolerance and the coexistence of diverse cultures«, a veritable »Babylon on the river Pruth«, a

New York 1966, esp. pp. 447–449. More generally, see FRED STAMBROOK: *The Golden Age of the Jews of Bukovina, 1880–1914*. Working Paper 03–2, Center for Austrian Studies at the University of Minnesota, 2003, and the impressionistic account by HERMANN STERNBERG: *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Czernowitz*. In: *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina*, vol. 2. Ed. by HUGO GOLD. Tel Aviv 1962, pp. 27–47.

³ *Jüdische Zeitung* 1 (1907), 8. November, p. 2.

⁴ *Die Welt* 5 (1901), 11. Oktober, p. 5; S. AN-SKI (SOLOMON ZAINWIL RAPAPORT): *Gezamlte shriftn* (Yiddish). New York 1921, vol. 6, p. 115. See also *Jüdisches Volksblatt* 4 (1902), 24. Oktober, p. 3: »Bukovina has often been called the Jewish El Dorado, and rightly so.«

⁵ For relevant statistics, see ALBERT LICHTBLAU/MICHAEL JOHN: *Jewries in Galicia and Bukovina, in Lemberg and Czernowitz*. Two divergent examples of Jewish Communities in the Far East of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In: *Jewries at the Frontier. Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*. Ed. by SANDER L. GILMAN/MILTON SHAIN. Urbana 1999, pp. 46–50; N. M. GELBER: *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina (1774–1914)*. In: *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina*, vol. 1. Ed. by HUGO GOLD. Tel Aviv 1958, pp. 45–48; 63–64, n. 10; *Die Welt* 18 (1914), 12. Juni, pp. 579–580; SALOMON KASSNER: *Die Juden in der Bukowina*. Vienna 1917, pp. 42–43.

region infused with what Otto von Habsburg (son of the last Habsburg emperor) called »a synthesis of national consciousness with a higher ...European outlook«. In a similar vein, writer Gregor von Rezzori imagined Czernowitz as »the melting pot for dozens of ethnic groups, languages, creeds, temperaments, and customs«. ⁶ One of the best-known nineteenth-century chroniclers of life in this area, Karl Emil Franzos, notoriously conceived of neighbouring Galicia as »semi-Asiatic«, but he described Bukovina as a »flourishing little piece of Europe« and as akin to Switzerland in its tolerant atmosphere of »peace and harmony« between peoples. ⁷ This perception of Czernowitz and Bukovina as sites of unusual national or ethnic significance was not unique to Jewish memory and historiography, but was shared by Romanians, Ukrainians, Germans and Poles, the other major population groups. ⁸

A recurring motif in these panegyrics holds that Bukovina's Jewish political culture was unique and that Jewish political achievements here ought to be considered a triumph. What marked out the politics of Jewish Bukovina was its remarkably strong autonomous streak: a broad cross-section of local society accepted that the Jews were a separate group with their own political interests and needs. As ever, consensus as to what sort of a group they were remained elusive, but few doubted that Jewish politics was much more than

⁶ GREGOR VON REZZORI: *The Snows of Yesteryear*. London 1990, p. 277. See also *ibid.*, pp. 275–290. For the other quotations, see IHOR CZECHOWSKYJ: *Das »Czernowitzer Schiff: Unter dem Segel der Toleranz in ein vereintes Europa*. In: *An der Zeiten Ränder. Czernowitz und die Bukowina*. Ed. by CÉCILE GORDON/HELMUT KUSDAT. Vienna 2002, pp. 363, 375.

⁷ KARL-EMIL FRANZOS: *Aus Halb-Asien. Culturbilder aus Galizien, Südrussland, der Bukowina und Rumänien*, vol. 1. Leipzig 1876, pp. 113, 185–186. See also *ibid.*, pp. 158–165 on Czernowitz. More generally on this discourse, see HARALD HEPPNER: *Eine Stadt wird ein Begriff: Czernowitz*. In: *Czernowitz: Die Geschichte einer ungewöhnlichen Stadt*. Ed. by HARALD HEPPNER. Cologne 2000, pp. 167–178 (esp. p. 177). For examples of this approach, see EMANUEL TURCZYNSKI: *Geschichte der Bukowina in der Neuzeit*. Wiesbaden 1993; ROBERT A. KANN: *The Multinational Empire. Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1918*. New York 1977, vol. 1, pp. 330–332; FRED STAMBROOK: *National and Other Identities in Bukovina in Late Austrian Times*. In: *Austrian History Yearbook 35 (2004)*, pp. 185–203; WILHELM KOSCH: *Juden und Deutsche in der Bukowina*. In: *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte 1 (1916)*, 25. Dezember 1916, p. 143; RICHARD WENEDIKTER: *Die Karpathenländer*. In: *Das Nationalitätenrecht des alten Österreich*. Ed. by KARL GOTTFRIED HUGELMANN. Vienna 1934, pp. 724–737.

⁸ See the articles in HEPPNER, *Czernowitz* (fn. 7), esp. STEFAN PURICI: *Die Geschichte der Bukowina*, pp. 79–82. More generally, see also EMIL BIEDRZYCKI: *Historia Polaków na Bukowinie*. Warsaw 1973; ION I. NISTOR: *Der nationale Kampf in der Bukowina. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rumänen und Ruthenen*. Bucharest 1918; IVAN M. NOWOSIWSKY: *Bukovinian Ukrainians*. New York 1970; *Buchenland. Hundertfünfzig Jahre Deutschtum in der Bukowina*. Ed. by FRANZ LANG. Munich 1961.

a marginal subset of a larger, and more important, political scene, as was the case in many other places; here, it was on the political map in its own right. Context was decisive in an environment where the Austrian administration imported new political norms and elites into an area described by an early-twentieth century commentator as a »playground of savage peoples« with »blood-soaked soil«. ⁹ Czernowitz became the eastern outpost of a multinational empire and the unchallenged urban centre of a strikingly multinational province. The lack of a dominant nationality changed the ground rules of politics, enabling and sustaining the development of a separate Jewish political sphere, alongside those of the Ukrainians, Romanians, Germans and Poles.

From the 1880s, this autonomous sphere was formidable. It can be divided along standard lines, with nationalists of all stripes; integrationists, who from the 1890s overlapped with autonomous ethnic politics more than was the case elsewhere; and a powerful Orthodoxy in the form of the Hasidic movement. ¹⁰ The Jewish street – as it was commonly called – was always a force to be reckoned with in Bukovina politics; its substantial weight as a power broker derived in the first instance from Jewish electoral success at all levels, from chambers of commerce through municipal councils to regional and imperial parliaments (*Landtag* and *Reichsrat*). ¹¹ This was the sole province of the empire where Jews received formal recognition as a nationality, during negotiations for reform of the regional parliament's electoral system in 1909/10; the only major city which elected a Jewish nationalist mayor; the only regional assembly in the empire with a Jewish Club (or fraction); and the only regional executive with Jewish nationalist representation. Jews were also well represented in the Great Landowners' electoral curia. One should note, too, the classic situation of Jewish prominence in mainstream liberal politics; Bukovina has been described as a »remote eastern bastion« of Austrian liberalism, with Czernowitz the key to this, in particular its Jews and Germans. ¹² From the

⁹ KASSNER, Die Juden in der Bukowina (fn. 5), p. 7. On the Josephinian treatment of the province as almost a tabula rasa for the creation of modern and rational state administration, see KURT SCHARR: Die innere Verwaltungsentwicklung der Bukowina 1775–1918. Beharrlichkeit alter und Heranwachsen neuer politische Strukturen. In: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 55 (2007), pp. 178–209; H. J. BIDERMAN: Die Bukowina unter österreichischer Verwaltung, 1775–1875. Lemberg 1876.

¹⁰ EZRA MENDELSON: On Modern Jewish Politics. Oxford 1993, chap. 1.

¹¹ Formally represented at all levels of public administration and governance, the Jews were commonly seen as a »decisive factor« in local politics. See Jüdische Zeitung 1 (1907), 8. November, p. 2.

¹² MARTIN BROZAT: Von der Kulturnation zur Volksgruppe. Die nationale Stellung der Juden in der Bukowina im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. In: Historische Zeitschrift 200 (1965), p. 575. More generally, see PETER PULZER: Jews and the German State. Oxford 1992, pp.

1880s, much of this Jewish support for liberalism, like that of other groups, was redirected into a more particularist assertion of ethnic and national rights. This autonomist (or nationalist) sphere gathered strength from the early 1890s, making the city and the region appear, in the words of a sympathetic Galician observer, a kind of »Piedmont of the Jewish national movement in Austria«, where assimilation rapidly became an »obsolete farce«.¹³

While undeniably a redoubt of political strength, the Jewish street in Bukovina was by no means trouble-free. A counterpoint to its success was its terminal fractiousness. While in and of itself not unusual – division and conflict were hallmarks of modern Jewish political life – in Bukovina this derived also from a combination of unique local factors. The first of these was a political and personal feud of extraordinary intensity and longevity (see below). Related to this was a structural problem that grew out of the particular circumstances of the region's politics: the uneasy balance of power among Bukovina's *Völker* – with none able realistically to claim political or cultural dominance, in the manner, for example, that Poles managed in Galicia – opened up space for a forceful mode of ethnic/national politics to flourish. In the Jewish case, this led to a distinctive brand of *Volkspolitik*, sometimes called by locals *Realpolitik*, their version of what was known in the Zionist movement as *Landespolitik*. The Jewish political culture described above was a form of *Landespolitik* of almost unparalleled strength; it was an ethnic politics that most of those involved described also as nationalist politics. This was not, however, straightforward Zionist politics, and the powerful current of Bukovina Jewish politics did not flow into a successful Zionist movement. The reasons for this are two-fold, and lead back to the above-mentioned personal and political conflict on the one hand, and this conflict's political context on the other. The two should not be considered in isolation.

A crucial episode in both stories, as will become clear, was the rise of the *Jüdische Volksrat*. Its establishment in early 1911 came at an important juncture in the development of Jewish nationalism in the Austrian empire. *Landespolitik* was at its short-lived zenith, symbolised by the existence in the *Reichsrat* of the Jewish Club, one of Austrian Jewry's most ambitious political projects. Comprising four members – two from Galicia, one from Bohemia, one from Bukovina – the first and only Jewish Club in the empire's central parliament stood at the apex of the Jewish nationalist movement in Austria between 1907 and 1911; it offered an unprecedented forum for the advance-

85–96; 121–147; 324–337; GARY B. COHEN: Jews in German Liberal Politics: Prague. In: Jewish History 1 (1986), pp. 55–74.

