The arrival in Vienna of over one hundred thousand Jewish refugees fleeing the Russian army's advance into Galicia and Bukovina in the first months of World War I had a profound impact on Viennese Jewry. The refugees became a constant and pervasive theme of wartime Jewish debate in Vienna, and their influence was felt in many areas of communal life—political, cultural, economic, and religious. Moreover, their very visible presence in the city served to highlight the always prominent "Jewish Question" in Vienna for Jews and non-Jews alike, precipitating an eruption of virulent anti-Semitism that initially targeted the refugees but was later directed at Viennese Jews in general. (Indeed, one Jewish newspaper commented in September 1917 that anti-Semitism had become a "national sport.") As the welfare problem posed by the refugees developed into a highly charged issue in Viennese politics, welfare work also became an important arena of Jewish politics. The rise to prominence of the Jewish nationalists in the welfare effort played a central role in their striking wartime achievements in both the general and Jewish political spheres. The refugees and the politics of welfare were thus vital elements in the changing contours of Viennese Jewish politics during the war and its immediate aftermath. More concretely, they were part of a shift in the political culture of Viennese Jewry—in broad terms, the increasing salience and temporary ascendancy of ideologies of nationalism and ethnic self-determination—that was part, in turn, of similar developments in minority and ethnic politics (sometimes called "ethnopolitics") in wartime east central Europe.

Center for Austrian Studies
The author is Clore Fellow in Modern Jewish History at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 45 St. Giles', Oxford, OX1 3LP, and Hebrew Centre Lecturer in Jewish History, University of Oxford.

1. Dr. Bloch's Österreichische Wochenschrift (hereafter Bloch's Wochenschrift), Sept. 14, 1917, 582.
2. On this shift in political culture, see Geoff Eley, "Remapping the Nation: War, Revolutionary
Galicia Comes to Vienna

By the middle of September 1914 the Russian offensive on the eastern front led to the occupation of nearly all of eastern Galicia and part of Bukovina; by mid-November Russian forces were closing in on the west Galician capital Cracow. In these areas of massive and concentrated Jewish settlement, the Russian military installed a regime characterized by systematic anti-Jewish measures, including pogroms, hostage taking, and deportations.\(^3\) Evidently well aware of the dangers posed by Russian military occupation, Jews responded to news of the Russian advance into eastern Galicia by mass flight, with perhaps as many as 400,000 making for the monarchy’s western provinces or Hungary.\(^4\) The speed of the Russian campaign left little time for preparation. The vast majority simply abandoned their homes and property, fleeing by foot or in crowded trains and cattle wagons. As the Russians quickly moved west, Vienna became the preferred destination of many refugees, who hoped to find help there from relatives or friends among the city’s large Galician Jewish community, which made up a sizable component of Vienna’s Jewish population of approximately 185,000 in 1914.\(^5\)

---


The refugees began to arrive in late August, with a massive influx during the first two weeks of September; by mid-September, Jewish sources estimated that the number of Jewish refugees was between 50,000 and 70,000. Incorporating only those registered with the police and receiving welfare assistance, government statistics lagged behind actual numbers, as many avoided registration. Nonetheless, the official tally of welfare recipients rose to nearly 80,000 by the end of the first week of December. The sheer volume and speed of the influx overwhelmed any efforts to accurately keep track of arrivals. A government report of October 1915 put the high point of “destitute” refugees at 125,000 early in that year, but at least 50,000 to 60,000 who did not qualify as destitute may be added to this. Numbers remained at this level until July 1915 when, in the wake of the Austrian reconquest of much of Galicia in the preceding two months, the government instituted a program of refugee repatriation.

While overall responsibility for dealing with the refugees was the province of the Interior Ministry, day-to-day administration devolved upon local authorities. In rural areas of Austria and the Czech lands the burden was shared with welfare organizations; in the larger towns and cities the police took charge. For the Austrian authorities the refugee issue had an ideological dimension over and above the practical task of coordinating a huge relief effort. It offered the government an opportunity to showcase the unity of the monarchy’s peoples in the war effort, thereby counteracting, it was hoped, centrifugal nationalist tendencies. Official pronouncements and publications about the refugees emphasized the Gesamtösterreich idea and cooperation between the nationalities. Success in providing aid for the refugees, it was maintained, was due to a “deep and intuitive understanding of the community of fate that binds together all of the monarchy’s peoples.” The welfare effort was presented as a project that could promote the stability of the state. The many vocational and retraining courses offered to the Galician refugees, for example, would contribute after the war to the economic and cultural development of that notoriously “backward” region of the monarchy. Of more immediate practical use was the refugees’ role as a large and loyal substitute workforce in munitions and supply factories and in agriculture.

---

6For estimates, see Bloch’s Wochenschrift, Sept. 18, 1914, 649; Nov. 6, 1914, 765; Nov. 27, 1914, 823. See also Beatrix Hoffmann-Holter, “Abreisendmachung”. Jüdische Kriegsfüchlinge in Wien 1914 bis 1923 (Vienna, 1995), 35–38. For the government’s figures, see Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 6, 29. By the end of June 1915, the Austrians had succeeded in recapturing all of western Galicia and most of eastern Galicia; see Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg, vol. 2 (Vienna, 1931), 315–504; and Stone, Eastern Front, 136ff.

