

Sarah R. Johnson

From Repudiation to Rapprochement: The 'Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens' and its relationship with Zionism in the Weimar Republic

Trotz des offiziellen Bruchs zwischen dem Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (C.V.) und der Zionistischen Vereinigung für Deutschland im Jahr 1919 behielt der C.V. eine bedingte Neutralität gegenüber bestimmten zionistischen Projekten und Organisationen. Dieser Artikel analysiert die Methode des C.V., gegen Zionismus in Vorträgen und Veröffentlichungen zu kämpfen. Es zeigt sich, dass dies in erster Linie auf einem größeren Versuch, jüdische Verwurzelung in Deutschland zu verteidigen und nicht auf einer Ablehnung zionistischer Ideologie an sich gründete.

Despite its official break with the Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland and the Zionist movement in 1919, the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (C.V.) maintained conditional neutrality toward certain Zionist organizations and projects during the Weimar Republic. This article examines the C.V.'s methods of fighting the Zionist movement in its lectures and publications during the Weimar Republic. In doing so, it argues that these measures reflected its larger determination to defend Jewish rootedness in Germany and was not based on a rejection of Zionist theory itself.

Founded in 1893 to provide German Jews with legal defense in cases of antisemitism, by the 1920s, the 'Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens' (C.V.) had become both the most prominent German-Jewish institution, as well as one of the loudest and most unequivocal opponents of Zionism in Germany. By the mid-1920s, the Centralverein had grown to double its pre-war size, and its fight against antisemitism had expanded beyond solely legal defense work to include educational and cultural engagement in local communities throughout Germany.¹ This was designed to help C.V. members build a positive connection to their Jewishness, while also strengthening a deep and enduring German identity. It was this synthesis of Germanness and Jewishness along with the fight against all manifestations of anti-Semitism that lay at the core of the C.V.'s work during the Weimar Republic.² Though the C.V. first addressed its suspicion that Zionism reinforced and supported antisemitism in a 1913 resolution, it remained

¹ Following the First World War, the number of German Jews who joined the CV rose from just over 35,000 in 1913 to 45,000 in 1919 and by 1924 it had 72,000 members – double that of its pre-war levels. Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, Tätigkeitsbericht für die Jahre 1924 und 1925, Berlin 1925, p. 89.

² During the last years before the start of the First World War, the C.V. changed from emphasizing Germanness over Jewishness to affirming both at the same time. For more on the Centralverein's positions toward Germanness and Jewishness prior to the First World War, see: Reinharz, Jehuda: 'Deutschtum' und 'Judentum' in the Ideology of the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, 1893-1914, in: Jewish Social Studies 36 (1974), pp. 19-39.

largely ambivalent towards Zionism as a whole until after the First World War.³ As the C.V.'s presence in Jewish communities throughout Germany expanded during this period in reaction to a growing influx of new members, the way in which it conceptualized its relationship to both Zionism and German-Jewish identity shifted as well. The German Zionist movement's insistence on the primacy of Jewishness and the necessity of creating a homeland in Palestine therefore became increasingly more incongruous with the C.V.'s politics.

Though opposition to Zionism rapidly became a central aspect of the C.V.'s institutional identity over the course of the following years, in the immediate post-war period, it was nevertheless a direct response to acute instances of rising antisemitism and new-found Zionist influence in Germany following the First World War. Despite its official break with the Zionist movement in 1919 and continued public condemnation of Jewish nationalism throughout the 1920s, the C.V. nevertheless continued working together with the Zionist movement on select social and political projects.⁴ While the C.V. expanded its programming aimed at weakening the 'Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland' (ZVfD) rapidly in the early years of the Weimar Republic, by 1926 the sharp divide between the two organizations had already begun to diminish with the debate around Keren Hayesod, and would continue to lessen as a result of the rise of the NSDAP. Though it fought against the Zionist movement politically, most C.V. leadership recognized that the Zionists themselves were, much like the C.V. itself, only working for what they saw as best for the Jewish people. One of the more difficult aspects of the C.V.'s relationship to the Zionist movement was therefore finding a balance between rejecting Zionism as a means to combat antisemitism and the desire to find common ground in the interest of defending a unified Jewish community. This tension between condemnation and limited cooperation was typical of the C.V. executive's position on Zionism during the Weimar Republic.