¹³ Neue National-Zeitung 15 (1913), 4. Juli, p. 105.

ment of Jewish political interests, with potential benefits for Jewish politics across Europe. The Club was supported both by the Zionist movement and by an informal coalition of forces working towards the goal of Jewish national autonomy within a reformed, democratic and federal Austria. It appeared to offer at least partial fulfillment of one of the nationalists' prime goals, which was to make Jewish issues and politics a familiar part of the state's political discourse at the highest levels.¹⁴

Further adding to the propitious timing for the launch of the *Volksrat* was that, as already noted, Jews had been recognised as one of Bukovina's constituent nationalities as part of the regional administration's proposals for electoral reform in 1909/10, resulting in an electoral geometry that has been described as »one of the most complex« in Europe.¹⁵ The imperial government was less than amenable to what amounted to a radical challenge to the status quo with regard to the nationalities question, one of the empire's most intractable problems. Government reluctance on this score was reinforced by insistent lobbying from Jewish groups vehemently opposed to the very idea of Jewish nationalism; consequently, this aspect of the reform package was rejected. This was a battle fought on two fronts: between Jewish nationalists and their opponents within Jewish society, while on the broader political stage it pitted centre against periphery. The outcome was never in doubt, and the nationalists' impotence fueled their outrage. The *Landtag*, in a symbolic gesture designed to highlight provincial autonomy (or lack thereof) and also to give succor to its Jewish colleagues, responded to the imperial government's refusal to sanction its proposal by reiterating that it recognised the Jews as a nation – if only in Bukovina!¹⁶ This symbolic victory was understandably hailed as a triumph,

¹⁴ More generally on the Club, see LEON WECHSLER/HEINRICH GABEL: *Der yidisher klub* (Yiddish). Buczacz 1908; HARALD BINDER: *Galizien in Wien. Parteien, Wahlen, Fraktionen und Abgeordnete im Übergang zur Massenpolitik*. Vienna 2005, pp. 448–454; ADOLF GAISBAUER: *Davidstern und Doppeladler. Zionismus und jüdischer Nationalismus in Österreich 1882–1918*. Vienna 1988, pp. 479–488.

¹⁵ GERALD STOURZH: *Der nationale Ausgleich in der Bukowina 1909/10*. In: *Die Bukowina. Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*. Ed. by ILONA SLAWINSKI/JOSEPH P. STRELKA. Bern 1995, p. 49. See also JOHN LESLIE: *Der Ausgleich in der Bukowina von 1910. Zur österreichischen Nationalitätenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*. In: *Geschichte zwischen Freiheit und Ordnung. Gerald Stourzh zum 60. Geburtstag*. Ed. by EMIL BRIX et al. Graz 1991, pp. 113–144; ALON 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. by JOHN S. MCGIEL. New York 1996, pp. 1–16.

¹⁶ For details on the parliamentary process, see RUDOLF WAGNER: *Der Parlamentarismus und nationale Ausgleich in der ehemals österreichischen Bukowina*. Munich 1984, pp. 147ff.

and indeed it was the greatest filip imaginable for the nationalists, the culmination of years of effort aimed at achieving their most basic demand: state recognition as a separate nationality.

Against this background, the creation of the *Jüdische Volksrat* was also a moment of great import in the history of Zionism in Bukovina, part of a final attempt to put the Zionist house there in order. Bukovina Zionism shared the structural and ideological weaknesses of the larger Austrian movement, which, although nominally unified, consisted of semi-autonomous regional movements during its first decade, a de facto arrangement that was formalised in 1907 when the Galician arm split from the parent body. Austrian Zionism reflected the regional and centrifugal forces at play in Austrian society; the Galician and Bohemian branches pressed for a loose, federal relationship with the Viennese centre, while the latter resolutely refused to cede its self-appointed role as the movement's supreme arbiter.¹⁷ The consequence was an inefficient organisation that too often pulled in mutually contradictory directions, both ideologically and in terms of practical politics, resulting in diminished influence. Bukovina enjoyed semi-autonomous status in this federal structure, although it was always overshadowed in Zionist terms by its dominant neighbour Galicia. Compounding these problems was that the Bukovina movement experienced in an intensified form the internal tensions between the demands of »here« and »there« that beset Zionism everywhere. While Austrian Zionism mirrored the international movement's post-Herzlian adoption of »synthetic Zionism«, with its concurrent commitments to *Landespolitik* and Palestine, this balancing act was imperfectly implemented in Austria, where the submerged conflicts remained unresolved, emerging into the open periodically in the years prior to the First World War. In Bukovina, however, open conflict was the norm rather than the exception.¹⁸

¹⁷ GAISBAUER, Davidstern und Doppeladler (fn. 14), pp. 118–123, 237–238, 301–303, 327–328; N. M. GELBER: Toldot ha-tenua ha-tzionit be-galitsia, 1875–1918 (Hebrew). Jerusalem 1958, vol. 2, pp. 564–566; Die Welt 16 (1912), 5. Januar, pp. 10–12; Jüdische Zeitung 5 (1911), 29. Dezember, pp. 3–4.

¹⁸ For an exchange on Landespolitik priorities that attracted considerable attention, see the articles by two of Bukovina's leading Zionists in Die Welt 5 (1901), 25. Januar, pp. 3–5; 8. Februar, pp. 5–7; 22. Februar, pp. 6–7. A similar situation prevailed in Galicia, where a dual-track approach embracing here and there (with an emphasis on here) had been the movement's hallmark from its earliest days. MORDECHAI EHRENPREIS: Ha-tenua ha-tzionit be-galitsia (Hebrew). In: Pirkei galitsia. Ed. by YISRAEL COHEN/DOV SADAN. Tel Aviv 1957, pp. 69–80, called this a »double programme« in 1894/1895. See also GELBER, Toldot ha-tenua (fn. 17), vol. 1, chaps. 8–10. For the Austrian movement as a whole on the »here-there« issue, see GAISBAUER, Davidstern und Doppeladler (fn. 14), pp. 451–459.

Bukovina Zionism had its beginnings in nationalist activism among university and high-school students in the 1890s. Influenced by contact with Kadimah, the pathbreaking Jewish-nationalist organisation at the University of Vienna, these students established a number of small but enthusiastic groups. As elsewhere, the advent of Herzl and his political Zionism in the latter half of the 1890s galvanised local activists and connected them with an expanding movement. After some initial discussion regarding a merger with the stronger Galician organisation, a separate Bukovina district was established in 1901. Progress in the initial years was halting, a result of limited support beyond the confines of student circles, inadequate funding and an inability to create a strong central authority to guide the disparate assortment of Vereine that constituted the rank and file.¹⁹ These deficiencies characterised Bukovina Zionism throughout the pre-First World War years. If a measure of consolidation was evident by 1907, when the Austrian movement was reorganised in the wake of the Galician secession, it was limited at best. In September 1908, Austrian Zionism's central authority (the *Landes-Komit e*) lamented the »extremely pitiful« state of the Bukovina organisation, while the latter's governing body (*Distrikts-Komitee*) had given up the ghost and ceased functioning, to be temporarily replaced by a student association.²⁰

In early 1910, an internal coup installed a new leadership and president, the latter a close, long-time associate of Herzl, Prof. Leon Kellner. The Zionist Central Office in K oln expressed satisfaction with these developments, optimistically anticipating »a new era« for Bukovina Zionism.²¹ Kellner, along with his deputy Mayer Ebner, one of Bukovina's first and most prominent Zionists, attempted to reorganise and revitalise the movement, with only mod-

¹⁹ On the early years, see GAISBAUER, *Davidstern und Doppeladler* (fn. 14), pp. 68–70, 183–191; LEON ARIE SCHMELZER, *Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina*. In: GOLD, *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina* (fn. 5), vol. 1, pp. 91–95; MANFRED REIFER, *Dr. Mayer Ebner. Ein j udisches Leben*. Tel Aviv 1947, chap. 2; GELBER, *Toldot ha-tenua* (fn. 17), vol. 2, pp. 437–438, 441, 444. For an example of the kind of conflict that flared up, see *J udisches Volksblatt* 7 (1905), 24. M arz, pp. 4–5; 31. M arz, p. 5; 7. April, pp. 4–5; 14. April, pp. 5–6.

²⁰ *Zionistisches Landes-Komit e f ur  sterreich to Zionistisches Zentralkomitee f ur West- sterreich*, 15. September 1908. In: Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (CZA), Z2/436. See also the exchange of letters between *Akademische Verbindung Hebronia* and *Zionistisches Zentralbureau, K oln (ZZB)*, 24. August 1908 and 30. August 1908. In: CZA, Z3/389; *Die Welt* 12 (1908), 6. November, p. 12; GAISBAUER, *Davidstern und Doppeladler* (fn. 14), pp. 191–192.

²¹ SCHMELZER, *Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina* (fn. 19), pp. 96–97. See also *J udische Zeitung* 4 (1910), 11. M arz, p. 5, 29. April, p. 5.

est success.²² By the early months of 1912, the office in Köln was at the end of its tether, arguing that the movement in Bukovina was in a »miserable« situation and that a reorganisation was still »urgently needed«.²³ By April 1912, one local leader feared that the Bukovina organisation was incapable of sustaining itself and raised the spectre of incorporation into Galicia, while Kellner requested assistance and floated the idea of resignation. Keenly aware of the untapped potential in Bukovina for the Zionist cause, Köln delegated Philipp Korngrün, recently hired as Secretary for Propaganda in South-Eastern Europe, to take matters in hand.²⁴ Korngrün instigated yet another re-launch, which on this occasion managed slowly to inject a modicum of life into what had been an almost moribund movement. More money gradually began to flow in to the coffers, propaganda work was intensified, a plan – already initiated by Kellner – to establish a colony of Bukovina Jews in Palestine was given renewed impetus and a permanent office was opened in November 1912. Korngrün spent a considerable amount of time in the region in his endeavours to put operations on a more professional footing; he tried to overhaul the local Zionist infrastructure and made several tours of the province in 1912, lecturing and drumming up support.²⁵ The net result of his work was the establishment of a firmer foundation for the movement than had hitherto existed, providing a platform for further expansion. This represented incremental progress rather than dramatic change, but given the movement's chequered history should be considered an achievement.²⁶ His larger goals, however, were stymied by a failure to overcome the most serious stumbling block, the internecine battles that were the defining feature, and root cause of the problems, of local Jewish political culture, about which Korngrün com-

²² See Kellner's report of June 1911: Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Bukowiner Landeskomitees in dem Jahre 1910 und 1911. In: CZA, Z2/389.

