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Re-Negotiating Czechoslovakia
The State and the Jews in Communist Central Europe: The Czech Lands, 1945-1990

by

Jacob Ari Labendz

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Archives:

ABS	<i>Arviv bezpečnostních složek</i> [Security Services Archive]
JDC	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
JM-PP	<i>Židovské museum v Praze - Pováleční Plzeň</i> [Jewish Museum in Prague - Postwar Plzeň]
MZV	<i>Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí</i> [Ministry of Foreign Affairs]
DP	<i>Diplomatický protokol</i> [Diplomatic Protocol]
DP-T	<i>Diplomatický protokol tajný</i> [Diplomatic Protocol Secret]
GS-A	<i>Generální sekretariát</i> [General Secretary]
GS-T	<i>Generální sekretariát - tajný</i> [General Secretary - Secret]
TO-O	<i>Teritoriální oddělení - obyčejní</i> [Territorial Division - General]
TO-T	<i>Teritoriální oddělení - tajný</i> [Territorial Division - Secret]
NAČR	<i>Národní archiv České republiky</i> [National Archive of the Czech Republic]
AN-Zahr	<i>Antonín Novotný - Zahraniční</i> [Antonín Novotný - Foreign]
KSČ-ÚV	<i>Komunistická strana Československa - Ústřední výbor</i> [Communist Party of Czechoslovakia - Central Committee]
MŠK	<i>Ministerstvo školství a kultury</i> [Ministry of Education and Culture]
SPVC	<i>Sekretariát pro věci církevní</i> [Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs]
SÚC	<i>Státní úřad pro věci církevní</i> [State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs]
ÚPV	<i>Úřad předsednictva vlády</i> [Office of the President of the Government]
ŽNO	<i>Židkovská obec v Praze</i> [Jewish Community in Prague]

In Text:

CC-CPC	Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia [<i>Ústřední výbor Komunistická strana Československa</i>]
CJRC	Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands [<i>Rada židovských náboženských obcí v Českých zemích</i>]
CPC	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia [<i>Komunistická strana Československa</i>]
CSR/ČSR	Czechoslovak Republic [<i>Československá republika</i>]
CSSR/ČSSR	Czechoslovak Socialist Republic [<i>Československá socialistická republika</i>]
JDC	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
SEA	Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs [<i>Sekretariát pro věci církevní</i>]
SOEA	State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs [<i>Státní úřad pro věci církevní</i>]
StB	<i>Státní bezpečnost</i> [State Security]
WJC	World Jewish Congress

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My parents planted the seeds of this dissertation in 1989, when they arranged for my father and me to join Harry Rapaport on trip to “rescue Holocaust Torahs” from Poland. The persistence of Jewish life in Central Europe after the Holocaust has fascinated me ever since. This dissertation then took root in a moment of clear-headed hunger. I broke my fast on *Yom-Kippur* 2006 at the Jewish Theological Seminary with Jack Sasson. He encouraged me to leave my job and to pursue a doctorate in Jewish studies. Whenever I have doubted myself over the course of the past eight years, I recalled his exclamation, “There’s a place in scholarship for you!” Jack changed my life with seven words. I owe a similar debt to Ray Jackendoff and Robert Baker, my undergraduate advisor and high-school English teacher, who encouraged me to indulge my inclination to scholarship.

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¹ Ethics of our Fathers (*Perkei Avot*), 6:6.
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Rabbinics/Talmud/Mishnah/Seder_Nezikin_Damages/_Pirkei_Avot/Chapter_One.shtml> (23 July 2014).

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Proverbs teaches, “Train up a child in the way that he should go, and even when he is old, he will not depart from it.”² I thank my parents and grandparent for setting me on a way rich in *Yiddishkeit*, charity, kindness, and love. I am just as grateful to them for supporting and even encouraging me as I departed from their way to seek my own direction. My deepest regret is that

² Proverbs 22:6, trans. Jewish Publication Society (1917). <<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2822.htm>> (13 July 2014).

my pursuit of knowledge and experience drew me from their midst for so long. In their most trying times and on occasions of rejoice, I often found myself far away and immersed in study. I never loved or cared for them any less. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Marilyn and Ralph Labendz, and to my grandparents, *zichronam l'vracha*, Marianne and Martin Labendz, and Pearl Shain.

To my parents and grandparents
with love, gratitude, and admiration

Marilyn and Ralph Labendz
Marianne and Martin Labendz, *z"l*
Pearl Shain, *z"l*

INTRODUCTION

When Rabbi Karol Ephraim Sidon (b. 1942) spoke at the installation ceremony marking his 1992 ascent to the post of Chief Rabbi of Prague and the Czech Lands, he referred to his fellow community members as Czech Jews, Czech members of the Jewish nation. After the event, a few of the attendees approached the rabbi to protest this categorization. They explained that they considered themselves Czechs of the Jewish religion. Rabbi Sidon responded with quiet sarcasm. He expressed delight that he would be seeing his coreligionists in synagogue on the coming Sabbath. Once again, they corrected the rabbi. They would be absent from the services. They were not religious (*nej sme pobožni*).¹

Rabbi Sidon could have continued the conversation by asking his interlocutors by what regard they considered themselves Jewish, if neither by nationality nor religion. I will refrain from attempting to answer this imagined question on their behalf, as it is not the place to do so here, and also because the sociologist, Alena Heitlinger, has already published insightful work to that end.² I have retold this story, rather, because it reflects one of the most significant transitions in European Jewish history in last two-hundred years, as well as the persistence of discourses about Jews across that divide.

The years 1945 through 1989 represent the final stage of a two-century-long experiment, spanning almost all of modernity, in which East-Central European governments sought bureaucratic and sometimes violent means to answer the so-called “Jewish Question.” Where, if at all, did Jewish subjects-cum-citizens fit into the region’s rising civic polities and national

¹ Personal communication with Rabbi Sidon (30 June 2009).

² Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust and Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006).

communities, whose members, collectively and as individuals, acquired increasingly more rights and responsibilities from the state? Could Jews become trusted and productive members of society? Could they abandon their presumed loyalties to one another in order to become fully national Czechs, Hungarians, and Poles? Would the biology, creed, and history of Europe's paradigmatic 'other' prevent its integration into the continent's modern empires and nation-states? If yes, then what was to be done? If not, then what of Jewishness could remain and in what form? While the fall of communism in 1989 did not resolve these questions, it shifted the primary responsibility for answering them to the civic and private spheres. So ended, without resolution, a two-hundred year period in the history of Jews in Europe.

The "Jewish Question:" Origins and Development

One of the central questions of European modernity concerned the place of Jews, as individuals and as a collective, in the continent's emerging national communities and their foundling states. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Europeans claimed membership in exclusive assemblages of peoples, united by the belief that they shared a common language, territory, heritage, and fate, along with the right to political self-determination as such. The integration of Jewish Europeans into these communities became a testing ground for liberal ideologies and the Enlightenment, as stakeholders, beginning the late-eighteenth century, debated the nature and causes of perceived Jewish difference and the means to ameliorate it, if any existed.³ In hindsight

³ Selected works that have influenced me or which pertain to the territories under consideration here include: Ezra Mendelsohn, ed., *Jews and the State: Dangerous Alliances and the Perils of Privilege* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003); idem., *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983); Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); Jan Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938-48: Beyond Idealization and Condemnation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK and New

these national communities appear to have been collectively “imagined” or merely a way of “seeing” the world.⁴ Yet the popular belief in their existence had very real repercussions for Jews, both positive and negative, particularly once political states formed to represent national communities. With the end of the First World War, the nation-state provided the framework in which all Western and Central European Jewish culture developed.

The simple fact that Europeans felt compelled to debate the nature of Jewish national belonging demonstrates that Jews, even when included into Central Europe’s national communities, belonged to them differently than their Christian and post-Christian compatriots, about whom no conversation needed to be had. Yet the debates also reflected insecurity with regard to the clear delimitation of those same communities. The inclusion of Jewish individuals into Europe’s new nations, by choice and by welcome, undermined the very ethno-mythological

York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013); Jonathan Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918* (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988); idem., *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Kateřina Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé?: Národní identita Židů v Čechách, 1918-1938* [Czechs, Germans, Jews? the national identity of Jews in the Czech lands, 1918-1938] (Prague, Czech Republic: Paseka, 2005); Marcel Sötzler, *The State, the Nation, and the Jews: Liberalism and the Antisemitism Dispute in Bismarck’s Germany* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008); Marsha Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1983); idem., *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001); Michal Frankl, “*Emancipace od židů*”: *Český antisemitismus na konci 19. století* [“Emancipation from the Jews:” Czech antisemitism at the end of the 19th century] (Prague and Litomyšl, Czech Republic: Paseka, 2007); Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, eds., *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989);

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, UK and New York, NY: Verso, 1991); and Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

foundation upon which they stood. Sympathetic voices attempted to negotiate this tension by redefining Jewishness as a category of religious affiliation alone, with only historical and cultural bearing on the ability of individual Jews to become full members of the nations among whom they lived. In contrast, some nation-states, like First Republic Czechoslovakia (1918-1938), offered Jewish citizens the right to claim membership in the national community of their choice, including the Jewish nation. This policy, which I discuss below, provided some guarantee that those Jews who had identified as either Czech or Slovak truly felt that they belonged.

This willingness to accept Jews into Europe's national communities, at least formally and legally, often turned on the belief that Jews, as individuals, could somehow overcome their very Jewishness. As early as 1781, a Prussian bureaucrat laid the blame for Jewish difference, pejoratively conceived, at the feet of medieval Christian society for its mistreatment of the minority. He urged his government to remove the restrictions that had led to their degeneration and suggested state-driven measures for their improvement.⁵ Some of those who supported Jewish integration thus looked forward to the disappearance of Jews *qua* Jews from European society. Some Christians even hoped for Jews to convert on a mass scale. This type of philosemitism betrayed a widely felt ambivalence about Jews, which in some quarters culminated in reaction. The perceived refusal of Jews to assimilate, despite having been granted entry to the nation, inspired resentment as well as doubt with regard to their abilities and desires ever to belong.⁶

Many Europeans, however, rejected the possibility of Jewish integration from the beginning. Some did so on ideological bases. They drew upon longstanding traditions of

⁵ Katz, *Out of the Ghetto*, 57-79.

⁶ Stötzler, *The State, the Nation, and the Jews*. For an insightful analysis of counter discourses, see Mitchell Bryan Hart, *The Healthy Jew: The Symbiosis of Judaism and Modern Medicine* (New York, NY and Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Christian anti-Judaism, which they rearticulated in modern discourses based in science, romanticism, and national politics.⁷ Others struggled with emotional misgivings about Jews, which conflicted with their commitments to liberalism. Indeed, the successful acculturation of many Jews, which often rendered them invisible as such, engendered strident anti-Jewish reaction in some quarters.⁸ Self-proclaimed antisemites protested too much the inability of Jews to adapt. At the same time, they portrayed Jews as national opportunists, able to adopt the external trappings of their host nations in order to exploit them for personal and Jewish-national gain. Often times, they attributed their greatest fears about European modernization to their Jewish fellow citizens, following a long-established tradition of projection.⁹ Certainly, some Europeans did not share these prejudices. Even they, however, understood the terms of the debates about Jews. So too did Jews, who often adopted the majority's discourses to frame their own politics.¹⁰

European state solutions to the “Jewish Question” generally conformed to two typologies, neither of which mapped neatly onto philosemitism or antisemitism. As per above some advocated for the acceptance of Jewish individuals as fellow national-citizens of the Jewish religion. France adopted this policy shortly after the Revolution. The state accorded equal rights

⁷ In the wake of the Second World War, Hannah Arendt argued that medieval, Christian anti-Judaism differed fundamentally from modern antisemitism on both ideological and structural grounds. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966). Her insights and arguments have influenced generations of scholars. I prefer the perspective of Jonathan Hess in *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity*. He identifies deep continuities of ideology and structure between medieval and modern animosity towards Jews.

⁸ Mary Gluck, “The Budapest Flâneur: Urban Modernity, Popular Culture, and the ‘Jewish Question’ in Fin-de-Siècle Hungary,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2004): 1-22.

⁹ David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2013).

¹⁰ For a good discussion, see Hess, *German, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*. Czech Jews living around the world engaged in such debates in a special edition of the *Bulletin* of the Czechoslovak Jewish Representative Committee, “Czechoslovak Jewry: Past and Future” (October-November, 1943).

to Jews as citizens, but denied them the right to organize themselves as a separate nationality of France with legal rights and privileges. Other Europeans contended that Jews composed a distinct, if idiosyncratic, nationality of their own and advanced various strategies for integrating them (or not) as a community into the nation-state. This need not have implied antisemitism. Many Jews shared a belief in Jewish national otherness. Czechoslovakia took this into consideration when crafting its policy for integrating Jewish citizens. Like the rest of the post-Habsburg nation-states, its population included large contingencies of other national minorities. The state extended to them considerable political and cultural rights as such, Jews included. Yet, as per above, Czechoslovakia (like Poland) adopted a hybrid solution, by which it granted Jewish citizens the choice whether or not to claim membership in the Jewish national minority of the territorial nation-state of Czechoslovakia.¹¹ This represented a continuity of practice from the region's previous regimes, which endeavored to manage national tensions from above. This phenomenon distinguished East-Central Europe from much of Western Europe, which followed the example set by France and also Britain.

European Jews advanced various and competing strategies for negotiating their place within the continent's modern nations and their states. Advocates of assimilation argued amongst themselves about the degree to which they should shed their Jewishness, often only vaguely defined, even after conversion to Christianity ceased functioning as the entry ticket to society. Assimilationists also clashed with Jewish nationalists, who sought cultural and political means to develop and normalize the Jewish people within the community of nations. The latter divided themselves as well, between advocates of cultural autonomy in Europe and proponents of

¹¹ Hillel J. Kieval, "Negotiating Czechoslovakia: The Challenges of Jewish Citizenship in a Multiethnic Nation-State," in *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry*, eds. Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman (Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 103-19.

political Zionism, who wished to establish a separate Jewish nation-state or territory. The location that they preferred depended upon their religious orientation and their perception of the severity of antisemitism in Europe.¹² By the early twentieth century, those who advocated for Palestine had come to dominate the political Zionist movement. Even so, a small minority with Bohemian roots hoped that their new state would assume a bi-national, Jewish-Arab culture.¹³ Socialism offered a third path into the future for many Jews, but the ideology proved flexible enough in practice and theory for proponents of assimilation and Jewish nationalism alike to incorporate it into a wide array of political programs. Jewish religious reformers, conservatives, and reactionaries similarly vied to adapt their religion—self-consciously or not—to Europe’s changing landscape. Thus, the question of Jewish integration, as constructed by Europe’s majority populations, assumed a position of foundational importance in the evolution of modern Jewish culture, politics, and religion. The “Jewish Question,” more than anything else, drove European Jewish history for centuries.

A False Stop and New Beginnings

The Second World War brought a temporary cessation to debates about the integration of Jews into European society. It followed two decades of rising ethno-national tensions in Central and Eastern Europe, which manifested in Hungary in laws that restricted Jewish representation in certain spheres of public activity. Some areas of the public and private sectors in Poland instituted similar restrictions. The country banned Jewish ritual slaughter. In Czechoslovakia,

¹² On territorial choice, see Gur Alroey, “‘Zionism without Zion’?: Territorialist Ideology and the Zionist Movement,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 1-32.

¹³ Dimitry Shumsky, “On Ethno-Centrism and its Limits - Czecho-German Jewry in Fin-de-Siècle Prague and the Origins of Zionist Bi-Nationalism,” *The Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, vol. 5 (2006): 173-88.

national conflict centered on Czech-German and Slovak-Hungarian divides. All sides had antisemitic factions, however, which gained strength through the 1930s. Some Czech and Slovak activists associated their Jewish compatriots with their national adversaries.

Beginning in 1938, Nazi-Germany seized control over most of the European continent. The state's central ideology turned on a mythologized yet biological definition of nationhood. In the name of securing racially pristine living-room (*Lebensraum*) for the German people, the state-cum-empire sought the expulsion and then the murder of all individuals of Jewish descent. The Nazis and their collaborators, many of whom had other motives for their violence, killed nearly six-million "Jews" between 1938 and 1945. They came close to resolving Europe's "Jewish Question." Yet they did not. Nazi Germany fell to the combined military forces of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain. For some time in Central and Eastern Europe, however, the Soviet Union stood as the only formidable force which, among other ideals, stood strongly for the extension of full rights and equality to Jews.

After the war, Europe's nation-states once again grappled with the problem of how to integrate their Jewish minorities, as survivors of the genocide returned from concentration camps and emerged from hiding. Others repatriated after spending the war years in refuge abroad or fighting with foreign armies. Across the continent, newly divided into capitalist and communist blocs, Jews (and others considered by the Nazis as such) resumed their lives as full citizens with equal rights under the law. In the nation-states of East-Central Europe, however, Jewish citizens lost the option to organize themselves into territorially bound national minorities with political rights and privileges. Antisemitism may have remained a problem throughout the continent, but it manifested most violently and publicly in Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. Even in the Czech lands, Jewish citizens faced difficulties in restituting stolen personal property. These eastern

states, therefore, witnessed high rates of Jewish emigration, even before the anti-Zionist campaigns of the late 1940s and early 1950s. In each state, nonetheless, tens of thousands of Jews remained. Some of them reestablished Jewish communal organizations.

Thus began the history of Jews in socialist East-Central Europe. In many ways, this period differed considerably from any preceding it. The Second World War, the Holocaust, and the westward spread of communist hegemony wrought demographic, cultural, and political changes. The genocide devastated the Jewish minority. Its survivors returned to societies undergoing processes of further homogenization, due to forced and voluntary population transfers, carried out in a climate of heightened ethno-nationalist sentiment. This included the mass emigration of Jews to Palestine from 1945 until May 1948 and, thereafter, to Israel. The foundation of that state and its imbrication in the emerging Cold War as a site of political and military contest, moreover, changed the character and consequences of Jewish nationalism around the world. Finally, for the first time, East-Central European leaders sought a Marxist-Leninist answer to the “Jewish Question,” as they shifted their allegiance to Moscow and submitted to Soviet oversight.

Despite these changes, however, and despite the self-consciously revolutionary politics of the communist parties, much remained the same. This applied equally to the persistence of discourses about Jews and to the perpetuation of the regional tradition of governments seeking to manage Jewish integration—and all ethno-national strife—from above.¹⁴ For roughly four decades,

¹⁴ Bradley Adams, “The Politics of Retribution: The Trial of Jozef Tiso in the Czechoslovak Environment,” in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath*, eds. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 252-89; Matěj Spurný, *Nejsou jako my: česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945-1960)* [They are not like us: Czech society and minorities in the borderlands (1945-1960)] (Prague, Czech Republic: Antikomplex, 2011), 337-43; and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010).

marked by major transitions of political culture and context, party-state officials struggled alongside local Jewish community leaders and others to reconcile lasting ideas about Jews with newly imported soviet discourses. They came into conflict with one another as they adapted their inherited administrative models to the communist system. This process ended only with the fall of the party-states in 1989. I therefore consider the communist years to be the last chapter of a two-hundred year period in the history of Jews in East-Central Europe.

Few, until recently, have accorded this period attention as such. For some time, popular audiences and scholars interested in Jewish affairs shifted their gaze, perhaps understandably, to the uncanny restoration of Jewish hegemony in the Middle East. They have also paid heed to the remarkable success of the Jewish minority in America and to the flourishing of Jewish culture there, which has few, if any, historical rivals. This shift of focus reflects a Zionist-inflected, Dubnowian model of rising, competing, and falling Jewish centers. Israeli and American-Jewish history merit much attention, but it should not come at the expense of a more diversified and global approach to Jewish studies. Indeed, one cannot hope to understand the American and Israeli cases in a fully nuanced manner without looking carefully at the history of Jews in socialist Europe, which drew tremendous attention and resources from American and Israeli Jews.

A number of authors—again, until recently—have inflected their writing on the history of Jews in communist Europe, intentionally or not, with Western-Jewish, Cold-War political discourses. They have portrayed the region as a place of state antisemitism and have tended to interpret Jewish-state relations within that narrow frame. The titles of valuable books on the subject and on the period that followed reflect this orientation: *In the Shadows of the Holocaust*

& *Communism, Gray Dawn, Out of the Shadows, Vanishing Diaspora*, etc.¹⁵ They partake of a broader and also problematic historiographical and popular trend in which authors seek to uncover the “crimes of communism.” In such works, citizens lived ‘under’ communism and ‘in’ liberal democracies. Communist ‘authorities’ had as their counterparts Western ‘officials’.

I do not mean in any way to exonerate the communist regimes, their leaders, and their officials from wrongdoing. Yet I prefer to reach my conclusions through analysis, rather than encoding them into my questions. I have found it profitable here to endeavor to understand the decisions, perspectives, and motivations of all parties on their own terms. A few concerned colleagues and teachers have warned me that some may therefore seek to label as me an apologist for communism, particularly some of my European readers. I am convinced, however, that as an historian, I must show empathy to unsavory characters, not because of debt I owe to them, but to myself and my own society.

Why the Czech Lands

In the following chapters, I use the Czech case to think broadly about how the terms of ethno-national and civic integration changed for the Jewish citizens of East-Central Europe’s nation-states after the Holocaust and through four decades of communist rule. The Czech lands, the regions of Bohemia and Moravia, which composed the western province of Czechoslovakia, function superbly as a case study for this project. Scholars have already used the region as a

¹⁵ Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Charles Hoffman, *Gray Dawn: The Jews of Eastern Europe in the Post-Communist Era* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992); Edward Serotta, *Out of the Shadows: A Photographic Portraits of Jewish Life in Central Europe since the Holocaust* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1991); and Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*.

laboratory for studying the intersection of statecraft, ethnicity, and nationalism,¹⁶ as well as the integration of Jews into modern East-Central European society, particularly during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁷ Czechoslovakia, furthermore, remained a multi-ethnic state—if only a bi-national one—through the entire period of communist rule. This makes it possible to offer comparisons between the articulation of national (after 1969, federal) policies in different political-cultural and ethnic contexts. I maintain a focus on the Czech lands, but reference Slovakia when doing so provides perspective. Finally, I selected the Czech lands because the history of Jewish-state relations in that region swung between extremes. On one hand, Czechoslovakia became an international symbol of communist anti-Zionism and antisemitism during the early years of the Cold War and again at its conclusion. On the other hand, during the 1960s the country witnessed a flourishing of Jewish cultural life, particularly in Prague. The government sponsored a number of international projects celebrating (and mourning) Czech-Jewish heritage. Jewish themes, in some years, even featured prominently and positively in its political discourses and propaganda.

¹⁶ Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czech and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); and Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

¹⁷ See footnote 3.