1919 and the Official Break

Following the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which provided British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine, Zionism gained new political legitimacy and a stronger reputation in the international and German community.⁵ Though the declaration had little direct influence on the way in which members of the ZVfD articulated their own religious and national loyalties, that it came only a year after the 1916 Judenzählung in Germany strengthened C.V. fears of growing antisemitism in Germany.⁶ Despite this growing apprehension, the C.V.'s official stance towards including Zionists as dual

³ While it still welcomed Zionists as members following 1913, it was only those whose Zionism focused on was providing persecuted Eastern European Jews with a new and safe home in Palestine. See: Wiener Library, London, 456/110: Hauptgeschäftsstelle des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens: Material zur Frage der Jewish Agency, (1929), 18. For more about the 1913 debate on Zionism and the main factors that led to this resolution, see: Dietrich, Christian: Verweigerter Anerkennung. Selbstbestimmungsdebatten im "Centralverein Deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens" vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg, Berlin 2014.

⁴ Barkai, Avraham: "Wehr Dich!": Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (C.V.), 1893-1938, München 2002, p. 144.

⁵ Lavsky, Hagit: Before Catastrophe. The Distinctive Path of German Zionism, Detroit 1996, p. 46.

⁶ Zimmermann, Moshe: Die Deutschen Juden, 1914-1945 München 1997, p. 4.

members remained a relatively open and tolerant one until the end of the war. This was due to two different considerations, the first being rising antisemitism in the first months of the Weimar Republic, and the second was a response to a generational shift in Zionist leadership that increasingly emphasized Palestinocentrism at the expense of Germanness.⁷ These two factors, both of which grew out of the last years of the German Empire and the First World War, led C.V. leadership to suspect the Zionist movement of indirectly supporting growing antisemitism in Germany and quickly became a serious concern for the C.V.⁸ This escalated further when the antisemitic German National People's Party (DNVP) affirmed its support of the German Zionist movement and its desire to "reestablish" a Jewish state in Palestine in 1919.⁹ That the DNVP openly supported the German Zionist movement threatened the C.V.'s mission to safeguard Jewish life in Germany by strengthening claims of Jewish foreignness in Germany. The C.V. therefore argued that the Zionist position lent credence to and strengthened antisemitism in Germany. It was for these reasons that the C.V. leadership decided not only to break completely with the German Zionist movement, but to fight it as actively as it did antisemitism.

At the yearly C.V. general assembly in May 1919, Syndic Ludwig Holländer gave a speech on contemporary antisemitism in which he addressed the rising problem of increased overlap in Zionist and antisemitic accusations against the German Jewish community.¹⁰ Though German Zionists argued in slightly different terms, Holländer claimed in his speech that the ZVfD nevertheless predicated much of its practical work on the rejection of the viability of Jewish life in Germany.¹¹ For much of the C.V. leadership, the question of whether it was the Zionists denying Jewish belonging in the diaspora or the anti-Semites declaring that Jews were not truly Germans, both were equally alarming in their claims of Jewish foreignness in Germany. Due to the increasing similarity between Zionist and antisemitic arguments, the C.V. therefore characterized Zionism as "Wasser auf die Mühle" – grist for the mill – of the anti-Semites.¹² It was for this reason that in 1919 the C.V. leadership declared a full and official break with the Zionist movement and dedicated parts of its defense work to fighting Zionism as a means for fighting antisemitism.

⁷ Reinharz, Jehuda: Ideology and Structure in German Zionism, 1882-1933, in: *Jewish Social Studies* 42 (1980), pp. 128-129. Reinharz's construct of generational shift within German Zionism is discussed further in his article: Three Generations of German Zionism, in: *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 9 (1978), pp. 95-110 as well as in the introduction to the edited volume: *Dokumente zur Geschichte des deutschen Zionismus 1882-1933*, Tübingen 1981.

⁸ Foerder, Ludwig: Die Stellung des Centralvereins zu den innerjüdischen Fragen in den Jahren 1919-1926, Wroclaw 1927, p. 8. For more about the Zionist movement in Germany, its role within different political and social spheres in Germany, and its own fight against antisemitism during this period see: Vogt, Stefan: *Subalterne Positionierungen. Der deutsche Zionismus im Feld des Nationalismus in Deutschland, 1890-1933*, Göttingen 2016; Nicosia, Francis R.: *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany*, Cambridge 2008; Teichert, Carsten: *Chasak! Zionismus im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1933-1938*, Köln 2000.