²³ ZZB to Alfred Engel, 6. März 1912; ZZB to Kellner, 6. März 1912. In: CZA, Z3/786.

²⁴ Leo Krämer to ZZB, 30. März 1912; ZZB to Kellner, 28. März 1912. In: CZA, Z3/786.

²⁵ Bericht des zion. Landes-Komitees an die Landeskonferenz, May 1912–October 1919, 1–4. In: CZA, Z4/0998; Die Welt 16 (1912), 24. Mai, pp. 628–629; Der Jüdische Volksrat (JV), 31. Mai 1912, pp. 2–3; 29. August 1913, p. 2; SCHMELZER, Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina (fn. 19), p. 99. Schmelzer worked as the movement's Honorary Secretary in Czernowitz in the period leading up to the outbreak of war in 1914. On Korngrün's role, see also ZZB (Berlin) to Philipp Korngrün, 22. März 1912; 26. März 1912; 6. Juni 1912. In: CZA, Z3/735.

²⁶ For an assessment by Kellner's successor, see Theodor Weisselberger to EAC (Berlin), 10. März 1914. In: CZA, Z3/788. For summary accounts of Bukovina Zionism in these years, see GAISBAUER, Davidstern und Doppeladler (fn. 14), pp. 354–360; SCHMELZER, Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina (fn. 19), pp. 96–97.

plained to Zionist headquarters that »despite a hundred discussions and meetings« he could find no-one able to rise above the discord.²⁷

The attempted regeneration of Bukovina Zionism in the years 1910–14 was overshadowed by the parallel project of the *Volksrat*, which absorbed much of the energy of the two principal Zionist leaders, Kellner and Ebner. From their perspective, this was a concerted drive to address precisely the seemingly insuperable difficulty – the internal split in Bukovina Jewry – that had rendered the Zionist organisation ineffectual. While they were tackling this, their purely Zionist commitments necessarily suffered from benign neglect. They could not work at full power on both fronts simultaneously, and there was insufficient personnel to take up the slack in the Zionist movement proper. Moreover, both were of the opinion that in the particular circumstances of Bukovina, the *Volksrat* offered a more appropriate instrument than the Zionist organisation with which to cut this Gordian knot. In their eyes, the reigning system of *Strauchertum* (as they liked to call it, on which see below) was the fundamental problem facing both Bukovina Zionism and Bukovina Jewry in general; the *Volksrat* was their attempt to fix it.

In Bukovina, the familiar tensions surrounding the issue of *Landespolitik* – should it be part of the Zionist organisation's purview or hived off into a separate political body?; did it distract Zionists from the ultimate objective of Palestine? – were rendered toxic by virtue of being inextricably intertwined with the previously noted all-consuming feud. This confluence of principles, politics and personalities had a crippling impact. If it is too harsh a judgement to call Bukovina Zionism stillborn, it is true to say that the movement never properly took flight and certainly failed to establish itself as a serious force. Rather, it lurched from relative dormancy to crisis and back again. We should, however, differentiate between Zionism as a formal organisation and Jewish nationalism as a political and cultural movement. The latter was successful by any yardstick; Bukovina was home to an extraordinarily powerful Jewish *Volkspolitik* that drew both on internal Jewish models (including, of course, Zionism) and on local modes of ethnic and national politics. It was a marriage of the two, with Zionism as the stepchild of the union, at once neglected and fought over. We cannot understand the emergence of the *Volksrat* idea and its development as an institution and movement without also understanding the situation of its alter-ego, the Zionist movement in Bukovina. Neither has been examined by historians to date in any but the most cursory fashion.

²⁷ Cited in SCHMELZER, *Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina* (fn. 19), p. 99.

Benno Straucher and the Thirty-Year War

A central thread in the story of the *Volksrat*, and to a great degree the catalyst for its formation, was Benno Straucher and the conflicts swirling around him. Straucher (1852–1941) was at the epicentre of a vicious, permanently escalating dispute between apparently irreconcilable factions, which has been described, only partially in jest, as a »thirty-year war«. ²⁸ One of the most extraordinary and successful Jewish diaspora politicians of the modern era, Straucher was – at least nominally – a nationalist of liberal-democratic bent. More importantly, he was an unashamed populist, the pivotal figure of Jewish Bukovina and its capital Czernowitz, where he occupied a daunting array of public and communal offices. With his catchphrase »Jewry is in danger«, Straucher skilfully rode the rising nationalist and democratic tide; his rapid ascent from the mid-1880s was widely interpreted as a reflection of popular resentment against the Germanised notables who to that point controlled the levers of power in Jewish Bukovina. He was in some respects a Jewish version of the charismatic Christian Social leader Karl Lueger, an observation made with alacrity by his opponents. Like Lueger, the mayor of Vienna from 1897–1910 and no great friend of the Jews, the lawyer Straucher was something of a demagogue, a self-proclaimed champion of the proverbial »little man« and the voice of the Jewish masses. ²⁹ To his supporters he was the »predestined representative« of Czernowitz's Jews, who under his leadership had become »a political power... which the other nations of the land must take into account«. ³⁰ If they saw him as a kingmaker, without whose support nobody could be elected mayor of Czernowitz, he viewed himself as the »Jewish politician par excellence«. ³¹

Straucher's record of service was second-to-none. He was equally at home in the coffee-houses and wine-cellars where he held court; in local associational life and the municipal administration (he was a city councillor and

²⁸ REIFER, Dr. Mayer Ebner (fn. 19), p. 51; *Die Stimme* [Neue Folge] 18 (1965), Dezember, p. 4; *Czernowitzer Humor* 19 (1925), Dezember, p. 7 (my thanks to Markus Winkler for this reference).

²⁹ GAISBAUER, Davidstern und Doppeladler (fn. 14), pp. 511–515; *Die Stimme* [Neue Folge] 3 (1949), 3. Dezember, pp. 3–5; *Die Stimme* [Neue Folge] 14 (1960), November, pp. 3, 8. See also *Jüdisches Volksblatt* 7 (1905), 18. August, pp. 4–5 for an account of his career to that point.

³⁰ For the first quotation: *Die Volkswehr* (VW), 3. Juni 1911, p. 1. For the second: VW, 20. April 1911, p. 2.

³¹ As a kingmaker: VW, 8. November 1913, p. 2. For his self-description: VW, 26. Oktober 1912, p. 1.

served on the council executive); in the *Kultusgemeinde*, of which he was president for many years; in the regional parliament (both as a representative and executive member); and in the imperial parliament in Vienna, where he represented Czernowitz from 1897 to 1918. Initially elected to the *Reichsrat* on an independent democratic ticket, he gradually donned the mantle of Jewish *Volkstribun*, a worthy successor to Joseph Samuel Bloch, the publicist and activist rabbi who represented an East Galician constituency in the *Reichsrat* from 1883–1895 and similarly made his name as a vocal advocate of Jewish causes and defender of Jewish rights.³² Unlike Bloch, Straucher showed little inclination for the niceties of ideology; rather, he adhered with great single-mindedness to an uncomplicated set of ideas about the existence of a separate Jewish people and its collective rights. His list of achievements was undeniably impressive,³³ while his accumulation of offices almost beggars belief. In the years immediately preceding the First World War, he simultaneously held numerous management and supervisory positions in private and public companies and organisations (from breweries, banks and welfare bodies to tax and school commissions), in addition to his elected posts.³⁴ For a time, Straucher remained a force in the enlarged postwar Romania in which Czernowitz and Bukovina Jewry found themselves. He was president of the *Kultusgemeinde* and a member of the Romanian parliament for a good portion of the 1920s, but the end of Austria also signalled the twilight of his dominance, which was much reduced due both to his age and the difficult circumstances faced by Jews in the dramatically different context of independent Romania. Married with three children, he reportedly spent the last years of his life in an asylum for the insane and died without fanfare during the Soviet occupation of Czernowitz.³⁵

The magnitude of his dominance was matched only by the volume and intensity of the vitriol that he attracted. To his rivals, he was a megalomaniac (how else to explain the bronze statue of Straucher outside one of the community's most important buildings?), a dictator devoid of authentic ideological beliefs, a corrupt master of political intrigue. The contempt was mutual, each

³² IAN REIFOWITZ: *Imagining an Austrian Nation. Joseph Samuel Bloch and the Search for a Multiethnic Austrian Identity, 1846–1919*. Boulder 2003; ROBERT WISTRICH: *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*. Oxford 1989, chap. 9.

³³ On which, see the litany in his bathetic paean to himself and his career in VW, 24. März 1935, pp. 1–3.

³⁴ JV, 14. Januar 1911, p. 7. JV, 30. August 1912, p. 1 gives a figure of sixteen positions.

³⁵ See the obituaries (written, it should be noted, by his opponents): MAYER EBNER in: *Yediot hitakhdut olei germania ve-olei ostria* (Hebrew), April 1941, nos. 16–17; MANFRED REIFER in: *Die Stimme* [Neue Folge] 7 (1953), Juli, p. 3.

side hurling abuse at the other and trading insults at every opportunity. The battle was noteworthy not so much for what was said, which – although on occasion tasteless and scurrilous – was on a par with the generally over-heated tenor of contemporary Jewish political rhetoric, but rather for the astounding longevity and pervasiveness of the conflict, which lasted well into the interwar Romanian years.³⁶ It was a confrontation of both norms and temperaments. Straucher's populism and tendency to demagoguery, along with his apparent assumption that rules and regulations were for him to make or ignore, clashed head-on with the more straitlaced style of his opponents, who often assumed a tone of uncompromising political and moral rectitude. A ruthless and frequently vindictive political operator of consummate skill, Straucher flaunted his power; his opponents preferred a sober, correct approach, insisting that politics was not an end in itself but a means of achieving higher national goals – the rebirth and regeneration of the Jewish nation. Straucher on occasion paid lip-service to a higher calling, and it would be unfair to deny his sincerity in this, but for the most part he was a professional politician impatient with lofty visions. He kept his sights on the visible and attainable, working indefatigably on numerous fronts: municipal and regional infrastructure projects, the defence of Jewish rights, the Jewish welfare network and his web of ever-shifting political alliances.