Jews and the State in the Communist Czech Lands

At least 43,000 citizens of Jewish origin called Czechoslovakia home in 1945, out of a prewar population of over 350,000.¹⁸ More than half chose to emigrate. Others attempted to conceal their roots.¹⁹ Still others hoped to rebuild the Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust. Before they could establish a new *modus vivendi*, before the wounds of the war could begin to heal, the Communist Party came to power with the ambition to transform society. It brought the state under the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and ruled until 1989. For those Jews who did not emigrate by 1950, the communist years were marked by renegotiations of ethnicity, nationality, religion, and citizenship; periods of fear and persecution and others of relative freedom and renaissance.

During these years, the Communist Party and the state administration struggled to direct Jewish re-integration and to manage Jewish affairs in accordance with their official ideologies, while also accommodating the demands of the domestic political sphere and the vicissitudes of the international arena. The party-state's attempt to resolve the "Jewish Question" failed, in part, because of the paradigmatically modern difficulty of trying to force Jews (and ideas about Jews) to conform to categories developed for thinking about Christian and post-Christian Europeans of supposedly exclusive ethno-linguistic communities. Czechoslovak officials struggled in vain to

¹⁸ Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném Československu" [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], in *Židé v novodobých dějinách: Soubor přednášek na FF UK, Uspořádal Václav Veber* [Jews in contemporary history: A collection of lectures at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, organized by Václav Veber] (Prague, Czech Republic: Karolinum, 1997); and Petr Brod, Kateřina Čapková, and Michal Frankl, "Czechoslovakia," *YIVO Encyclopedia*. <<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Czechoslovakia>> (6 July 2014).

¹⁹ On Jewish choices in the postwar period, see Blanka Soukupová, "Modely životných osudů českých Židů po šoa" [Models of the fates of Czech Jews after the Shoah], in *Židovská menšina v československu po druhé světové válce od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War from liberation to a new totalitarianism] (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 81-106.

separate Jewish identification and practice into distinct ethnic and religious spheres, *de facto* criminalizing the former under the guise of anti-Zionism and officially supporting and financing the latter in the name of freedom of conscience.

With attention to communist ideologies and only the first four or five years of communist rule to consider, Peter Meyer characterized the party-state's approach to the challenge of Jewish integration as follows,

Communist theory had promised to solve the "Jewish question" once and for all by eliminating the social roots of antagonism between Jews and non-Jews.... The final solution was assimilation, but this assimilation was to be a voluntary one, and for a transitory period the Jews were promised a free rein to develop their cultural and communal traditions and institutions.²⁰

Writing more than sixty years later and on the years that immediately followed, Martin Šmok agrees with Meyer and elaborates upon his argument,

The plan of the Czechoslovak authorities in the late 1950s was clear. Pressure on the Jews to make them assimilate, combined with a prohibition of Jewish education, was to eradicate any manifestations of "Zionism" (a label used to describe even remote awareness of Jewish identity) among youth. Any elderly Jews remaining in Czechoslovakia were to be permitted to live out their days in relative calm and material security - as long as they remained the last generation.²¹

This even pertained to the party-state's policy of supporting the Jewish communities as churches, because it also sought to establish incrementally an atheistic society through educational, coercive, and economic means. This subtle difference in policy and ideology, however, permitted party-state officials to act with leniency towards the Jewish communities in ecclesiastical matters, particularly when empathy and self-interest led them to do so. In contrast, after the anti-

²⁰ Peter Meyer, "Czechoslovakia," in *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, eds. Peter Meyer, Bernard D. Weinryb, Eugene Duschinsky, and Nicolas Sylvain (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1953), 40.

²¹ Martin Šmok, "'Every Jew is a Zionist, and every Zionist is a Spy!' The story of Jewish Social Assistance Networks in Communist Czechoslovakia," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2014): 78.

Zionist turn of 1949, officials could not countenance any expressions of Jewish ethnic identification—at least until the 1960s.

Distinguishing Jewish nationalism, not to mention ethnicity, from the Jewish religion proved impossible, for a number of reasons. The Jewish religion traditionally commemorates the history of the Jewish people. Supporting and facilitating the practice of that religion, thus, often meant encouraging its adherents to focus on their ethnic difference from the majority. Despite the party-state's demand that all citizens of the Jewish religion identify as nationally Czech or Slovak, much suggested that they still composed a separate ethnic group. This made religious gatherings suspect. (To wit, many people joined the Jewish religious communities out of ethnic solidarity and to receive various forms of assistance, rather than out of religious conviction.) Jews had suffered differently during war, due to imposed "racial" distinctions, which more closely corresponded to ethnic, rather than religious, conceptions of Jewishness. In response, many Jews, particularly in Slovakia, turned to political Zionism. Then, in 1948, Jewish settlers founded a nation-state of their own in the Middle East, which demanded attention from Czechoslovak ministries, the Communist Party, and Jewish citizens. So too did Western-Zionist organizations, which operated in the country. Their interventions distinguished Jewish citizens further from their non-Jewish neighbors. Finally, the ascent of the Communist Party to power did nothing to ameliorate the ambivalence with which many non-Jews looked upon their Jewish compatriots. Indeed, the intensification of nationalist sentiment among non-Jews during the Second World War exacerbated longstanding ambivalences about the place of Jews in nation. This pertained in particular to the very state officials responsible for stamping out Jewish nationalism in the domestic sphere, the agents of the State Security Administration. Yet even those policies and decisions which could be considered to have been expressions of

philosemitism—often reactions to antisemitism—turned on ideas of Jewish difference and exceptionalism.

Managing and enforcing the artificial and value-laden distinction between Jewish ethnic identification and Jewish religious practice engendered conflicts between the state organs responsible for them respectively. They struggled against one another to alleviate contradiction-born tensions and to frame their competing policies in Marxist-Leninist terms. The dissonance between official policies and popular beliefs, both old and new, only exacerbated this problem. So too did the impingement upon Jewish-state relations of other areas of administration, national concern, and political culture.

The leaders of the Jewish religious communities, many of whom held sympathies for communism, adapted to this political-cultural framework. On the one hand, they made little public effort to express sentiments of ethnic solidarity with fellow Jews. They even inveighed on the world stage against Israeli politics. On the other hand, however, Jewish leaders succeeded in winning concessions from the state in the ecclesiastical sphere. They also took advantage of the inter-state fissures and other political considerations to widen, as much as possible, what the ecclesiastical arena comprised. Jewish leaders offered justification from a religious perspective, for example, in order to stage Holocaust commemorations and to provide a range of social services to their members. While some have seen “collaboration” in the relationships between Jewish leaders and the state, I argue that a willingness to work with the state actually maintained the Jewish communities through 1989. It also inspired a counter-culture during the final years of communist rule, which would define post-communist Czech-Jewish culture for years.

By identifying intra-state friction as a major determining factor in Jewish-state relations, I offer an alternative to studies that have treated Europe’s socialist states as Soviet-satellite

monoliths, driven, where Jews were concerned, by antisemitism alone. Through my attention to the bureaucracies of the party-state and their interactions with the official Jewish communities, I also reveal the second half of the twentieth century to have been one of unfolding Jewish political and religious culture. In this, I draw inspiration from Rogers Brubaker. He confirms that an analytic focus on the state is important due to its control over the public and political spheres, but he also argues convincingly that states do not “create ‘identities’ in the strong sense.”²²

To be sure, I focus in this work on divisions within the Jewish communities as well as, along with Jewish experiences and political practices that fell outside of the communities’ purview. My use of the term, “Jewish-state relations,” should not be understood as reflecting a simple binary. Rather, I use it as to refer to a complex set of political, economic, and cultural interactions and networks which shared a fundamental basis in the state’s attempt to manage Jewish affairs and the integration of the Jewish minority. Understood in this way, a focus on Jewish-state relations provides a compelling and unavoidable framework for the study of Jewish history from the Second World War until the fall of communism.

Historical Background: The Bohemian and Moravian Case: 1848-1948²³

Since the early nineteenth century, activists asserting the existence in Europe of coherent ethno-national communities with the inherent rights to political self-determination, struggled to inscribe the population of the Czech lands into two distinct camps: Czechs and Germans. With increasing success, they drew firm boundaries of national difference within communities long marked by national “ambivalence,” bilingualism, and—what nationalizers would consider—intermarriage. The Viennese center of the Austrian (after 1867, the Austro-Hungarian) Empire, seeking to control

²² Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 43.

²³ Compiled from works cited in footnotes 3 and 15, unless otherwise noted.

and to benefit from these deepening cleavages, passed legislation that codified them into law. Nationalizers found additional edification in the rising current of international opinion regarding national-political rights. This culminated in American President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points of Light" speech of 1918.

While extremists in both the Czech and German camps drew upon popular anti-Jewish sentiment to exclude Jews from their national communities, others adopted more sympathetic and pragmatic solutions to the "Jewish Question." Just as nationalizers fought over the identities of children living in "mixed" Czech-German households, so too did they seek to inflate their ranks—at the expense of their adversaries—by welcoming into their communities fellow subjects-come-citizens of the Jewish faith. This did not mean, however, that they had overcome their ambivalence towards Jews. Some Czech nationalists, for example, accused upper and middle class Jews of promoting the German language and culture, or "Germanizing." They characterized them as traitors to their home country. Yet as Michal Frankl has shown, Czech antisemitic discourses reflected a range of suspicions that lay beyond the bounds of the local nationalities contests between Czechs and Germans.²⁴ Even Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1837), the first President of Czechoslovakia, who fought stridently against antisemitism and for the extension of full legal equality to Jews, openly expressed his own discomfort with them, as well as his doubt in their ability to transform themselves fully into ethnic Czechs.²⁵

Bohemian and Moravian Jews advanced a number of competing strategies for navigating this uncertain landscape. A growing number, particularly in Bohemia, advocated various degrees

²⁴ Frankl, *Emancipace od Židů*. See also Michael L. Miller, "The Rise and Fal of Archbishop Kohn: Czechs, Germans, and Jews in Turn-of-the-Century Moravia," *Slavic Review*, vol. 65, no. 3 (Autumn, 2006): 446-74.

²⁵ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, 198-216.

of assimilation into the Czech nation.²⁶ Others drew inspiration from the local environment and embraced Jewish nationalism, most often in the form of cultural Zionism, but also in its political-territorial form.²⁷ Many urban Jews, living at the intersection of German and Czech culture, fashioned themselves as inter-national mediators (i.e., between Czechs and Germans). As their allegiances shifted towards the Czech nation, particularly after the foundation of Czechoslovakia and in light of vocal German antisemitism, a number of them came to understand themselves as being of hybrid Czech-Jewish identity—a transposition of their national-intermediary position onto a new political context.²⁸

Czechoslovakia, founded in 1918 as a “multiethnic nation-state,” preserved the ambiguity of Jewish national belonging by extending to its citizens of the Jewish religion the right to choose whether to identify as nationally Jewish or to claim membership in one of the country’s other national groups, each of which—including Jews—enjoyed cultural and political rights. Czech Zionists provided the impetus for this decision. They suggested that recognizing a Jewish

²⁶ Hillel Kieval characterizes this move as “secondary acculturation,” from Jewish to German during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, and then from German to Czech in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. See Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*; cf. Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). For reflections on this debate and new directions, see Dimitry Shumsky, “Historiography, Nationalism and Binationalism: Czecho-German Jewry, the Prague Zionists and the Origins of the Bi-national Approach of Hugo Bergmann,” *Zion* vol. 69, no. 1 (2004): 45-80 (in Hebrew). See also Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé* [Czechs, Germans, Jews?], 93-174.

²⁷ Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé* [Czechs, Germans, Jews?], 175-258. See also Shumsky, “Historiography, Nationalism and Binationalism;” and Jiří Křesťan, “Židovské spolky a česká společnost (1918-1940)” [Jewish associations and Czech society (1918-1940)], in *Židovské spolky a česká společnost (1918-1940)* [Jewish associations and Czech society (1918-1940)], eds. Jiří Křesťan, Alexandra Blodigová, and Jaroslav Bubeník (Prague, Czech Republic: Sefer and the Institute for the Terezín Initiative, 2001), 15-76.

²⁸ Shumsky, “Historiography, Nationalism and Binationalism.” This article inspired a debate with Martin J. Wein. Shumsky, “Czecho-German Jews and More,” *Zion* vol. 70, no. 3 (2005): 393-99 (in Hebrew); and Martin J. Wein, “Only Czecho-German Jews?” *Zion*, vol. 70, no. 3 (2005): 383-92 (in Hebrew).

national category would provide Czechoslovak-loyal, German- and Hungarian-speaking Jews with an alternative to claiming German or Hungarian nationality. This appealed to Czechoslovak leaders who sought to limit the power of the country's two largest ethnic minorities, which depended significantly upon their demographic weight as recorded in the census.²⁹

Contemporary observers and historians have correctly cited this policy as evidence of the successful assimilation of Jews into Czech culture and society, particularly in comparison to Poland, Hungary, and Romania.³⁰ Yet Czechoslovakia's offer of national choice to Jews also cast into law popular ambivalence about their place in the Czech nation. Whereas non-Jewish Czechs belonged thereto by virtue of their birth, Jews had to choose to belong—and they could even choose to leave. Some non-Jewish Czechs, like Masaryk, attempted with grace to overlook this distinction. Others, refused to abandon the perception of Jews as national opportunists.³¹

²⁹ Kieval, "Negotiating Czechoslovakia." This was a serious concern. In 1921, Germans composed a full 30.60% of the population of the Czech Land's. For demographic information see <[http://www.czso.cz/csu/2012edicniplan.nsf/t/B5001FC4EE/\\$File/4032120117.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2012edicniplan.nsf/t/B5001FC4EE/$File/4032120117.pdf)> (24 February 2013).

While it may be impossible to assess the impact of this policy on Czech-German political competition, it had a marked effect upon Bohemian and Moravian Jews. Whereas 48.43% of them had identified German as their language of daily interaction (*obcovací řeč*) in the 1910 census, which lacked explicitly national categories, only 34.85% of them chose German nationality in 1921. Ten years later, that number dropped further to 31.00%. That the vast majority of these defectors claimed Jewish nationality reflected the confluence of rising Jewish nationalism and pro-Czechoslovak sentiment within this cohort. In comparison, the camp of Jewish Czech-speakers suffered much less attrition, with 51.45% of Bohemian and Moravian Jews reporting Czech-language use in 1910 and 46.42% of them claiming Czech nationality in 1930. This, however, did not prevent a number of them for voting in national elections for the Jewish Party, which portrayed itself as representing the Jewish nation of the Czechoslovak nation-state. Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé* [Czechs, Germans, Jews?], 27-53.

³⁰ Martin J. Wein, *A Slavic Jerusalem: An Intimate History of Czechs and Jews* (In process). For a regional discussion see, Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 40-104. See also, Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jew of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln, NE and Jerusalem, Israel: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2005), 8-62.

³¹ Frankl, *Emancipace od Židů*; and Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 26-97.

Czechoslovak nationalities policy, however sensitive and comparatively benevolent towards Jews, thus did little to mitigate popular ambivalence about them. During the 1930s, when Nazi Germany intentionally inflamed Czech-German tensions in neighboring Czechoslovakia, both Czech and German nationalists derided Jews and sought their social exclusion. Under the influence of Nazi Germany, the government of the Second Czechoslovak Republic (30 September 1938 - 15 March 1939) passed anti-Jewish legislation, which mirrored independent initiatives taken by segments of civil society.³² With the incorporation of Bohemia and Moravia into the German Reich in 1939, Jews found themselves legally excluded from the Czech and German nations and subject to deportation, concentration, starvation, slavery, and ultimately genocide. The Nazis and their collaborators murdered 78,145 out of some 118,000 Bohemian and Moravian Jews by the end of the Second World War.³³

To be clear, the intention here is not to characterize Czech society as antisemitic—far from it. Czech Jews enjoyed a high degree of integration and acceptance in the First Czechoslovak Republic, as demonstrated by their social and cultural achievements and a considerable amount of “intermarriage” between Jews and non-Jews. The region, moreover, lacked the history of violent antisemitism that had characterized many of the surrounding ones, including Slovakia. It is precisely for this reason that the persistence of anti-Jewish sentiment and gnawing questions about the possibility of Jewish integration are worth examining in the Czech lands.

³² Fred Hahn, “Židé a druhá, Česko-slovenská republika” [Jews and the second Czechoslovak Republic], *Střední Evropě*, vol. 38-39 (1994): 190-96.

³³ On the Holocaust in the Czech lands, see Rothkirchen, *The Jew of Bohemia and Moravia*; and Chad Carl Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). For an interesting revision to figures related to Bohemian and Moravian Jews from 1920-1948, see Petr Sedlák, “Židé v českých zemích v letech 1945-1949” [Jews in the Czech lands in the years 1945-1949], *Tereziánské studie a dokumenty* (2008): 13-45.

During the early years of the Second World War, the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile revised the terms of Jewish integration into the bi-national state, but preserved an element of Jewish national choice and thereby also the encoding of ambivalence about Jews into state policy. The London-based leadership resolved to rescind the country's system of national minority rights and to reinvent postwar Czechoslovakia as a bi-national state for Czechs and Slovaks (with rights for other Slavic nationalities). After the restoration of Czechoslovakia, the government (and people) violently expelled over 2.5 million ethnic Germans. It spared only those who could demonstrate that they had remained "loyal" during the Second World War. The country adopted similarly policies with regard to the Hungarian minority, which resided in the eastern province of Slovakia.

The Czechoslovak government, in exile and once restored to power, held some sympathy for Jews. Politicians viewed them as fellow first victims of the Nazis. They certainly could not accuse them collectively of collaboration with the Nazis, as they did German and Hungarian citizens. The government thus offered Jewish citizens the choice to remain in the country as assimilated Czechs and Slovaks of the Jewish religion or to emigrate as national Jews, presumably to Palestine (after May 1948, to Israel). From that point forward, the state only recognized "Jewish" as a category of religious affiliation. To wit, this change occurred a before the communist take-over of 1948. It represented a rearticulation of Masaryk's program of extending national choice to Jews in a more radical time—and a plan to solve the "Jewish Question" through emigration.³⁴

³⁴ Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938-48*. See also Moshe Yegar, Eva Adamnová, and Petr Sláma, *Československo, Sionismus, Izrael: historie vzájemných vztahů* [Czechoslovakia, Zionism, Israel: the history of bilateral relations] (Prague, Czech Republic: Victoria Publishing and East Publishing, 1997), 118-24.

This plan did not proceed without complications. The government initially failed to pass specific legislation for Jewish citizens. This left them subject as individuals to the same policies as the rest of the population. In theory, this made sense. If the state no longer recognized Jews as a national minority, then it could not write legislation which treated them as such.³⁵ This caused hardship for some surviving Jewish citizens. Regional courts investigated the loyalties of 2,000 Jews of supposed German nationality. Despite the fact that they retained their Czechoslovak citizenship in the end, they still lost their rights to the restitution of personal property.³⁶ Much depended upon local contexts. An official of the county branch of the Communist Party in Kyjov reported in 1946 that,

... the National Socialists [no relation to the German Nazi Party] here specialize in seeking out arguments all Jews, provided that they are here and have property, would be considered Germans.³⁷

Citizens who had claimed “Jewish” nationality in the 1930s census expected to face legal problems as well. The vast majority, however, did not. The status of Jewish refugees from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia also stood in limbo for some time after Czechoslovakia ceded the region to the Soviet Union. In 1946, the government resolved these issues bureaucratically, in cooperation with the local Jewish community and, to a lesser extent, the World Jewish Congress.³⁸

³⁵ Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938-48*.

³⁶ Radka Čermaková, “Poválečné Československo: Obnovený stát ve střední Evropě” [Postwar Czechoslovakia: a renewed state in Central Europe], in *Židovská menšina v československu po druhé světové válce od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War from liberation to a new totalitarianism] (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 28.

³⁷ Memo from the County Directorate of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in Kyjov (20 March 1946). NAČR, Gen-Sek UVKSC binder 78, archival unit 582, 3.

³⁸ Jacob Ari Labendz, “‘In unserer Kreise:’ Czech-Jewish Activism and Immigration in America, 1939-1944,” *Jewish Culture and History* (forthcoming); and Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938-48*.

Despite the refusal to extend national rights to Jews in the domestic sphere, the postwar governments of Czechoslovakia, both pre-communist and communist, supported political Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel. National Jews, no longer welcome at home, needed somewhere to go. Czech nationalists, moreover, had a tradition of sympathizing with Zionists, with whom they felt a kinship as representatives of fellow small nations, which they believed had endured centuries of German exploitation. The Czechoslovak government therefore collaborated at great expense with Western- and Palestinian-Jewish organizations to assist, not only Czechoslovak Jews, but also hundreds of thousands of Jews from the surrounding countries to reach Palestine.³⁹ It also sold weapons to the *Hagana*, the precursor to the Israeli Army.

The Communist Party maintained all of these policies after taking power in February 1948. Despite its official commitment to “internationalism,” it adopted an extremely nationalist orientation, in part, to court voters. The party advocated taking the severest of measures against the German and Hungarian minorities and accused other political parties of failing to act against them with resolve.⁴⁰ At the same time, the party stood publicly against antisemitism. Not only did communists associate antisemitism with their fascist nemeses, but they also understood that their domestic opponents used antisemitism to win supporters, particularly in Slovakia.

³⁹ On the Jewish emigration and transmigration from and through Czechoslovakia to Israel, see Monika Hanková, “Změna postoje vládnoucích orgánů ČSR k židovské komunitě po roce 1948 na příkladu vystěhovalectví” [The change in the attitude of the governing organs of Czechoslovakia towards the Jewish community after the year 1948 through the example of emigration], in *Židé v Čechách: Sborník ze semináře konaného v říjnu 2006 v Liberci* [Jews in the Czech lands: the proceedings from the seminar that took place in October 2006 in Liberec], eds. Vlastimila Hamáčková, Monika Hanková, and Markéta Lhotová (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2007), 96-104.

⁴⁰ Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), especially 89-103, 178-198; and Spurný, *Nejsou jako my* [They are not like us], 337-43. See also Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 267-347.

Czechoslovak communists followed the Soviet Union's lead in their support for Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Indeed, some believe the permission to sell arms to Israel to have been a concession by the USSR to Czechoslovakia for not participating in the U.S. Marshall Plan. The Czechoslovak Army even trained the Israeli armed forces.⁴¹

As per above, these changes in policy did not mean that citizens and officials stopped thinking about Jews in ethno-national terms. Nationalist mobs in Slovakia carried out a series of pogroms. Their rhetoric evoked the age-old libel that Jews murdered Christian children. Hooligans also desecrated Jewish cemeteries. In the Czech lands, Jews continued to face derision for "Germanizing" and suffered attacks in the popular media and in their places of employment. Jews across the country faced discrimination in their attempts to reconstitute private property, stolen during the war. (This issue declined in importance, however, as the party-state completed the processes of commercial and industrial nationalization, which had begun under the previous regime.)