⁹ Barkai, "Wehr Dich!", 2002, p. 115 and pp. 406-407.

¹⁰ Holländer, Ludwig: *Der Antisemitismus der Gegenwart*, Berlin 1919, p. 12.

¹¹ Besides its having been adopted by anti-Semites, part of the C.V.'s rejection of Zionism also lay in its repudiation of any kind of völkisch-nationalist or racial theory, regardless of whether it came from German Zionists or gentiles. In response to this shared rhetoric, the C.V. became determined to demonstrate to both Jews and Christian Germans that Jewishness could not only easily and completely coexist with Germanness, but that they could be synthesized into a cohesive personal identity as well. Wiener Library, London, MF Doc 55/20, Doc. 786, Ortsgruppe Kassel Meeting Minutes, May 20, 1920.

¹² *Zionismus und Antisemitismus*, in: *Im deutschen Reich* 25 (1919), 7-8, July 1919.

In June of 1919, the C.V.'s monthly newspaper *Im deutschen Reich* published a report on the above-mentioned general assembly. Alongside the C.V.'s decision to split from the Zionist movement, the speeches in this report reflect many of its leading members' initial reluctance to do so. This apologetic determination was best articulated by the Dessau politician and C.V. executive board member Hermann Cohn, who stated during the debate that "[the C.V.] needs to draw a line between us and the Zionists, regardless of how painful it may be."¹³ The C.V. executive's decision to break with the Zionist movement was in this sense almost solely an institutional break, one that intended to serve the larger purpose of distancing and defending German Jews against all possible sources of antisemitic persecution. Therefore, while it did lead to a separation at the institutional level between the C.V. and the ZVfD, this divide did not necessarily represent a repudiation of Zionists themselves or of their place within the German-Jewish community. It was therefore out of a perceived necessity for the safety of German Jews that the C.V. severed ties with the Zionist movement in 1919.

The C.V. and Zionism in the Public Sphere

The C.V.'s new policy of fighting the Zionist movement in its lectures and publications was therefore based not on a full rejection of the Zionist project, but rather on a determination to work for what it perceived to best serve the interests of German Jews. By the mid-1920s, its community engagement aimed at fighting Zionism often closely overlapped or was even identical with that against antisemitism. During the Weimar Republic, the C.V. published first a monthly and then a weekly newspaper that it distributed both to its members as well as to German organizations and prominent individuals. Both the first newspaper *Im deutschen Reich* and its successor *C.V.-Zeitung* acted as official arms of the C.V. and published articles aimed at keeping its members and supporters informed of pressing matters, as well as to prepare them to confront issues in their own communities.¹⁴ The tone of its anti-Zionist articles was in most cases relatively mild; in criticizing Zionist positions from a more detached perspective, the C.V. sought to be a voice of reason that would appeal to its supporters and respond evenly to its critics. Despite the moderate tone, however, these articles directly attacked the ZVfD and its politics while systematically deconstructing and refuting Zionist propaganda that appeared both in speeches and in the ZVfD's newspaper the *Jüdische Rundschau*.¹⁵ In doing so, the C.V. aimed to project a strong but not overly polemical front against Zionism, and in doing so to educate its readers on the connections between Zionism and antisemitism while also building a more well-informed and engaged readership.

Through its own publishing company, the 'Philo-Verlag', the C.V. released numerous pamphlets and books that addressed and refuted antisemitic stereotypes through a discussion of their social and cultural foundations. While copies of these books were

¹³ Hauptversammlung des Centralvereins, in: *Im deutschen Reich* 25 (1919), 6, June 1919. All translations by the author.

¹⁴ Brodnitz, Julius: Auf neuen Wegen zu alten Zielen, in: *C.V.-Zeitung* 1 (1922), May 4, 1922.

¹⁵ In August 1928, for example, the Centralverein published a four-page article responding to recent articles published in the *Jüdische Rundschau* that made claims about the relationship between the C.V. and Zionism. Written by the C.V. president Ludwig Holländer, the article "Saturiertheit und Revolution: Zur Frage: Centralverein und Zionismus" deconstructs the claims made in the *Jüdische Rundschau* and provides a series of counter-arguments that both supported and reinforced its own position. Holländer, Ludwig: Saturiertheit und Revolution, in: *C.V.-Zeitung* 7 (1928), August 10, 1928.

generally issued to all the local C.V. branches, they were also primarily targeted at Christian organizations, groups, and prominent individuals in Germany in the hope of educating the larger public about antisemitism and the Jewish community.¹⁶ These books aimed “to give Jews a strong weapon in the fight for their honor, their rights, and their civil and cultural belonging to the German people and also to educate Germans on both Jewish and antisemitic concerns.”¹⁷ Since it allowed the C.V. to encourage positive connections to Jewishness and Germanness while also providing German Jews with the tools to defend themselves in their daily lives, using its publications to educate both its members and the general public about Jewish rights and belonging in Germany rapidly became a central aspect of the C.V.’s defense against antisemitism.