Trading on the political capital he amassed from his achievements, he built a formidable political machine in the prewar years, commonly referred to, by

³⁶ See REIFER, Dr. Mayer Ebner (fn. 19), pp. 51–62. On the bronze bust of Straucher in the lobby of the Jüdisches Haus, see *ibid.*, p. 57; *JV*, 3. Februar 1911, p. 4; 10. Februar 1911, p. 3. For an example of tarring him with the Lueger brush, see REIFER, Dr. Mayer Ebner (fn. 19), p. 53. Many years later, scores were still being settled. Besides Reifer's hagiographical volume on Ebner, see SCHMELZER, *Geschichte des Zionismus in der Bukowina* (fn. 19), pp. 97–99; STERNBERG, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Czernowitz* (fn. 2), pp. 32–34. See GAISBAUER, *Davidstern und Doppeladler* (fn. 14), pp. 518–520 for a summary. The politics of recrimination and invective in Bukovina was not a uniquely Jewish phenomenon, but was familiar among and between other groups also. By the late-nineteenth century, the province had become a byword for political scandals in Austria. See ANDREI CORBEA-HOISIE: *Czernowitz 1892. Die »nationale« Wende in der Bukowiner Innenpolitik aus Wiener Sicht*. In: *Grenzregionen der Habsburgermonarchie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Bedeutung und Funktion aus der Perspektive Wiens*. Ed. by HANS-CHRISTIAN MANER. Münster 2005, pp. 97–98; *idem*: *Politik, Öffentlichkeit und Geld in der kakanischen Provinz. Eine Affäre im Czernowitz des beginnenden 20. Jahrhunderts*. In: *»... zwischen dem Osten und dem Westen Europas«*. *Deutschsprachige Presse in Czernowitz bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Ed. by SUSANNE MARTEN-FINNIS/WALTER SCHMITZ. Bremen 2005, pp. 3–7.

those antagonistic towards it, as a regime of terror and a »despicable mafia«.³⁷ Straucher himself was »the leader of an assimilationist party ... dishonest, treacherous [and] conniving«,³⁸ a »self-serving, unscrupulous careerist«,³⁹ a »petty Caesar«, a »senile windbag« and »habitué of bars«, far too comfortable »in the dank atmosphere of a wine cellar«. ⁴⁰ To these moral failings were added political crimes: he was the »father of antisemitism« in Czernowitz, a »Christian leader«⁴¹ and »modern Herod«,⁴² »the embodiment of the most reckless egotism and the most unthinking brutality. He sees himself as the sovereign ruler of the city, and his notion of sovereignty is that of a feudal lord in the darkest middle ages«. ⁴³ He »controls ... the city, bringing us political, economic and moral ruin«. He was nothing less than a »catastrophe for Jews«;⁴⁴ »the entire misfortune of our people in Bukovina stems from him«. ⁴⁵ Bile and invective of this sort permeated the political debate. The oppositional rhetoric was shrill, expressing an intense resentment that appeared to know few bounds. (And, it should be noted, this was a two-way street.) Straucher was the »most hated« man in Bukovina;⁴⁶ for his rivals, propelled by their »burning hatred«, ⁴⁷ half-measures were pointless against his »repulsive demagoguery ... Strauchertum must be fought unreservedly and ruthlessly – until it is annihilated«. ⁴⁸

Who, then, were his primary opponents? Broadly speaking, discontent was rooted in the local Zionist movement, together with a loose and shifting alliance of those disappointed, offended or injured by Straucher. This was not a straightforward division of factions. Some Bukovina Zionists were aligned with him and he received support from the Zionist leadership in Vienna. ⁴⁹

³⁷ JV, 13. Juni 1913, p. 3; for more of the same, see JV, 20. Juni 1913, p. 2; 16. Oktober 1913, p. 3.

³⁸ JV, 3. März 1911, p. 4.

³⁹ JV, 2. Juni 1911, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Respectively: JV, 6. Oktober 1911, p. 1 and 8. Dezember 1911, p. 3; 2. August 1912, p. 2; 9. August 1912, p. 1; 3. März 1911, p. 3.

⁴¹ JV, 28. März 1913, p. 3.

⁴² JV, 13. Juni 1913, p. 2.

⁴³ JV, 28. Februar 1913, p. 1.

⁴⁴ JV, 14. Januar 1911, p. 3.

⁴⁵ JV, 3. März 1911, p. 4.

⁴⁶ JV, 20. Oktober 1911, p. 3; see also 24. Februar 1911, p. 4; 29. September 1911, p. 2; 20. Oktober 1911, p. 3.

⁴⁷ JV, 13. April 1911, p. 3.

⁴⁸ JV, 10. November 1911, p. 3. For similar calls to arms: JV, 3. Februar 1911, p. 1; 13. April 1911, p. 4; 7. Juli 1911, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Dr. Bloch's *Österreichische Wochenschrift* 28 (1911), 26. Mai, p. 343, called Straucher the »mollycoddled ... and pampered pet« of the Viennese Zionist leadership. Also indicative

But for the leaders and key activists the root cause of the failure of the Zionist movement to fulfil its immense potential in Bukovina was the Straucher system: not just because it was inherently corrupt and lacked an ideological rationale, but also because it fatally split the base of support for Jewish nationalism in Bukovina, siphoning off energy into a distorted caricature of *Landespolitik* that could not co-exist with, or support, other Zionist work in the province.⁵⁰

The solution to this, as noted above, was to be the *Volksrat*, the brainchild of Leon Kellner (1859–1928.) Born in Tarnow, Galicia, to a family of modest circumstances – his father was a small corn dealer, his mother ran a grocery store – Kellner received a traditional religious education in Cheder, briefly attended the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau and secondary school in Bielitz, and studied at the University of Vienna. An expert in English language and literature, with a particular interest in Shakespeare, he taught at schools in Vienna and Troppau, and in the 1890s taught English philology at the University of Vienna. A devoted Anglophile who made frequent lengthy visits to Britain, his friends included such luminaries as George Bernard Shaw and Israel Zangwill. In 1904, he took up the position of Professor of English Language and Literature at the university in Czernowitz. He spent the war years in Vienna and subsequently made his home there, working as an English expert in the office of the Austrian president. A close friend and loyal ally of Herzl from the very beginning of Herzl's Zionist career, Kellner wrote pseudonymous political commentary for the movement's principal newspaper *Die Welt* and succeeded Herzl as the paper's chief editor. His intense involvement with Herzl exacted a heavy toll: in the late summer of 1900, he suffered a breakdown that necessitated a temporary hiatus in his Zionist work.⁵¹

One of his most important contributions to the Jewish public sphere was his tireless advocacy for adult education, inspired at least in part by the concept of the Toynbee Hall, which he had seen first-hand in London in 1898. Mightily impressed by its egalitarian spirit and the range and popularity of its intellectual and cultural offerings, he was the moving force behind the creation in December 1900 of a Jewish Toynbee Hall in Vienna, which provided the

is that Straucher had sufficient support to ensure his election as a Bukovina delegate to the Zionist Congress in Vienna in 1913. Weisselberger to ZZB, 26. Juli 1913. In: CZA, Z3/786; Philipp Korngrün to Arthur Hantke, 20. August 1913. In: CZA, Z3/787.

⁵⁰ See, for example, JV, 14. Januar 1911, p. 2; 15. Dezember 1911, p. 3.

⁵¹ PAULA ARNOLD: Leon Kellner (1859–1928). In: Herzl Year Book 2 (1959), pp. 171–183; ANNA KELLNER: Leon Kellner. Sein Leben und Sein Werk. Vienna 1936; GAISBAUER, Davidstern und Doppeladler (fn. 14), p. 357, n. 186; ZAHAVI-GOLDHAMMER, Tshernovits (fn. 1), pp. 173–175. Paula Arnold was Kellner's eldest child; Anna Kellner was his wife.

impetus for a series of similar ventures further afield in Galicia and Germany. He brought this idea to Czernowitz, where he was instrumental in establishing a Jewish Toynbee Hall in 1911.⁵² Always in great demand as a lecturer and writer, Kellner was a civic-minded, engagé intellectual who combined his love of German (and English) culture with devotion to Austria and a steadfast commitment to the Jewish and Zionist cause, a not unusual Habsburg mix (save for the English component). As a politician, his style was reflective and serious, yet he also demonstrated a useful popular touch. He was disinclined, however, to aggressive demagogic rhetoric, preferring to maintain a level of civility in political discourse; he was by nature, he wrote in 1913, »productive and energetic«.⁵³ He proved a capable politician, leading the Zionist organisation and the *Volksrat*, in addition to serving for four years as a *Landtag* deputy (1910–14). For his many loyal supporters, his association with Herzl was manifest, offering a link with the great man: his work with the *Volksrat*, one of them wrote, was akin to Herzl's creation of the World Zionist Organisation, albeit on a much reduced scale.⁵⁴ Here was a leader they could trust, a man of substance and class who offered a well-articulated vision of better things to come for the Jews of Bukovina.⁵⁵

Kellner's right-hand man in his reform crusade was Mayer Ebner (1872–1955), Bukovina's pre-eminent Zionist figure. Born in Czernowitz into a relatively comfortable milieu – both his father and grandfather were small businessmen – Ebner, like Kellner, received a traditional Jewish education at Cheder along with the best of local Austrian schooling, proceeding from the state-supported Israelitisch-deutsch *Volksschule* to *Gymnasium* and university, all in Czernowitz. He earned his living as a lawyer, but his lifelong passion was Jewish nationalism, to which he brought boundless energy and a combative sensibility better suited than Kellner's to the rougher edges of political competition. Like Straucher, he was a master of political polemic and a shrewd strategist, possessed of a fine analytical mind which he demonstrated in his prolific journalism and political essays.

By any measure, his career was long and illustrious. An early initiate into the Zionist cause as a *Gymnasium* student, he was among the founders of

⁵² See his accounts of this in LEON KELLNER: Eine jüdische Toynbee-Halle in Wien. In: Ost und West 1 (1901), pp. 291–298; JV, 10. November 1911, pp. 1–2; 14. November 1913, pp. 1–2.