7On the administrative distribution of labor, see Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 5. The quotation is from ibid., 9. For further examples, see Monatschrift der Österreichisch-Israelitisch Union (hereafter Monatschrift der Union) 27 (May–June 1915); 4; Bloch’s Wochenschrift, Apr. 23, 1915, 317–18; Neue Freie Presse, Dec. 15, 1915 (A.M.), 13; and Joseph Redlich, Austrian War Government (New Haven, 1929), chap. 4.

8See Friedrich von Wiser, Staatliche Kulturarbeit für Flüchtlinge (Vienna, 1916); Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 16, 20, 22; and Bloch’s Wochenschrift, Sept. 30, 1916, 436–37. Courses as varied as embroidery, shoemaking, horticulture, plumbing, and poultry farming were available for the refugees.
By far the greatest concentration of refugees was in the capital. In early September 1914 a central organization (Zentralstelle) was formed to coordinate refugee care in the city, with Rudolf Schwarz-Hiller, a Vienna-born lawyer and liberal Gemeinderat (municipal council) member since 1910, as its director. The offices of the Zentralstelle in the heavily Jewish-populated district of Leopoldstadt soon became the center of a vast welfare network, functioning as the primary point of contact between refugees and the state authorities. With some 80 percent of refugees availing themselves of its services, the Zentralstelle was supporting an estimated 125,000 people by early 1915. Funded by the Interior Ministry, the organization provided a comprehensive range of services, including advice and assistance upon arrival at Vienna’s railway stations, financial aid, subsidized food and accommodation, free medical care and legal assistance, child care, transport, clothing, an employment bureau, occupational courses, cultural and recreational activities, and, eventually, free repatriation. From fourteen departments with 140 mostly voluntary staff in early November 1914, it grew to sixty-eight departments with 500 employees by early 1917.

Although initially overwhelmed by the magnitude and speed of the mass flight, the authorities attempted to exercise a degree of control over its direction. Military needs were paramount; railroads were needed for troop transport, for example. To assist in the coordination of the welfare effort, the government appealed to private, voluntary organizations. Concerned about Vienna’s capacity to absorb such an influx, the Interior Ministry turned in early September 1914 to the Israelitische Allianz zu Wien for help in setting up a number of camps in Moravia to house refugees. While eager to do its part in what it called “patriotic aid,” the Allianz—a liberal, culturally Germanophile (although nominally nonpolitical and determinedly supranational) organization devoted to the protection of Jewish rights—was wary of a potential blurring of the distinction between government and private welfare. Moreover, ever sensitive to possible accusations of parochialism, the Allianz was initially determined to maintain the fiction of nondenominational help, preferring a joint venture with the authorities on both practical and ideological grounds. In response to the ministry’s request, the Allianz—while declining to publicly assume responsibility and thus set a precedent


10See Zentralstelle der Fürsorge für Flüchtlinge (Vienna, 1917); Die Gemeinde-Verwaltung der Stadt Wien vom 1. Jänner 1914 bis 30. Juni 1919 (Vienna, 1923), 167–68; and Bloch’s Wochenschrift, Nov. 6, 1914, 765; Jan. 1, 1916, 17–19. For the less numerous refugees from the professional and middle classes, two smaller committees were created with government backing in late September. The Wiener Hilfskomitee, headed by the Galician politician and academic Leon von Bilinski, handled some 20 percent of the refugees, while the Ukrainische Hilfskomitee supported approximately 1,500 refugees; see Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 6; and Reichspost, Sept. 29, 1915 (A.M.), 8–9.

for openly confessionally based relief—provided many of the basic provi-
sions for the hastily erected camps in Moravia and undertook a series of
intensive fund-raising drives among its members.  

Jewish community leaders and welfare bodies voiced similar concerns,
arguing that refugee welfare was primarily the government’s responsibility
and that Jewish groups should avoid shouldering too much of the burden,
as this would allow or encourage the government to reduce its role. Further,
the task was in any case too enormous for Jewish organizations to handle.  

But it was precisely this enormity that overwhelmed the government and
led it to request assistance, as only a cooperative effort could begin to cope
with the problem. While throughout the war preferring a minimum of pub-
licity, the Allianz relaxed its strictures when faced with the government’s use
of nationality as a convenient organizing principle in relief work. The refugee
camps were organized along national lines, as were the government’s wel-
fare statistics, which categorized the refugees according to nationality—Ger-
mans, Poles, Ruthenians, Rumanians, Slovenes, Croats, Italians, and Jews—
despite the fact that the Jews did not enjoy legal status as one of the
monarchy’s constitutionally recognized nations.  

It was not long before protests were heard about the refugee influx into
Vienna. In early September 1914 Christian Social Mayor Richard Weiskirchner
asked the Interior Ministry to divert the flow of refugees from the capital,
claiming that they posed a threat to public hygiene. Gemeinderat repre-
sentatives complained in early October to Prime Minister Stürghkh that the city
was “overfull” and requested a halt to further refugee admission. In mid-
October leading Christian Social activist Leopold Steiner called for imme-
diate forced repatriation of those already in the city; they were not only a
public health risk, he maintained, but also a drain on already scarce provi-
sions.  