Along with combating negative stereotypes, as the C.V.’s fight against antisemitism gradually became a more multifaceted process in the early 1920s, it increasingly focused on providing community lectures as a means for shaping both gentile and Jewish opinions on German Jews.¹⁸ As the C.V.’s institutional identity shifted from an ‘Abwehrverein’ to a ‘Gesinnungsverein’, its leadership expressed their growing conviction that legal defense was constructive only if it were being done on behalf of a strong and united Jewish community.¹⁹ These educational and defense lectures were a significant part of the C.V.’s plan for preparing its members to engage in debates both with Christian Germans and with Zionists, and were therefore an inherent aspect of the C.V.’s larger fight against both.

While continuing to provide legal defense against antisemitism, the C.V.’s regional and local offices provided tailored educational programming for both Jews and Christians with the goal of encouraging C.V. members to develop a positive connection to their Jewishness and to strengthen communities against both Zionism and antisemitism.²⁰ In addressing and disputing any challenge to the safety and success of Jewish life in Germany, the C.V.’s lectures were structured around a similar framework to that of its publications. These educational and public relations initiatives served a dual purpose of preparing the C.V. and its members to engage in debates on various topics with non-Jews and with Zionists.²¹ The C.V. organized its communal outreach around lectures with topics such as “The Jewish Question,” “Germanness and Jewishness,” or “Antisemitism and Christianity,” with leading figures from the Berlin central office traveling to local communities to give speeches and lead the resulting discussions and debates.²² Though attendance and the level of discussion varied greatly according to the community, C.V. leadership hoped that they would lead to a better understanding of the issues facing the Jewish community and strengthen ties to Jewishness and Germanness.

¹⁶ One such book is Bruno Weil’s *Die jüdische Internationale*, which was published in 1924 in reaction to a rise in accusations of Jewish internationalism and a world-wide conspiracy to address these various claims directly. Weil, Bruno: *Die jüdische Internationale*, Berlin 1924.

¹⁷ Stern, Heinemann: *Angriff und Abwehr. Ein Handbuch zur Judenfrage*, Berlin 1924, p. 4.

¹⁸ Holländer, Ludwig: *Die sozialen Voraussetzungen der antisemitischen Bewegung in Deutschland*, in: *Im deutschen Reich* 13 (1907), 10, p. 28.

¹⁹ Brodnitz, Friedrich; Cohn, Kurt and Tietz, Ludwig: *Der Central-Verein der Zukunft. Eine Denkschrift zur Hauptversammlung 1928 des Central-Vereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens E.V.*, Berlin 1928, pp. 15-16.

²⁰ WL MF Doc. 55/34, Doc. 1478, “Frauenarbeit zur Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus,” 1931.

²¹ Holländer, Ludwig: *Deutsch-jüdische Probleme der Gegenwart. Eine Auseinandersetzung über die Grundfragen des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens e.V.*, Berlin 1929, p. 32.

²² WL MF Doc. 55/12, Doc. 383, *Lecture Announcement*, April 4, 1924.

Community engagement was therefore not only aimed at defending against anti-semitism, but also toward education and providing an academic but still ‘volks-tümlich’ analysis of each specific problem.²³

While these lectures often took place as part of the C.V.’s local and regional yearly programming, it also organized special defense meetings when local communities became concerned about the ZVfD’s presence or antisemitic agitation in their towns.²⁴ Similarly structured to its educational lectures, these defense evenings centered around a lecture given by a representative from the C.V.’s Berlin central office whose talk was then followed by discussion with the audience. The discussions were a valuable opportunity to engage directly with C.V. opponents and their counter arguments in the hope of demonstrating that “attacking Jews is actually a cultural disgrace [Kulturschande].”²⁵ In framing antisemitic rhetoric not only as anti-Jewish but as decidedly anti-German as well, the C.V. emphasized Jewishness as an inherent part of German culture and as such denounced antisemites as the ones who had no place in German society.