⁵³ JV, 6. Juni 1913, p. 2. See A. KELLNER, Leon Kellner (fn. 51), p. 60, for Kellner's own description of his combination of loyalties. For indications of his popular appeal, see JV, 31. März 1911, p. 5; A. KELLNER, Leon Kellner (fn. 51), p. 80.

⁵⁴ JV, 14. Februar 1913, p. 3.

⁵⁵ For a sample of his views, see JV, 1. Dezember 1911, pp. 1–2; 24. Januar 1913, pp. 1–2.

Bukovina's first Jewish-nationalist student association, *Hasmonäa* (a duelling fraternity), in 1891.⁵⁶ He welcomed the arrival of the worldly Herzl into the hitherto insular Jewish nationalist scene, attending the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 as a Bukovina delegate. A prescient advocate of what came to be known as synthetic Zionism, he saw *Landespolitik* and Palestine work as two complementary sides of the same coin. Described by a supporter as »the pioneer of Jewish *Realpolitik*« in Bukovina, he saw himself as a »trail-blazer« of *Real- und Gegenwartspolitik* and it was in this context that he cooperated with Straucher in the establishment in the summer of 1901 of the *Jüdischer Volksverein*.⁵⁷ Part of a network of similar groups in Austria and similar in intent to the later *Volksrat*, Ebner wanted the *Volksverein* to be »the centre of all Jewish political life«. But already here, the seeds of his conflict with Straucher were evident, as he warned little more than a year later that »the liberator [ie Straucher] is becoming a dictator«. ⁵⁸ The definitive break between the two seems to have taken place in 1905, and the fight was pursued with unremitting intensity thereafter, punctuated only by a brief ceasefire in the immediate post-First World War years.⁵⁹ In tandem with his leading role in Zionist circles, he served for many years in the *Kultusgemeinde*, of which he became president in the early 1930s, and was elected in 1913 to the Czernowitz municipal council (*Gemeinderat*). For much of the First World War he was a Russian prisoner in Siberia, returning to Czernowitz in 1917, where he immediately assumed an almost uncontested leadership role in the initial absence of both Straucher and Kellner in Vienna. In the Romanian years, Ebner was founder and editor of the *Ostjüdische Zeitung* (1919–38), the sole German-language press outlet for Romanian Jewry, served as parliamentary deputy between 1926 and 1933, established the Jewish National Party of Romania and was vice-president of the Nationalities Congress in Geneva (1931). He found his way to Palestine in 1940.

Notwithstanding that his battle with Straucher was a consistent thread throughout his career, conflict was not his preferred mode of politics. Rather, he advocated cooperation between Bukovina's nationalities, and although an avowed nationalist was alive to ideological excesses. During his tenure on the

⁵⁶ He was reportedly quite the duellist: JV, 28. Februar 1913, pp. 1–2; REIFER, Dr. Mayer Ebner (fn. 19), p. 34.

⁵⁷ The first quote is in JV, 13. April 1911, p. 3; the second in JV, 17. Februar 1911, p. 3. On the *Volksverein*, see *Jüdisches Volksblatt* 3 (1901), 5. Juli, pp. 2–3. For his views on *Landespolitik*, see, for example, his articles in *Die Welt* 5 (1901), 8. Februar, pp. 5–6; 22. Februar, pp. 6–7.

⁵⁸ *Jüdisches Volksblatt* 4 (1902), 24. Oktober, p. 3 for both quotes.

⁵⁹ JV, 17. Februar 1911, pp. 3–4.

municipal council, he repeatedly spoke out against what he perceived as the dangerous hypernationalisation of public administration and governance. He pleaded for a scaling back of the obsession with pursuing narrowly defined national interests in, for example, appointment to public offices, no matter how minor. Public utilities, state financial institutions, education – he complained that all were plagued by a blinkered preoccupation with a crude conception of national representation, inhibiting the development of a local patriotism beyond or parallel to the boundaries of national identification and inflicting grave damage on the city's infrastructure and administration.⁶⁰ This critique exemplified his brand of nationalism, which was liberal, democratic and rational; for Ebner these were the indispensable attributes of a healthy polity, a view that informed his political activism over the course of more than half a century.

The Volksrat

The ideological, moral and political impulses that mattered most for both Ebner and Kellner – national reform, democracy, Zionism – were brought together in the *Volksrat* concept, which Kellner launched in October 1910, six months after his assumption of the leadership of Bukovina's Zionist organisation. Following the initial announcement of intent, a further six months of preparatory work ensued. Signalling an aspiration to democratic legitimacy, Kellner and his colleagues held public meetings across the province, in addition to courting support from sectional interests (civil servants, traders and manufacturers, academic and professional groups, students).⁶¹ With the press widely seen as a key instrument in the battle for hearts and minds, a notable step was the publication from January 1911 of a weekly newspaper to provide the nascent movement with a mouthpiece and a forum for opinion and debate. (As the Straucher party organ *Die Volkswehr* proclaimed in its first issue in 1909, the press was a »great power«.)⁶² By January 1911, too, a party platform was in place. This laid out an ambitious program, ranging from provision of kindergartens, nurseries and apprentice homes to welfare assistance for young

⁶⁰ JV, 16. Mai 1913, p. 2; 1. August 1913, pp. 1–2; 16. Oktober 1913, pp. 1–2.

⁶¹ See the October 1910 announcement »An die Juden der Bukowina«. In: CZA, Z2/390. For the early stages, see JV, 14. Januar 1911, pp. 4–5; 10. Februar 1911, pp. 6–7; 17. Februar 1911, pp. 4–5.

⁶² VW, 8. Dezember 1909, p. 5. More generally, see MARKUS WINKLER: Jüdische Identitäten im kommunikativen Raum. Presse, Sprache und Theater in Czernowitz bis 1923. Bremen 2007.

women, adult education, libraries, occupational training (here stressing craft and agriculture for youth), poor relief, a bank for artisans, loan societies for traders and a free employment agency.⁶³ Economic reform, cultural uplift and political activism were to form a seamless unity.

In order to give institutional form to these ideas, and to propel the movement forward in an accountable manner, elections were prepared. These were to be held on as broad a democratic basis as possible: voting was to be direct, universal and confidential, with all adult Jewish citizens eligible, a notably more inclusive approach than the prevailing franchise rules in the *Kultusgemeinde* or in general politics. Bukovina was divided into 18 electoral districts that would together elect a body of 36 delegates, with each mandate representing 3,000 Jews. (Czernowitz was allotted ten mandates.) This mix of systematic planning and public agitation, underpinned by a rhetoric of democracy as a *conditio sine qua non*, was designed to bolster the *Volksrat's* claim to offer a genuine alternative to the Straucher system.⁶⁴ To this end, elections were held in March 1911, proving a qualified success with some 6,000 votes cast.⁶⁵ Guided by a principle of national renewal, the *Volksrat* was quasi-governmental in scope and ambition. It wished to function internally as a Jewish parliament and the executive arm of an administrative apparatus, and externally as the authoritative representative body vis à vis government and other civil and political groups; it was to be promoter and guarantor of equitable Jewish representation in all parts of the public sphere; it promised wide-ranging economic, social and cultural support.⁶⁶ In short, the *Volksrat* was to be the core of an autonomous Jewish society in Bukovina. This society already existed, thought Kellner, Ebner and their colleagues, but was falling woefully short of realising its vast potential.

This was not the first attempt to harness the latent strength of Bukovina Jewry in such a fashion. Like the earlier *Volksverein*, it was a local instance of the impulse that motivated a number of attempts, all ultimately unsuccessful, to create a representative organisation of Austrian Jewry. This was evident both among nationalists, who had created the Jewish National Party of Austria in 1906 and attempted in vain to form a *Reichsorganisation* between 1910 and 1912, and among ethnically-minded, but non-nationalist Jews, who had

⁶³ JV, 20. Januar 1911, p. 1.

⁶⁴ See JV, 20. Januar 1911, pp. 1–3 for details.

⁶⁵ JV, 10. März 1911, pp. 2–3. Predictably, the Straucher camp was unimpressed, snarling that the election was a »contemptible humbug« and »crude farce«, and that »only immature ... fools could have faith in such a swindel«. VW, 7. März 1911, pp. 1–2. See also VW, 9. März 1911, pp. 1–2.

⁶⁶ JV, 17. März 1911, pp. 2–3, 6.

for years tried to unite in an empire-wide body, the *Allgemeiner Österreichischer-Israelitischer Bund*.⁶⁷ In theory, Bukovina ought to have been fertile ground for this kind of project and there had indeed been previous efforts in this direction. Following the *Volksverein*, for example, Straucher was at the forefront of an attempt in 1905 to create a unified organisation of Bukovina Jewry. This was neither the first nor last of such ventures.⁶⁸ By the time the *Volksrat* emerged, Straucher had managed to establish a similar body, called variously a *Volksrat* or *Nationalrat*, although in neither form nor substance was it comparable to Kellner and Ebner's *Volksrat*.⁶⁹

Once the *Volksrat* was formally constituted, it immediately embarked on what amounted to a permanent offensive, of which the most obvious manifestation was a series of election campaigns to representative bodies: first the regional assembly, followed in quick succession by the imperial parliament, the Chamber of Commerce, the municipal council and the *Kultusgemeinde*. Not content with electoral challenges, the *Volksrat* also moved to establish alternative power bases to those controlled by Straucher. Toynbee Hall was to be its counterpart to his *Jüdisches Haus*, an imposing edifice opened in 1908 in the centre of town that functioned as headquarters and clearing house for Jewish activity and institutions (and which was itself a counterpart to the »national houses« of other groups), while the newspaper *Jüdische Volksrat* was its answer to Straucher's *Volkswehr*. Other projects included a credit cooperative to provide financial assistance for hard-pressed retail trade and small-scale industry, an employment agency and an apprentice home.⁷⁰ We need the *Volksrat*, said Kellner, because Bukovina Jewry suffered from »distress and vulnerability, neglect and brutalisation«. The goal of this concerted assault was announced in no uncertain terms: »demolition« of the Straucher

⁶⁷ DAVID RECHTER: A Nationalism of Small Things. Jewish Autonomy in Late Habsburg Austria. In: Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 52 (2007), pp. 101–104.