While many Jews thus encountered antisemitism, both directly and indirectly, relatively few chose to emigrate before 1948. Some Jewish citizens decided to remain in Czechoslovakia out of attachment to the land of their birth. Others stayed because they feared the difficulty of beginning new lives abroad. Many also felt optimistic about their prospects at home, particularly in light of its reputation for philosemitism and its ongoing cooperation with Jewish organizations. The latter agreed with this assessment. In 1947, the American Jewish Joint

⁴¹ Arnold Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship: Israel and the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1953* (Urbana and Chicago, IL and London, UK: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 54-122; and Yegar, Adamnová, and Sláma, *Československo, Sionismus, Izrael* [Czechoslovakia, Zionism, Israel], 60-132. Bradley Abrams does not list the arms sales as such concessions in "The Marshall Plan and Czechoslovak Democracy: Elements of Interdependency," in *The Marshall Plan: Fifty Years After*, ed. Martin A. Schain with an introduction by Tony Judt, Europe in Transition: The NYU European Studies Series (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 93-116.

Distribution Committee proposed resettling in Czechoslovakia Polish-Jewish refugees from the American Zone of occupied Germany.⁴² Only after the communist coup did Czechoslovak Jews, and Czechs in particular, emigrate in large numbers. Most went to Israel. As if to prove the ambivalence of some non-Jewish Czechs and Slovaks about the place of Jews in their united nation, state officials and private citizens often treated Jewish citizens seeking emigration as national traitors. Many of those who sought this path complained of mistreatment and of policies which prevented them from taking their property with them.⁴³ On the other hand, many Jews trusted the Communist Party to protect them from antisemitism, just as the Soviet Union had fought against Nazis Germany. Many also rejected Zionism. They steeled themselves to endure hardships—banal in comparison to those of the war years—as Czechoslovakia reinvented itself as socialist country supposedly free of racism.⁴⁴

In sum, ambivalence about the place of Jews in the Czech national community and, after 1918, in the Czechoslovak nation-state marked Jewish-state relations in Bohemia and Moravia from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. State policies designed to manage the

⁴² Letter from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee office in Paris to the headquarters in New York City, letter no. 2638 (27 March 1947); letter from Israel Jacobson to President Jan Masaryk (18 March 1947); and Letter from M. W. Beckelman to Joseph J. Schwartz (1 March 1947). JDC, AR45/54, 200, microfilm).

⁴³ “Memorandum o stížnostech židovských vystěhovalců odjíždějících z Československa do Izraele a jiných zemí” [Memorandum about the complaints of Jewish émigrés leaving from Czechoslovakia to Israel and other lands] (30 May 1949), reprinted from the State Central Archives, Political Trials Collection, bundle 314, archival unit 1480-638, in *Československo a Izrael, 1945-1956: Dokumenty* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1945-1956: documents], eds. Marie Bulínový, Jiří Dufek, Karel Kaplan, and Vladimír Šlosar (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Historical Institute of the Czech Army and with the State Central Archives, 1993), 214-17.

⁴⁴ Aside from the very general figures for Jewish emigration that I provide below, statistics do not exist to suggest what proportion of Czech and Slovak Jews adopted various competing identificational and political strategies in postwar Czechoslovakia. I refer again to the work of Blanka Soukupová, “Modely životných osudů českých Židů po šoa” [Models of the fates of Czech Jews after the Shoah].

integration of Jews, even if comparatively benevolent for the region, perpetuated ideas of Jewish difference. The postwar attempt to resolve these tensions by administrative fiat and by encouraging emigration could not overcome the weight of history and new challenges. A number of scholars now point to continuities of practice and ideology from the war years into the first period of communist rule. They note, in particular, the desire to build homogeneous nation-states, even at the cost of great violence, and the belief that internal enemies poisoned the nation.⁴⁵ Jewish citizens may have been justified in believing that they would find sanctuary under communist protection. When conditions changed, however, they once again faced accusations of treachery and otherness, based in the very same ambivalences that had complicated their ancestors' integration. So began the first re-criminalization of Jewish descent in the Czech Lands after 1945 and the very chapter of Jewish history under consideration here.

Counting and Naming Jews

Several factors make it difficult to arrive at the number of Jews who resided in the Czech lands after the Second World War and who lived there through 1989. Developing heuristics for deciding whom to consider Jewish poses the greatest challenge, followed by a lack of reliable data. Should this count include only individuals who considered themselves Jewish? Censuses, taken roughly every ten years, recorded only the number of citizens who stated an affiliation with the Jewish religion. The Jewish religious communities also published gross membership data, which sometimes conflicted with the census results. In the early postwar years, they divided their

⁴⁵ Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, "Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Problems, Perspectives," and Kevin McDermott, "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia: Origins, Processes, Responses," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, UK and New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 2010, distributed in the U.S.A. by Palgrave Macmillan), 1-18 and 98-118.

members into two categories: Jews according to traditional religious law, whose mothers had been Jewish or who had converted, and individuals of Jewish descent who qualified for assistance as Holocaust survivors. Some community members did not consider themselves believers and some practitioners did not join the official communities. Some Jews by religion attempted to hide that information from census-takers and I have doubts about the reliability of the figures provided by the communities. Neither of these sources provides insight into how many citizens considered themselves Jewish by ethnicity or nationality. The state stopped recording this information when it decided that Jewish citizens could no longer claim membership in their own national minority. In light of the party's anti-Zionist ideology, postwar reports on the history of and contemporary problems with national identification in Czechoslovakia even ignored the cohort of citizens who had claimed membership in the Jewish minority during the interwar years. Yet even if this sort of data existed for the years through 1989, it would resist interpretation because ethno-national identification does not map neatly onto single, uncomplicated categories and because it can change within a person's lifetime. The censuses and community's publications, thus, merely provide approximations of the number of citizens who associated in some way with the Jewish religion and the Jewish communities.

It may be ethical to count as Jewish only those individuals who self-identified as such. Yet that number would fail to include a significant number of individuals whom the state, like the Nazi regime before it, considered either Jewish or, in the communist case, "of Jewish origin." This form of exogenous identification often had serious implications for the lives of those concerned. The Nazis persecuted and murdered millions of Europeans whom they identified as racially Jewish to one degree or another. A number of their victims never saw themselves as Jews, including some lucky enough to survive the genocide. In the early postwar years, their

experiences not only marked them as Jewish, but also left them with memories, relationships, and needs that connected them to Jews and also to the Jewish communities. Other survivors who had identified as Jewish before the war wished not to be considered so in its aftermath. The National Security Administration of communist Czechoslovakia collected the names and personal information of individuals who had joined domestic Zionist organizations between 1945 and 1950. This included recording the identities of their immediate family members. Its successor agency used this information to compile a registry of all citizens “of Jewish origin” during the 1970s and 1980s, which it supplemented with other data sources. Even without these programs, citizens “of Jewish origin” faced semi-official discrimination at work, in school, and in dealing with state offices. In periods of heightened antisemitism and anti-Zionism, media outlets and party-state representatives alike reported on the presumed Jewish roots of individuals and groups whom they sought to disparage.

More sympathetic parties also intervened into Czechoslovak affairs with the goal of aiding the country’s Jewish minority. They included the State of Israel, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Service, as well as some faith-based organizations. They each applied their own system of heuristics for determining whom to assist, which most often corresponded to the state’s usage of the unofficial category “of Jewish origin.” (Most religious organizations worked with the Jewish communities and therefore relied upon their decisions whom to consider Jewish.) The provision of services by Western-Jewish and Israeli organizations to individuals with no formal relationship to the official Jewish communities confirmed the suspicions of the security services that unaffiliated Zionists abounded on the territory of Czechoslovakia. So to did the public statements of those Western organizations and the policy of the State of Israel (clarified in 1970) to extend an offer of

citizenship to all people with at least one Jewish grandparent or who had converted to Judaism. While foreign aid and naturalization rights in Israel proved invaluable to some citizens and helpful to others, it also exacerbated the tensions inherent to Jewish-state relations. In the late-1950s, this manifested in the arrest and conviction of a number of Jews for crimes against the state.⁴⁶ This suggests that exogenously determined information matters for considering the history of Jews in the Czech lands, even if care must be taken as well not to label individuals as Jewish in contravention of their wishes.

Nowhere in this work do I presume to provide an accurate tally of the number of the Jews in Czechoslovakia. The foregoing suggests the futility of such an endeavor, as the figure always depended upon who was counting and for what reason. In this study I seek to analyze and interpret the tensions inherent to the state's attempts to manage Jewish identification, especially as it conditioned and conflicted with the activities of the Jewish communities and the identificational process of individuals. Superimposing my own set of heuristics would only result in the obfuscation of these phenomena.⁴⁷

Sufficient data exists, nonetheless, to offer a general sense of how many Jews, loosely defined, resided in Czechoslovakia and the Czech lands in the immediate postwar years. In 1945, Jewish community officials recorded the presence of 14,359 citizens of Jewish origin in the Czech lands, of whom roughly one third did not consider themselves religiously Jewish.⁴⁸ Slovakia had a larger Jewish population, composed of 20,000 Jews by both origin and religion

⁴⁶ Šmok, “‘Every Jew is a Zionist, and every Zionist is a Spy!’ See also, Tomáš Habermann, “Procesy, o ketrých se nemluvalo: izraelské vyslanectví a distribuce sociálních podpor v letech 1953-1957,” *Marginalia Historica* (forthcoming).

⁴⁷ On the difficulties of counting Jews in Europe (or anywhere else), see John Borneman, “Identifying German Jews,” in John Borneman and Jeffrey M. Peck, *Sojourners: The Return of German Jews and the Question of Identity* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 1-34.

⁴⁸ Sedlák, “Židé v českých zemích” [Jews in the Czech lands], 24.

and another 8,000 by descent alone.⁴⁹ The number of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia swelled considerably over the next few years, primarily due to the arrival of between 8,000 and 12,000 immigrants from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, as well as 1,254 net births. The count of Jews in that region by descent and religion reached a high point of 24,395 in 1949.⁵⁰

Those early postwar years also witnessed massive waves of Jewish emigration, mostly to Palestine and Israel. Between 18,000 and 20,000 Jews from Czechoslovakia relocated there between 1945 and 1950.⁵¹ Sub-Carpathian immigrants likely predominated among them, as did Slovak Jews.⁵² Some authors, however, cite the much higher figure of 35,000 émigrés to Israel by 1951.⁵³ Based on my own calculations, at least 2,000 Czechoslovak Jews arrived on American shores between 1945 and 1950.⁵⁴ Other sources, however, suggest that the number likely exceeded 3,000.⁵⁵ Another few thousand Jews from Czechoslovakia sought new homes in other foreign lands, primarily in Western Europe and Australia.⁵⁶

At present, this represents the extent of the available information regarding the return and emigration of Jews from Czechoslovakia in the immediate postwar years. It provides only a general sense of the movement of that population, and not only due to the disparities between some counts. A number of citizens left the country illegally. Others traveled simply as Czechs and Slovaks, rather than as ethnic Jews to Israel or to the West with the assistance of Western-

⁴⁹ Brod, “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 159.

⁵⁰ Sedlák, “Židé v českých zemích” [Jews in the Czech], 23-26.

⁵¹ Brod, “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 151; Hanková, “Změna postoje vládnoucích orgánů” [The change in the attitude of the governing organs], 100; and Sedlák, “Židé v českých zemích v letech 1945-1949” [Jews in the Czech lands in the years 1945-1949], 32.

⁵² Sedlák, “Židé v českých zemích” [Jews in the Czech lands in the], 33.

⁵³ Ján Mlynárik, *Dějiny Židů na Slovensku*, trans. Milan Pokorný (Prague, Czech Republic: Academia, 2005), 342.

⁵⁴ Labendz, “*In unserer Kreise.*”

⁵⁵ Sedlák, “Židé v českých zemích” [Jews in the Czech], 31. I tend to trust this number.

⁵⁶ Brod, “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 151.

Jewish organizations. They do not appear as Jews in the historical record, nor, perhaps, should they.⁵⁷

The Czechoslovak government implemented heavy restrictions on Jewish (and also non-Jewish) emigration towards the end of 1949, which stabilized the numbers of Jews in the country. 15,514 citizens declared the Jewish religion in 1950 census, 9,038 in the Czech lands and 7,476 in Slovakia. That same year, the country's Jewish communities reported a combined total membership of about 20,000. Whether this disparity reflects the hesitancy of citizens to report their Jewish religious affiliation to the state or a gross overestimation on the part of community functionaries is difficult to tell.⁵⁸ The total number of Jews in Czechoslovakia, based upon the membership roles of the Jewish communities, totaled around 17,000 in 1951 and 18,000 in 1963.⁵⁹

Language, Scope, and Historiography

I have already addressed what I mean by “Jewish-state relations.” This introduction, however, requires a few additional notes on language, scope, and historiography. In light of the foregoing discussion, I often rely upon the ambiguity of the English words “Jew” and “Jewish” to convey the very fluidity in Jewish identification and practice that the party-state sought to master. In the Czech language, the words for a national Jew and Jew by religion sound the same, but appear differently on the page. When referring to the former, Czechs write the word “*Žid*” with a capital “*ž*.” It appears without capitalization when referring to the latter. The adjectival form “*židovské*”

⁵⁷ For more information, see Sedlák, “*Židé v českých zemích*” [Jews in the Czech], 31.

⁵⁸ “*Zpráva o situaci v židovské náboženské společnosti v ČSR*” [Report on the situation in the Jewish religious community in Czechoslovakia] (n.d., around 1960), 2. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁵⁹ Tomáš Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě* [The history of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia], Edice Judaika, vol. 10 (Prague, Czech Republic: Sefer, 2001), 638.

is never capitalized and depends for its meaning upon the noun that it modifies. The most common uses of that adjective for present purposes are “*židovský původ*,” Jewish origin, and “*židovské vyznání*,” the Jewish faith. I deploy these terms in translation when context requires more specificity.⁶⁰ To be clear, even when I refer to individuals or groups as Jews or Jewish, I recognize that they likely indentified in more complex ways, particularly in light of the tradition of bi-nationality and religious laxity among Jews in the Czech lands.⁶¹ In this work, however, I focus on spheres of sociopolitical and cultural interaction in which Jewish identification (and the identification of individuals as Jews) took precedence.

By the “Czech lands,” I mean the former Austrian-Habsburg Crown Lands of Bohemia and Moravia. I often refer to individuals as “Czech Jews.” A minority of them may not have considered themselves Czech or may have felt that they belonged to more than one European ethno-linguistic community. In these cases, I use the word “Czech” to indicate that the individuals in question resided in the Czech lands and that they participated to some extent in Jewish life within and conditioned by the Czech context.

I evoke the terms “Central Europe” and “East-Central Europe” interchangeably to refer to a politically defined and temporally bound region that comprised Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and sometimes Romania, from 1945 to 1989. In this, I follow Lonnie Johnson, who characterized the region as a shifting intermediary space between imagined

⁶⁰ For discussions of the challenges that this fact poses for Czech scholars see, Brod, “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 147; and Blanka Soukupová, “Židé a židovská reprezentace v českých zemích v letech 1945-1948 (Mezi režimem, Židovstvím a Judaism) [Jews and the Jewish representation in the Czech lands in the years 1945-1948 (between the regime, Jewishness, and Judaism), in *Židovská menšina v československu po druhé světové válce od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War from liberation to a new totalitarianism] (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 103-04.

⁶¹ On Czech-Jewish bi-nationality, see Dimitry Shumsky, *Zweisprachigkeit und binational Idee: Der Prager Zionismus, 1900-1930* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

Western and Eastern worlds, which corresponded to territories that differed fundamentally in economic, industrial, and political terms.⁶²

When I refer to “communist Czechoslovakia” I do not mean to imply that the state ever achieved communism, let alone socialism, which it nonetheless declared itself to have accomplished in 1961. I mean only to refer to the fact that the Communist Party controlled the policies and ideologies of the state. Hence, I frequently refer to that complex institution as the “party-state.” Whenever necessary and possible, however, I specify the organ of the party or state responsible for a particular decision, policy, or phenomenon. I use variants the terms, “the Soviet Bloc” and “the Iron Curtain” colloquially, and do not intend with them to make any deeper political claims about East-Central Europe.

All translations in this work are my own, unless otherwise noted. I use Czech and Slovak names to refer to places within Czechoslovakia, except when popular English-language versions are available, as is the case, for example, with Prague. This represents a departure from the English-language historiography on the region concerning earlier periods, when different ethno-linguistic groups vied for political and cultural hegemony. The Second World War and its violent aftermath brought resolution to these conflicts. During the period under consideration here, most people would have recognized Czech political and national hegemony throughout the region. I therefore use only Czech place names. In lieu of providing a pronunciation guide to the Czech language, I direct the reader to any number of fantastic resources available on the Internet.

I focus primarily on the history of Jews in the Czech Lands. Even before Czechoslovakia federated in 1969, Slovakia maintained parallel sub-ministries that operated with varying degrees of independence, depending upon their purview and the year. The history of Jewish integration

⁶² Lonnie Johnson, *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends* (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996).

into Slovakia, moreover, differed significantly from that of the Czech Lands. In order to analyze four decades of affairs and to put them into conversation with earlier periods, I have therefore decided leave Slovak-Jewish relations to others authors, except as they affected conditions in the Czech Lands or provide a foil for analysis. This division is common in European scholarship.

Finally, only two authors have published works which, in some way, present the entire history of Jewish-state relations in the communist Czech lands from 1948 through 1989. Alena Heitlinger and Blanka Soukupová have left indelible marks on this work, both with their scholarship and mentoring. (Again, all mistakes are my own.) From their respective fields of sociology and ethnography, however, they often frame their investigations differently than I. With that in mind, I leave my evaluation of their work and my modest challenges thereto for the prose and footnotes of the coming chapters.

Section and Chapter Organization

I have organized this dissertation into two sections. In the first, composed of two units of three chapters each, I address in as much isolation as possible how the Communist Party and the state administration developed their ideologies and policies regarding so-called Jewish nationalism, on the one hand, and the Jewish religion, on the other. Chapters One and Four feature close readings of the early history of these two, fundamental aspects of Jewish-state relations. I discuss them both in the dual contexts of the long history of Jews in the Czech lands and the broader political culture in which they articulated during the first years of communist rule. Thematic studies follow these introductions, in which I weigh into two of the most prominent scholarly and popular debates about the history of Jews in socialist Europe: the politics of commemorating the Holocaust and the postwar fates of Jewish properties. I use these topics as vehicles for discussing

the ramifications and reception of the party-state's ideologies and policies in the broader public sphere.

In the second section of this work, I explore the evolution of Jewish-state relations as a bureaucratic and political affair, which involved many state agencies, the Communist Party, the Jewish communities, and various international actors. These chapters focus on the contradictions inherent to the party-state's artificial distinction between Jewish ethnic and religious identification and practice, and address how they manifested in various contexts. I divide the years 1956 through 1989 into three unequal parts. Each corresponds to a successive stage in the development of domestic Jewish-state relations, which I use to address different aspects thereof. In Chapter Ten, I focus on the years 1989 and 1990 alone to explicate important transitions within the Czech Jewish communities at the twilight of communist rule and their lasting influences on Czech-Jewish culture. In Chapter Ten, I also focus on the place of intra-communal politics in Jewish-state relations.

In Chapter One, I analyze the emergence of anti-Zionism as a central tenet of party-state ideology and its implications for Jewish-state relations. Czechoslovakia's first communist leaders established the bureaucratic and conceptual frameworks in which stakeholders would negotiate Jewish-state relations through 1989. They did so in the context of a Soviet anti-Zionist campaign, which culminated in the Slánský Affair of 1952, a show trial of top Czechoslovak officials, primarily "of Jewish origin." Yet party-state officials responded with initial hesitancy to Soviet directives, and their initiatives, particularly in the domestic sphere, reflected local priorities and traditions. Despite the pretensions of Czech and Slovak communists to revolution, their policies and rhetoric actually facilitated the transmission of native, pre-communist, antisemitic tropes into the party-state system, where they persisted for decades. By 1952,

nonetheless, the party-state had virtually criminalized being “of Jewish origin” on distinctly local terms. The incorporation of antisemitism into party-state propaganda inspired waves of popular anti-Jewish reaction, much to the consternation of party leaders.⁶³ The curtailment of Jewish emigration to Israel in 1950 further complicated the integration of Jewish citizens. Jewish nationalists and imagined enemy “Zionists” could no longer leave the country nor publicly admit their (purported) allegiances. This cast the suspicion of the entire state security apparatus upon all citizens “of Jewish origin.”

The politics of commemorating the Second World War and the Holocaust brought questions related to the national identification of Jews into the public sphere. The communist state based much of its legitimacy upon an ideologically based interpretation of that conflict, which elided the Jewish identities of its victims and the racist motivations behind their murder. Jewish community members, in contrast, memorialized the genocide of European Jewry and made it a focal point of their shared culture. The tensions between these two discourses has attracted more attention than any other aspect of Jewish affairs in socialist Europe. I add my voice to this discussion to correct errors of interpretation, and also to investigate how debates about Jewish national belonging articulated in the public sphere. Especially during the first communist decades, everyone knew that the Nazis had killed millions of people whom they had identified as Jews in a racist genocide. What did it mean to ignore the Jewish identities of the Nazis’ victims, while also demanding that citizens of Jewish origin, many of whom had survived the camps, reject Jewish national identification? How did the public understand these policies and their contradictions?

In Chapter Two, I argue that much of the scholarship on Holocaust memory in socialist

⁶³ Kevin McDermott, “A ‘Polyphony of Voices’? Czech Popular Opinion and the Slánský Affair,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2008): 840-65.

Europe is reductionist. It focuses on the state's attempts to obfuscate the Jewish specificity of the genocide and portrays Jewish commemorations as subversive. This "dual narrative" framework inaccurately and ahistorically portrays Soviet-Bloc memory politics as a zero-sum game.⁶⁴ This framework has proven compelling for its simplicity, for its basic correspondence with the facts, and because it resonates with western⁶⁵ and domestic-dissident⁶⁶ criticisms of communism from the last decade of the Cold War. The very rootedness of this approach in twentieth-century politics, however, limits its usefulness for achieving insights into that same period.⁶⁷

I argue, instead, that party-state officials employed a two-tiered system of memory politics. They set an "official narrative" before the public in which they elided the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust, in order to characterize the genocide as a crime perpetrated in the name of class warfare. That account celebrated the sacrifices of the Red Army and domestic communist fighters, portraying them as liberators and the guarantors of future peace. Yet the

⁶⁴ In English, Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 47-66; and Livia Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 156-99; and Thomas C. Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 428-30. In Czech see Blanka Soukupová, "Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání po Šoa (k významům pamětních míst a míst v paměti). Léta 1945 až 1989" [Prague in Jewish landscape of remembrance after the Shoah (towards the meaning of memorial sites and sites of memory). The years 1945 until 1989] in *Neklidná krajina vzpomínání: Konkurenční společenství paměti ve městě* [The Restless landscape of memory: the competition of society of memory in the city], *Urbánní studie*, vol. 1 (Prague, Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2010), 9-56.