The categorization of Jews as a nationality did not go unnoticed; see Jüdische Zeitung, Aug.
10, 1917, 3. For the government’s employment of national categories in its statistics, see Staatliche
Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 29ff.; and Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv,
Ministerium des Innern (hereafter AVA/Mdl), no. 59736/15, 19, and no. 56166/16, 19. On the
sometimes ambiguous status of the Jews in the Habsburg empire, see Gerald Stourzh, “Galten

12 The Viennese Allianz was formed in 1873 in emulation of the French Alliance Israélite Uni-
75; and N. M. Gelber, “Die Wiener Israelitische Allianz,” Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts 3 (1960):
190–203. On the Allianz attitude to welfare and its role in provisioning the camps, see Bericht
der Israelitischen Allianz zu Wien (hereafter BIAW), 1914, no. 42: 7–9; 1915, no. 43: 8. The refugee
welfare bodies created by the government were nominally nonconfessional; see, for example,
Bloch’s Wochenschrift, Apr. 20, 1917, 238. On the government’s appeal to private welfare groups,
see Redlich, Austrian War Government, 104–6.

13 See, for example, Protokolle der Plenar-Sitzung, Dec. 30, 1914, CAHJP, AW, 71/15; Bloch’s
Wochenschrift, Sept. 4, 1914, 609–10; and Zweiimonats-Bericht für die Mitglieder der österreichisch-
israelitischen Humanitätsvereine “B’nai B’rith” (hereafter ZBB) 17 (1914): 183.

14 See Die Tätigkeit der Wiener Gemeindeverwaltung in der Obmänner-Konferenz während des Welt-
initially in Moravia and later in other areas of Austria and the Czech lands. While Jewish refugees were sent to Moravia, Italians, Ruthenians, and Poles were sent to camps in Lower Austria, Carinthia, and Bohemia, respectively. In early December 1914 the ministry decreed that no further refugees would be admitted to Vienna; they would instead be housed in the camps and in Moravian and Bohemian towns and villages. Nonetheless, at least some of those with means to support themselves were able to enter the city and remain. In the communities that took in the refugees, the government worked in close cooperation with the Allianz to set up local welfare committees—often identical with the local Kultusgemeinden (government-sanctioned Jewish representative bodies)—which enjoyed quasi-official status as intermediaries between the refugees and the authorities.

The camps proved to be an unsatisfactory solution to the problem of refugee accommodation, at no point holding more than 20 percent of all refugees. Articles in the Jewish press regularly complained of overcrowding, poor hygiene, and insensitivity to the refugees’ social and religious needs (such as maintaining kosher kitchens), while Jewish groups lobbied the Interior Ministry to improve conditions. Until November 1914 it was mostly destitute east Galicians who were sent to the camps; subsequently, the government opted—after consultation with the Allianz—to disperse the many west Galician and Bukovinian arrivals among communities in Moravia and Bohemia. Both government and Jewish organizations came to view the camps as inadequate. A further refugee influx of late summer 1916 saw the overwhelming majority distributed among towns and villages in the Czech lands and in western Austria and Hungary.

In early July 1915, following the Austrian reconquest of most of Galicia, the government instituted a program of refugee repatriation. By the beginning of November it was estimated that some 250,000 refugees had returned home, including 70,000 from Vienna. The first statistical survey of the refugees was published by the Interior Ministry in late 1915. Of 390,000 refugees

---


On refugee distribution, see Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 30ff. For the order to close Vienna to refugees, see Gemeinde-Verwaltung der Stadt Wien, 168. On the less than hermetic nature of the closure, see Hoffmann-Holter, "Abreisendmachung," 40–41. On government cooperation with the Allianz in the provinces, see BIAW, 1914, 15; and Wiser, Staatliche Kulturarbeit, 2–3.

On Jewish efforts to bring these problems to the government's attention and on conditions in the camps, see BIAW, 1914, 8–10; Judische Zeitung, Oct. 30, 1914, 1–2; Block's Wochenschrift, Dec. 4, 1914, 846–47; July 30, 1915, 582–83; and Neue National-Zeitung, Oct. 16, 1914, 2; Nov. 27, 1914, 2.

Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 10–13; BIAW, 1914, 15; 1915, 9; 1916, no. 44: 12–15; 1917, no. 45: 10. From a peak of over 12,000 in April 1915, Jewish numbers in the camps fell to under 6,000 by June 1917. Of a total camp population of 73,000 in October 1915, some 10,500 were Jewish; see Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 30, 44, 46; and BIAW, 1914, 17–19; 1917, 12.

in the Austrian half of the monarchy (that is, excluding Hungary), 157,000 (approximately 40 percent) were Jews. In Vienna, the 77,000 Jewish refugees represented some 55 percent of the 137,000 refugees in the city. Thus, half of all Jewish refugees were concentrated in the capital.20

Continuing repatriation reduced the number in Vienna to 40,000 to 50,000 by June 1916, when a Russian offensive on the eastern front triggered a new wave of approximately 200,000 refugees.21 Few, however, were admitted into Vienna, and any new arrivals were balanced by a resumption of repatriation; some 12,000 returned to Galicia in the latter part of the year. By the end of 1916, an estimated 40,000 Jewish refugees remained in the capital.22