⁶⁸ *Jüdisches Volksblatt* 7 (1905), 1. September, p. 1; 18. August, p. 4; *Jüdische Zeitung* 2 (1908), 7. Februar, p. 5; *Jüdische Zeitung* 4 (1910), 15. April, p. 4.

⁶⁹ VW, 29. Oktober 1910, p. 2; 10. November 1911, p. 2; JV, 14. Januar 1911, p. 4. Kellner drew also on his experience in Troppau, where he had observed the nearby »Deutsche Volksrat für Böhmens«. See A. KELLNER, Leon Kellner (fn. 51), p. 78; ZAHAVI-GOLDHAMMER, Tshernovits (fn. 1), p. 175. See also ERICH SCHMIED: J. W. Titta und der deutsche Volksrat für Böhmen. In: *Bohemia: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder* 26 (1985), pp. 309–330.

⁷⁰ On the employment agency, which opened in late 1912: JV, 20. Dezember 1912, pp. 2–3; 3. Januar 1913, p. 3; on the credit cooperative, which opened in January 1912: JV, 29. Dezember 1911, p. 1; 25. Oktober 1912, p. 3; on the apprentice home, which opened in November 1913: JV, 11. September 1912, p. 1; 31. Oktober 1913, p. 3.

regime. As the *Volksrat* candidly admitted, and as the Straucher party noted with bitter recrimination, this was a »civil war«. ⁷¹

The timing of the *Volksrat*'s establishment in March 1911 was not coincidental; with the organisation in place, the movement was ready for its first campaign, the regional parliamentary elections of April 1911. The *Landtag* was an important base of operations for Straucher, who was an influential figure in its inner circle and head of its Jewish Club, an eight-member group made up of deputies from his Jewish National Party. ⁷² In combining his *Landtag* role with two other major elected offices in the *Gemeinderat* and *Reichsrat*, Straucher had positioned himself as the central Jewish parliamentary representative on municipal, regional and imperial levels. For the *Volksrat*, a strike at one of his key strongholds constituted an irresistible target and a tumultuous few weeks followed. Large riotous public meetings were commonplace, with police intervening regularly to restore order or shut down unruly gatherings. Accusations of corruption and malpractice were rife, allegedly involving dead voters, blackmail, bribery, intimidation and all manner of subordination of democratic norms. The excitement generated was unprecedented. The *Czernowitzer Tagblatt* was impressed with the »feverish tension«, while the Bukowiner Post commented that Czernowitz had never experienced electoral »agitation« quite like it. ⁷³ The capital was certainly the campaign's focal point, but both sides spared no effort to ensure that their message was heard throughout the province.

In a close result, two *Volksrat* candidates were elected, Kellner and Max Fokschaner, a Czernowitz lawyer with experience as an activist in public affairs and the press. ⁷⁴ This was in equal measure a signal success for the new movement and an unpleasant surprise for Straucher's forces, which, despite the advantages of incumbency, patronage and a formidable electoral machine,

⁷¹ For Kellner's quote, see JV, 17. März 1911, p. 3. On »demolition«, see JV, 3. Februar 1911, p. 1. For the rhetoric of civil war, see JV, 14. März 1913, pp. 1–2; JV, 29. Dezember 1911, p. 2; VW, 13. April 1911, p. 1; 20. April 1911, pp. 1–2.

⁷² The Jewish National Party was a semi-functional organisation that had for some years led an on-off existence. See GAISBAUER, Davidstern und Doppeladler (fn. 14), pp. 515–516.

⁷³ Cited in JV, 28. April 1911, p. 1; 13. April 1911, p. 7. See also the populist, if not slanderous, election brochure *Shma yisroel. oyfruf tsu ale yidn in der bukovine fun dem yidishen folksrat* (Yiddish). Czernowitz 1911, aimed at the Orthodox population.

⁷⁴ Three rounds of voting were necessary, as no candidate obtained a sufficient majority in the first two rounds. Kellner was elected in the »allgemeine Wahlkurie in den Städten«, Fokschaner in the »allgemeiner Kurie der Landgemeinden«. For coverage of the campaign, see JV, 24. März 1911, pp. 1–7; 26. März 1911, pp. 1–2; 31. März 1911, pp. 1–7; VW, 13. April 1911, pp. 1–2; 20. April 1911, pp. 1–3; 25. April 1911, pp. 2–3. For results, see JV, 28. April 1911, pp. 1–3, 7.

were compelled to acknowledge that this parvenu foe enjoyed a good measure of public support. For the *Volksrat*, this first foray into electoral politics augured well. Barely a month after its creation it had secured a foothold in a vital political institution that gave its leaders an invaluable bully pulpit. The challenge now was to build on this promising foundation by broadening its base of support beyond the lawyers, doctors, civil servants, merchants and youth which were its core constituencies. The *Volksrat* claimed the allegiance of the »entire intelligentsia«, but was acutely aware that the »poorer element« of the population was firmly in Straucher's camp.⁷⁵

That there was much work still to do was quickly made clear, as Straucher and his allies regrouped to frustrate the *Volksrat's* cautious attempts at conciliation. This was manifested in the minor debacle that ensued as the ten Jewish deputies – eight from the Jewish National Party, two from the *Volksrat* – tried to paper over their differences in order to form a *Landtag* Club. As a unified faction, the Jews could compete on better terms with other *Landtag* groups, particularly the dominant Romanians and Ukrainians, and were potentially a potent factor in regional politics. The Club was established, but remained for a long period in a state of suspended animation, paralysed by the inability of the two parties to cooperate. The sticking point, as ever, was Straucher. As the newcomer and weaker partner, the *Volksrat* saw the benefit of a united Club but refused to accept Straucher as its head; for his part, Straucher was little inclined to make concessions except under duress, preferring to nullify the Club than to work with the *Volksrat* inside it. The lack of a cohesive *Landtag* faction was keenly felt by the *Volksrat*. As the sole Jewish Club in any of the empire's regional parliaments it represented, like its counterpart in the *Reichsrat*, something larger than a mere faction; it was a tacit acknowledgement by the imperial system that Jews were a political collective, and implicit in this was a step towards recognition of Jewish nationality.⁷⁶

The manoeuvrings in the *Landtag* Club saga spilled over into the next major contest, the *Reichsrat* elections of June 1911. Here again, initial signs of tentative collaboration promptly gave way to a resumption of hostilities. As a gesture of goodwill, the *Volksrat* opted not to contest Straucher's reelection in Czernowitz; instead, it put forward Arthur Mahler, Straucher's erstwhile colleague in the *Reichsrat* Jewish Club, for the second Czernowitz

⁷⁵ JV, 13. April 1911, pp. 2, 5. For the opposing side's analysis, see VW, 27. April 1911, p. 2; 29. April 1911, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁶ On the Landtag Club, which began to work only once Straucher resigned as chair, see JV, 19. Mai 1911, pp. 1–3; 1. November 1912, pp. 2–4; 29. November 1912, pp. 1–2; VW, 30. Oktober 1912, pp. 1–2.

mandate. Far from supporting Mahler, Straucher was instrumental in bringing in a spoiler candidate almost certainly intended to split the Jewish vote. In a contest where his backing might have exerted a crucial influence on Jewish voters, Straucher's studied neutrality contributed to Mahler's defeat and indirectly assisted the Christian Social party's victory. Whether intentionally or not, and the *Volksrat* was in no doubt that it was his intention, Straucher in this way remained the sole Bukovina Jewish nationalist in the *Reichsrat*. Always loath to share the spotlight, he no doubt found the prospect of once more working with Mahler, now sponsored by the *Volksrat*, most unpalatable.⁷⁷

Despite this setback, the *Volksrat*'s permanent revolution continued, if not at the exalted level of regional and imperial parliaments. Next in its sights were the Bukowina Chamber of Commerce and the capital's municipal council, and in both cases it registered some success. In the former, Markus Kisslinger, a prominent Czernowitz businessman and prime mover behind both the Jewish orphanage and Toynbee Hall, was elected in December 1911.⁷⁸ The Chamber of Commerce was by definition a sectional interest but, given the strong Jewish presence in urban areas, the municipal arena was a stronghold of Jewish politics. In Suczawa (Suceava), for example, some eighty kilometres south of the capital with a population of around 4,000 Jews in 1900 (over 30% of the total population), 13 of 30 city councillors were Jews, while in Czernowitz the number was 18 of 50.⁷⁹ The municipal council franchise was restricted and voters were grouped in economic categories that intersected partially and informally with ethnicity or nationality. (In the *Landtag*, following the 1909/10 reform, ethnicity/nationality was formally acknowledged while the franchise remained restricted). Persistent pressure to reform a system seen by many as lacking democratic legitimacy had met with resistance from the authorities and vested interests. As part of the reform effort, and also to reach out beyond the Jewish sphere during the *Gemeinderat* election season of February and March 1913, the *Volksrat* created a Jewish *Bürgerkomitee*, the aim

⁷⁷ On the *Reichsrat* elections, see JV, 16. Juni 1911, pp. 1–3; 23. Juni 1911, pp. 1–2; 14. Juli 1911, p. 2; VW, 15. Juni 1911, pp. 1–2; 17. Juni 1911, pp. 1–2; 20. Juni 1911, pp. 1–2; 22. Juni 1911, pp. 1–2. On Straucher and Mahler in the *Reichsrat* Club, see VW, 8. Juni 1911, p. 2; 24. Juni 1911, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁸ On Kisslinger, described as a »selfmademan« (JV, 8. Dezember 1911, p. 1), see JV, 21. Februar 1913, pp. 1–2. On the Chamber of Commerce elections, see JV, 27. Oktober 1911, pp. 1–2; 10. November 1911, pp. 2–3; 29. Dezember 1911, p. 2; VW, 23. November 1911, p. 3; 6. Januar 1912, p. 2.