⁶⁵ For an example of this attack in American popular culture see the song: Safam, "Leaving Mother Russia," on *Safam Encore* (USA: SAFAM Records, 1978), track 3.

⁶⁶ Charter 77, Document no. 29/1989: "The Tragedy of the Jews in Post-War Czechoslovakia," translated in Peter Brod, "Czechoslovakia: Jewish Legacy and Jewish Present," *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 20/1 (1990): 58-65; and Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, "Slovaks and the Holocaust: Attempts at a Reconciliation," *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 19/1 (1989), 57-68.

⁶⁷ This argument is similar to Hasia Diner's attribution to late 1960s Jewish political strategies in the USA, the false, though broadly accepted belief that American Jews did not speak about the Holocaust during the 1950s. See *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009).

party-state also supported the Jewish communities in their efforts to mourn their own losses, provided that they did so within a set of implied parameters. Jewish leaders and the state administration thus entered into a reciprocal relationship, in which the former propagandized for the latter, in exchange for political leniency and even personal benefit. In 1956, the conservative, leadership-wing of the Communist Party undermined its own two-tiered system for controlling the political memory of the Second World War, when it began incorporating Holocaust commemorations into its foreign, and even its domestic, propaganda. In that year, Jewish leaders began representing their country at international Holocaust commemorations, with the goal of improving Czechoslovakia's image in the West. Party-state officials developed a strategy for contributing evidence to the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel without compromising their anti-Zionist and Marxist-Leninist commitments. The publicity around the trial, however, further undermined the "official narrative" at home.

In Chapter Three, I explore the domestic political uses of the Holocaust in the communist Czech lands and their implications for discourses on Jewish nationalism. The well-documented prominence of the Holocaust as a theme of Czech literature and film during the 1960s was not, as some have portrayed it, a non- or anti-communist phenomenon, nor did the party-state meet it with opposition. Rather, due to the popular association of Stalinism with antisemitism, communist reformers and, later, even the liberalizing state deployed the Holocaust as a symbol with which to call for and mark political progress within the communist system. This trend turned on the recognition of Jewish ethnic specificity, particularly in the context of the Holocaust, and its cooption by non-Jewish Czechs. It culminated in 1968 in conversation with state's ongoing re-evaluation of its relationship with Israel. After the Soviet-led invasion of that year, the neo-orthodox administration attempted to wipe out manifestations of Jewish ethnic

identification and also to restore Holocaust-related cultural production to its pre-liberalization *status quo*. Officials feared that the genocide would remain a potent symbol for reformers and dissidents. They miscalculated. The battles over Jewish national identification had ended for most of the population well before 1968 and the Holocaust no longer functioned well as a metaphor for contemporary politics. In the 1980s, state administrators believed that they could court American favor by facilitating Holocaust commemorations. The last decade of party rule thus saw an increase in such activities. This suggests that the perception that the party-state engaged solely in historical revisionism corresponds only to a brief period in time and that the decline in commemorations during the 1970s had as much to do with popular culture as it did with state intervention.

Chapters Two and Three require a few caveats. First, as Blanka Soukupová notes, most of the sources that testify to Jewish communal attitudes and activities during this period reflect only those of a small leadership cohort. It may therefore be impossible to gauge with any accuracy the experiences and hopes of thousands of Czech Jews.⁶⁸ An analysis of Jewish communal activities and the statements of Jewish leaders, nonetheless, offers a picture of the conditions and contexts in which individuals grappled with their personal memories of genocide and war.

I suggest further that the town of Terezín may not be the best location to look if one

⁶⁸ Blanka Soukupová, “Židé v českých zemích v šedesátých letech 20. století (léta uvolnění a opatrných nadějí v intencích reformního komunismu)” [Jews in the Czech lands in the sixties of the 20th century (years of release and cautious hope in the intentions of reform communism)] in *Reflexie Holokaustu* [Reflections on the Holocaust], eds. Monika Vrzgulová and Peter Salner (Bratislava, Slovakia: Zing Print, 2010), 36. Alena Heitlinger offers some insight based upon ethnographic research conducted decades later. See *In the Shadows*, 67-104.

hopes to understand the place of the Jewish genocide in Czech political culture.⁶⁹ As the Czech land's main monument to the Second World War, alongside the memorial at Lidice,⁷⁰ it remained for decades a site of political contestation, the terms of which far exceeded the bounds of Jewish-state relations.⁷¹ Rather than treating Terezín as a bellwether for gauging the character of Czech memory politics, I consider that memorial to represent its most conservative limit; the point from which all other Holocaust-related initiatives departed. Too strong an emphasis on Terezín, moreover, draws attention from other sites and forms of commemoration prioritized by and perhaps more visible to both Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs. To be sure, the failure of the Terezín Museum to address the Holocaust in some years pained many Jews.⁷² Yet the criticisms published in *Věstník*, the bulletin of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities (CJRC), between 1968 and 1970, reflected only the culmination of concerns at a particular point in time.

⁶⁹ When I write in the period 1945-1989, I use the Czech name, *Terezín*, to refer to the Bohemian garrison town that the Nazi Protectorate turned into a concentration camp for Jews and political prisoners between 1941-1945. This reflects Czechoslovak governance. When I write about the Second World War, however, I use the town's German name, *Theresienstadt*, despite the fact that Czech prisoners, even then, called it by its Czech name.

⁷⁰ In reprisal for the assassination of Reinhardt Heydrich, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia raised the village of Lidice in June 1942, murdering nearly 200 of its male inhabitants and deporting hundreds of women and children to concentration camps.

⁷¹ Jan Munk, "Z historie Památníku Terezín" [From the history of the Terezín memorial], *Terezínské listy*, 21 (1993): 11-24; Marek Polonarz, "K výstavní činnosti památníku Terezín v letech 1948-1997" [Regarding the exhibition activities of the Terezín Memorial in the years 1948-1997], *Terezínské listy*, 28 (1998): 7-8; and Marie Křížková, "Stálé muzejní expozice Památníku Terezín" [The permanent museum exhibition of the Terezín Memorial], *Terezínské listy*, 2 (1971): 49-56.

Constructing Second World War memorials remained a contested affair for decades, even in the USSR, which provided ideological leadership in most years for the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Valentine Bogorov, "In the Temple of the Sacred Motherland: Representations of National Identity in the Soviet and Russian WWII Memorials," in *Identičnost i geografija v postsovetskoj Rossii: sbornik statej* [Identity and Geography in post-Soviet Russia: a collection of articles], eds., Mark Bassin and Konstantin Èduardovič Aksenov (St. Petersburg, Russia: Gelikon Pljus, 2003): 200.

⁷² Blanka Soukupová identifies Terezín a site of major rupture between Czech and Czech-Jewish collective memory in "Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání" [Prague in Jewish landscape of remembrance], 48.

They had matured in content and intensity throughout the 1960s and were shared even by high-ranking communist officials. The concerns of 1968-1970, thus, should not be projected upon the 1950s, as has often been the case. For these reasons, Terezín only features in my analysis at point of heightened significance or when it serves to illustrate a larger point.

Finally, the place of Holocaust memory in Czechoslovak-Israeli relations receives only marginal treatment in my dissertation. The main reason for this is that a general and updated study of Czechoslovak-Israeli relations remains a scholarly desideratum, particularly for the latter decades of the Cold War.⁷³ That said, I do address a few critical moments, when the contours of Czechoslovak-Israeli relations led to changes in the political culture of Holocaust commemoration. I relate additional information and suggest lines of further inquiry in my footnotes.

In Chapter Four, I introduce the development and implementation of the party-state's policies for managing Jewish religious affairs. The state extended to its citizens of the Jewish religion the right to organize for the purposes of worship and education, even as it rejected Jewish nationalism and persecuted "citizens of Jewish origin" as potential "Zionists." Between 1949 and 1953, the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs forced the Czech Jewish communities to restructure themselves in line with the state's policies for the management of churches. Officials found willing partners within those organizations, some of whom cooperated out of conviction and others out of fear. This arrangement opened avenues of influence for rabbis and

⁷³ Most works concern only the first postwar decades and were written with either no or limited archival access in Czechoslovakia. The archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remain restricted with regard to documents produced after the late 1960s. The best two works currently available have already been cited: Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*; and Yegar, Adamnová, and Sláma, *Československo, Sionismus, Izrael* [Czechoslovakia, Zionism, Israel]. The most recent contribution is a short, yet valuable chapter in Petr Zidek and Karel Sieber, *Československo a blízký východ v letech 1948-1989* [Czechoslovakia and the Middle East in the years 1948-1989] (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for International Relations, 2009).

Jewish lay leaders, who understood that state administrators did not fear the Jewish religion as much as they did, for example, the Roman Catholic Church. Jewish leaders also perceived that officials hoped to avoid acting in ways that might upset American Jews, whose political influence they overestimated. Working hand-in-hand with sympathetic officials in the Ministry of Culture, community leaders thus laid the groundwork for the Jewish renaissance of the 1960s. At the same time, the years 1949-1953 also inaugurated a period of nearly forty years, during which state administrators intervened into the affairs of the Jewish communities, sometimes even to the extent of replacing their leaders with more pliant individuals. The inextricable links between Jewish ethnic and religious culture severely complicated the management of the Jewish communities, as I show with reference to the debates about the re-opening of a *kosher* cafeteria in Prague in 1951.

In Chapters Five and Six, I analyze the political-economy of Jewish communal properties as a vehicle for exploring how the terms of Jewish-state relations in the ecclesiastical sphere articulated in the public arena. The Holocaust left the small Jewish communities in the possession of hundreds of properties, primarily empty synagogues and overgrown cemeteries, scattered across the country. Most of the historiography on the postwar fates of these properties focuses their destruction, interpreted as evidence of state and popular antisemitism.⁷⁴ There is much truth to that perspective. Such accounts, however, tend to approach this destruction in abstraction from the complex economic and political systems in which they occurred. I consider

⁷⁴ For example, see Blanka Soukupová “Poměr státu a veřejnosti k osudu synagog, židovských hřbitovů židovský budov v Českých zemích po šoa (léta 1945-1956) [The state and public and the destiny of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and Jewish buildings in the Czech lands (Soa years 1945-1956) (trans. in original)], *Slovenský národopis*, no. 2 (2012): 133-50. For a more nuanced approach that has influenced my own work, see Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

this unfortunate because property issues accounted for a significant amount of the interactions between the Jewish communities and the offices responsible for ecclesiastical affairs. They also tended to involve other state and civic sectors. The outcomes of these negotiations (and sometimes lawsuits) had profound effects upon the evolution of Jewish-state relations, in ways not only related to attitudes towards Jews. A focus on antisemitism also precludes more nuanced interpretations of how Czech Jews understood the destruction and sale of Jewish communal properties at the time and the reflection of those positions in their politics.

I begin Chapter Five by differentiating between the dominant perspectives within the Jewish communities with regard to their preferred solutions for deciding the fates of their synagogues and cemeteries respectively. I then turn to the issue of the synagogues, which occupied the attention of Jewish leaders and state administrators during the first postwar decades. The semi-forced sale by the Jewish communities of unused synagogues benefited the offices responsible for administering religious affairs. It lowered the amount of money that they had to request from the state to cover the communities' expenses. The prerogative of ecclesiastical officials to decide Jewish communal property matters also offered them fleeting moments of power within a state system that placed little value on their work. The officials in charge of ecclesiastical affairs, thus, often defended Jewish communal property rights from the encroachment of other sectors of the state and the planned economy. They even endeavored to find culturally sensitive uses for empty synagogues. The sales, in turn, provided the communities with the financial latitude to maintain their cemeteries and to expand their cultural and social-welfare programs. This provided a structural basis for the emergence of Jewish-state mutuality, during the 1950s. Mutuality, however, had its limits. More venal officials and those with different priorities often put Jewish leaders in the position of having to decide between

preserving monuments and meeting the needs of their communities. This became the dominant form of property relations after 1969, when the state administration sought to curtail Jewish cultural life and when the most valuable properties, the synagogues, had already been sold.

In Chapter Six, I therefore turn to the history of the Jewish cemeteries, in order to explore how state administrators used Jewish properties to place pressure upon Jewish leaders. The postwar communities identified preserving their cemeteries as one of their main priorities. They functioned as venues for memorializing the Holocaust, and, in times of antisemitism, stood as a testament to Jewish rootedness in the region. In 1956, Jewish leaders reached an agreement with the state to leave all of the Jewish cemeteries in the hands of the communities. The latter promised to maintain them, but also sought state support for that endeavor. The state, however, did not offer much assistance and the cemeteries fell into disrepair. During the 1970s and 1980s, some regional administrators hungered for new property and sought to erase the physical memory of Jews from their territories. They colluded with the Ministry of Culture to force the sale and destruction of Jewish cemeteries. Wary of their own powerlessness and anticipating an imminent end to Czech Jewry, Jewish leaders participated in this destruction. Some even used it as a means to enrich themselves. During the 1980s, these practices cost the Jewish leadership the trust of many community members. It also drew considerable international attention.

I begin the second section of my dissertation with Chapter Seven, in which I explore the emergence of competing priorities and perspectives on Jewish affairs within the party-state system from 1954 through 1961. This corresponded to the first period of slow de-Stalinization. During those years, changes in the orientation of the party-state led to a divergence in its policies concerning the Jewish minority. A relationship of mutuality developed between the Jewish communities and many of the officials responsible for managing ecclesiastical affairs. During the

same period, the security services adopted a more paternalistic approach to managing the threat that they perceived in Jewish nationalism. Rather than persecuting citizens of Jewish origin, agents endeavored to protect them from the influences of foreign Zionists and Israeli diplomats. They also sought to enforce strict limits on Jewish cultural activity, just as the Ministry of Culture agreed to relax them. I argue that both of these approaches reflected authentic communist responses to transitions in the domestic and international arenas. The divergence between them reflected the basic problem inherent to the party-state's policy of dividing Jewish life into two separate spheres of and assigning different agencies to manage them. I explicate the tensions between these two perspectives by analyzing how different sectors of the state administration responded to the attempts by Western-Jewish organization to provide monetary and other aid to Czech and Slovak Jews.

In Chapter Eight, I identify intra-state competition as a major determining factor in Jewish-state relations, particularly between 1960 and 1975. The chapter takes as its main vehicle the development of Operation Spider, a cover program of the state security administration, launched in 1972, for registering all citizens of Jewish origin. During the 1960s, the party instituted a series of reforms and policy changes which touched most spheres of Czech life. As a result, the security services lost much of their influence over Jewish-state relations. An economic crisis, compelled the party-state to seek better relations with the West. This further undermined the attempts by the security services to isolate the Jewish minority. It also led to a flourishing of Jewish life, especially in Prague. This new balance of powers reversed itself again after the Soviet-led invasion of 1968. Thereafter, the security services cooperated with the Ministry of Culture, which had been purged of purported reformists, to restore Jewish-state relations to its *status quo ante*. Its agents drew strength from a renewed anti-Zionist campaign and resumed

their war on domestic Jewish nationalism. Conditions, however, had changed. The disruption of relations with Israel in 1967 removed the Israeli diplomatic corps from Czechoslovakia. The murder in Prague of a Western-Jewish official in that same year led to a decline in the attempts by organized Western Jewry to intervene into Czech-Jewish affairs. Rather than assuming that they had won their struggle to protect citizens of Jewish origin from foreign influence, the agents of the state security administration re-imagined the Zionist threat as domestic and diffuse, with ties to an international Czech-Zionist network. Never satisfied that they had identified the entire cadre of Czech “Zionists,” agents endeavored to register the entire Jewish minority, regardless of how individuals thought about their own identities. Operation Spider never yielded the desired results nor does it seem to have affected the lives of many individuals. My analysis of Operation Spider, nonetheless, demonstrates the centrality of intra-state conflict to determining Jewish-state relations, particularly from 1960 through 1975.

After 1975, international affairs exerted more influence than ever over domestic Jewish-state relations in the Czech lands. Whereas I include such considerations into my analysis of the competition between the security services and the ecclesiastical authorities during the 1960s, I take them as my primary object of investigation in Chapter Nine. Between 1975 and 1989, changes in the international arena disrupted the attempts by state administrators to return life at the domestic Jewish communities to the way that they imagined it to have been during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The intensification of globalization, which manifested in the policies of *détente*, forced the party-state to accede, once again, to the penetration of the domestic Jewish communities by Western-Jewish organizations. For roughly five years, state administrators sought the help of Jewish leaders to turn these developments to their benefit. Yet by the mid-1980s they realized that their Western adversaries had the upper hand. State administrators then

purged the Jewish leadership for the second time since 1975. The new officials drew their community into as much isolation as possible from the Western-Jewish world and endeavored, unsuccessfully, to disrupt the cohesion of international Jewish organizations. In 1989, as the regime crumbled, the highest offices of the party-state circumvented their subordinates and the local Jewish leadership to pursue independent negotiations with Western-Jewish leaders. They hoped doing so would bring economic and political benefits. They did not. I consider only the following Western-Jewish organizations: the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the World and European Jewish Congresses, and Project Judaica.

In Chapter Ten, I address a crisis within the Jewish communities that culminated in 1989 and ended prematurely with the fall of the communism. I use it as a lens with which to focus on the reciprocal influence of intra-communal tensions and Jewish-state relations throughout the period of communist rule. In the 1980s, dissent rang from various quarters of the community. Some protested the collaboration of Jewish leaders in the sale and destruction of cemeteries. Others complained about the poverty of Jewish cultural and religious life. Still more raised questions about the community's secretive practices regarding the distribution of Western-Jewish financial aid. I devote most of Chapter Ten to the struggle of a small band of young oppositionists in 1989 to force the Jewish leadership to take responsibility for securing Jewish cultural and religious continuity in the Czech lands. The appeal divided the leadership. Its top functionaries, nonetheless, maintained control over the community, moved into reaction, and slandered their young coreligionists on the international stage. Although this conflict never reached a proper conclusion, it remains significant because it had a profound effect on post-communist Czech-Jewish culture and on the way that the history of Jewish-state relations in the communist Czech lands has been remembered until today.

Finally, in my conclusion, I return briefly to the contemporary Jewish community in Prague in order to begin a discussion about the political and cultural legacies of the decades under consideration here. To that end, I refer back presently to the anecdote with which I began this introduction. The protests of Rabbi Sidon's interlocutors should now make more sense. They reflected the discourses that party-state officials sought to impose upon Jewish life for over four decades. In the past twenty-five years, this framework has slowly given way to novel perspectives. A new politics of memory has emerged in the Czech lands regarding the experiences of Jews and non-Jews alike in the party-state.

The year 1989 brought a conclusion to the final stage of a two-century-long epoch of Central European Jewish history. This period merits attention far beyond the academic sphere. Its legacy became part of the immediate cultural and political inheritance of the European Union, with the accession thereto of the East-Central European states in 2004. This reflected most recently and dramatically in the demand of one Hungarian legislator that the state compile a list of Jews, whom he characterized as "a national risk."⁷⁵ Yet it also echoes more softly in the ways that citizens, both Jewish and non-Jewish, think about the place of Jews in European society today. This story also offers instruction for thinking more broadly about the ability of states, particularly in Europe, to manage the challenges presented by the stubborn refusal of ethnic, national, and religious identification to map neatly onto sharp, politically predetermined categories. As the European Union has moved towards greater integration, its national communities have seized upon Roma, Muslims, Turks, North Africans and Arabs as symbols of "otherness" in their midst. Perhaps the story of state-guided Jewish integration and exclusion,

⁷⁵ Cnaan Liphshiz, "Hungarian Lawmaker to Speak on 'Zionist Threat,'" *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (20 January 2013). <<http://www.jta.org/2013/01/20/news-opinion/world/hungarian-lawmaker-to-speak-on-zionist-threat>> (1 July 2014).

which reaches its conclusion in the forthcoming pages, will offer something of value for considering these pressing concerns.

CHAPTER ONE

“Of Jewish Origin”: Criminalizing Jewish Descent, 1948-1954

On 20 November 1952 Czechoslovak citizens turned on their radios to hear the following elite officials indicted for high treason and other crimes:

Rudolf Slánský... of Jewish origin, from a businessman's family... the former General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and, before his arrest, deputy President of the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic.
Bedrich Geminder... of Jewish origin, the son of a businessman and an inn-keeper... the former manager of the International Department of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.
Ludvík Frejka... of Jewish origin, the son of a doctor...¹

State prosecutor Urválek brought similar charges against eleven more defendants in a high-profile show trial that would come to be known as the Slánský Affair.² Even before Urválek

¹ *Proces s vedením protistátního spikleneckého centra v čele s Rudolfem Slánským* [The trial of the leadership of the anti-state conspiratorial center with Rudolf Slánský at the head] (Prague, Czechoslovakia: The Ministry of Justice, 1953), 44.

² This is not the place to retell the story of the Slánský Affair in detail. It has already found explication and revision at the hands of competent historians, survivors, and journalists. Of interest here are only those manifold ways in which the trial, broadly conceived, effected citizens of Jewish origin and religion, along with those party-state officials with whom they interacted. The two most significant works on the Slánský trial are Karel Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1990); and Jiří Pelikán, ed., *The Czechoslovak Political Trials, 1950-1954: The Suppressed Report of the Dubček Government's Commission of Inquiry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971). Some of the most recent insights into the Slánský Affair in a transnational context can be found in Jiří Pernes and Jan Foitzik, eds., *Politické procesy v Československu po 1945 a "případ Slánský": Sborník příspěvků za stejnojmenné konference, pořádané ve dnech 14.-16. dubna 2003 v Praze* [The political trials in Czechoslovakia after 1945 and the "Slánský Affair": A collection of contributions from an eponymous conference, held 14-16 April 2003 in Prague] (Brno, Czech Republic: Kateřina Mikšová–Nakladatelství Prius pro Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR v Praze, 2005). On the reaction to the Slánský Affair among the general public and its implications for the Communist Party see Melissa Feinberg, "Fantastic Truths, compelling Lies: Radio Free Europe and the Response to the Slánský Trial in Czechoslovakia," *Contemporary European History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (February 2013): 107-25; and McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'? Czech Popular Opinion and the Slánský Affair," *Slavic Review*, vol. 67, no. 4 (2008): 840-65; and Idem., "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia: Origins, Processes, Responses," in *Stalinist Terror in*

mentioned their class backgrounds, he identified eleven of the men as being “of Jewish origin.” He described the indicted as a conspiracy of “Trotskyite-Titoist, Zionist, bourgeois, nationalistic traitors and enemies of the Czechoslovak people, the people’s democratic order, and socialism” in the service of American imperialism.³ The court sentenced eleven of the men to death and the remaining three to life imprisonment.

