the immediate aftermath of the 1867 Compromise from German to Hungarian. That most Jewish youngsters now mixed with non-Jewish classmates no doubt accelerated the process of linguistic assimilation. What had been a largely German-speaking population increasingly became Magyarized. (See Table 10.)

Between 1880 and 1910, the percentage of Jews who declared their mother tongue Magyar in Budapest rose from 59 to 90 (about 5% above the non-Jewish average), while German plummeted from 35 to 8.6 percent. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that about two-thirds of Budapest Jews remained bilingual. In 1900, two-thirds of the Magyar speakers and half of the German also spoke the other language. Consequently, despite rapid and almost complete Magyarization, Budapest was still the largest German-speaking urban Jewry in Europe after Vienna, easily surpassing Berlin. The culture of Budapest Jews, certainly its intellectual and propertied middle-classes, retained its cosmopolitan complexion, even while opening up to the local vernacular. Jews continued to consume German literature and newspapers such as that pacesetter of modern Hungarian journalism, the Pester Lloyd, even as the first generation of significant Jewish writers in Hungarian made its appearance. From the 1880s on, Jewish culture in Budapest took on a Magyar inflection. The major Jewish publications appeared in Magyar, though the audience for these Jewish periodicals remained relatively modest in comparison to the circulation of the great Yiddish dailies appearing in Warsaw at the time.

Jewish cultural consumption in the capital was of course not limited to what can be seen as an effort to create a Magyar Jewish culture. By the beginning of the century, Jews were an integral part of the Budapest literary scene. While few of them were found among the first rank of Hungarian authors, they excelled as publishers, editors, journalists and critics. Many clustered about the Nyugat (West) and Haszadik Század (Twentieth Century), outstanding periodicals advocating radical critique and avant-garde culture. During the interwar period, a sharp debate erupted between partisans of what came to be known as the népies (populist) and urbánus (urbanist) camps, with the former accusing urbanist intellectuals of being alienated from their nationalistic roots and distorting Hungarian culture. Influential writers of that period, including Dezső Szabó, Gyula Szekfű, and László Németh, viewed Budapest as a liberal, cosmopolitan, alien implant in Hungary, largely due to its overwhelming Jewish presence. Already at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the writer Miklós Révai had complained that Pest was a city of Jewish, Armenian, Serb, and German moneygrubbing “bloodsuckers.” “Budapest!” was the appellation that antisemitic wits, among them the popular mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger, coined for the city. In previous generations, Szekfű cautioned, Jews had set out to conquer the economy in a naive, misled, and foolishly hospitable nation; now their ambition embraced first the cultural and then even the political sphere.

Politics, Power, Antisemitism

Jews in Budapest could not partake in municipal politics before they were emancipated in 1867. When the revolution broke out in March 1848, it seemed as if political equality was imminent, but euphoria quickly gave way to bitter disappointment as the liberals made repeated concessions to the rioting mob. Jews who had flocked to join the National Guard were dismissed, disarmed, and subjected to a humiliating census to determine whether they were legal residents. Pest Jews could only look on with envy at neighboring Vienna, where Jews enjoyed the franchise and where two Hungarian Jewish doctors, Adolf Fischof and Karl Goldmark, had assumed leading political roles in the revolution.

During the Dualist Era, however, the tables were turned. In contrast to Vienna, where Mayor Lueger had been enthusiastically voted in on an antisemitic platform, in Budapest, the liberal István Báréczy reigned, and for a brief few months in 1913, a Jew, Ferenc Heltai (1861–1913), had served as lord mayor. Heltai’s career is instructive: he was elected MP from 1896 to 1913, serving concurrently on the municipal council, specializing in transportation and later the gas utility. Jews had played an important role in the history of Budapest. Sámuel Wodaner, a convert, had financed the Chain Bridge (Lánchíd) that linked Buda with Pest in 1849; Moritz Wahrmann, elected MP for Lipótváros, and later the head of the Pest community, had cosponsored the bill to unite Buda and Pest in 1870; József Hűvös (1838–1914) was credited with the fact that Budapest introduced the world’s first subway, during the millennium celebrations in 1896. The banker Miksa Kramer, vice president of the Pest Jewish Burial Society, and another banker, Simon Krausz, president of MIKEFÉ, are good examples of key politicians on the municipal council who were also deeply involved in Jewish affairs.

The lively participation of Jews in Budapest municipal politics is in no small part due to the curial system, with its limited franchise, that lasted until after the interwar period. This system disproportionately empowered the Jewish propertied and educated middle class. A total of 1,200 “virilists,” Budapest’s highest taxpayers, elected half of the 400 seats on the municipal council. The other half was elected by a narrow electorate comprising about 5.5 percent in 1873 and 8.7 percent by 1910 of the Budapest population. According to one (not so reliable) source, Jews (probably including converts) constituted about 11 percent of the councilmen in 1873, a number that rose to 29 percent in 1900 and to 55 percent in 1910. This spectacular growth was due to the increasing presence of Jews not only among the virilist representatives (in 1873, 13%; in 1900, 35%; and in 1910, 65%), but also those elected by the general enfranchised public (in 1873, 9%; in 1900, 23%; and in 1910, 45%). During the Károlyi government, and later, even more spectacularly, during the Communist regime under Béla Kun, Jews in nothing but name briefly occupied center stage of Hungarian and Budapest politics. After World War I, the franchise was considerably broadened under the Horthy regime, depriving the Social Democrats and Vilmos Vágvornyi’s Democratic Party of their prewar clout. Nevertheless, Jews continued to serve on the municipal council.