Though not directly associated with German Jewry itself, accusations from antisemites in Germany during the early 1920s continued to be made that Jews only pretended to be loyal to the countries in which they live in order to receive the benefits of the state while also receiving those of their own Jewish ‘Sonderstaat’.²⁶ Therefore, while the C.V.’s executive board wanted to support select Jewish charity efforts in Palestine such as the ‘Pro-Palästina Komitee’ – an organization that aimed to gain both government and private support for Zionist ‘Aufbauarbeit’ in Palestine – it was increasingly reluctant to do so openly in the fear that it could lead its opponents to believe the C.V. condoned Jewish nationalism.²⁷ The question of when and how to engage with the Zionists was therefore one that the C.V. frequently addressed in its local and regional meetings. This was the case when, in a 1924 report to the Berlin central office on an executive board meeting in Breslau, Dr. Arthur Nussbaum expressed his belief that the C.V. needed to adjust the way in which it tried to combat growing Zionist influence. Though he emphatically asserted his longstanding opposition to Zionism, Nussbaum nevertheless acknowledged that Zionism itself was also a reaction to antisemitism and that its values were to a certain degree honorable as well.²⁸ It was for this reason that he believed that while the C.V. should continue to oppose Zionist propaganda and politics, it should also do so in a more moderate manner in order to convince those who might support Zionism to join the C.V. instead.

²³ WL MF Doc. 55/45, Doc. 1771, Letter, September 4, 1931.

²⁴ WL MF Doc. 55/20, Doc. 786, Letter, January 19, 1922.

²⁵ WL MF Doc. 55/29, Doc. 1269, Paul Rieger, “Vom Heimatrecht der deutschen Juden,” February 24, 1922.

²⁶ Weil, *Die jüdische Internationale*, p. 17. In an article published in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, publisher and anti-Semite Theodor Fritsch argued that it was clear that German Jews viewed themselves as a nation in their own right and as a separate state within a state. Since Germans would never tolerate a different national group like the English or the Japanese as citizens, Fritsch therefore argued that Germans were obligated to reject the German Jews as well. This was, as the C.V. argued in their response, perfect evidence for just how dangerous Zionism was for the safety and well-being of German Jews. See: *Zionismus und Antisemitismus*, in: *Im deutschen Reich* 25 (1919), 7-8, pp. 340–341.

²⁷ WL 456/110, Hauptgeschäftsstelle des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, “Material zur Frage der Jewish Agency,” (1929), 19. For more on the Pro-Palästina Komitee see: Walk, Joseph: *Das Deutsche Komitee Pro Palästina 1926–1933*, *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* 52 (1976), pp. 162–93.

²⁸ WL MF Doc. 55/41, Doc. 1710, Meeting Report, August 6, 1924.

The Question of Positive Work in Palestine

Despite the anti-Zionist nature of much of both the C.V.'s programming in its local and regional chapters and its publications, the C.V. central office in Berlin nevertheless retained an often conflicting and conditional position to the Zionist project in Palestine. This support of what Ludwig Holländer called the 'positive work' in Palestine was present in C.V. policies to varying degrees throughout the Weimar period, particularly regarding the support of social and cultural work targeted at providing Eastern European Jews with a new home in Palestine.²⁹ C.V. leadership objected to the means by which Zionists were trying to create this new homeland to which the C.V. also objected, largely because they saw it as threatening the stability and safety of Jewish life in the diaspora. Despite this critique, the C.V. did not regard its critical attitude towards the Zionist project in Palestine as preventing the Yishuv's further development. Instead, C.V. leadership under Holländer argued that even a critique of Zionist work in Palestine could contribute to its further success if the critique itself was based on practical considerations and the desire to work for what was best for the entirety of the German and Jewish communities.³⁰