The Slánský trial marked the culmination of an anti-Zionist campaign that began in 1948. It also established the framework in which stakeholders would negotiate Jewish-state relations in communist Czechoslovakia until the fall of the regime in 1989.⁴ Initially imposed from Moscow,

Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression, eds. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Manchester, UK and New York, NY: Manchester University Press; distributed by Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 98-118. For accounts with particular attention to Jewish history see Arnold Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship: Israel and the Soviet Bloc, 1947-53* (Urbana and Chicago, IL and London, UK: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 165-96; Moshe Yegar, Eva Adamová, and Petr Sláma, *Československo, Sionismus, Izrael: historie vzájemných vztahů* [Czechoslovakia, Zionism, Izrael: a history of relations], 144-52; Paul Lendvai, *Anti-Semitism without Jews: Communist Eastern Europe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 244-59; and Peter Meyer, “Czechoslovakia,” in *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, Peter Meyer, Bernard D. Weinryb, Eugene Duschinsky, and Nicolas Sylvain (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1953), 153-91. Igor Lukes implicates American intelligence operations in Slánský’s arrest in “The Rudolf Slánský Affair: New Evidence,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 58, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 160-87; and idem., “Rudolf Slánský: His Trials and Trial,” Cold War International History Project, Working Paper #50 (July 2011). Helaine Debra Blumenthal explores the reception of and reaction to the Slánský Affair by Jewish communities in the U.S.A., Israel, and Western Europe in “Fourteen Convicted, Three Million Condemned: The Slansky Affair and the Reconstitution of Jewish Identities after the Holocaust” (Ph.D. Diss: University of California, Berkeley, 2012). On the Israeli citizens arrested in Czechoslovakia and forced to testify at the Slánský trial, see Ivo Pejcoch, “Politické procesy s Šimonem Ornsteinem a Mordechajem Orenem—antisemitské tendence v komunistickém Československu” [The political trials of Shimon Orenstein and Mordechai Oren—antisemitic tendencies in communist Czechoslovakia], *Tereziňské listy* (2011), 142-54. See the bibliography for a list of related memoirs.

³ *Proces s vedením* [The trial of the leadership], 8.

⁴ Paul Lendvai astutely noted the challenge that the leaders of Europe’s communist states faced when they sought to implement changes to state policies and ideologies. If the Communist Party was meant to have been infallible, it followed that their doctrines and resolutions could not easily be overturned. Indeed, it took a daring speech by Khrushchev in 1956 to provide the justification for transitioning away from the Stalinist model. (He characterized Stalin’s rule as a deviation from the proper course of socialist development, facilitated by the emergence of a cult of

the Soviet Bloc's anti-Zionist turn forced party-state officials in Czechoslovakia to repudiate the State of Israel and to seek exculpation for their formerly supportive relationship with that state, deemed criminal in retrospect. Domestically, the campaign took on a distinctly troubling character, as the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia steadily implemented a policy of state antisemitism. Indeed, the trial achieved the extra-legal criminalization of Jewish descent in that country, casting Jewish citizens in their familiar roles of national scapegoats and domestic "others." It destroyed the fragile *status quo* established after the Second World War.

The Slánský Affair quickly became a contested symbol of Stalinism around the world and even within Czechoslovakia. It helped establish Zionism and Jewish-state relations as major battlegrounds of the Cold War, strikingly out of balance with the miniscule size and political weakness of Central Europe's Jewish communities. Across the region, the trial inspired a wave of anti-Jewish accusations, propaganda, and persecution—not ten years after the Holocaust.⁵ It shook the faith of communists and fellow travelers in the West, in Israel, and even within the Soviet Bloc.⁶ At home, the Slánský Affair established a conceptual link between antisemitism and Stalinism which would shape the discourses of reform, dissent, and communist reaction for decades.

The Old-New Logic of Jewish Affairs

The trial of Rudolf Slánský and his co-defendants, along with the anti-Zionist campaign initiated

personality around the deceased leader.) Despite the fact that the Czechoslovak party-state overhauled its relationship with domestic and international Jewry after that date, it never transcended the conceptual model for it established during the years 1948-1953. See Lendvai, *Anti-Semitism without Jews*, 13.

⁵ Meyer, et. al., *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*; and Lendvai, *Antisemitism without Jews*.

⁶ Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?: Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 122-35.

in 1948, introduced non-Jewish Czechoslovak citizens and officials to a new language for thinking about their Jewish compatriots, the latter's relationship with the party-state, and the place of Jews within the Czech and Slovak nations.⁷ The proceedings of the Slánský trial established three particular ideas about the danger posed by Jews and "Zionists" to the fledgling communist state, along with a fourth which developed later, in light of the reaction to the trial in the West. Two had roots in pre-communist discourses about Jews, which strongly suggests the need to consider the early communist years in terms of the decades that preceded them, rather than as the dawn a new age.

First, the trial publicly confirmed, with the formal trappings of jurisprudence, the party's characterization of Zionism as a bourgeois, enemy ideology in the service of American imperialism, nearly powerful enough to subvert the entire party-state system. It associated "Zionism" with the specter of "Titoism," the contrived, though not baseless, fear that elements within the communist parties of East-Central Europe would attempt to follow Yugoslavia's example and break with Stalin to chart their own national paths to socialism—or worse, to capitalism.⁸ By the time of the trial in 1952, however, "Zionism" had replaced "Titoism" as a

⁷ Peter Steiner likens the communist show trials to an inoculation. He explains that the party-states used them to introduce into the public sphere and render taboo ideologies they considered deviant. See "Justice in Prague, Political and Poetic: Some Reflections on the Slánský Trial (with Constant Reference to Franz Kafka and Milan Kundera)," *Poetics Today*, vol. 21, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 654-79. Kevin McDermott and Melissa Feinberg, nonetheless argue convincingly that the Communist Party (inevitably) failed at controlling the public reception of the Slánský trial. See Feinberg, "Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies"; McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices?'; and Idem., "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia."

⁸ Bradley Abrams, "Hope Died Last: The Czechoslovak Road to Socialism," in *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (Budapest, Hungary and New York, NY: Central European University Press, 2009), 362. On Czechoslovakia and the national path, see idem., "The Marshall Plan and Czechoslovak Democracy: Elements of Interdependency," in *The Marshall Plan: Fifty Years After*, ed. Martin A. Schain with an introduction by Tony Judt, Europe in Transition: The NYU European Studies Series (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), 93-116; Michal Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu*

main bugaboo of Soviet propaganda.⁹ Not only did the proceedings and predetermined convictions of the Slánský trial establish these ideas about Zionism official facts, but they also made clear that the party-state suspected all citizens of Jewish origin of harboring “Zionist” tendencies.¹⁰

Second, the trial and the associated propaganda drew heavily upon longstanding ambivalences about the place of Jews in the Czech and Slovak nations. The trial proceedings confirmed the category “of Jewish origin” (*židovského původu*) as politically salient and further associated it with “cosmopolitanism.” The first term suggested that Jewish citizens did not share the majority population’s hereditary relationship to the Czech and Slovak nations, a key component of national belonging as understood by most Europeans at the time.

The accusation of “cosmopolitanism” evoked the popular association of Jews with the bourgeoisie, as well as fantasies of international Jewish conspiracies. Communists were

revoluce: zrod a počátky marxistického revizionismu ve střední Evropě, 1953-1960 [Searching for the lost meaning of the revolution: the genesis and beginnings of Marxist revisionism in Central Europe, 1953-1960] (Prague, Czech Republic: Argo, 2009), 44; and H. Gordon Skilling, *Communism: National and International: Eastern Europe after Stalin* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 3-36 and 84-130. With specific attention to Jewish history, see Jan Rataj, “Poválečný vývoj a východní geopolitické začlenění Československa: od socializující demokracie k diktatuře” [The postwar development and eastern geopolitical incorporation of Czechoslovakia: from socializing democracy to dictatorship] and Radka Čermakova, “Poválečné Československo: Obnovený stát ve střední Evropě” [Postwar Czechoslovakia: a renewed state in Central Europe] in *Židovská menšina v Československu po druhé světové válce. Od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War. From liberation to a new totalitarianism], eds. Blanka Soukupová, Peter Salner, and Miroslav Ludvíková (Prague, Czech Republic: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 7-22 and 23-35.

⁹ Michal Reiman argues that Stalin inaugurated his anti-Zionist campaign for domestic purposes and that he anticipated, but chose to ignore, problematic repercussions in the satellite states. See “Sovětská politika a sovětské vedení 1948-1953. Sovětský kontext procesů v zemích “lidové demokracie” [Soviet politics and Soviet leadership. The Soviet Context of the trials in the lands of the “people’s democracy”], in *Politické procesy v Československu po 1945 a “případ Slánský”* [The political trials in Czechoslovakia after 1945 and the “Slánský Affair”], eds. Jiří Pernes and Jan Foitzik, 28-29.

¹⁰ McDermott, “A ‘Polyphony of Voices’?,” 846-59.

supposed to have been “internationalists,” proletariat members of individual nations that marched in step with the working classes of other nations, following the Soviet Union’s lead. Referring to citizens “of Jewish origin” as “cosmopolitans” suggested that they lacked these national ties and socio-political loyalties.¹¹ Demagogues portrayed “Zionists” (i.e., Jews) as, on the one hand, everywhere the same and loyal only to themselves, and, on the other hand, able to adopt outwardly the culture and language of any group among whom they lived. The danger of Jews, according to this logic, exceeded their purported disloyalty. It rested in their ability to feign national belonging, and thereby to manipulate and gain power over non-Jewish Europeans. Of supreme concern in this case was the supposed infiltration of the Communist Party by “Zionists” charlatans.¹² To demonstrate that the trial’s defendants did not belong to the Czech or Slovak nations, the prosecution and the state-run media reported that some of them, or at least their forebears, had only recently replaced their original, German-sounding last names with new Czech alternatives.¹³ This became common practice in subsequent trials and media reports.¹⁴

¹¹ On “cosmopolitanism” see Helaine Blumenthal, “Communism on Trial: The Slansky Affair and Anti-Semitism in Post-WWII Europe,” (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Program in Eurasian and East European Studies, 2009), 13-16. <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4wr2g4kf>> (14 July 2014); and Pelikán, ed., *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 49.

¹² Meyer, “Czechoslovakia,” 162-65.

¹³ After the Second World War, many Bohemian and Moravian Jews—and also non-Jews—traded their German first and last names for Czech alternatives (often equivalents) as a sign of their identification with the Czech nation and rejection of Germany. Between 1945 and 1946, the Jewish Religious Community in Prague alone recorded 349 of such name changes and received requests for an additional 76. Blanka Soukupová “Židé a židovská reprezentace v českých zemích v letech 1945-1948 (mezi režimem, židovstvím a judaismem)” [Jews and the Jewish representation in the Czech lands in the years 1945-1948 (between the regime, Jewishness, and Judaism)], in in *Židovská menšina v Československu po druhé světové válce. Od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War. From liberation to a new totalitarianism], eds. Blanka Soukupová, Peter Salner, and Miroslav Ludvíková (Prague, Czech Republic: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 66. This practice drew on prewar practices. Austrian Emperor Joseph II made the adoption of German last names a condition of the partial emancipation of Bohemian Jewry in 1781. After the emergence of Czech nationalism in the middle of the nineteenth century and with the foundation of Czechoslovakia in

The brazen antisemitism of the Slánský affair and of early Soviet-Bloc political culture begs a few questions. Why did communist elites use the euphemism “of Jewish origin?” Why did they not simply speak of “Jews?” Karel Kaplan has shown this to have been a matter of contention, even at the highest levels of government. President Klement Gottwald (1896-1953, President 1948-1953) intervened personally against some of his colleagues and their Soviet advisors to replace the word “Jew” (*Žid*) in the Slánský indictment with the term “of Jewish origin”¹⁵ From then through 1989, it remained the preferred nomenclature for referring to ethnic Jews.

“Of Jewish origin” is an elusive term, the connotations of which depend greatly upon intention and context. Its roots lay in emancipation-era debates about the integration of Jews into Europe’s emerging and secularizing national communities. It can suggest pessimistically that Jews carry inherited traits which prevent them from assimilating. Alternatively, it can imply that Jews, given the appropriate context, would be able to transcend the Jewishness of their forebears and join their host nations. Ideally, in this case, their parentage would soon become nothing more than a simple fact of personal history—the fact “of Jewish origin.”

1918, many Bohemians and Moravians traded their German-sounding last names for Czech alternatives. Jews were heavily represented among them. On Jewish names in Bohemia and Moravia see Ruth Bondyová, *Rodinné dědictví: jména Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, [Family inheritance: the names of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia] (Prague, Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Franze Kafky, 2006).

¹⁴ For example see the party report, “Žaloba na skupinu slovanských buržoasních nacionalistů, sionistů a jiných nepřátel v bezpečnostním aparátě na Slovensku” [Case of the group of Slovak bourgeois nationalists, Zionists and other enemies in the security apparatus in Slovakia] (26 November 1953). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/5, bundle 69, archival unit 187, point 16.

¹⁵ Kaplan, *Report on the Murder*, 223. A draft of the Slánský arraignment wherein the word “Jew” was corrected by pencil to read “of Jewish origin” may be found in NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/5, bundle 2, archival unit 26, point 1, 81. See also McDermott “A ‘Polyphony of voices’?” 843-49. McDermott argues that the party struggled to balance its use of anti-Zionism to attract nationalists with the danger that it could unleash anti-Jewish populism or confirm Western allegations Soviet-Bloc antisemitism.

Among communists this debate took its own course. Europe's communist parties denounced antisemitism, along with other forms of racial politics. They claimed that the bourgeoisie deployed such ideologies to distract the laboring classes from their exploitation at the hands of domestic capitalists by redirecting their anger towards their socio-economic counterparts abroad. This anti-antisemitism drew Jews to communism in disproportionate numbers, particularly in turn-of-the-century Eastern Europe.¹⁶

Ambivalence regarding Jewishness and Jews, nonetheless, characterized early communist thought and shaped Jewish-state relations under party rule for generations. Karl Marx predicted that the proletarian revolution would lead to the disappearance Jewishness, which he identified as the spirit of the bourgeoisie.¹⁷ Many Jewish communists held similar sentiments regarding their own heritage. Ethnic Jews served as political officers in the Soviet NKVD (the predecessor to the KGB) in disproportionate numbers and often persecuted non-socialist Jews.¹⁸ Thus, from the

¹⁶ The classic work on this topic is Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For an outline of recent revisions see Kenneth B. Moss, "At Home in Late imperial Russian Modernity—Except When They Weren't: New Histories of Russian and East European Jews, 1881-1914," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 84 (June 2012): 401-42. See also idem., "1905 as a Jewish Cultural Revolution? Revolutionary and Evolutionary Dynamics in the East European Jewish Cultural Sphere, 1900-1914," in *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews*, eds. Stefani Hoffman and Ezra Mendelsohn (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 185-98; Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 1983); and Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985).

¹⁷ Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Problem (1844)," reprinted from *Zur Judenfrage, 1844*, ed. Ellis Rivkin and trans. Helen Lederer (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College, n.d.), 6-10 and 34-42, in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 2nd edition (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 324-27. See also Shlomo Avineri, "Marx and Jewish Emancipation," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol., 25, no. 3 (July-September 1964): 445-50.

¹⁸ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 220-21; and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 107-19.

onset, a tension plagued the relationship between Marxism and Jewishness. On the one hand, many communists associated Jewishness with the very socio-economic system that they hoped to overthrow. On the other hand, they denied any biological links between Jews and this conception of Jewishness. Some even rejected Jewish nationhood altogether. Communist discourses thus exonerated Jews as individuals from a disembodied and negatively perceived Jewishness, while also implying their collective guilt for society's ills.

This ambiguity did not suggest a particular course of action. Rather, it offered fruitful ground for debate within the Europe's communist parties and also lent itself to pragmatic exploitation. One of the main controversies that precipitated the 1905 Menshevik-Bolshevik split was whether to permit the formation of a Jewish fraction within the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, the forerunner to the Communist Party of the USSR. Joseph Stalin (1878-1953), who would later lead the Bolsheviks, declared in 1913 that Jews did not compose a nation of their own.¹⁹ Yet during the Second World War, he welcomed the assistance of Jewish socialists from the Jewish-nationalist camp. When the war ended, he choreographed the murder of his former associates and directed an antisemitic campaign that spread across the Soviet Bloc.²⁰

This ambiguity articulated in Czechoslovak-communist politics as well. Václav Kopecký (1897-1961, Minister of Information, 1945-1953), known for his leadership of the domestic anti-Zionist campaign and for his antisemitic outbursts,²¹ use the category "of Jewish origin"

¹⁹ Joseph Stalin, "The Jews are not a Nation (1913)," reprinted from idem., *Marxism and the National Question* (Moscow, USSR: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1934), 9, 16, 64-67, and 73-75, in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 2nd edition (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 430-33.

²⁰ Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir Pavlovich Naumov, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001).

²¹ In 1947 Kopecký referred the Jews as "'bearded Solomons' and 'scum' (*svolač*), who falsely claimed to have participated in the anti-Nazi resistance." McDermott, "'A Polyphony of

positively in a lengthy 1943 speech.²² Therein, he repudiated antisemitism and insisted that “citizens of Jewish origin” would have a place alongside their non-Jewish compatriots in the reconstituted republic—provided, of course, that they could prove their loyalty. Indeed, the conceptual possibility of denying the existence of a Jewish nation, manifested in the term “of Jewish origin,” facilitated the offer of national inclusion to Jewish citizens in postwar Czechoslovakia, which no longer tolerated foreign (non-Slavic) national minority communities. The postwar state offered Jews the right to retain their citizenship as ethnic Czechs and Slovaks of the Jewish religion. The term “of Jewish origin” also provided an alternative to the word *Žid*, an appellation long rejected by liberal Jews and a vulgar epithet in common parlance.

In sharp contrast, during the anti-Zionist campaign that began in 1949, the label “of Jewish origin” set a specific group of citizens apart from the majority population without regard for how its members, as individuals, thought about themselves. The state, nonetheless, continued

Voices’?,” 854. Kopecký likely had in mind Jewish “optants” from Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, who took advantage of an agreement between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia to emigrate into the Czechoslovak interior after the latter country ceded their home territory to the former. These newcomers were, on the whole, more religious than their Czech counterparts—hence the comment about the beards—and tended to identify as nationally Jewish. Kopecký’s comments reflect a discomfort with a certain segment of the Jewish population—a sentiment shared by many Czech Jews. His reference to allegedly false claims by Jews about having participated in the resistance reflected ambivalence about the disproportionate role that Jewish fighters played in the struggle. It also reflected the reality that as national Jews—as opposed to “Czechs”—many of the Jewish “optants” had to base their petitions for repatriation on extra-national grounds, like participating in the fight to liberate Czechoslovakia. Jan Láníček puts Kopecký’s comments in better perspective and quotes them at greater length in “The Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile and the Jews during World War 2 (1938-1948) (Ph.D. diss., University of Southampton, 2010), 260-64 and 297-309.

²² Václav Kopecký, “V řadách čs. osvobozovacího hnutí nesmí být místa pro antisemitské tendence” [In the ranks of the Czechoslovak liberation movement there cannot be room for antisemitic tendencies], (1943). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/45, bundle 1, archival unit 41. The first time that Kopecký used the category “of Jewish origin” in this speech was to refer to the Jewish fighters who fought and fell alongside General Ludvík Svoboda for the liberation of Czechoslovakia (page 8). Later, he used it to create ideological space for citizens of Jewish origin to overcome their former national identification—even when it was with the German or Hungarian peoples (pages 9-10).

to deny them the ability to organize as a national minority and thereby to defend themselves as a group. Under interrogation, Slánský refused to identify himself as a Jew, but he could not deny his roots.²³ He had to admit to being “of Jewish origin.” He also could not accuse the state of antisemitism, first, because he did not consider himself Jewish, and second, because he believed antisemitism to have been antithetical to communism and therefore alien to the state. Thus, unlike nineteenth-century Europeans who divided themselves over the question of Jewish integration, party-state leaders cloaked their exclusion and persecution of Jews behind the sort of liberal-universalist rhetoric ordinarily associated with the integrationist camp. Communists, in other words, combined formerly exclusive positions to produce a type of antisemitism that they could hold above reproach—one often masked as anti-Zionism.

Jana Svobodová relates the label “of Jewish origin” to the equally pejorative category, “of bourgeois origin.”²⁴ Communist ideologues suspected that Jews, like the heirs of upper- and middle-class families, had inherited their forebears’ supposedly anti-socialist and anti-national tendencies. These two conceptual categories shared much in common, in fact, due to the disproportionately high representation of Jews in the professional classes between the two world wars and the gross overestimation of this phenomenon among segments of the non-Jewish population. Indeed, party-state officials often deployed class-oriented language in attacking their Jewish compatriots. Doing so lent legitimacy to what otherwise would have been considered taboo among communists, who associated racial antisemitism with Nazism. That Jewish ethnicity often trumped bourgeois descent in 1950s propaganda reflects both the rapid disappearance of the middle-class and the incongruous persistence of Czechoslovak Jewry after the

²³ Kaplan, *Report on the Murder*, 188.

²⁴ Jana Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu v českých zemích 1948-1992* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism in the Czech lands 1948-1992], *Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR* [Notebooks of the Institute of Contemporary History], vol. 19 (1994), 37.

Holocaust.

The third idea established through the anti-Zionist campaign and the Slánský trial was that Zionist and Israeli agents sought to exploit the ethnic particularity of citizens “of Jewish origin” to the ruin of Czechoslovakia. The State of Israel contributed significantly to the ambiguity associated with Jewish identification. Its very existence made it difficult to believe that the Jews were not a nation or that Jewishness would disappear with the achievement of communism.²⁵ Israel’s eventual alignment with the West cast further suspicion on the entire Jewish population of socialist Europe, particularly because so many of them had relatives in that country. Early on, the State Security Administration (the StB) accused the Israeli Ligation in Prague of using its social-welfare operations to disguise espionage, propaganda, and illegal-emigration programs. (Of course, this was not without a significant element of truth.²⁶) The Ministry of the Interior therefore placed its anti-Zionism unit within its Military Counterintelligence Administration and charged it with disrupting the activities of the Israeli Ligation on Czechoslovak soil. StB agents had little recourse, however, to constrain the Israeli diplomats. Instead, they concentrated on identifying (and arresting) their purported, domestic accomplices, both active and potential. And all citizens “of Jewish origin” carried such potential in their eyes.