Vienna was not the only of the monarchy’s major cities to receive refugees, although it was host to by far the largest number. By April 1915 the Allianz estimated that 30,000 Jewish refugees were in the Hungarian half of the monarchy, of whom some 20,000 were in Budapest (the Hungarian government put the figure at 12,000 to 13,000 in the capital). The Austrian government and local Jewish groups provided support (the refugees were Austrian citizens), grudgingly assisted by the Hungarian authorities, who were intent from the outset on moving as many Galicians as possible through Hungarian territory into Austria, if necessary in sealed trains. Despite constant harassment and repeated expulsions, refugees continued to arrive and remain in Budapest during the course of the war. By the end of 1916, the Allianz estimated that there were 20,000 Jewish refugees in the provinces and the capital, while in September 1917 the Hungarian Interior Minister cited a figure of 25,000.23 Somewhat fewer found their way to Prague. From a peak of some 15,000 in early 1915, numbers fell to 5,000 by mid-1916 and by early 1918 most had reportedly left.24

20See Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 29ff. As government statistics were estimates, numbers are rounded to the nearest five hundred. In Bohemia, 57,000 Jews constituted 60 percent of 97,000 refugees, while in Moravia 18,500 Jewish refugees made up 30 percent of the 57,500 total.

21BIAW, 1916, 10, 16. The new refugees were described in the Allianz report as “mostly without means and unfit for work.” By the end of July, the Russians occupied nearly all of Bukovina and had made significant advances in eastern Galicia; see Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg, vol. 4 (Vienna, 1933), 359–664; and Stone, Eastern Front, chap. 11.

22Tätigkeit der Gemeindeverwaltung, 68; Hoffmann-Holter, “Abreisendmachung,” 60–71; and BIAW, 1916, 15. In July 1917 the Interior Ministry was supporting 423,500 refugees in the Austrian half of the empire; 177,000 (just over 40 percent) were Jewish, of whom some 41,000 were in Vienna; see AVA/Mdl, no. 46578/17, 19; and BIAW, 1917, 11–12. There were also 89,000 Ruthenians, 82,000 Italians, 37,500 Poles, 20,000 Slovenes, 9,000 Croats, and 7,000 ethnic Germans.


Refugee numbers in Vienna dwindled gradually. There was little incentive for the destitute to return to the devastated regions of east Galicia, while others had by now established themselves and were perhaps reluctant to return to an area that seemed increasingly likely to become part of a newly independent Polish state. By April 1918, 34,000 Jewish refugees (of a total 38,000) were still receiving government support. In early August the Zentralstelle reported that it was supporting 26,000 refugees, and by mid-September this had fallen to 20,600 as repatriation quickened. While the number of refugees receiving support remained at more or less this level until February 1919, thousands arrived in Vienna from Galicia in the wake of pogroms in November 1918 (and from Budapest in March 1919 after the Bela Kun regime took power). By January 1920 there were an estimated 24,000 refugees still in Vienna.

The Politics of Welfare

For Viennese Jewry, mounting a relief effort on such a large scale required an unprecedented mobilization of resources, yet the actual contours of the task were familiar. Aiding less fortunate east European coreligionists had always constituted an important part of the work of the Allianz and of B’nai B’rith (an influential philanthropic and educational society), and neither organization was free of the ambivalent attitudes common among acculturated western Jews toward the Ostjuden. To the Zionists, the Galician Jews were a potential reservoir of support rather than suppliants in need of cultural elevation. As Galicia came to Vienna in the war years, the welfare effort dominated the agenda of all Jewish groups until 1917 and became, in part at least, an arena of sharply contested political turf battles. The prominence of the Zionists in relief work contributed to their increased influence in both Jewish and Austrian government circles during the war. Welfare work thus

25See BIAW, 1917, 6; and ZBB 20 (1917): 163. On conditions in Galicia, see Sh. An-ski, Der yidisher khurbn fun poyln, galitsie, un bukovina, in his Gezamlte shriftn, vols. 4-6 (New York, 1922-24).
26For the April 1918 figure, see Kreppel, Juden und Judentum, 154. For the later figures, see Sitzung des Stadtrates, Aug. 8, 1918, Amtsblatt der Stadt Wien 27, no. 67 (Aug. 20, 1918); and Sitzung des Stadtrates, Sept. 12, 1918, ibid., no. 76 (Sept. 20, 1918).
27For various estimates of the number of refugees in Vienna in the immediate postwar period, see Rechter, “Neither East nor West,” 107-8.
played a significant role in wartime Viennese Jewish politics, in particular in the emergence of Jewish nationalism as a major political force.29

A marked degree of fragmentation was evident in the Jewish welfare effort from the outset, with separate relief drives launched at the same time by the Zionists, the Allianz, and B’nai B’rith. Immediately inundated by entreaties for assistance from individuals and organizations alike, the Vienna Kultusgemeinde proceeded on a case-by-case basis, shying away from any attempt either to undertake systematic relief or to assume a coordinating role in welfare work. The Kultusgemeinde leadership argued that, despite its own statutory obligation to provide welfare services for Viennese Jewry, it was the government’s duty to care for the refugees, given the magnitude and provenance of the task (the war was, after all, a state rather than a Jewish affair). This remained its attitude throughout. Although, as already noted, the Allianz, B’nai B’rith, and Zionist leaderships agreed in principle that the government was ultimately responsible for refugee welfare, all chose nevertheless to set up extensive welfare networks of their own.30

A wide array of services, often paralleling those of the Zentralstelle, was offered by the Jewish groups. Food and shelter, medical help, financial and legal aid, education and child care, representation before the authorities—all were available. The twenty-four-year-old Anitta Müller, who by dint of her work with the refugees became a leading figure in Viennese welfare circles and was later elected to the Vienna Gemeinderat, organized a large welfare network devoted primarily to the needs of women and children.31