By the mid-1920s, the C.V.'s executive board viewed the work being done for the Jewish community in the Yishuv as beneficial enough for the Jewish community as a whole that it once again reassessed its position towards Zionism. In 1926, the C.V. executive released another official resolution on the Zionist project, which, for the first time since 1919, focused less at the Zionist movement in Germany and far more at the C.V.'s relationship to the growing 'Aufbauarbeit' in Palestine.³¹ This resolution stated that if the Zionist project in Palestine were based only on providing social relief to Eastern European immigrants, then the C.V. would not object. It was the fact that both the Jewish and gentile communities viewed the work in Palestine as a central aspect of the Jewish national project that prevented the C.V. from offering public support.³² The following year, the C.V. released another resolution again emphasizing highly conditional terms of support for the Zionist project, this time in connection with the re-establishment of the above-mentioned 'Pro-Palästina Komitee'. These two resolutions allowed the C.V. leadership to support limited and conditional involvement in certain Zionist projects provided their focus remained on social work and not on the politics of Jewish nationalism. Therefore, while the C.V. was increasingly willing to support certain Jewish charity efforts in Palestine, this support was predicated on the condition that the organization in question could not be interpreted by C.V. opponents as condoning Jewish particularism or disloyalty to Germany.

²⁹ Holländer, Ludwig: Innerjüdische Befriedung. Aussprache mit dem Gegner, in: C.V. Zeitung 7 (1928), July 6, 1928, p. 27.

³⁰ The C.V. therefore rejected claims that its lack of support for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem or other aspects of building up the Yishuv in Palestine detracted in any way from the Zionist project's viability or success. Instead, its leadership pointed to Vladimir Jabotinsky, who, though the leader of the growing Revisionist Zionist movement, also harshly criticized the creation of a Jewish university, stating that even a critique of this work can contribute to its further success if it came from a place of practical consideration and the desire to work for what was best for the entirety of the German and Jewish communities. See: Holländer, Innerjüdische Befriedung, 1928.

³¹ Though it was not released until 1926, the text of the resolution had already been drafted and approved five years prior in 1921. Barkai, "Wehr Dich!", p. 136.

³² WL 456/110, Hauptgeschäftsstelle des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, "Material zur Frage der Jewish Agency," (1929), p. 19.

Despite its rejection of Zionism and its fight against it in both its educational programming and in the press, the C.V. continued to support causes that were aimed at strengthening the Jewish community even when they overlapped with Jewish national projects in Palestine, such as the 'Pro-Palästina Komitee', Keren Hayesod, and the Jewish Agency.³³ It was in regards to Keren Hayesod that the C.V.'s conditional support of Zionism was most clearly reflected. Established in Germany in 1922 as the primary fundraising organ for Jewish development projects in the Yishuv following a split from the London-based organization of the same name, Keren Hayesod in Germany functioned as a neutral organization run by Zionists.³⁴ In 1926, the question arose as to whether the C.V. should support Keren Hayesod, remain neutral towards it, or actively work against it. It was not that the majority of the C.V.'s executive committee was against Keren Hayesod's work in Palestine as such, but rather that it did not want to openly support the political values with which Keren Hayesod was associated.³⁵ Since it was led by members of the Zionist movement, many C.V. members considered Keren Hayesod as complicit in rejecting Jewish rootedness in Germany by promoting Jewish nationalism in the Diaspora.³⁶ As such, C.V. leadership, particularly those in its local branches, were reluctant to accept the C.V. lending support to Keren Hayesod. That this rootedness was the point at which the relationship between the C.V.'s German-Jewish and the Zionists Jewish-nationalist policies irreconcilably diverged is consistent with other points at which the C.V. was forced to address why it rejected German Zionism.

Though the majority of C.V. members remained against Keren Hayesod well into the 1930s, leading members of the C.V. executive were nevertheless also members of Keren Hayesod.³⁷ In 1926 for example, Leo Baeck, Hermann Cohn, and Felix Goldmann, who were all members of the C.V.'s executive committee at the time, were also members of Keren Hayesod as well.³⁸ This discrepancy between the attitude of the C.V. executive and that of many of its members demonstrates the extent to which the C.V.'s public position toward the Zionist project differed from its internal actions. Part of this difference was due to a generational shift within C.V. leadership that began in the years 1923/24. This younger generation, many of whom had roots in the Jewish youth movements, was less supportive of the C.V.'s strict emphasis on Germanness and instead was more likely to support socialist causes such as those of the Zionist movement in Palestine.³⁹ Provided the Zionist organization was based outside Germany and dedicated to building up the

³³ Just as the C.V. was willing to cooperate in certain Zionist affiliated organizations, the ZVfD and the ZO both openly called for including non-Zionists within these organizations as well. Reinharz, *Dokumente*, 1981, p. 300, pp. 337-8, p. 416, p. 429.