Finally, the reaction to the Slánský Affair in the West reinforced the perception in Czechoslovakia that Jews commanded disproportionate influence in the USA.²⁷ Party-state

²⁵ Slezkyn, *The Jewish Century*, 294-97.

²⁶ Michael Beizer uncovered the links between the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s relief programs and Israeli efforts to spread Zionism in Europe and to encourage Jewish immigration to Israel. See “I Don’t Know Whom to Thank’: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s Secret Aid to Soviet Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, new series, vol. 15, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 115-18.

²⁷ Láníček, “The Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile,” 266-319.

officials observed that the country's perception abroad depended to a considerable degree upon their treatment of domestic Jewry. Indeed, the Slánský trial led many in the West to condemn both Czechoslovakia and the entire Soviet Bloc as antisemitic; in other words, far more like Nazis than communists. Party-state officials soon came to perceive their country's reputation as lying in the hands of America's Jewish communities. As shall be discussed in later chapters, this consideration often led them to act benevolently towards their own country's Jewish communities, particularly when it had the potential to be noticed abroad. On the other hand, officials also understood that too much indulgence could raise doubts among Arab leaders regarding Czechoslovakia's anti-Zionist commitments and thereby disrupt their international trade and military alliances.

Three Paths to a Trial and its Discourses

Two well-known factors in coincidence account in large part for the Communist Party's antisemitic turn after 1948 and for the development of the new framework for thinking about Jews just explicated. A third, often-neglected factor increased the danger to Jewish citizens and the salience of the anti-Jewish discourses motivating and legitimizing their persecution. The factors, in the order with which they will be addressed below, are: the Soviet Union's anti-Zionist turn, a Soviet-Bloc-wide campaign to root out internal enemies, particularly those presumed to be hiding within the ranks of the communist leadership, and the end to Jewish emigration to Israel. The initial impetus for all three of these factors came from the Soviet Union, which closely managed the affairs of its client states. Yet even as Czechoslovak officials acquiesced to the will of their political masters, they implemented it in ways that resonated with local cultures and served domestic and personal ends.

An analysis of these three factors in as much isolation as possible reveals tremendous contingency in how officials determined the course of Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia. Party-state functionaries only hesitantly followed the Soviet Union's lead in implementing the anti-Zionist turn in the domestic sphere. While it took relatively little pressure to lead party-state officials to identify Jewish citizens qua "Zionists" as the country's most dangerous internal enemy, it still took time for many of them to abandon their commitments to fairness, equality, and the rule of law. Brazen manifestations of antisemitism clashed with the progressive image that Czechoslovak citizens and leaders had constructed of their nation in the previous decades. Finally, the curtailment of Jewish emigration to Israel undermined a thirty-year *status quo* in Jewish-state relations by denying the extension of national choice to Jews. (Jews who had objected to assuming the identity of ethnic Czechs and Slovaks of the Jewish religion had been allowed to emigrate.) The shock of this disruption took officials, Jewish leaders, and the public decades to resolve. Despite all of this initial hesitancy, however, the party-state's implementation of Soviet policies quickly led to the *de facto* criminalization of Jewish descent in Czechoslovakia on distinctly local terms.

Czechoslovakia Responds to the Soviet Union's Anti-Zionist Turn

Stalin inaugurated a domestic anti-Zionist campaign in the autumn of 1948, when he perceived among Soviet Jews a growing sense of ethno-national solidarity and widespread identification with the newly founded State of Israel.²⁸ Whereas Jewish communists had once risen to prominence in the Soviet Union as model socialists, presumably without bourgeois nationalist

²⁸ The arrival of Israel's first Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Golda Meir (then, Meyerson), inspired enthusiastic outpourings of support from Soviet Jews for the nascent Israeli state. See Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 127-28.

attachment, the formation of a Jewish state transformed them into members of “an ethnic diaspora potentially loyal to a hostile and foreign state.”²⁹ To the accompaniment of propaganda that evoked pre-communist, anti-Jewish tropes, Soviet security forces and party-state officials targeted Jewish citizens for juridical and extra-legal persecution. Their campaign followed the model of earlier ethnic purges, even if they murdered comparatively far fewer Jews.³⁰ Stalin’s own antisemitism, shared by many Russians, played no small role in this affair.

The repudiation of Zionism did not engender an immediate shift in the Soviet Union’s strategic support for Israel. That occurred only incrementally through 1949 and into 1950, in response Israel’s shift into the Western camp, the failure of the Israeli Communist Party to attract votes, and other factors.³¹ The Soviet Union thus temporarily adopted a “dual policy,” characterized by the repudiation of Jewish nationalism at home and the support for the Jewish state abroad.³² Unlike Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union did not permit Jewish citizens to

²⁹ Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 297.

³⁰ Ibid., 297-315; and Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 134. Judd Teller reports that the Soviet security forces murdered 433 Jewish artists and intellectuals after 1948. See *The Kremlin, The Jews, and the Middle East*, cited in *ibid.*, 134. The assault on Soviet-Jewish artists began even before the events of fall 1948. On 12 January of that year, Soviet security forces in Belarus murdered Solomon Mikhoels, who led both Moscow’s State Jewish Theater and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. The Soviet anti-Zionist campaign culminated in 1952 with the trial and execution of fifteen functionaries of the latter organization, along with ten others. See Rubenstein and Naumov, *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom*. The Slánský Affair is widely believed to have been a rehearsal for an even higher-profile show trial in the Soviet Union of Jewish doctors, who allegedly conspired to assassinate Joseph Stalin. The latter’s death in 1953 prevented it from transpiring.

³¹ Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 123-203. Krammer suggests that the Soviet Union may have supported Israel primarily to cast the Middle East into chaos and thereby incite tension between the U.S.A. and Great Britain. Israel’s resounding victory in the war of 1948 rendered this moot. *Ibid.*, 201.

³² Ibid., *The Forgotten Friendship*, 127-28. Krammer argues that “Israel was carrying out a dual policy of its own in its relations with the Soviet bloc. While Israel’s diplomats and trade representatives maintained normal relations at the governmental level, they were at the same time crucially involved in influencing their host country’s immigration restrictions and expediting the process which would bring Soviet Jews to Israel.” *Ibid.*, 149. It should not be

emigrate after the Second World War. As a multi-national empire, the Soviet Union did not share with Czechoslovakia—or with the Poland, Hungary, and Romania—the goal of achieving ethnic homogeneity. Indeed, despite having rejected Zionism, the Soviet Union still identified some citizens of Jewish origin as nationally “Jewish” [or “Hebrew”] on their official documents. From Moscow’s perspective, Jewish emigration could only embarrass the Soviet Union and strengthen its enemies.

For Czechoslovakia, as for the other Soviet client state, few policy implications followed directly from Moscow’s anti-Zionist turn, especially because of its initial domestic focus. Some countries, particularly those with strong antisemitic traditions initiated anti-Zionist campaigns of their own, targeting Jewish citizens.³³ Most, including Czechoslovakia, nonetheless, continued to permit and even facilitate Jewish emigration to Israel through 1949—often via Czechoslovakia—as their leaders still hoped to resolve the problem of Jewish integration through the voluntary exit of the Jewish minority. They also saw an opportunity to benefit from Israeli and Western-Jewish “ransom” payments and also from the abandoned or confiscated properties of émigrés.³⁴ Such

overlooked that in the Czechoslovak case, the party had established a similar relationship with the Social Democrats, with whom cooperated in the West and persecuted at home. See Pelikán, *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 25.

³³ Meyer, “Introduction,” in *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, Peter Meyer, Bernard D. Weinryb, Eugene Duschinsky, and Nicolas Sylvain (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1953), 1; and idem., “Czechoslovakia,” 153.

³⁴ Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 145-46 and 158-60; Meyer, “Czechoslovakia,” 145-52. For the perspective of Jewish émigrés see “Memorandum o stížnostech židovských vystěhovalců odjíždějících z Československa do Izraele a jiných zemí” [Memorandum about the complaints of Jewish émigrés leaving from Czechoslovakia to Israel and other lands] (30 May 1949), reprinted from the State Central Archives, Political Trials Collection, bundle 314, archival unit 1480-638, in *Československo a Izrael, 1945-1956: Dokumenty* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1945-1956: documents], eds. Marie Bulínový, et. al., (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Historical Institute of the Czech Army and with the State Central Archives, 1993), 214-17. Officials often forced would-be Jewish émigrés to pay steep bribes—based upon their financial status—in order to receive passports and visas. See also Monika Hanková, “Změna postoje vládnoucích orgánů ČSR

emigration continued from some states until 1952.³⁵

Czechoslovakia's public anti-Zionist campaign remained relatively subdued and bureaucratic until exploding into frenzy in advance of the Slánský Affair.³⁶ For example, when, in February 1950, Minister of National Security Ladislav Kopřiva addressed the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party about the need for vigilance in the fight against internal enemies, he did not mention Jews or Zionists once. Kopřiva, rather, directed the Presidium's attention to the members of the fallen bourgeoisie and of the country's former opposition parties, now banned. He also called into question the loyalty of comrades who had joined the Party *en masse* after 1945.³⁷ When the party and the state's security services began

k židovské komunitě po roce 1948 na příkladu vystěhovalectví” [The change in the attitude of the governing organs of Czechoslovakia towards the Jewish community after the year 1948 through the example of emigration], in *Židé v Čechách: Sborník ze semináře konaného v říjnu 2006 v Liberci* [Jews in the Czech lands: the proceedings from the seminar that took place in October 2006 in Liberec], eds. Vlastimila Hamáčková, Monika Hanková, and Markéta Lhotová (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2007), 96-104.

³⁵ Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 151-64. This applied to Romania, in particular. Radu Iaonid, *Ransom of the Jews: The Story of the Extraordinary Secret Bargain between Romania and Israel* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 62-91. For accounts by Israeli agents who helped facilitate Jewish emigration to Israel see Amos Ettinger, *Blind Jump: The Story of Shaike Dan* (New York, NY: Cornwall Books, 1992); and Efrayim Dekel, *Bricha: Flight to the Homeland* (New York, Herzl Press, 1973).

³⁶ Jews faced economic discrimination, particularly as concerned the restitution of property stolen during the Second World War. This applied especially to personal property. I address Jewish communal property in Chapters Five and Six. Meyer, “Czechoslovakia,” 73-92; and Eduard Kubů and Jan Kuklík Jr., “Reluctant Restitution: The Restitution of Jewish Property in the Bohemian Lands after the Second World War,” trans. Charlotte Kreutzmüller, in *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, eds. Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler and Philipp Ther, Studies on War and Genocide, vol. 10 (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2007), 223-34.

³⁷ Speech delivered by Kopřiva to the Central Committee of the CPC, “Revoluční bdělost a čistota strany” [Revolutionary vigilance and the purity of the Party] (22 February 1950). NAČR, ÚV-KSČ-02/5, bundle16, archival unit 209. Successive rounds of purges between 1948 and 1954 brought rate of membership in the CPC among Czechoslovak citizens down from 21% to 11.8%. They often targeted new, postwar members, like former Social Democrats. Jan Foitzik, “Souvislosti politických procesů” [The meaning of the political trials], in *Politické procesy v*

arresting, trying, and making public spectacle of the country's purported internal enemies, they first targeted those groups, along with Catholic clergy and communists whom they suspected had been exposed to Western influence. In comparison with some of its neighbors, Czechoslovakia turned only slowly against its Jewish minority.

A number of international and domestic factors contributed to setting this initially subdued tone. First and foremost, the Czechoslovakia's leaders had provided far too much assistance to the nascent state of Israel for them take a proactive stance against that country without calling too much attention to their own implication in its survival and success. As per above, Czechoslovakia also continued to benefit financially from the transmigration of Jews from the surrounding countries to Israel for its leaders to jeopardize their relationship with that state.³⁸

Domestic political culture contributed as well. The party's initial support for Israel rang consonant with a tradition of sympathy for Zionism in the Czech lands which persisted through the 1948 transition.³⁹ Much to the chagrin of party ideologues, the communist press continued to

Československu po 1945 a "případ Slánský" [The political trials in Czechoslovakia after 1945 and the "Slánský Affair"], eds. Jiří Pernes and Jan Foitzik, 11.

³⁸ On emigration, see Radka Čermakova, "Poválečné Československo: Obnovený stát ve střední Evropě" [Postwar Czechoslovakia: a renewed state in Central Europe] in *Židovská menšina v Československu po druhé světové válce. Od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War. From liberation to a new totalitarianism], eds. Blanka Soukupová, Peter Salner, and Miroslav Ludvíková (Prague, Czech Republic: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 32-35; Hanková, "Změna postoje vládnoucích orgánů" [Changes in the position of the governing organs]; Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 151-64; Meyer, "Czechoslovakia," 145-52; and Yegar, Adamová, and Sláma, *Československo, Sionismus, Izrael* [Czechoslovakia, Zionism, Israel], 67-76.

³⁹ On the attitude of Czechoslovakia's first President, Tomáš G. Masaryk to Zionism see Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 198-216. On the origins of government support for domestic Jewish nationalism in Czechoslovakia see idem., "Negotiating Czechoslovakia: The Challenges of Jewish Citizenship in a Multiethnic Nation-State," in *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry*, eds. Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani

write favorably about Israel—or at least, insufficiently negatively—throughout 1949, even to the point of celebrating its commitment to socialist values.⁴⁰ Similarly, despite an intensification of antisemitism through the Second World War, the crude expression of antisemitic sentiments remained relatively taboo in Czech society, at least until 1950. One reason for this was that the party considered populist antisemitism to be a powerful tool in the hands of its political opponents, especially those in Slovakia.⁴¹ Indeed, party-state officials went to great lengths to clarify that their newfound anti-Zionism had nothing to do with their feelings about Jews. They insisted that the resolutions sent by citizens, clubs, and factory collectives in support of the Slánský trial not contain antisemitic invective.⁴²

Still, the party did attempt to accommodate the changing winds blowing from Moscow. As tensions rose and as Soviet Union's position shifted, party-state leaders sought to achieve a bureaucratic and ideological monopoly over Czechoslovakia's relationship with Israel, both at home and abroad. What is most striking about their initiatives through 1950, albeit with some exceptions, is how they attempted to act reasonably and to avoid public displays of what could

Hoffman (Oxford, UK and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 103-19.

⁴⁰ Vladimír Waigner, "Hlášení sekretariátu ÚV KSČ" [Announcement of the Secretariat of the CCCPC] (2 November 1949). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/3 bundle 18, archival unit 63, 49. The journalists' confusion was justified, since the Soviet Union's position on Israel and Zionism derived more from reasons of state than ideological conviction. As Walter Laqueur explained, "Soviet Leadership thinks in terms of power politics, not in those of lofty idealism. At the bottom of its Middle Eastern policy, it's neither pro-Arab, nor pro-Israel; it is pro-Soviet." "Soviet Policy and the Jewish Fate: In Russia and in Israel," *Commentary* (October, 1956): 309, cited in Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 203.

⁴¹ Minutes of a meeting of the Czechoslovak government on 2 October 1945, "Pogrom ve Velkých Topolčanech na Slovensku" [The pogrom in Velkých Topolčanech], reprinted from Slovakia State Central Archives, collection 100/24, bundle 138, archival unit 1494, in *Československo a Izrael 1945-1956: Dokumenty* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1945-1956: documents], Marie Bulínová, et. al. (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History, 1993), 17-29.

⁴² McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'?" 855-56.

be considered antisemitism in both speech and policy. Although a certain distrustful “othering” of Jews pervaded internal party-state communications and some public speeches, it only gained widespread, official expression around 1951. In that year, Communist ideologues and publicists developed a robust language for encoding attacks on Jewish citizens. It comes under analysis in the following section.

In contrast, Czechoslovak leaders immediately brought their country’s formal relationship with Israel into accord with Moscow’s line, as they did in all matters of foreign policy. This meant terminating their various military aid programs, despite the cost to their own country in terms of lost revenue. In 1949 and early 1950, party-state officials expelled the foreign-Jewish organizations that had been operating in their country since 1945. Following the lead of their Soviet colleagues, they accused these groups and their local collaborators of facilitating illegal emigration, propagating Zionism, breaking various financial laws, and, worst of all, placing their nationwide networks at the disposal of western and Israeli intelligence services.⁴³ In expelling these groups, officials also sought to increase their country’s hard-currency reserves with confiscated funds.⁴⁴ In late 1949, after a flood of Jewish emigration, Czechoslovak officials, following Moscow’s lead, placed strict limitations on which Jewish

⁴³ The most important American Jewish organizations operating in Czechoslovakia were the American Jewish Joint Distribution Service (the Joint) and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). The Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the Jewish Agency for Israel (known in Czechoslovakia as the Palestinian Office) were the most active Israeli agencies. Czechoslovak authorities had expelled all of these organization by the end of 1949, with the Joint being the last to leave. See Meyer, “Czechoslovakia,” 93-98. On the Joint Distribution Committee in postwar Europe see Tom Shachtman, *I Seek My Brethren: Ralph Goldman and “The Joint”: The Work of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee* (New York, NY: Newmarket Press, 2001), 12-15. See also Captain Kroupa, report to Ladislav Kopřiva “Sionistické organisace a židovské spolky–poznatky” [Zionist organizations and Jewish clubs–notes] (24 April 1951). ABS, A2/1-1724.

⁴⁴ In 1953 the JDC and the Israeli Legation attempted unsuccessfully to recover their frozen assets from the state. See collection of correspondences in ABS, A6/2-939.

citizens could qualify for exit visas. Finally, in December 1952, immediately after the Slánský trial, the Foreign Ministry expelled the Israeli Legate to Czechoslovakia (and Poland), Dr. Arié Léon Kubový, on espionage charges partly based on evidence acquired through the interrogation and torture of the Israeli citizen and political activist, Mordechai Oren.⁴⁵

Czechoslovak officials also took action to bring the country's civic relationship with Israel into accord with Soviet-Bloc policies. In November 1948, the Communist Party established the League of Czechoslovak-Israeli Friendship (*Svaz československo-izraelského přátelství*) as a Czechoslovak-communist alternative to the country's Jewish-nationalist organizations. Although the party tolerated such groups and had even used them to facilitate Jewish emigration to Israel, it could no longer allow them to dominate the country's non-governmental ties to that country. In founding the League, the party hoped to take control over the process by which citizens applied for Israel-bound emigration. They also sought to redirect into party coffers the donations that Jewish citizens made to domestic Zionist organizations.⁴⁶ The party thus founded the League in order to manifest the belief that it was possible to reject Zionism and still maintain a "friendship" with Israel—or, at least, between the Czechoslovak and Israeli peoples. Its establishment reflected a transitional stage in Jewish-state relations, when communists still hoped to solve the problem of domestic Jewish-nationalism bureaucratically, through education and emigration.

⁴⁵ Lena Arava-Novotná, "Od antisemitismu k antisionismu," 92; Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 192; Mordechai Oren *The Story of a Political Prisoner in Prague* (Israel: Sifriat Poalim, Ltd., 1958) (in Hebrew); and Yegar, Adamová, and Sláma, *Československo, Sionismus, Izrael* [Czechoslovakia, Zionism, Israel], 163. See collection of documents in MZV, TO-O 1945-1949, Izrael, box 6; and GS-A 1945-1955, box 155.

⁴⁶ Letter W. Stamberg to Bedrich Geminder (6 November 1948). reprinted from State Central Archives, collection 100/3, bundle 102, archival unit 316, in *Československo a Izrael 1945-1956: Dokumenty* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1945-1956: documents], Marie Bulínová, et. al. (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History, 1993), 173-74.

Whether such a proposition was tenable or not, the attempt to maintain the League as a Czechoslovak-communist, rather than “Jewish,” affair rendered it unviable. Theoretically, nothing should have prevented Jewish citizens of proper ideological conviction from participating in the league as ethnic Czechs and Slovaks. Yet the founders’ fears of Zionist infiltration and mistrust of Jews in general led them to undermine their own project.⁴⁷ They accepted no members and collected no fees in order to prevent “the league from becoming an exclusively Jewish affair.”⁴⁸ (Who else would have joined such a club in postwar Czechoslovakia?!) They even declined to establish branch offices around the country. Instead, a founding official suggested,

... gradually to establish a network of trustees, as an honorary function, who will be in contact with the local population and the Prague center. The trustees should be at once: chosen by us, politically reliable collaborators, as far as possible, never Jews [emphasis added].⁴⁹

Thus, throughout its brief duration, from 1948 to 1950, the League remained an affair of the Prague bureaucracy. Without Jewish support, it had to depend upon the Communist Party and other organizations for subventions. None obliged.⁵⁰ In 1949, the same functionary quoted above

⁴⁷ Vladimír Waigner, who helped organize and direct the League, explained his reasoning for not moving forward with a plan to fund the group by selling special stamps as follows, “We will not undertake the stamp operation for now for political reasons. The Zionists are as active as beasts and one cannot monitor them enough.” Letter to Jan Sekaj (9 March 1949). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/1, bundle 59, archival unit 483, 11.

⁴⁸ Vladimír Waigner, “Referát pro s. Gemindera o Svazu československo-israelského přátelství” [Report for comrade Geminder on the League of Czechoslovak-Israeli Friendship] (1 November 1949). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/3, bundle 102, archival unit 316, 24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁰ The Central Council of Unions offered 50,000kčs per year, which was equivalent to a monthly contribution of 0.0014kčs from each of its members. The League of Czech Youth offered only 1,000kčs annually, which led Waigner to demand a reconsideration of his request. Ironically, the largest annual pledge, of 12,000kčs, came from the Central Union of Zionists, the country’s largest Zionist organization and the League’s public competitor. The latter’s functionaries likely felt compelled to donate. The League, nonetheless, demanded additional funds of them. Vladimír Waigner, “Hlášení pro sekretariat ÚV KSČ o finančním stavu Svazu čsl.-israelského přátelství–k

suggested remedying this problem by dissolving all of the country's Zionist organizations and, presumably, seizing their assets. He also suggested that their files would provide information useful to defeating domestic Zionism.⁵¹ In 1949, however, the party was not yet prepared to take such action.

The League faced additional challenges due to the “very sensitive” (*velmi choulostivá*) nature of its work.⁵² Indeed, for the entire two-years of its existence, I have found evidence of only one League-sponsored event, a concert by a leftwing Israeli musician.⁵³ As Moscow's anti-Zionist campaign escalated, the League's administrators found themselves in the increasingly uncomfortable position of being the official “friends” of one of the Soviet Union's chief enemies. When, in 1950, Israel sent a new legate to Prague, the League asked the head of the International Division of the Communist Party, Bedřich Geminder, if it should

prepare... some small celebration, this means within a small circle of invited individuals and without such an undertaking being paid any media attention. Since [the diplomat]

rukám s. Štambergera” [Report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on the financial state of the League of Czechoslovak-Israeli Friendship—attn. Comrade Štamberger] (11 December 1948). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/03, S18 AJ63, p. 60.