Efforts on behalf of the refugees extended beyond material assistance. Galician and Viennese Zionists, for example, organized lectures and sponsored publications in an attempt to counter antirefugee sentiment and inform a wider public about the culture and history of East European Jews.32 From the Orthodox side, Agudes Yisroel (the League of Israel, Orthodox Jewry's


30For an example of the Kultusgemeinde leadership’s attitude, see Heinrich Schreiber, “Die Wiener Kultusgemeinde und die Fürsorge für die jüdischen Flüchtlinge,” Hickls Wienerjüdische Volkskalender 14 (1916–17): 66–69. See also Bloch’s Wochenschrift, Sept. 18, 1914, 648–49. On the attitudes of the other groups, see ZBB 17 (1914): 183; BIAW, 1914, 7–20; and Jüdische Zeitung, Oct. 9, 1914, 1.


32The Komitee zur Aufklärung über ostjüdische Fragen was formed for this purpose; see Bloch’s Wochenschrift, Oct. 29, 1915, 805–6; Jan. 26, 1917, 57; and Henisch, Mi-bayit u-mi-huts, 156–57, 260. The bulk of the committee’s activity was undertaken by Galicians.
primary political organization in east central Europe) played a prominent role in providing welfare with what it called a “spiritual” emphasis, focusing on religious education, kosher food distribution, and strictly supervised accommodation for children.33

Jewish responses to the refugees were not uniformly positive. Both the Jewish press and the Viennese police noted local Jewish ambivalence toward the refugees, whether on the part of established Jews who feared being identified with the Galicians or poorer Jews who were unhappy at the prospect of economic competition. Admonitions about ostentation in fashion and lifestyle (aimed in particular at refugee women) were frequent until early 1915.34 Patronizing attitudes toward the Ostjuden surfaced at regular intervals also. To B’nai B’rith, for example, the refugees had emerged from the darkness of their ghetto into the “bright light of the west” and needed to be “educated” to adopt a Western European lifestyle. Poor, unfamiliar, and déclassé, they were still at the cultural level of western Jewry’s Urgroßstädter. Similar reactions were evident in Budapest and Prague, reflecting the familiar pattern of, on the one hand, embarrassment on the part of acculturated Jews (in Budapest, local Jewish leaders reportedly went so far as to request the refugees’ expulsion) and, on the other, Zionist enthusiasm for the “authentic” Jewish culture of the refugees.35

Coordination between the different groups involved in the welfare effort was minimal. Zionist offers of cooperation to the Zentralstelle and B’nai B’rith were rebuffed or ignored.36 The Allianz, as the largest and most powerful of the welfare agencies, was chosen by the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the leading American Jewish relief organization, to be the conduit for American Jewish relief funds and evinced little inclination to work with other groups.37 For their part, the Zionists resented the Allianz monopoly on the

36See Jüdische Zeitung, Nov. 27, 1914, 1; Feb. 19, 1915, 1; and Zionist Central Office for Western Austria to Zionist Central Office, Berlin, Sept. 19 and Oct. 10, 1914, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA), 23/840.
37American Jewish Relief Committee to Allianz, Jan. 21, 1915, Joint Distribution Committee Archives, New York (hereafter JDCA), Austria, File 19; Boris D. Bogen, “Activities of the Joint
distribution of American Jewish funds (with its attendant political benefits), and the issue remained a source of friction. The political potential of welfare work was a particularly important consideration for the Zionists, and government recognition of their prominent role was a welcome confirmation of its significance.  

By the end of the war the Zionists had become the most active force on the welfare scene. With the Kultusgemeinde’s financial resources severely depleted by inflation, the communal welfare infrastructure was stretched to the breaking point (government assistance was similarly inadequate). In the immediate postwar period, with food and clothing scarce, prices high, and tuberculosis raging, the Kultusgemeinde was simply unable to provide sufficient help, according to one Zionist source, to cover “even the barest necessities.” Only by dint of a large-scale aid operation mounted by the Joint Distribution Committee was it possible to meet the needs of the tens of thousands of Jewish unemployed, demobilized soldiers and pogrom refugees. When the JDC established a committee in June 1919 to coordinate all Jewish relief work in Vienna, the Zionists and the Allianz were treated by its representatives as equal partners. Hoping to democratize and broaden the social and political base of welfare, the JDC regarded Zionist cooperation as essential. The Allianz, weakened by the rising nationalist tide and the loss of its empirewide network, was reluctant to treat the Zionists as equals but was in no position to dictate terms. In the course of the war, then, the relative status of the Zionists and their ideological opponents had been virtually inverted in the welfare sphere.

Distribution Committee in Austria,” unpublished manuscript in JDCA, Austria, General, April 1920–21, 8.

Maximilian Paul Schiff, the JDC representative in Vienna, complained to Judah Magnes that the Zionists “never lose sight of their political aspirations”; see Schiff to Magnes, Apr. 15, 1916, JDCA, Austria, File 19. On the distribution of American Jewish relief funds, see Zosa Szajkowski, “Jewish Relief in Eastern Europe, 1914–1917,” Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 10 (1965): 24–51. On Zionist resentment at being denied access to these funds, see Leo Herrmann to Leo Motzkin, Jan. 21, 1915, CZA, L6/598; and Judische Zeitung, Sept. 28, 1917, 4. The Zionists’ medical clinic, legal rights office, and welcome service at railway stations all received government praise and support; see Judische Zeitung, Apr. 14, 1916, 7–9; and AVA/Mdl, no. 31922/16, 19.