³⁴ This perceived neutrality and its success in encouraging economic growth in Palestine made Keren Hayesod into one of the most threatening Zionist-led organization in Germany during the Weimar Republic. For more on Keren Hayesod's development and the relationship between the C.V., Keren Hayesod, and the Zionist movement in Germany during this period, see: Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe*, 1996, pp. 88-105.

³⁵ In a letter to Berlin executive board member Jakob Marx, Alfred Wiener stated that while he was not necessarily a *Kampfhahn* in regards to the Zionists, he nevertheless viewed rejecting Keren Hayesod as unavoidable provided that doing so did not lead to any petty fighting with the Zionists. WL MF Doc. 55/08, Doc. 175, Letter, February 25, 1926.

³⁶ WL MF Doc. 55/08, Doc. 175, Letter, March 1, 1926.

³⁷ Barkai, "Wehr Dich!", 2002, p. 136.

³⁸ Foerder, *Die Stellung des Centralvereins zu den innerjüdischen Fragen*, 1927, p. 24.

³⁹ Paucker, Arnold: *Der jüdische Abwehrkampf gegen Antisemitismus und Nationalsozialismus in den letzten Jahren der Weimarer Republik*, Hamburg 1968, p. 38. The generational shift in C.V. leadership during the mid-1920s included leading figures such as Eva and Hans Reichmann, Ludwig Tietz, and Alfred Hirschberg, among others. For a further discussion of generational shifts within C.V. leadership, see: Barkai, "Wehr Dich!", 2002, pp. 150-170.

land of Palestine without an emphasis on Jewish nationalism, then the C.V. was willing to either tacitly support it, or at least remain neutral toward it. This conditional neutrality allowed for increased interaction between C.V. members and organizations such as the above-mentioned Keren Hayesod and Pro-Palästina Komitee, as well as with the Jewish Agency for Palestine, but not with the ZVfD.⁴⁰ Despite this limited cooperation with Keren Hayesod, the C.V. nevertheless continued to expand its fight against Zionism in Germany in an attempt to counteract rising antisemitism in German politics.

The Shift from anti-Zionism to a-Zionism

In 1928, the C.V. released what would come to be called the 'Mecklenburg resolution', in which it stated its decision to increase its work in supporting a synthesis of Germanness and Jewishness and to combat Zionist propaganda at a more intensive pace. This resolution was based on growing perceptions of the danger of Zionist propaganda for Jewish life in Germany. As the pace of Zionist work in Palestine increased, the assumption that all German Jews not only supported the Zionist project, but were therefore not truly Germans was growing among non-Jewish Germans.⁴¹ While the 1926 and 1927 resolutions focused on the Zionist movement abroad, the severe tone of the 1928 'Mecklenburg Resolution' was a reaction to recent political and social developments in Germany, such as increasing support for antisemitic political parties and the NSDAP. While the C.V. was more open to supporting Jewish social work in Palestine by 1928, the C.V. and its executive still viewed the ZVfD's work in Germany and its possible negative effect on the continued safety of German-Jewish communities as a clear threat to integration.

Finding a balance between fighting antisemitism through Zionism and the desire to maintain the outward image of Jewish solidarity was particularly difficult during the elections of the later Weimar years. Less than two weeks before the Reichstag elections in May of 1928, both the antisemitic 'völkisch' parties and the Zionists held assemblies in Duisburg to mobilize their supporters. Though the C.V.'s official position called for fighting both movements, the C.V. chapter in Duisburg nevertheless sent out a notice to its members asking them to prioritize the fight against the antisemitic parties and their assemblies taking place in Duisburg over those being held by the Zionists.⁴² By putting their fight against Zionism on hold until after the election, the local Duisburg chapter represented the larger shift in C.V. priorities from fighting Zionism and antisemitism to focusing almost exclusively on combating antisemitism and racial policy. Though not renouncing its fight against Zionism completely, in putting this fight on hold until after the election, the C.V. returned, if only briefly, to its more tolerant wartime attitude towards Zionism.

⁴⁰ Barkai, "Wehr Dich!", 2002, p. 232. The Jewish Agency was established in 1922 as the official Jewish representative body in the British Mandate. Between 1923-29 negotiations took place between Zionists and non-Zionists resulted in an expanded Jewish Agency run by both Zionists and non-Zionists. Reinharz, Dokumente, 1981, pp. 420-421.

⁴¹ WL 456/110, Hauptgeschäftsstelle des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, "Material zur Frage der Jewish Agency," (1929).