⁵¹ Vladimír Waigner, “Hlášení sekretariátu ÚV KSČ o činnosti cionistických organizací” [Announcement for the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on the activities of Zionist organizations] (15 November 1949). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/1, bundle 59, archival unit 483, 21.

⁵² Vladimír Waigner, “Referát pro s. Gemindera” [A report for comrade Geminder], 24.

⁵³ Vladimír Waigner, “Zpráva pro s. Gemindera o s. Portnojovi z Izraeli” [Report for comrade Geminder on comrade Portnoy from Israel] (23 September 1949). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/3, bundle 18, archival unit 63, 56. It is quite likely that League held celebrations of Israel's independence day. Bedřich Geminder was asked to approve such a celebration in Prague's Slovanský dům in 1948. “Žádost W. Stambergera, pracovníka mezinárodního oddělení ÚV KSČ, aby B. Geminder rozhodl v některých otázkách spojených se zahájením činnosti Svazu čs.-izraelského přátelství” [The request of W. Stamberger, employee of the international division of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia that B. Geminder decide on a few questions related to the initiation of activities by the League of Cz.-Israeli Friendship] (6 November 1948), reprinted from State Central Archives, collection 100/3, bundle 102, archival unit 316, in *Československo a Izrael 1945-1956: Dokumenty* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1945-1956: documents], Marie Bulínová, et. al. (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History, 1993), 173-74.

represents for us the legate of a bourgeois, pro-American state. On the other hand, here there perhaps may arise some higher interests the maintenance of a “friendly” connection, which are not known to us...⁵⁴

By 1950, the original intentions upon which the League had been founded had faded into a charade. It ceased functioning in that year and its chairman, Karel Kreibich, left to serve as the Czechoslovak Ambassador to the Soviet Union.⁵⁵

Despite its brief existence and relative inactivity, the League did have a lasting impact upon Jewish-state relations in one, extremely important arena. Between 1948 and 1950, the League administered the party’s relationship with its Israeli counterpart. This amounted to little more than responding—often negatively—to the latter’s requests for material support.⁵⁶ Indeed, the

⁵⁴ Vladimír Waigner, letter to (Geminder at) the the International Division of the Secretariat of the CC-CPC (23 March 1950). NAČR, KSC-ÚV-100/1, bundle 59, archival unit 483, 24. In the end, the new Legate, Dr. Arié Léon Kubový never even received an appropriate welcome from the President and the Foreign Minister, both of whom refused to meet with him for his entire tenure in Czechoslovakia. Lena Arava-Novotná, “Od antisemitismu k antisionismu: Československu po roce 1948” [From antisemitism to anti-Zionism: Czechoslovakia after the Year 1948], in *První pražský seminář: Dopady holocaustu na českou a slovenskou společnost ve druhé polovině 20. století* [The first Prague seminar: effects of the Holocaust on Czech and Slovak society in the second half of the 20th century] (Prague, Czech Republic: Varius Praha and Spolek akademiků–Židů, 2008), 91.

⁵⁵ As a historical figure Kreibich demands attention. He was an ethnic German and a founding member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Despite his national identification, he supported the postwar expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovak territory. He also blamed world Jewry for the development of antisemitism after 1933, which he attributed to Jewish support of capitalism and the World Jewish Congress’s criticism of the Soviet Union. Blanka Soukupová, “Druhá republika, protektorát a dobová antisemitská propaganda” [The Second Republic, the Protectorate, and period antisemitic propaganda], forthcoming. Yet Kreibich was a man of deep communist principle. Despite his misgivings about world Jewry, he did not stand by as communism embraced racism.

⁵⁶ The League administered an account bearing just over 560,000 Czechoslovak crowns (kčs), earmarked for supporting the Israeli Communist Party and collected from Czechoslovak citizens. Yet, due to Czechoslovakia’s weak postwar economy and its pervasive shortages, the government insisted that the money be spent only on domestically produced and readily available goods and services. This severely limited the assistance that the League could offer the Israeli party. In late 1949, Minister of Information Václav Kopecký allocated an additional 300,000kčs for printing a Hebrew-language edition of President Gottwald’s 1946 book, *Deset Let* [Ten years], a collection of the latter’s speeches from 1936 through 1946. The translation

party rendered the League all but meaningless in Israel by forbidding it to work with Israeli government agencies or any group not affiliated with or sympathetic to the country's communist party and communist Czechoslovakia.⁵⁷ The Soviet Bloc had already given up hope of winning Israel's allegiance, and the League, from an international perspective, served only to put a friendly face on the two countries' increasingly strained relations. Relations between the communist parties of Czechoslovakia and Israel nonetheless took on temporary significance in the years leading up to the Slánský trial of 1952 (after the League ceased to operate). The documents and testimony provided by Israeli communists to Czechoslovakia contributed to building the case against Mordechai Oren and Shimon Orenstein, lead members of the left-wing, Israeli political party MAPAM, whose coerced and fabricated testimonies played a key role in the conviction of Rudolf Slánský and his co-defendants.⁵⁸

never materialized, however, because the Czechoslovak government placed too many restrictions on how the funds could be transferred and the books produced. See collection of documents in NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/3 bundle 18, archival unit 63, folder "1948-1950."

⁵⁷ This limited the League's partners to the Communist Party of Israel and its cultural arm, the Association for Popular Culture (*Agudah Tarbut La'am*). The League complained to no avail that these restrictions limited its efficacy. Vladimír Waigner, "Hlášení mezinárodnímu oddělení sekretariátu ÚV KSČ o činnosti Svazu československo-izraelského přátelství" [Announcement to the International Division of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia about the activities of the League of Czechoslovak-Israeli Friendship] (9 May 1949). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/1, bundle 59, archival unit 483, 14.

⁵⁸ The goal of the Israeli Communist Party was to discredit MAPAM in the eyes of the Israeli Left, which favored the latter party by tremendous margins. For an example of the damning testimony provided against Slánský by Israelis, see "Záznam" [Memorandum] (27 September 1952). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/3, bundle 102, archival unit 316, folder 1950-1954, 75. Shortly after the Slánský trial, the Israeli Communist Party requested that Czechoslovakia publish copies of the proceedings in Hebrew and Arabic to help them respond to accusations of collaboration leveled in the Israeli Parliament. "Záznam o návštěvě generálního tajemníka Komunistické strany Izraele soudruha Mikunise a jeho průvodce soudruha Toubi v ÚV KSČ" [Memorandum about the visit of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Israel, Comrade Mikunis, and his attendant, Comrade Toubi at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] (1 December 1952). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/3, bundle 102, archival unit 316, folder 1950-1954, 77-78. See also Beinín, *Was the Red Flag Flying there?*, 102-71; Blumenthal, "Fourteen Convicted, Three Million condemned," 110-16; Oren, *The Story of a Political*

It may be tempting to discount the importance of the League or to characterize it as a temporary ruse.⁵⁹ To do so, however, would be to ignore a brief period when the Communist Party attempted to subvert domestic Jewish nationalism without attacking Jewish citizens. A testament to the high seriousness of the League is that it brought together individuals who, in a matter of just a few years, would find themselves set against one another in the Slánský Affair. Minister of Information Václav Kopecký served as the League's honorary president. Bedrich Geminder oversaw its foreign activities. Karel Kreibich served as its chairman. Kopecký would later lead the anti-Zionist campaign within the Communist Party. Geminder hung with Slánský, and Kreibich stood out as one of the only high-ranking communist officials to condemn the party for staging an antisemitic trial. His tenure in Moscow did not last long.⁶⁰

Czechoslovak State Security initiated the next stage of the country's anti-Zionist campaign in 1950, just as the League shut its doors. Its officers launched an investigation into the "Zionist organizations and Jewish clubs" that survivors had established—in most cases, re-established—after the Second World War. Out of 148 associations, however, the secret police forcibly closed only three, which it justifiably considered "fascist-Zionist:" the Stern Group, the

Prisoner in Prague [Hebrew]; and Yegar, Adamová, and Sláma, *Československo, Sionismus, Izrael* [Czechoslovakia, Zionism, Israel], 160-63.

The Communist Party of Israel continued to rely upon its Czechoslovak counterpart for material aid and ideological support for decades after the League ceased functioning. The archives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia are replete with information regarding these relations. For the years 1945-1960, see the records of the International Division of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/3; and NAČR, AN-Zahr., carton 109, folder "Vztýhy KSČ-KSI" [Relations of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia-the Communist Party of Israel].

⁵⁹ Meyer devotes only one paragraph to the League. See "Czechoslovakia," 128.

⁶⁰ Vladimír Waigner, "Referát pro s. Gemindera" [A report for comrade Geminder], 23.

Irgun, and *Betar*.⁶¹ The first two were paramilitary organizations of Jewish nationalist-extremists (“revisionists”), which the State of Israel had already disbanded and outlawed, but which continued to operate in Central Europe. The third was a youth group that fed the former organizations. The leaders of these three banned group, nonetheless, suffered little for their political activities in these early years of the anti-Zionist turn. As the StB’s Captain Koura reported to Ladislav Kopřiva,

“During the dissolution of these fascist Zionist organizations their functionaries confirmed in writing that they would not conduct any Zionist activities on the territory of the ČSR.”⁶²

This was hardly a draconian response to political dissent at a time when Catholic clergy endured hard labor, torture, and imprisonment for their faith.

It took time, indeed, for party-state officials to turn their country’s anti-Zionist campaign fully inwards and to repay Zionism with harsh penalties. Despite urging from the League, the party continued to permit the country’s main Zionist umbrella organization, the Central Zionist Union, to operate through much of 1951.⁶³ During the first months of that year, however, the

⁶¹ Most of the 148 groups had very little to do with Zionism. Many were burial societies or other charitable institutions. The official name of the *Irgun* was *Ha-Irgun Ha-Tzvai Ha-Leumi be-Eretz Yisrael* [The National Military Organization in the Land of Israel].

⁶² Memo from Captain Kroupa to Minister of National Security Ladislav Kopřiva (24 April 1951). ABS, A2/1-1724. See page 1 for quote.

⁶³ Unlike before the Second World War, the postwar Czechoslovak Zionist Union did not include organizations from the “revisionist” camp, such as the three groups that the party-state banned in 1950. “Informace o činnosti Ústředního svazu sionistického” [Information about the Central Zionist Union] (December 1972). ABS, Z-1009, folder 1, 1. The five postwar member organizations were HaShomer HaTza’ir (left-wing youth), Achduth HaAvodah (center-left wing), Mapai (left wing), the General Zionists, and the Mizrahi movement (religious Zionists). Three additional organizations existed outside of the postwar union’s framework: Agudath Israel (far-right religious), the Union of Zionist-Revisionists, and the Stern Group (see above). See “Zpráva o politických stranách a dalších organizacích v Izraeli, o světových organizacích a židovských organizacích v Československu, zpracovaná pravděpodobně Státní bezpečností” [Report on the political parties and additional organizations in Israel, on international organizations, and on Jewish organizations in Czechoslovakia, compiled likely by State Security]

Ministry of the Interior colluded with the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs, the latter's Slovak counterpart, and the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands to establish that the Central Zionist Union had "neither political nor economic meaning."⁶⁴ Just four months later that organization held an emergency general assembly to discuss its own "voluntarily" dissolution, due to "the coincidence of certain circumstances" (*shodou určitých okolností*)⁶⁵ On 8 August, the Ministry of the Interior accepted the Union's notice of dissolution and approved the transfer of its assets to the Jewish National Fund in Israel, as stipulated in its statutes.⁶⁶

On its own, the dissolution was unexceptional. Many Jewish organizations disbanded during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Indeed, many had been re-established for the sole purpose of doing so and then leaving their restituted assets in Jewish-communal hands. As the social state

(1949), reprinted from State Central Archives, collection 100/1, bundle 59, bundle 78, archival unit 583, in *Československo a Izrael 1945-1956: Dokumenty* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1945-1956: documents], Marie Bulínová, et. al. (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History, 1993), 229-34. On interwar Czech-Zionist organizations, see Kateřina Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé?: Národní identita Židů v Čechách 1933-1938* [Czechs, Germans, and Jews? The national identity of Jews in the Czech lands, 1933-1938] (Prague, Czech Republic: Paseka, 2008), 212-14; and Jiří Křesťan, Alexandra Blodigová, Jaroslav Bubeník, and Dana Marvalová, *Židovské spolky v českých zemích v letech 1918-1948* [Jewish associations in the Czech lands, 1918-1948] (Prague, Czech Republic: Sefer, 2001), 26-38. On the relationship between interwar Czechoslovak Zionist-revisionists and the Central Zionist Union, see idem., "Piłsudski or Masaryk? Zionist Revisionism in Czechoslovakia 1925-1940," *Judaica Bohemiae*, vol. 35 (1999), 223-24.

A smaller branch office of the Central Zionist Union seems to have operated in Prague until 1954, but I have found no record of its existence. See Arava-Novotná, "Od antisemitismu k antizionismu," 92; and Křesťan, Blodigová, Bubeník, and Marvalová, *Židovské spolky v českých zemích* [Jewish associations in the Czech Lands], 168.

⁶⁴ Letter from the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs to the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs (22 January 1951); and a letter in return (7 February 1951) ABS, H-425-222, bundle 4, 12-13.

⁶⁵ Invitation to meeting on 24 June 1951 (16 May 1951). ABS, H-415-222, bundle 4, 74.

⁶⁶ "Návrh na obžalovací spis v procesu s protistátní centrem a na stanovení termínu procesu" [Proposal for the arraignment of the trial of the anti-state center and for setting a time for the trial], (11 November 1952). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/5, bundle 30, archival unit 103, point 19b, 38.

developed, the government forced additional Jewish charities to close as well (along with similar institutions associated with other churches) declaring them redundant and anti-socialist.⁶⁷ It could even be argued that the Central Zionist Union had an exceptionally long life for an organization that promoted a taboo ideology.

The closure, nonetheless, coincided with and, indeed, marked a new stage of Czechoslovakia's anti-Zionist campaign. It occurred just as the party-state began purging citizens "of Jewish origin" from positions of note, and even from some of lesser prestige. It also precipitated the arrests of the country's Zionist leaders, the former heads of the Union and its subordinate groups.⁶⁸ Their coerced testimonies, supported by confiscated documents, featured prominently in the Slánský trial and thereby contributed to the criminalization of Jewish descent in Czechoslovakia.

In June 1952, accompanied by strident anti-Zionist (and implicitly anti-Jewish), propaganda, which had intensified with the New Year, Czechoslovakia moved formally against mainstream domestic Zionists. The Communist Party's powerful Political Secretariat approved a resolution submitted by the Ministry of National Security, which claimed that

It has recently been shown that the Central Union, the Zionists groups that are united within it, and other Zionist associations which remained outside of the Union, engaged already from the year 1945 on the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic in anti-state activity.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Examples of such organizations are Prague's two Jewish youth homes, which Party-state officials forcibly closed in 1951. Jacob Ari Labendz, "Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist: Managing 'Jewish Power and Danger' in 1960s Communist Czechoslovakia," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014): 93-94.

⁶⁸ Arava-Novotná, "Od antisemitism k antisionismu" [From antisemitism to anti-Zionism], 92-94; and Meyer, "Czechoslovakia," 158-61. See also "Trestní oznámení na představitele nepřátelských sionistických organizací [Criminal complaint against the representatives of the enemy Zionist organizations] (7 May 1953). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/5, bundle 57, archival unit 155, point 9c.

⁶⁹ "Návrh na obžalovací spis" [Proposal for the arraignment], 38.

The Secretariat instructed the Ministry of the Interior to rescind its recognition of the Central Zionist Union's notice of voluntary dissolution and charged the Central National Committee in Bratislava with forcibly dissolving that organization, prohibiting its activities, and seizing its assets for the state. All regional national committees received instructions to take similar measures against the country's remaining "Zionist" groups, those that had not belonged to the Union.⁷⁰

Thus, the leaders and members of Czechoslovakia's formerly tolerated Zionist organizations suddenly found themselves accused, not only of propagating an enemy ideology, but of working proactively against the People's Republic. Terror spread among Czech and Slovak citizens of Jewish origin regardless of their relationship to Judaism and Zionism. Those who had been active in Jewish and Zionist organizations had the most to fear, as the Secret Police compiled lists of domestic "Zionists" based on the confiscated records of the organizations that the state had closed, both foreign and domestic.

This escalation into crisis, however, and the very real suffering of Jewish citizens that it caused should not overshadow the fact that officials took each incremental stage in the anti-Zionist campaign seriously in its own time. I would argue that for many high-ranking party-state officials the very notion of its transformation into an antisemitic campaign would have seemed foreign, reprehensible, and implausible as late as 1951. This, of course, does not mean that the party was free of anti-Jewish sentiment—far from it. It reflects, rather, the erstwhile tendency among communists to avoid public displays of antisemitism and its manifestation in law and policy. During these early years of ideological commitment, party members needed to believe

⁷⁰ Ibid., 38-39. For additional documents pertaining to the development of this resolution among officials from the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of the Interior, see ABS, A6/2-939.

that they were acting honorably and in accordance with the best of Czech traditions, even as they committed acts of extreme cruelty. Similarly, even as the party intensified its anti-Zionist campaign, many officials attempted to maintain an air of legality and fairness. The party therewith strove to maintain its legitimacy before its members and the general public.

It was only after 1951, that the Communist Party adopted antisemitism as a domestic political tool and began persecuting Jews—as “Zionists”—openly and shamelessly. Arnold Krammer writes that by 1952

[t]he Soviet Union’s domestic policy... superseded its foreign policy in the Middle East, and Israel was seen in a single light, as an extension of the domestic purges. The Slánský trial in Czechoslovakia was a culmination of all the facets of the East European upheaval.⁷¹

This certainly holds true from a Soviet perspective, where the repudiation of Israel followed a domestic, anti-Jewish-nationalist campaign. Yet, in the Czechoslovak case, the converse rings far truer. In that country, the Soviet-led campaign against Israel transformed a local problem with the administration of ethnicity into a political crisis of the highest international proportions, and Jewish citizens into perceived enemies of the state. The driving factor behind these shifts, explored in the following section, was the ever-intensifying hunt for “internal enemies” across the Soviet Bloc, as well as the Soviet Union’s intervention, which transformed it into a hot war on European Jews.

The Hunt for the Internal Enemy

The Soviet Bloc’s anti-Zionist campaign gave shape in Czechoslovakia to a wholly separate political phenomenon of the same period: a Moscow-inspired hunt for “internal enemies” lurking within the communist parties of the satellite republics. In terrifyingly elegant combination these

⁷¹ Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 185.

two trends escalated to achieve the extra-legal criminalization of Jewish descent in Czechoslovakia and, to various degrees, across the Soviet Bloc. Indeed, what began as a Soviet-directed purge of high-ranking officials with Jewish roots soon took on a sinister and local character. Non-Jewish communists and even members of the general public molded the campaign in accordance with Czech tradition and domestic political-culture. They also placed it in the service of their own agendas. The immediate result was police terror, judicial murder, an explosion of popular antisemitism.⁷² Together, these set the parameters within which stakeholders would negotiate Jewish-state relations for decades. The Communist Party's anti-Jewish campaign's more lasting legacy, however, was the conceptual identification of Stalinism with antisemitism, a powerful link that persists until today.

After the breakdown of Soviet-Yugoslav relations in 1948, Stalin feared that other countries would follow the latter into dissent, which they would justify with Lenin's theory that each nation would chart its own path to socialism. Stalin, favoring a dictatorial form of democratic centralism and paranoid that he would lose further influence, went on the offensive in ways long familiar to Soviet citizens. He, his security services, and subordinate counterparts across Central and Eastern Europe initiated a series of deadly show trials and purges, designed to secure fealty through fear. They also turned on specific segments of the general public, targeting a wide range of victim groups, from Catholics to Social Democrats to Jews, and even some classes that seem to have been invented for the purposes of persecution, like the *Kulaks*.⁷³ Just as

⁷² On popular antisemitism in response to the trial see Feinberg, "Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies," 121-24; McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'?" 850-55; and Idem., "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia," 110-12; Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism], 45.

⁷³ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 21-58 and 78-86. With reference to Czechoslovakia, see McDermott, "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia," 107-08; and Pelikán, *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 24. McDermott explains the goal of Stalinist "mass repression," "to bolster the legitimacy of the

Moscow clothed its anti-Zionist campaign in poorly fitting ideological garb, so too did Stalin and the region's communist leaders attribute their uses of coercive politics to the Marxist dogma that class conflict would intensify after the advent of communist rule. Party-state propaganda warned of capitalist infiltration, reactionary sabotage, and the imminence of a third world war.⁷⁴ This helped to divert popular frustration with the unfulfilled economic promises of early communist rule by attributing the responsibility for any and all shortcomings to outsider-enemy classes, both new and old, and to the unfortunate among the states' functionaries.⁷⁵ Across the Soviet Bloc, officials took this moment as an opportunity to defeat their rivals by labeling them as traitors, saboteurs, Trotskyites, and Titoists (i.e., acolytes of Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito [1892-1980]).⁷⁶

With the Czechoslovak trial of 1952, Soviet Bloc leaders shifted the primary target of their hunts from alleged "Titoists" to "Zionists."⁷⁷ The former category had grown stale and empty as Moscow's control over East-Central Europe solidified and as more pressing conflicts

infant communist state by declaring a 'class war' on the 'bourgeois', 'impure' and 'socially harmful elements' who stood in the way of the communist project. See "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia, 104-5."

⁷⁴ McDermott, "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia," 103-04.

⁷⁵ Pelikan, *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 52-54, McDermott, "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia," 104; Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, "Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe," in *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, UK and New York, NY: Manchester University press, distributed by Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9-10; and Václav Brabec, "Vztah KSČ a veřejnosti k politickým procesům na počátku padesátých let" [The relationship of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the public towards the political trials at the beginning of the 1950s], *Revue dějin socialismu* (July 1969): 363-385.

⁷⁶ Indeed, the choice of Slánský for the role of primary victim derived from such rivalries. McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'?", 848.