⁷⁹ GAISBAUER, Davidstern und Doppeladler (fn. 14), p. 522; DAVID SHA'ARI: Yehudei bukovina bein shtei milchamot ha-olam (Hebrew). Tel Aviv 2004, p. 178.

of which was to forge a united bourgeoisie capable of challenging Straucher's hegemony in the capital.⁸⁰ Although falling well short of this goal, their work in this instance was rewarded with two seats, Mayer Ebner and journalist Adolf Wallstein, increasing the Jewish quota to 20 of 50 seats on the *Gemeinderat*. The *Volksrat* – and the Zionist movement – now had its two most important leaders in two of Bukovina's major representative bodies.⁸¹ A preponderance of Jewish votes, the *Volksrat* claimed, had been cast against Straucher's party; this was, so they hoped, the death knell of his regime. Ebner and his colleague declined to join the *Gemeinderat*'s Straucher-dominated Jewish Club. As already indicated, Ebner was wary of allowing the national issue to permeate all political work. Defense of the national *Besitzstand* at all costs, he believed, was counter-productive and the municipal council ought to be neutral ground, with regard both to national affairs in general and the internal Jewish conflict in particular.⁸²

Neutral ground, however, was at a premium. How difficult it was to disentangle the local political spheres was demonstrated in a bizarre and unseemly squabble that erupted towards the end of 1913. Ostensibly, this was a disagreement about the capacity of the city's Jewish prayer houses. Responding to a perceived shortage of space for worshippers during the High Holidays, the *Volksrat* offered its newly-built Toynbee Hall for this purpose, a spacious and modern alternative to the many »wooden shacks, taverns and dance halls« in use.⁸³ To the *Kultusgemeinde* leadership, existing space was sufficient, while they could ill-afford the loss of income resulting from the abandonment of available venues. The issue was aired in a riotous *Gemeinderat* session, where the spectre was raised of intervention by municipal and regional authorities – and this in a battle between two secular nationalist parties over religious affairs! Tempers ran high. Amidst the general uproar, Straucher called Ebner a »liar«, a »brawling blackguard«, an »ill-bred boor« and an »impudent scoundrel«; Ebner responded in kind and the mayor was compelled to adjourn the meeting as the »tumult« threatened to spiral out of control. The surreal sequel saw police officials touring prayer houses on the eve of the High Holidays to

⁸⁰ JV, 31. Januar 1913, pp. 1–2; 21. Februar 1913, p. 3; 7. März 1913, pp. 1–3.

⁸¹ On the elections, see JV, 7. Februar 1913, pp. 1–3; 28. Februar 1913, pp. 2–3; 7. März 1913, pp. 1–3; VW, 26. Februar 1913, pp. 1–2; 5. März 1913, p. 1; 15. März 1913, pp. 1–2.

⁸² JV, 7. März 1913, pp. 1–2; 28. März 1913, pp. 2–3.

⁸³ JV, 10. Oktober 1913, p. 1. The *Volksrat* claimed that as many as 25,000 people were crammed into 47 prayer houses, an average of 500 per site. See JV, 27. September 1913, p. 1.

assess the competing claims.⁸⁴ This farcical episode highlights the poisonous compound of municipal politics, religion and Jewish politics in Czernowitz and shows, too, the extent to which Jewish politics in the city was enmeshed in the broader political culture. The latter constituted a series of overlapping domains, rendering Ebner's search for a neutral space a forlorn endeavour.

If Ebner rhetorically invoked an idealised neutral sphere in the municipal council, his overall strategy, and that of the *Volksrat*, was predicated on the assumption that city hall was one of a number of interlocking pieces of a single structure: *Strauchertum*. The *Volksrat*'s next target, therefore, was the »*Paschawirtschaft*« of the Czernowitz *Kultusgemeinde*, the system's most familiar – and perhaps familial – element.⁸⁵ Formally responsible for religious and welfare matters, the Czernowitz *Kultusgemeinde* in practice exhibited elements of a *Volksgemeinde* with much broader areas of competence and authority. For most *Kultusgemeinden*, political, economic and cultural work formed an implicit part of their larger agenda; in Czernowitz, these aspects constituted primary rather than secondary characteristics. The *Kultusgemeinde*, for example, made plain to the Bukovina government in 1911 that it was reluctant to confine itself to a narrow religious definition of its proper sphere of interest. In its view, the imperial legislation of 1890 – regulating the relationship of religious communities to the state – permitted considerable leeway regarding the scope of internal Jewish affairs; moreover, the legislation did not stipulate precisely what the religious needs of Jews might be. The *Kultusgemeinde* leadership was in no doubt that in Czernowitz the »modern tendency« held sway and, accordingly, a »broader conception« of *Gemeinde* activity prevailed in the city. One of the key tasks it set itself, for example, was the »education of youth in a Jewish-national sense«. While scrupulously denying, in its communication with the government at least, that it was engaged directly in politics, the *Kultusgemeinde* made no secret of its wish to expand the boundaries of its work beyond attending to the religious needs of Czernowitz Jewry. Its trump card here was an insistence on autonomy. The state's refusal to accede to oft-repeated requests for funding had a silver lining in this respect; since the Jewish community was not in receipt of state funds, as Protestants and Catholics were, the *Kultusgemeinde* argued that it ought to enjoy relative autonomy to pursue its own agenda. The gist of this approach was that a strictly religious definition of Jewish society, which might have been appropriate in an earlier period, failed to take into account developments

⁸⁴ JV, 10. Oktober 1913, pp. 2–3; 16. Oktober 1913, p. 2; VW, 20. September 1913, pp. 2–3; 27. September 1913, pp. 1–2; 11. Oktober 1913, p. 2.

⁸⁵ JV, 21. März 1913, p. 1.

in Bukovina Jewry since the mid-1880s.⁸⁶ Similarly, Leon Kellner, conjuring up the familiar rhetorical divide between east and west, commented in 1913 that a *Kultusgemeinde* for western Jews needed only to supervise religious affairs, whereas »eastern Jews« required a modern organisation imbued with the national spirit.⁸⁷ Even more explicit was the claim in *Die Volkswehr*, which surely was unique in functioning as the mouthpiece simultaneously of a *Kultusgemeinde* and a nationalist political organisation (Straucher's Jewish National Party): the *Kultusgemeinde* in Czernowitz was »not only a religious but also a national centre of Bukovina Jewry«. ⁸⁸ This type of nationalist rhetoric about and from a *Kultusgemeinde* was exceptional and clearly anomalous in relation to almost all other *Kultusgemeinden* in the Habsburg lands. As one *Volkswehr* writer expressed it: »the Czernowitz *Kultusgemeinde* is the sole nationally governed Jewish community« in Austria.⁸⁹ This was a distinctive, even defining, element of Czernowitz and Bukovina Jewish political culture.

As the state-sanctioned representative body for Jewish affairs, the *Kultusgemeinde* functioned as an arm of government, a privileged position which, along with the power base afforded by the large institutional network under its control, made the nominally apolitical *Gemeinde* a key political battleground. It was, though, a fortress of the Straucher system, and Ebner and Kellner harboured no illusions that the *Volksrat* would be able to do more than dent its outer defenses in an election. Straucher's grip on the electoral apparatus was too tight to permit a fair contest; it would be, thought the *Volksrat*, more an »electoral comedy« than a true election.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, they felt duty-bound to keep the banner aloft and threw themselves into the *Kultusgemeinde* elections of June 1913. On this occasion, they were easily defeated, although they were quick to claim the inevitable moral victory: in a system so thoroughly riddled with corruption (rigged voting lists; no guarantee of voting secrecy, assorted means of bribery, pressure and extortion) winning was impossible.⁹¹ In sum, commented the *Volksrat*, »oppression, malice, greed, job-seeking and vulgarity« guaranteed victory for Straucher.⁹²

⁸⁶ The Kultusgemeinde laid out its thinking in a memorandum to the government in 1911. In: Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), Jerusalem, HM2/8341.21. On the 1890 legislation, see KLAUS LOHRMANN: Die rechtliche Lage der Juden in Wien zwischen 1848–1918. In: *Austriaca* 31 (1990), pp. 19–28.

⁸⁷ JV, 18. April 1913, p. 2.

⁸⁸ VW, 20. April 1911, p. 2. See also JV, 13. Juni 1913, p. 1, for a similar sentiment.

⁸⁹ VW, 18. Juni 1913, p. 3.

⁹⁰ JV, 25. April 1913, p. 2.

⁹¹ JV, 20. Juni 1913, pp. 1–2; 27. Juni 1913, pp. 1–3.

⁹² JV, 4. Juli 1913, p. 2.

The election, however, was only one element of the battle. The *Volksrat*'s larger purpose was to derail entirely the »public scandal« of the *Kultusgemeinde* administration, which it derisively called a local Tammany Hall.⁹³ To achieve this, it turned to the *deus ex machina* of government intervention, a choice anchored in liberal faith in the *Rechtsstaat*. *Volksrat* activists stressed repeatedly that they expected, and demanded, protection from what they judged to be Straucher's flagrant misrule. Since membership of the *Kultusgemeinde* was a state-imposed obligation, not a choice, it was incumbent upon the state to ensure that it functioned according to legal and civic norms.⁹⁴ It was this principled sense of a just government, combined with a tactical assessment that Straucher's position was unassailable without recourse to external assistance, that led the *Volksrat* to turn to the authorities in what amounted to an attempt to provoke an administrative coup d'état to topple the *Kultusgemeinde* executive. There was no hint here of a traditional reluctance to involve the potentially disruptive force of the state in internal Jewish affairs; rather, the *Volksrat*, as Kellner wrote, was seeking »from a just government assistance and deliverance«. ⁹⁵

In keeping with this view, *Volksrat* leaders sought state intervention from the outset, elaborating their case against the *Kultusgemeinde* in a petition presented to the Bukovina government in early 1911. (They chose to address their grievances to the regional government in an attempt to circumvent the municipality, the appropriate authority, as they believed the latter was little better than an extension of Straucher's regime.) The appeal documented a plethora of sins of commission and omission: financial mismanagement and fraud; abuse of funds for political and other inappropriate purposes; inequitable and politicised taxation policies; nepotism in employment practices; electoral fraud; overt politicisation, lack of accountability and failures of proper procedure in *Gemeinde* administration; exclusion and suppression of dissenting voices.⁹⁶ This was not the first occasion on which Straucher's opponents had asked the government for assistance to enforce reform. In 1907, Ebner and others had unsuccessfully petitioned the municipality regarding allegedly unfair *Kultusgemeinde* taxation policies.⁹⁷ In the course of the 1913 *Kultusge-*

⁹³ For the first quotation, see JV, 25. April 1913, p. 2. For Tammany Hall, see JV, 4. April 1913, p. 1.

