

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Leo Baeck Institute – New York | Berlin

is accepting proposals for papers to be presented at its 2026 conference at the

Center for Jewish History, New York

Oct. 25-27, 2026

Deadline for Submission: March 15, 2026

Between Revolution and Reaction

German-Speaking Jews and the Ideas, Politics, and Cultures of the Right

The Leo Baeck Institute – New York | Berlin (LBI), one of the most important archives and libraries on the history and culture of German-speaking Jews, will sponsor an academic conference in New York, October 25-27, 2026. Inspired not least by the contemporary political moment, the conference will investigate the topic of (German-speaking) Jews and the political, cultural, and intellectual right, especially since the 19th century. A formal call for papers will follow at the end of this year.

Both popular understanding and dominant historiographical narratives have tended to associate German Jews with the modern forces of "progress", "democracy", or "liberalism." Jews appear in these narratives as founders, political supporters, or social bases of movements and ideas broadly understood as belonging to the left half of an ideological spectrum. They have been cast – and not without reason – as the natural friends or beneficiaries of political upheavals that allowed them link Jewish emancipation and social equality with more universal democratic demands – from the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 to 1917/18. These narratives have themselves had significant consequences for German-speaking Jews – often tragic – as the real or imagined disproportionate role of Jews in left and liberal politics affected the attitudes towards Jews of other political actors and ideologues.

While plenty of historiography has explored the nuances not encompassed by a liberal imaginary of Jews at the vanguard of progress, there is still work to be done to understand the full breadth of Jewish political consciousness and action. This especially so for Jewish political engagements that prioritized "tradition", "order", or "conservatism," – the key values of the right. German-speaking Jews were no different from other populations in the sheer diversity of their politics, but it is worthwhile to consider how their position as Jews provided unique impulses. For instance, some Jewish conservatives explicitly linked their rejection of left or liberal causes to a fear of persecution as scapegoats by reactionaries. Others saw the individualism and universalism of democratic movements as a threat to Jewish tradition and communal cohesion – a slippery slope toward "assimilation." As a disenfranchised and discriminated minority, Jews also became politicized in different ways and at different times than other populations.

With the current rise of right-wing and far-right wing movements worldwide, the literature on the intellectual history of conservative movements since the French Revolution has taken on a new urgency. German-speaking Jews figure large in this discourse, not only as victims of the worst-case scenario of right-wing totalitarianism, but also as early analysts of the far right (the Frankfurt School, Hannah

Arendt) or lodestars of contemporary conservative thought (Leo Strauss, Ludwig von Mises). This conference aims to broaden and deepen our consideration of how German-speaking Jews positioned themselves during revolutionary and reactionary moments that shaped history and ideology and continue to structure our understanding of the past cycle of revolution and reaction that advances history and informs our mental maps of ideology. We are seeking papers that explore Jewish responses to conservatism that ranged from rejection to attraction.

How did German Jews engage with conservative thought and movements? How do intellectual, political, and cultural interactions between Jews and “the right” in other countries reflect on the case of German-speaking Jews? (How) have traditional ingredients of ideologies and policies of the right, such as nationalism, authoritarianism, and xenophobia, affected Jewish ways of engaging with those movements as participants or opponents? How have the Holocaust and the new postwar circumstances, including a Jewish state and new ideological formations, affected Jewish attitudes and activities?

Topics for papers or panels at the conference should shed light on these questions with a focus on German-speaking Jewish history. We welcome papers that investigate the actors, ideas, and events of that history, including the export and influence of thinkers and their ideas into other locales. Paper topics can include but are not limited to:

- The evolution of Jewish political subjectivity
- The link between universal democratic demands and Jewish emancipation
- Inner-Jewish politics, especially regarding education and religious reform
- The politics of gender and the family, both within Judaism and in the larger society
- The Jewish relationship to empire and the end of empire
- Conservative Jewish associational life (e.g., Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten, Verein zur Förderung der Bodenkultur unter den Juden Deutschlands, Verband nationaldeutscher Juden)
- Conservative political thought among Jews, and critical analysis of conservative and right-wing movements by Jewish thinkers
- The Jewish relationship to capital, property rights, and questions of class
- The Jewish encounter with nationalisms, including Zionism

The conference will bring together scholars of various career levels and specializations within the field. It is meant to foster an intellectual community around topics that tend to be underserved by other conferences in North America. Pending sufficient interest and funding, the 2026 conference will inaugurate a series of biannual conferences which will focus on topics specific to German-Jewish history but allowing for interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives. The LBI will provide food, lodging, and subsidies to defray the cost of travel for presenters.

Submission Instructions: Email proposals to lbiconference2026@lbi.org including an abstract (max 500 words), a biography (max 500 words), and information about your anticipated travel needs by **March 15, 2026**.

Conference committee:

Robin Judd (Ohio State University)

Darcy Buerkle (Smith College)

Paul Lerner (University of Southern California)

Philipp Nielsen (Sarah Lawrence College)

David Brown (LBI)

Frank Mecklenburg (LBI)

Magdalena Wrobel (LBI)

Markus Krah (LBI).