Jüdischer Nationalrat report of Dec. 13, 1918, JDCA, JDC Representative Committee Overseas, Austria, File 19. The most active Jewish welfare organization at this stage was the Zionist-oriented Soziale Hilfsorganisation Anitta Müller, the successor to the relief network set up by Müller in 1914; see “Zehn Jahre Arbeit des Vereines Soziale Hilfsorganisation Anitta Müller,” in CAHJP, AW, 2317; and Dritter Tätigkeits- und Rechenschafts-Bericht der Wohlfahrtsinstitutionen der Frau Anitta Müller für Flüchtlinge aus Galizien und der Bukowina (Vienna, 1918), 10–19.

What accounts for the rise of the Jewish nationalists to such a prominent position in the welfare effort? Certainly, they built a strong welfare organization, but so, too, did the Allianz and (to a lesser extent) B’nai Brith. The Zionists, however, focused the bulk of their attention and resources on the refugees in Vienna (whereas their rivals expended greater energy and funds on welfare projects in Galicia and elsewhere) and provided a more comprehensive range of services, in a sense offering themselves as an alternative to the Zentralstelle. The success of Anitta Müller’s organizations also contributed to the nationalists’ prestige, as Müller became publicly identified with their cause. It was, though, external factors that gave the Zionists certain crucial advantages. Increasing international political support for Zionism during the war, the democratic and nationalist upsurge within the monarchy, and the identification of the nationalists as the primary Jewish democratic force all helped pave the way for powerful outside agencies to endorse the local Zionists.\footnote{On the background to these political developments, see Jonathan Frankel, “The Paradoxical Politics of Marginality: Thoughts on the Jewish Situation during the Years 1914–21,” in Studies in Contemporary Jewry, vol. 4, ed. Frankel, 3–21; and David Vital, Zionism: The Crucial Phase (Oxford, 1987), 89–92, 169–70, 190–91.} Thus, the Joint Distribution Committee and the Austrian authorities, both with an interest in democratic reforms, granted the Zionists respect and recognition. B’nai Brith and the Allianz were obliged to extend grudging cooperation, acquiescing to the wishes of these outside actors. As Viennese Jewry grew progressively more dependent on external aid, the nationalists’ good standing in the eyes of the JDC and the Austrian government was an important source of internal communal influence.

**Anti-Semitism and the Refugees**

The refugees were by no means a homogeneous population. Rather, they comprised a cross-section of Galician and Bukovinian Jewry, from a small business and middle class to the more numerous poverty-stricken, from the strictly Orthodox to the acculturated and secularized. Common to most, however, was the experience of flight and uprootedness, a contingent status as outsiders and visitors (of uncertain duration) in the capital, and an awareness of increasing hostility and anti-Semitism aimed explicitly at them. Common too, for the majority, was a precarious economic situation, having abandoned property and livelihood to seek refuge in Vienna. And while they could be found across the economic spectrum—from white-collar professions and business to industrial and seasonal agricultural work—the refugees were for the most part mired in poverty, working in petty trade, in cottage industry, and as middlemen. Moreover, some restrictions were placed on their right to work. Galician lawyers, for example, were prohibited from practicing in Vienna from February 1915, while small businesses, trad-
ers, and artisans often experienced difficulties in obtaining work permits from local authorities.\(^42\)

The impact of the refugees on Jewish cultural, religious, and political life in the city was palpable. Most striking was the growth of a Jewish nationalist youth movement (beginning in 1917 and reaching its high point in 1918/19), for which Galicians provided both the leadership and the bulk of the rank and file. Further, they managed to create a variety of social, cultural, and political organizations, thereby at least partially compensating for the loss of community and the intensive Jewish environment to which many had been accustomed in Galicia. Refugees were the moving force behind the appearance in Vienna of a Zionist-oriented Yiddish daily and Marxist-Zionist and Orthodox weeklies. In addition, a considerable amount of Hebrew and Yiddish literature was published in Vienna during the war years, and several Polish-language journals were produced by the youth movement.\(^43\)

The presence of so many traditionally minded Jews contributed to the expansion of institutional Orthodoxy in Vienna. The war years saw the first signs of an organized Agudes Yisroel presence in the city. Agudah activity focused primarily on welfare, but expanded toward the end of the war into the political arena also. Hasidim appeared in Vienna for the first time in significant numbers during the war, with several Hasidic leaders (including the rebbes of Czortkov, Husiatyn, Sadagora, Brody, and Drohobycz) setting up courts in the city. Divested of their property and livelihood, the economic base of these Hasidic courts was fragile, and the physical proximity to both Western culture and less traditional modes of Jewish life was not without influence, particularly among the younger generation. Finally, refugees furnished both the leadership and the membership for the (admittedly modest) wartime growth of religious Zionism in Vienna.\(^44\)

It is clear, then, that the refugees were a distinct and highly visible presence in the city. Many locals resented them (despite official protestations to the contrary), complaining, among other things, that the refugees were dirty and noisy and that they pushed up food prices, congregated in the streets and coffee houses, bought up local businesses and residential properties, received


overly generous welfare payments, engaged in profiteering, and shirked military duty. These themes remained the staples of antirefugee agitation throughout the war years. Police agents in Leopoldstadt, host to many refugees, reported that the locals felt "invaded" and that the newcomers received "no sympathy." Antagonism and hostility were so widespread, in fact, that the police on occasion feared for the refugees' safety. Conversely, great joy was reported at the departure of many refugees in the summer of 1915.