⁹⁴ JV, 2. Mai 1913, pp. 1–2. For further examples, see JV, 7. April 1911, p. 1; 1. Dezember 1911, pp. 1–2; 25. April 1913, p. 2. Ebner expressed the same belief some years earlier also: *Jüdisches Volksblatt* 7 (1905), 8. September, p. 4.

⁹⁵ JV, 1. Dezember 1911, p. 2.

⁹⁶ JV, 10. Februar 1911, pp. 2–4.

⁹⁷ CAHJP, HM2/8341.21; JV, 10. Februar 1911, p. 2.

meinde electoral campaign, the *Volksrat* requested intervention by the authorities to ensure fair conduct of the election, which it feared was in danger of becoming a »sham«. ⁹⁸ Despite *Volksrat* concern that »the power of the state stops at the *Kultusgemeinde* gates«, the municipality found in its favour and ordered a restart to the electoral preparations. ⁹⁹ Straucher and his associates responded to the 1911 petition with a mix of outrage and contempt. The *Kultusgemeinde* wrote to the government, branding the petitioners »spiteful agitators and rabble-rousers« with »overheated imaginations« and calling Ebner a »well-known troublemaker« for whom »agitation and intrigue« were »chronic afflictions«. ¹⁰⁰ The *Volkswehr* thought it an »absolute disgrace« for Jews to denounce each other to the government, evidence of the *Volksrat*'s »malevolent, invidious, ignorant and malicious« nature. Reinforcing the *Kultusgemeinde*'s detailed rebuttal of any wrongdoing, it issued the *Gemeinde* a clean bill of health, affirming that »the entire administration is ... absolutely sound«. ¹⁰¹

The government, however, thought otherwise. In a formal response to the petition at the end of May 1913, it issued a devastating and comprehensive condemnation of the *Kultusgemeinde*, expressing the »most severe disapproval« at the »neglected state« of its administration. Enumerating a host of statutory violations that bordered on dereliction of duty, the report exposed to the public gaze a startling breadth and depth of impropriety, including laxity in financial dealings, irregularities and inequities in taxation policies, an autocratic disregard for democratic rules and procedures, and all manner of mismanagement. It culminated in the government's stern admonition: Put your house in order or face dissolution. The *Volksrat* pronounced itself satisfied with this timely vindication of its work, viewing it as a significant milestone in its lengthy campaign. ¹⁰² The *Kultusgemeinde* response was by turns recalcitrant, dismissive and indignant. The report was »monstrous«, an »affront« that had deeply insulted Bukovina Jewry. The government had been led astray by »informers«, »desparados« and »demagogues«, motivated, as the deputy mayor (soon to be mayor) Salo Weisselberger commented, by »blind

⁹⁸ JV, 4. April 1913, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁹ JV, 18. April 1913, p. 1. For the quotation, see JV, 11. April 1913, p. 1. Their complaint had been referred to the municipality, notwithstanding the *Volksrat*'s efforts once again to circumvent it by a direct approach to the regional administration.

¹⁰⁰ CAHJP, HM2/8341.21.

¹⁰¹ VW, 28. Dezember 1912, p. 3.

¹⁰² JV, 30. Mai 1913, pp. 1–6. It emphasised that this was merely the tip of the corruption iceberg, as the government had understandably skirted around the political implications of the *Kultusgemeinde*'s transgressions.

rage and hatred«; since the problems were merely »formal errors«, the *Kultusgemeinde* deserved »praise and appreciation, not censure and disapproval«. ¹⁰³ Straucher himself affected nonchalance, insisting that his administration was »proper, conscientious, successful and fruitful«. One of his allies in the regional assembly improved on this, waving away the problems as »merely formal deficiencies«; far from deserving reproach, Straucher ran an »exemplary community«. ¹⁰⁴ Notwithstanding its attempts to discount the findings as misguided and exaggerated, the *Kultusgemeinde* implicitly acknowledged their gravity by lodging an appeal and asking the government to reconsider. ¹⁰⁵

The *Volksrat* and its crusade against the Straucher system were not granted the time to play themselves out. This local saga was always at risk of appearing to be a petty intramural conflict; how much more so when set against the backdrop of the ensuing First World War and the end of the Habsburg Monarchy? But while the stage was limited, the issues at stake were not parochial. Power, autonomy and self-rule, democracy, Zionism and Jewish nationalism, Jewish political culture: all were at play and all had local, regional and imperial implications. To the protagonists there was an almost existential aspect to this struggle, which they saw as part of the grand project of national renewal. For Jewish society to falter so dramatically in the obviously hospitable environment of Habsburg Bukovina represented a mortal threat to the health of the national body politic. The resultant crisis threatened to undermine the highly prized stability and security of Bukovina Jewry.

The founders of the *Volksrat* challenged a powerful, entrenched regime; the subsequent battle fused intense ideological and personal differences, generating an animosity that proved resistant to compromise. The enormous progress they made in a short time was testimony both to their strategic acumen and to the chord they struck with parts of the Jewish public. A valuable niche in the formal structures of power was secured with the election of two key leaders, Kellner and Ebner, to the regional parliament and the Czernowitz municipal council (along with another representative in the province's Chamber of Commerce), while the movement established notable additions to the already impressive Jewish public sphere in the form of the *Volksrat* itself, Toynbee Hall, a newspaper, a credit cooperative, an employment agency and an apprentice home. All were based in the capital, but included the entire province in their purview. The *Volksrat*, after all, saw itself as a *Gesamtorganisation* of

¹⁰³ VW, 28. Mai 1913, pp. 1–2. For Weisselberger, see VW, 11. Juni 1913, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ VW, 28. Mai 1913, p. 2. For Straucher's response, see VW, 31. Mai 1913, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ JV, 6. Juni 1913, pp. 3–4.

Bukovina Jewry. To its supporters, it was a democratic and modern alternative to Straucher's feudalism; to the establishment, it was an unwarranted and illegitimate intrusion that threatened to undermine Jewish influence by sundering Jewish unity. The *Volksrat's* achievements represented major inroads into the previously unchallenged hegemony of the ruling party, even if its ultimate ambition, to dethrone Straucher and dismantle his system, remained out of reach.

This was, though, an unfinished story. The strife-ridden final years of the Bukovina Jewish political landscape grew out of, but should not be seen as the necessary culmination of, two decades of notably successful Jewish *Volkspolitik*, made possible by the singular nature of the province's political culture and its Habsburg matrix. In the Austrian context, the *Volksrat* saw itself as aligned with those striving for a democratic and pluralist empire in which all nations would enjoy the benefits of autonomy and self-rule. Straucher's Jewish National Party subscribed to much the same notion, since Jewish nationalists were part of a broad Jewish consensus that saw the empire as a rapidly modernising, relatively developed civil society that had made giant strides from the severe authoritarian *Vormärz* of Metternich and Franz I to the generally benign (if overly paternalistic) rule of Franz Joseph in his later years. This optimistic view about the march of progress, which constituted the bedrock of Jewish dynastic loyalism, was tempered by a realisation that there was still some way to go to reach the promised land of equality and democracy. Nowhere was this more true than on Austria's neglected eastern periphery. Jewish activists regularly expressed their frustration that the ideals of the *Rechtsstaat* were too often honoured in the breach when it came to Jewish interests.¹⁰⁶ The rhetoric and promise of the state – both at regional and imperial levels – were often relatively democratic and liberal, while its actions were all too often undemocratic and illiberal.¹⁰⁷ This disjunction between aspiration and reality was a source of Jewish discomfiture in the latter decades of imperial Austria. By and large, Jews held fast to their faith in the Habsburg state's benevolence: for a scattered minority bereft of its own territory, devotion to

¹⁰⁶ For examples of this kind of rhetoric, see VW, 8. Dezember 1909, pp. 1–2; 14. Juni 1913, p. 2; 29. November 1913, p. 1; *Jüdische Zeitung* 1 (1907), 15. November, pp. 1–2; *Jüdische Zeitung* 2 (1908), 13. März, pp. 1–2.

¹⁰⁷ For a relevant discussion, see GARY B. COHEN: *Neither Absolutism nor Anarchy. New Narratives on Society and Government in Late Imperial Austria*. In: *Austrian History Yearbook* 29 (1998), pp. 37–61; IDEM: *Nationalist Politics and the Dynamics of State and Civil Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1867–1914*. In: *Central European History* 40 (2007), pp. 241–278.

the Habsburgs and their version of the Rechtsstaat was an eminently rational course of action.

In Bukovina, as in Habsburg society in general, an uneasy equilibrium prevailed between the state and its numerous minorities. In the Jewish case, state and minority were for the most part mutually supportive, and Bukovina's exceptional Jewish political culture is evidence of this. The *Volksrat* and Bukovina Jewish nationalism were essential ingredients of its last years; tracing their history opens a window on the inner workings of Jewish politics, a constitutive part of Jewish society. At the same time, it provides a glimpse of the ebb and flow of the relationship between a minority and the imperial state, or, more precisely, between elements of both sides, since neither were monolithic entities. Particular and universal fed into one another. In Czernowitz and Bukovina this dynamic is made clear in the dense web of relationships – personal, professional, political – that bound together the great and good in a power grid where nationality, class and religion intersected with city, region and empire. We cannot properly apprehend either the political culture of Bukovina Jewry or its larger contexts without due attention to the specifics and interactions of these various dimensions.

If first and foremost a product of its Habsburg milieu, the *Volksrat* can be linked also to a wider setting. In aspiration and scope, it resembled the Jewish National Councils that emerged in many parts of central and eastern Europe in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, including in Bukovina. These were an echo of the form of shadow government set up to fill the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Russian and Habsburg states, and conceived of themselves as inclusive pan-Jewish institutions, a self-conception shared by the *Volksrat*. It shared too the National Councils' common trajectory, enjoying an initial period of success only to be overwhelmed by events beyond the control of the Jewish minority.¹⁰⁸ Seen in this light, the *Volksrat* was an episode in the larger story of the halting development of Jewish *Volkspolitik* in east central Europe in the early twentieth century.

¹⁰⁸ On the National Councils, see EZRA MENDELSON: *Zionism in Poland*. New Haven 1981, pp. 91–110; SHMUEL ETTINGER: *Jews and non-Jews in Eastern and Central Europe between the Wars*. In: *Jews and non-Jews in Eastern Europe 1918–1945*. Ed. by BELA VAGO/GEORGE L. MOSSE. Jerusalem 1974, pp. 8–10.