

Emil Lehmann Addresses Antisemitism: A Summary of his Ideas

Emil Lehmann (1829–1898) was a Jewish lawyer, politician, and activist from Dresden who fought for Jewish rights and religious freedom across the various German states. He was a prominent counter-figure to the academic antisemitic movement spearheaded by writers such as Treitschke. However, his ideals often conflicted with his goals, as he often failed to be elected to office due to heavy anti semitic beliefs among the the voters in Saxony. Nevertheless, he did have some political success. From 1875 to 1881, he served in the second chamber of the Saxon parliament, and during that time, he gave a speech to Jews in Leipzig titled “On the Antisemitic Movement in Germany” in response to the rise of antisemites like Richard Wagner, Adolf Stocker, and, of course, Treitschke. (Historische Protokolle des Sächsischen Landtages; 2007) In it, he first describes the crimes against Jews by antisemites. He decries the opinions of the leading antisemites, refusing even to say their name, and argues that these are all direct attacks on the entire community of German Jews. However, he is careful to conclude by asserting that Jews can indeed be German and that all Jews in Germany should try their hardest to become German nationalists, regardless of belief. While this speech has not been particularly important itself as a historical source, it serves to summarize Emil Lehmann’s beliefs and convictions. In this way, the speech is a good medium through which to understand his impact on later historical examinations of German antisemitism before the Nazi regime.

The speech was first published posthumously in 1899 in Lehmann’s collected writings, known as *Gesammelte Schriften*, by H.S. Hermann and edited by his relative, Johannes Lehmann. The book is 408 pages long, and it was scanned and published electronically in 2009 by the Goethe University in Frankfurt. The most notable editions were published in 1899 and 10 years later in 1909. There are print copies of the book available in the UC Davis and UCLA libraries, as well as a free pdf of the book on the Goethe University website

(Feimann-Sammlung; 2009). The speech was translated by GHDI's very own Erwin Fink for the website. The book itself has not been cited very much outside of several books found on Google Scholar on German-Jewish relations before the Nazi regime. Therefore, what makes this source significant is not the ways it has been referenced, but how it serves as a summary of Emil Lehmann and his influence as a retaliator against antisemitism.

Emil Lehmann only published several works during his lifetime, mostly writing speeches and letters rather than large publications. The works that actually were published during his lifetime, however, were: *Höre Israel* in 1869, *Zur Synode* in 1871, *Lessing in seiner Bedeutung für die Juden* in 1879, *Die Juden jetzt und einst. Beitrag zur Lösung der Judenfrage* in 1887, and *Der Deutsche jüdischen Bekenntnisses* in 1894. However, almost immediately after his death, his smaller works were compiled and published in the aforementioned *Gesammelte Schriften*, most likely due to his prevalence in the Saxon Jewish community, and this book has been cited in several works on German-Jewish history. One, Jonathan Hess's *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity*, identifies him as a "radical reformer" who wanted to put Jews and Christians on equal footing by advocating for mixed marriages. (Hess 2010; 109) He cites *Gesammelte Schriften* as his source for this, however it is impossible for me to find which particular piece it is from as I do not speak German. Nevertheless, this is a way in which an author uses his collected works acknowledge Lehmann's role as a radical Jewish thinker of the period while also including his interesting take on how Jews should respond to antisemitism.

Almost predictably, there was an increase in the mentions of Emil Lehmann across the whole of German historiography during the few decades of contemplation after World War II. His works have been cited in books such as *Chronik der Juden in Dresden, Jüdische Trauungen in Berlin 1759 bis 1813* in 1968, and *Die politischen Orientierungen der Juden in Deutschland* in 1966, mostly as an example of a Jewish politician in the Dresden area. These more modern

mentions of Emil Lehmann are reflective of the legacy Lehmann had as a member of the counter-movement against German antisemitism.

What makes Emil Lehmann's speech so fascinating is less how it has been cited and used across the years, but more the context in which it was presented as well as the life of the author. His speech is best described as a summary of Jewish resistance against rising antisemitism in imperial Germany. His words are a way through which current historical researchers can illustrate the Jewish population of Germany in the 19th century. Lehmann serves as an example of an educated, bourgeois Jewish thinker who became an important figure in his home region of Saxony, even rising to gain considerable political power.

Works Cited

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