Viennese anti-Semitism thus found a new lease on life by focusing on the new arrivals. Muted at first by censorship and the restrictions imposed by military rule, anti-Semitic voices grew in volume and intensity as the war dragged on, as living conditions deteriorated, and, in particular, as a measure of democracy was reinstalled in 1917 by the new emperor Karl I. Daily life in the city grew progressively more dour and difficult throughout the war, with rising prices; shortages of basic foodstuffs, fuel, and consumer goods; controls on gas and electricity consumption; restricted public transport; and increased levels of crime. The refugees were an obvious and visible scapegoat, and already in early 1915 Christian Socials and German nationalists called for their expulsion or internment.

In keeping with the notion of Burgfriede, a truce in the empire's internal conflicts, Jewish responses were initially kept out of the public sphere and were confined mostly to private appeals to government officials. As anti-Semitic articles began to appear with increasing frequency in the Viennese press from early 1915, attempts to respond in the Jewish press were often censored. From the Jewish point of view, government reluctance either to

45See PDW/SB 1914/15, Nov. 5 and 12, Dec. 17, 1914; Jan. 7, Mar. 18, Apr. 8, May 13, 1915; and Hoffmann-Holter, "Abreisendmachung," chap. 6. Government pronouncements stressed the compassion of the local population toward the new arrivals; see Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 4, 9–10; and Wiser, Staatliche Kulturarbeit, 1. Aware of the mounting frictions, however, the authorities were at pains to encourage increased tolerance; see, for example, the text of the Interior Ministry's decree of April 1915, in Monatschrift der Union 27 (May–June 1915): 2–5; Hoffmann-Holter, "Abreisendmachung," 41–43; and Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge, 3.


47On Viennese anti-Semitism during the war, see Bruce F. Pauley, From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism (Chapel Hill, 1992), chap. 5; and Boyer, Culture and Crisis, 432–37. More generally, see Wistrich, Jews of Vienna, 205–37.


act decisively against expressions of anti-Semitism or to allow a public Jewish response denoted a breakdown of the bargain implicit in the Burgfriede. Anti-Semitism, it was argued, was divisive and chauvinistic, threatening not only the Jews but also the democratic reforms vital to the monarchy’s survival: anti-Semitism was thus anti-Austrian.\textsuperscript{50} Jewish disappointment was all the more keen as the euphoric national unity of the initial weeks of the war had seemed to finally promise Jews acceptance as truly equal citizens—the quid pro quo for unconditional loyalty and a proven readiness to offer the ultimate sacrifice for the fatherland. This prospect dimmed with the rise of increasingly vitriolic and unchecked anti-Semitism. The initial Jewish reluctance to protest publicly gradually gave way to spirited defense (when permitted by the censor) and, after the May 1917 reconvening of parliament, to open discussion and even criticism of the authorities’ handling of the refugees and tolerance of anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{51}

Perhaps the most common of the accusations leveled against the refugees was that they engaged in economic crime—profiteering, smuggling, and black-market trading.\textsuperscript{52} That there was some truth to this was acknowledged in many Jewish responses. The extreme social and economic dislocation of the refugees was generally emphasized in their defense: desperate to survive, they often circumvented the law. Moreover, it was asserted, the anti-Semites ignored widespread profiteering, hoarding of food, and price-gouging by others, most notably the landowners and peasantry. It was even claimed that Jewish smuggling played a vital role in maintaining Vienna’s food supply and that smugglers had in fact helped ward off starvation for many in the city.\textsuperscript{53}

Spearheaded by the German nationalists, with the Christian Social Party in a supporting role, anti-Semitic agitation in parliament and the Gemeinderat, the press, the university, and public meetings intensified in the latter half of 1917, reaching a peak in the summer of 1918.\textsuperscript{54} While the Jewish press denounced the “pogrom threats” and the “sadistic” and “bloodthirsty”
attacks, *Zentralstelle* director Schwarz-Hiller expressed dismay at the authorities’ apparent apathy. If the refugees provided the initial catalyst for this wave of anti-Semitism, the target was soon broadened to encompass all Viennese Jews. At the June 1918 *Deutsche Volkstag* — attended by government officials and chaired by Mayor Weiskirchner — it was not just the refugees but the Jews in general who were denounced as profiteers, black-marketeers, smugglers, draft dodgers, and aliens in a German Austria.55

At the end of July 1918 the Vienna *Kultusgemeinde* felt compelled for the first time during the war to issue a public protest, calling for government action to curb the anti-Semites. The protest resolution made clear that only with the greatest reluctance had the *Kultusgemeinde* gone public, refraining from such a step for as long as possible in order not to inflict damage on the international reputation of the monarchy. Initiated by Vienna, and approved by some 440 *Kultusgemeinden* from the Austrian half of the empire, the resolution stressed Jewish patriotism and the great suffering endured by the Jews in the war. Ending with a veiled threat of dire consequences should the authorities fail to act, it warned that if necessary Jews would organize their own defense. To have even broached the notion of Jewish self-defense was a remarkable departure from previous practice, which scrupulously avoided any action likely to be interpreted as an intimation of anything less than total faith in the state’s goodwill toward the Jews. That the Vienna *Kultusgemeinde* would make such a statement (and was able to persuade over four hundred other communities to endorse it) indicates both the intensity of the anti-Semitism and a pragmatic recognition by the Jewish leaders that the government was either unable or unwilling to control it. The protest went unheeded by the authorities, who were in any case losing their ability to control the flow of events in September and October 1918.56