⁴² WL MF Doc. 55/39, Doc. 1606, Letter, May 7, 1928.

Even when the Zionists and the C.V. did come together for a common defense against antisemitism, conflict between the two nevertheless remained. Following Paul von Hindenburg's decision to dissolve the Reichstag and call for new elections in July 1930, the ZVfD agreed to form a joint committee to provide the Jewish community with political and financial support during the two months leading up to the September elections.⁴³ The committee disbanded immediately after the elections due to the inability of the two organizations to work together without accusing the other of trying to use the committee for their own interests. While this committee was short-lived and contested, it nevertheless demonstrated the extent to which both the C.V. and the ZVfD prioritized the fight against antisemitism and what they perceived to be best for the Jewish community over other internal political considerations. In an effort to present unified Jewish resistance against National Socialism, this reluctant and often antagonistic cooperation and the suspension of open condemnation of Zionism came to characterize the C.V.'s position during the last years of the Weimar Republic

As the NSDAP gained political influence in the early 1930s, the nature of the relationship between the C.V. and the Zionists changed as well. As the Nazis gained power, the C.V.'s anti-Zionist rhetoric became milder in an attempt to demonstrate Jewish solidarity, provide a more concerted effort against antisemitism, and equip its members with tools to resist persecution.⁴⁴ Even before the Nazis rose to power in 1933, the C.V. began to recognize the NSDAP as the largest threat facing the Jewish community in Germany and in doing so softened its stance toward the German Zionist movement. This led the local chapter 'Grenzmark' to claim that by 1932 they and their members no longer considered themselves to be anti-Zionist as had previously been the case, but instead identified themselves and their chapter as purely a-Zionist.⁴⁵ This was not due to a newfound sympathy for the Zionist movement or its values, but rather the fact that this local chapter viewed the continued fight against Zionism as detracting from the far more important fight against Nazism.⁴⁶ While this is only one particular instance, the shift from anti-Zionist to a-Zionist that the 'Grenzmark' chapter underwent in the last year of the Weimar Republic was representative of a larger institutional shift within the C.V. during this period as well.

The rise of the NSDAP in the last years of the Weimar Republic therefore in some ways both tempered and reinforced the C.V.'s position toward Zionism and helped form the C.V. into a more reactive and flexible organization. After the Nazi rise to power in January 1933, the C.V. was forced to shift its focus to reinforcing Jewish communal unity and working together with the German Zionist movement towards this goal.⁴⁷ Providing educational lectures and building resilience against antisemitism became part of a larger programming shift aimed at strengthening Jewish communal identity and belonging in the face of Nazi persecution – a process that began with the C.V.'s cultural programming and defense against antisemitism and Zionism during the Weimar Republic. The ways in

⁴³ The committee also included representatives from the Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten and the Berlin Jewish community. See: Paucker, *Abwehrkampf*, 1968, p. 43.

⁴⁴ WL MF Doc 55/37, Doc. 1530, Letter, December 14, 1931.

⁴⁵ WL MF Doc 55/37, Doc. 1536, Report, July 24, 1932.

⁴⁶ WL MF Doc 55/37, Doc. 1536, Report, July 24, 1932.

⁴⁷ WL MF Doc 55/22, Doc. 882, Letter, February 6, 1936.

which the C.V. used Zionism to combat antisemitism during the Weimar Republic and the limits of this fight within the Jewish community itself therefore demonstrate the fluidity of the C.V.'s institutional identity. In doing so, it also provides a larger framework for understanding how C.V. policy was shaped and determined by the shifting political and social frameworks in Germany both during the Weimar Republic and during other periods in its history as well.

Citation Sarah R. Johnson: *From Repudiation to Rapprochement: The 'Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens' and its relationship with Zionism in the Weimar Republic*, in: *Medaon – Magazin für jüdisches Leben in Forschung und Bildung*, 13 (2019), 25, S. 1–11, online unter http://www.medaon.de/pdf/medaon_25_johnson.pdf [dd.mm.yyyy].

About the author Johnson, Sarah R., 1990, PhD Student at the University of California, Los Angeles. Johnson's research focuses on modern German-Jewish institutional and cultural history, the history of Zionism, and the interwar period in Germany. Her dissertation examines the C.V.'s institutional history from its establishment in 1893 to its forced dissolution in 1938 within the shifting frameworks of institutional culture during the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, and Nazi Germany.