Immediately following the establishment of the Austrian republic at the end of the war, the refugees again became the target of verbal and (mild) physical abuse on the streets and in the press and parliament.57 The governing coalition of Christian Social and Social Democratic parties was intent on expelling them, citing as justification housing and food shortages and local
antirefugee sentiment. Government moves to expel the refugees in July and September 1919 were thwarted primarily by Zionist-led opposition, while a further expulsion attempt in 1920 saw League of Nations intervention on behalf of the refugees.\(^{58}\) Thereafter, the Austrian authorities did not actively pursue expulsion and the issue faded from the public limelight.

In the main, Jewish responses to wartime anti-Semitism followed familiar ideological contours; tactical adjustments were made but underlying strategies remained constant. All, of course, were bitterly disappointed by the intense upsurge of anti-Semitism that dashed initial hopes of unity achieved through shared sacrifice and bloodshed. That the war was a radicalizing and nationalizing experience for many Jews, both on the home front and in battle, and that the confrontation with anti-Semitism loomed large in these responses, is clear.\(^{59}\) Sensing the impotence of traditional forms of quiet diplomacy (known in Jewish political parlance as shtadlones, or intercession with the authorities), the liberals of the Kultusgemeinde, the Allianz, and B'nai B'rith eventually took a public stand on the issue, stressing the need for Jewish dignity and honor. The brutalization of the war years (coming after decades of Viennese anti-Semitism) led to a readiness to take tougher and more overt defensive action.\(^{60}\) With the advent of the republic, however, shtadlones returned to favor, although the Kultusgemeinde hedged its bets somewhat, subsidizing a Zionist-led defense force and cooperating with the nationalists in occasional public protests.\(^{61}\) For their part, Zionists tended to see in wartime anti-Semitism a confirmation of their vision of separate but equal Völker, with the most worthwhile response being the cultivation of a more intense collective Jewish life. This conviction was carried over into the postwar years. Cooperation between the parties in fighting anti-Semitism was minimal, with ideological differences too entrenched—even in the crisis atmosphere of the war—to enable any durable and effective collaboration.

**IN THE NEGOTIATIONS** about refugee expulsion in 1919–21, the government saw fit to deal with the Jewish nationalists as interlocutors on a par with the "official" community representative, the Kultusgemeinde. As already noted,

---

\(^{58}\)On expulsion attempts and Jewish opposition, see Edward Timms, “Citizenship and ‘Heimatrecht’ after the Treaty of St. Germain,” in Habsburg Legacy, ed. Robertson and Timms, 158–68; Leopold Spira, Feindbild “Jüd”. 100 Jahre Politischer Antisemitismus in Österreich (Vienna, 1981), 76–80; Moser, “Die Katastrophe;” 89–92; Judische Zeitung, Nov. 29, 1918, 5; and Wiener Morgenzeitung, Aug. 1, 1919, 3, 5; Sept. 12, 1919, 2, 4; Sept. 24, 1919, 1. East European Jewish refugees were also threatened with expulsion from Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary in the immediate postwar period; see Trude Maurer, Ostjuden in Deutschland 1918–1933 (Hamburg, 1986), 274–85, 355–416; and Kreppel, Juden und Judentum, 244–45.

\(^{59}\)See Reichmann, “Der Bewusstseinswandel;” passim; Mendelsohn, Zionism in Poland, 43–49; and Frankel, “The Paradoxical Politics of Marginality;” passim.

\(^{60}\)See, for example, Bloch’s Wochenschrift, Oct. 19, 1917, 653–54; Dec. 7, 1917, 764–65; May 3, 1918, 278–79. The July 1918 Kultusgemeinde resolution is further evidence of this readiness.

\(^{61}\)See Freidenreich, Jewish Politics, 181–86; and Rechter, “Neither East nor West;” 274–75.
an important factor in establishing the Zionists’ increased access to power was their successful welfare work during the war. That the refugees constituted a highly sensitive welfare and political problem in Vienna was crucial in parlaying the nationalists’ prominence in the welfare effort into political influence, and it was precisely this link between welfare and politics that made the refugee issue important in wartime Viennese Jewish politics.

If the impact of the refugees was particularly evident in the political arena, it was discernible, too, in the economic, cultural, and religious domains. Beyond this sudden infusion of dynamism into local Jewish society, the presence of the refugees touched on a number of major themes of Viennese and Habsburg Jewish history—the relationship between “eastern” and “western” Jews of the empire, anti-Semitism, and, most broadly, the very notion of Habsburg Jewry as a cohesive (or otherwise) entity. Over and above its significance as an episode in Jewish history, the experience of the Jewish refugees in World War I Vienna is illustrative not only of the nexus between welfare and politics but also of the striking “nationalization” of ethnopolitics in east central Europe during this period, a process whereby the demarcation lines between ethnicity and nationality grew increasingly blurred.