⁷⁷ Jan Foitzik argues against thinking about this change in terms of a linear transition. His main goal, however, is to demonstrate that most of Stalinism's victims were non-Communists and that the methods of terror did not change after 1953. He is wrong on the latter count. "Souvislosti politických procesů" [The meaning of the political trials], 11.

emerged on the Korean Peninsula and in the Middle East.⁷⁸ Soviet advisors therefore intervened to re-conceptualize a Czechoslovak show-trial already in preparation. They replaced its originally intended victim group, “bourgeois Slovak nationalists” (i.e. would-be Slovak “Titoists”) with a purported cabal of communists of Jewish origin working in the service of “Zionism” and American imperialism. Of course, these charges were not unique to the Czechoslovak case. They had already featured prominently, though subordinately, in the Hungarian trial of 1949. Indeed, the investigations and transcripts of that affair provided Soviet and Czechoslovak security officers with the initial “evidence” they needed to prepare the Slánský trial.⁷⁹

It made sense that the shift in orientation from anti-Titoism to anti-Zionism culminated in

⁷⁸ Pelikán, *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 46. McDermott and Stibbe, “Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe,” 7-9; cf. Bradly Abrams argues “While the apparent anti-Semitism of its trial is often noted (eleven of the fourteen defendants were Jewish), it should be pointed out that the charge of being Titoist agents took precedence over that of being Zionist agents.” See “Hope Died Last,” 362. I disagree, particularly if the issue of concern is not the trial itself but its implications for Czechoslovak political culture moving into the future. The discourses around “Titoism” declined after 1953 as part of the processes of de-Stalinization.

⁷⁹ Mátyás Rákosi, the General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, intervened personally to ensure that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia would hold a show trial of its own. He provided lists of names and false evidence regarding a transnational anti-communist conspiracy. The Hungarian Communist Party alleged that an American named Noel Field directed a network of anti-communist spies across Central Europe, whom he supposedly recruited while running a refugee camp during and after the war. Field fled to Prague after narrowly evading charges of pro-communist espionage in the USA. His time there and association with former refugees now holding high office made him an attractive choice for party members eager to fabricate evidence of a conspiracy. Kaplan, *Report on the Murder*, 19-59; and Lukes, “The Rudolf Slánský Affair,” 166-72. For an autobiographical account by Field’s family members who became entangled in the affair as well see Hermann H Field and Kate Field, *Trapped in the Cold War: The Ordeal of an American Family* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000). László Borhi claims that the theme of Hungary’s 1949 show trial initially was to have been anti-Zionism, but when “the ‘investigation’ got bogged down,” the Soviet Union provided a new script. See “Stalinist Terror in Hungary,” in *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression*, eds. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Manchester, UK and New York, NY: Manchester University press, distributed by Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 131-35.

Czechoslovakia. As Jiří Pelikán astutely points out

Starting in 1949, it became inevitable that not least among [Communist Czechoslovakia's] weaknesses was counted the number of people of Jewish extraction who held top posts in the Party, the Government and the economy—the more so since Czechoslovakia, having shown energy and initiative in implementing the common policy of the socialist countries towards Israel, had failed to respond as promptly as she should to the policy switch of 1949. The concluding phase of Czechoslovak-Israeli relations overlapped with the time when the other socialist countries had broken off relations and were adopting a tougher attitude to their Jewish citizens.⁸⁰

Thus, Stalin and his acolytes found the perfect setting in which to inaugurate a new stage of communist terror—one of deep “national and international significance.”⁸¹ The focus on Jews also spoke to members of Central Europe's newly homogenized national communities, which continued to struggle with the re-integration of Jewish citizens after the Second World War. In the months that followed, a number of Czechoslovakia's neighbors launched or prepared anti-Zionist and antisemitic campaigns of their own.

Although the underlying concept behind the Slánský trial originated in 1951 with Soviet advisors, the trial's antisemitism served distinctly Czechoslovak ends and soon took on a local character.⁸² With the trial, the Communist Party fortified its nationalist credentials which it had

⁸⁰ Pelikán, *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 48. In both interwar Czechoslovakia and Hungary Jews achieved disproportional representation among the country's middle classes and within the professions. Then, after the Second World War, Jewish citizens joined the Communist Party and occupied high positions therein at rates that far exceeded their demographic weight within the general population. When looking for communist scapegoats, it was not difficult for antagonists to seize upon older anti-Jewish stereotypes to allege that high-ranking communist Jews had infiltrated the party in order to destroy it from the inside. Peter Meyer, “Czechoslovakia” 154-55; and Borhi, “Stalinist Terror in Hungary,” 121-22.

⁸¹ Kaplan, *Report on the Murder*, 72.

⁸² To quote Kevin McDermott, “Even if we accept that the purges were initiated and coordinated in Moscow, the often fell on fertile soil, where adapted for domestic purposes, and were not always amenable to tight party control ‘from above.’ See “A ‘Polyphony of Voices’?,” 846. See also Bradley Abrams, “The Politics of Retribution: The Trial of Jozef Tiso in the Czechoslovak Environment,” in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath*, eds. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 252-89; and Feinberg, “Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies,” 117-24.

accrued by advocating for the expulsion of ethnic Germans and by criticizing the first postwar government for not punishing Nazi collaborators sufficiently.⁸³ With the trial, the party additionally assumed a monopoly over the political uses of antisemitism, which had been, until that point, a powerful tool in the hands of its opponents. Furthermore, by inventing a conspiracy of Jewish communists, rather than Slovak nationalists, the trial's architects avoided exacerbating the already significant tensions between Czechs and Slovaks.⁸⁴ Finally, by establishing that American-aligned "Zionists" had infiltrated the Communist Party and the government, the party-state's leadership sought to exculpate itself, both at home and abroad, for having armed the State of Israel and for having facilitated the mass exodus of European Jews to that country.⁸⁵

On an individual level, the trial's anti-Zionist orientation offered non-Jewish officials false hope that they might spare themselves from danger by acquiescing to the persecution of their Jewish colleagues.⁸⁶ Václav Kopecký encouraged such behavior by reaffirming the trial's

⁸³ For example, see Abrams, "The Politics of Retribution."

⁸⁴ Peter Meyers argues that with the Slánský trial, the Communist Party redeemed the violent antisemitism of postwar Slovakia in hindsight, which it had once condemned as "the expression of a sound class instinct." See "Czechoslovakia," 164. On postwar Czech-Slovak tensions, see Abrams, "The Politics of Retribution";

⁸⁵ One party expert explained the arming of Israel in hindsight as follows: "Czechoslovakia played the role of the 'Black Peter' [a reference to the losing hand in a popular children's card game with connotations of foolishness] when, for the military shipments to Israel, undertaken in the interests and intensions of American imperialism and with [the U.S.A.'s] awareness and aid, [Czechoslovakia] was designated at a world forum, indeed, by the U.S.A. as the main violator of the decrees and resolutions of the U.N. on the Palestinian question." Expert Commission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Odborný posudek o vojenské pomoci Československa Izraeli" [Expert appraisal of the military aid of Czechoslovakia to Israel] (10 September 1952). ABS, H-425-365-1. On the transmigration of foreign Jews through Czechoslovakia see Hanková, "Změna postoje vládnoucích orgánů" [Changes in the position of the governing organs], 98-102; and Krammer, *Forgotten Friendship*, 151-64.

⁸⁶ Vilem Hejl, "A Solution, Once and for All," *Zitrek* (10 March 1969); cited in Lendvai, *Antisemitism without Jews*, 6. Non-Jewish communists took similar steps in the Soviet Union during this period as well. See Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship*, 132. Ironically, Rudolf Slánský and his close friend and protector President Klement Gottwald adopted a similar perspective at the initial stages of the Czechoslovak purges. The security services first targeted

new theme before senior communists with language that made clear distinctions between “us” and “them,” and which wrapped antisemitism neatly in communist propaganda. On the occasion of Slánský’s removal from the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party, Kopecký said of Jewish communists and, it seems, Jews in general,

... they are people—at first glance you know—of foreign mentality, of a foreign nation, land, people, whose cosmopolitanism they mask with a façade of international radicalism.

It is, in reality, about the problem of cosmopolitanism, it is not about racism. I know, for example, that there are people of Jewish origin who fused fully with the nation and land, who grew up already like native people from the nation. But most cases among us are not people of this type. We cannot speak of native people and neither can we speak of actual internationalists. This is a people that is foreign to our nation, foreign to our land, and they are especially foreign to any feelings of warmth with relation to the Soviet Union [emphasis added].⁸⁷

Kopecký’s words drew on nationalist disdain for Jews which had little to do with communism or even politics at all.

Two months later, Kopecký urged his colleagues to hold a frank discussion of “Zionists,” unencumbered by political correctness and unfettered by fears that their statements would be misinterpreted (or, rather, correctly interpreted) as antisemitic. He explained,

And therefore, so that no one would fall under the suspicion of antisemitism [i.e. that they would not be thought to be antisemitic], they did not see the shadows and detrimental features of people of Jewish origin in the conditions of the new life in our land. They forgot about the cosmopolitan thinking of a good portion of people of Jewish origin... that Zionism, which was always a discourse of bourgeois ideology, has become an unusually serious danger in the last years [emphasis added].⁸⁸

party functionaries who had either spent the Second World War in the West or who had served in the Spanish Civil War. Since this did not apply to Slánský or Gottwald, they both felt a degree of safety. It did not last. Lukes, “Rudolf Slánský: His Trials and Trial,” 21.

⁸⁷ “Část vystoupení Václava Kopeckého na zasedání ÚV KSČ, které jednalo o odvolání Rudolfa Slánského z funkce generálního tajemníka” [Part of the speech by Václav Kopecký at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which concerned the removal of Rudolf Slánský from the position of General Secretary] (6 September 1951), reprinted from State Central Archive, collection 01, bundle 17, archival unit 29, in Marie Bulínová, et. al., eds., *Československo a Izrael, 1945-1956* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1945-1956], 246.

⁸⁸ “Část diskusního vystoupení Václava Kopeckého na zasedání ÚV KSČ, které jednalo mimo jiné o příčinách zatčení Rudolfa Slánského” [Part of a conversational presentation by Václav

And later,

It was wrong that we allowed ourselves to be afraid of the suspicion that we would be called antisemites and that we did not have the courage to look into the face of Zionism as an ideology of the class enemy, we did not have the courage that a Bolshevik must have in order to be able to defeat any enemy, no matter the form in which it presents itself. Some officials used this as an opportunity to defeat their political rivals.⁸⁹

Thus, not only did Kopecký identify citizens “of Jewish origin” as potential enemies of the highest order, he also assured his non-Jewish colleagues, living in a climate of fear, that they would face no negative repercussions, and perhaps would be rewarded, for saving themselves by persecuting of domestic Jewry. Some, like Kopecký, certainly enjoyed the latitude to act upon their own antisemitism. Others simply found uncomfortable safety in the new political climate. With this development, the StB gained a powerful new tool with which to harass a subset of citizens.

These practices soon spread to more banal sectors of society.⁹⁰ With the trial and its propaganda, the party created the conditions in which many Jewish citizens suffered attacks and discrimination in the professional, social, and educational spheres.⁹¹ To be sure, the party did not introduce antisemitism to the Czech lands and certainly not to Slovakia. It did, however, lead many citizens to believe that acting upon such sentiments and using them to justify injurious actions fell within the bounds of politically acceptable, even commendable behavior; behavior

Kopecký at a meeting of the CC CPC, which concerned, among other things, the reasons for the arrest of Rudolf Slánský] (6 December 1951). State Central Archive, collection 01, bundle 18, archival unit 28; Bulovíná, et. al., eds. *Československo a Izrael* [Czechoslovakia and Israel], 249.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 252.

⁹⁰ McDermott, “Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia,” 104.

⁹¹ There does not yet exist a definitive work on the conceptual development and intensification of anti-Zionist propaganda between 1948 and 1952 in Czechoslovakia. It seems, however, from my own limited investigation and from the work of Peter Meyer, published in 1953, that a significant change in tone and frequency followed the arrest of Rudolf Slánský in November 1951. See “Czechoslovakia,” 163-64. Jan Lániček is currently working on an analysis of the anti-Zionist press in the immediate postwar years.

befitting a communist. To borrow a term from Shulamit Volkov, antisemitism in the guise of anti-Zionism became a “cultural code” in communist Czechoslovakia that signaled national belonging and the attainment of proper political consciousness.⁹²

Kevin McDermott, who argues persuasively that scholarship has vastly underestimated the extent of popular antisemitic expression during this period, also describes the phenomenon as having been a liability for the Communist Party.⁹³ Populist excesses embarrassed the party internationally and revealed a lack of ideological and civic control at home. Thus, the party-center entered into a low-intensity campaign against antisemitism, not only among the people, but also within its lower ranks. President Gottwald and other leaders made repeated statements condemning antisemitism as foreign to communism. This all came to little avail, however, because the party could not compete with the intense antisemitism of its own anti-Zionist propaganda, and because many within the party-state apparatus, particularly at the lower levels, harbored animosity towards Jews. Gottwald, moreover, had accused “Zionists” of protecting their conspiratorial sabotage by labeling all criticism levied against Jews as antisemitic and also of exploiting the sympathies of non-Jews for Holocaust survivors. Prosecutor Urválek even entered these claims into the case against Slánský and his co-defendants.⁹⁴ In the eyes of the Communist Party, it seems as though Jewish citizens and their foreign protectors had spoiled what should have been an elegant anti-Zionist campaign.

Unfortunately, the archival record preserves only anecdotal evidence of the widespread,

⁹² Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 115-117 and 134-55.

⁹³ Feinberg, “Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies,” 122; and McDermott, “A ‘Polyphony of Voices’?,” 855-65.

⁹⁴ On Gottwald, see W. Oschlies, “The Phases and Faces of Czech Antisemitism,” *The Wiener Library Bulletin*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1970/1971): 26. For Urválek’s closing arguments see, “Proces s vedením” [The trial of the leadership], 504-05.

party-induced, antisemitic excesses that accompanied the trial and persisted for years in its wake. Those documents which remain, nonetheless, offer a glimpse into the quotidian experiences of Jews in Stalinist Czechoslovakia. In January 1953, the leaders of the Czech Jewish community met with Deputy President Zdeněk Fierling. they complained about antisemitic excesses. In May, they followed his directions and forwarded to the Ecclesiastical Secretariat testimonies from two cases wherein Jewish citizens in the city of Teplice faced discrimination and antisemitism at work.⁹⁵ The secretariat then ordered the County National Committee, the body responsible for quotidian public administration, to investigate the claims, which not only reflected poorly on the party-state, but signified that it's anti-Zionist message had been corrupted.

In the first case, a non-Jewish worker physically assaulted a Jewish accounting supervisor while making antisemitic remarks, after the latter had repeatedly criticized him for spending too much time speaking with a female coworker. The factory fired both the supervisor and his wife. In the second case, the non-Jewish employees of a local concern sent a memorandum to the Czechoslovak President in response to a shooting incident at work, in which an impetuous Jewish guard injured two people. They complained that despite the revolution of 1948 their factory still remained in the hands of "Jewish parasites." One man, a leader of the rabble, even declared to an officer of the National Committee that he had had enough of the "Jew-dealings" (*židárna*) at work.

⁹⁵ Collection of stapled documents beginning with a letter from the County National Committee in Teplice (*Okresní národní výbor v Teplicích*) to the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs (*Státní úřad věci církevní*) (8 July 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1953." Unfortunately, these cases and other like them provide only anecdotal evidence of the types of antisemitic persecution that Czech Jews experienced during the early 1950s. They also raise challenging questions of interpretation, particularly given the paucity of data that has survived, its frequent incompleteness, and the fact that much of it was written either by or for the StB. For insightful comment on how to interpret such sources see Feinberg, "Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies," 117-18.

The response of the County National Committee to the Ecclesiastical Secretariat demonstrates the extent to which the party had normalized antisemitism within the state apparatus, particularly among local officials, who were either unwilling or unable to distinguish between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. With regard to the first case, the ecclesiastical secretary of the County National Committee wrote,

The comrades at the factory are proving that the course [taken] against [the Jewish supervisor] was not any racism; but the personnel of the factory could no longer take the accounting of [supervisor] and company (Jews), and so they spoke that way [emphasis added].⁹⁶

At the time of secretary's report, the second case remained under investigation, but he concluded nonetheless, "In both cases we are not dealing with any antisemitism. Jews, if they work dutifully, are evaluated like every other employee." Thus, in the tradition of European antisemitism, he placed the onus for integration squarely upon the shoulders of Jewish citizens. He further implied that they had a propensity for shady business dealings and labor-shirking which they would have to overcome if they were to join the Czech-socialist national community.

These two cases evoke a number of common trends deserving of brief elucidation. Czechoslovak professional and social collectives regularly petitioned the government both to make requests and to demonstrate their members' proper ideological orientation. Indeed, the near-compulsory signing of such documents was a significant component of communist indoctrination, one which also helped the party to create an aesthetic of popular support.⁹⁷ This

⁹⁶ Letter from the County National Committee's ecclesiastical secretary, comrade Jiřova, to the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs (8 July 1953). NACR, SUC, box 119, folder "1953."

⁹⁷ This means, of course, that some individuals merely performed "approval," while dissenting privately. Melissa Feinberg discusses the politics of petitions and protests in "Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies," 120. Kevin McDermott reports a striking lack of antisemitic content in petitions sent to the Communist Party and President Gottwald during the Slansky trial. He attributes this lack to the intervention of the Communist Party, which orchestrated the tone of the

suggests that the abovementioned petitioners believed in good faith that that Communist Party wanted to hear antisemitic slander. Melissa Feinberg notes that the most frequent type of officially problematic response to the Slánský Affair recorded by the StB were those that involved antisemitism—and the police were, indeed, concerned about that. The reason for this, as she argues, was that “Anti-Semitic reactions to the trial were often not phrased in terms of Zionist imperialism, but in ways that echoed anti-Jewish discourses of earlier years.”⁹⁸ This leads to the conclusion that, inadvertently or not, the party had given credence to the very sort of racism that it purported to oppose when it fashioned its anti-Zionist campaign in its image. It is not surprising then that citizens and party members felt secure in using antisemitism to justify their actions, statements, and decisions. To be fair, Feinberg also makes clear that a minority of communists, even at the local level, fought against the popular slippage from anti-Zionism (back) into antisemitism.⁹⁹

The case involving the Jewish supervisor also serves as an important reminder that many of the purported instances of state and local antisemitism began with inter-personal conflicts that may have had nothing in principle to do with antisemitism. The supervisor may very well have been a difficult person. These cases, and other like them, point to the horrifying fact that with the anti-Zionist campaign and the Slánský trial, the party conferred upon non-Jewish citizens significant power to harass their Jewish compatriots. This, in turn, complicates the point made by the historian Jan Gross, that the Communist Party achieved fuller control of the population (in

documents. “A ‘Polyphony of Voices?,” 855-56. My own research has confirmed McDermott’s impression of the petitions.

⁹⁸ Feinberg, “Fantastic Truth, Compelling Lies,” 122. Feinberg argues that even some citizens who doubted the veracity of the indictments, supported the trial and believed its propaganda “because it intersected with what some considered deeper and more real truths about the nature of Jews.” Ibid., 123.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 123.

Poland), not by making private affairs political, but by making the political a private affair; that is, by placing its own security apparatus at the disposal of every citizen.¹⁰⁰ This may very well have been true. But, as historians are beginning to recognize, it was a double edged sword. When the Communist Party made the ideological sacrifice of using ethno-nationalism to win and maintain popular support, it also lost a measure of control over its own message.¹⁰¹ In this case, it released a flood of popular antisemitism which many associated with the party, despite its intents and wishes.¹⁰²

Indeed, it is a myth, rooted in patriotic discourses from the turn of the twentieth century, that Czech culture lacked an antisemitic tradition. That myth spread internationally during the Second World War, when Czech leaders in exile attempted to win sympathy for their country by

¹⁰⁰ Marci Shore, “Conversing with Ghosts: Jedwabne, Zydokomuna, and Totalitarianism,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, new series, vol. 6, no. 2 (spring 2005): 354-55; and Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

¹⁰¹ Matěj Spurný suggest, with regard to the persecution of Bohemian and Moravian Germans, that this was a calculated and temporary risk, designed to draw the masses to the Communist Party. *Nejsou jako my: česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945-1960)* [They are not like us: Czech society and minorities in the borderlands (1945-1960)] (Prague, Czech Republic: Antikomplex, 2011), 14. Indeed, in short time, the party began reversing (or, at least, revising) its anti-German and anti-Jewish positions. Spurný discusses ethnic Germans, Roma, and Ukrainians.

¹⁰² Citing popular yet false claims that the Czech lands lacked a local tradition of antisemitism (apart from anti-Germanism), some authors have attributed the anti-Jewish tenor of the 1950s to Soviet and communist intervention. It is understandable that Paul Lendvai would make such a claim, writing at the turn of the 1970s. See *Anti-Semitism without Jews*, 246-49. It is puzzling, however, that Lena Arava-Novotná maintained this line of argumentation even after Michal Frankl demonstrated that a local tradition of antisemitism had, in fact, existed in the Czech lands for decades before the advent of communist rule. Arava-Novotná, “Od antisemitismu k antisionismu,” [From antisemitism to Anti-Zionism], 93-94; and Michal Frankl, *Emancipace od Židů: Český antisemitismus na konci 19. století* [Emancipation from the Jews: Czech antisemitism at the end of the 19th century] (Prague and Litomyšl, Czech Republic: Paseka, 2007). Kevin McDermott is correct, however, to take seriously the argument of Kateřina Čapková, that “antisemitism, though ‘not significantly weaker than in neighboring states,’ remained at ‘low levels’ during the First Republic and was regarded by the majority of the intelligentsia as ‘politically unjustifiable and... unacceptable.” Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé?*,” 172-74, and 268; cited in McDermott, “A ‘Polyphony of Voices’?,” 853.

pointing to the relatively good treatment of Jews there during the 1920s and 1930s in comparison with the neighboring countries.¹⁰³ Yet a longstanding tradition of antisemitism persisted in the Czech lands nonetheless; and, as already explained, the party drew heavily upon it. Even as they did so, however, communist leaders continued to cling to the myth that the Czech lands had always been bastion of tolerance, progress, and democracy. This gave salience to their aforementioned claim that “Zionists” levied false charges of antisemitism against the party in order to protect themselves from prosecution for their alleged crimes. In asserting the *a priori* non-existence of Czech antisemitism, moreover, the Communist Party shifted the responsibility for any and all anti-Jewish outbursts upon Jews themselves. After all, in the absence of antisemitism, it would seem logical to assume that the excesses were somehow justified by Jewish actions.¹⁰⁴ Thus, even if the tenor of the Slánský Affair may be laid at the feet of Soviet advisors, the nationwide culture of antisemitic excess of the early communist years was, in the end, a party-enabled Czech affair, though not a wholly communist one.

In fact, it was to the highest offices of the party-state that Czech and Slovak Jews often turned when they encountered antisemitism. There, they expected to find ideologically committed communists who eschewed racism and functionaries well versed in the legal protections enjoyed by Jews as citizens. Melissa Feinberg has shown that they were justified in this belief.¹⁰⁵ Jewish leaders also understood that the party would make concessions to them in order to avoid providing fodder to Western critics who sought to portray Czechoslovakia as

¹⁰³ Láníček, “The Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile and the Jews,” 266-319.

¹⁰⁴ This is consonant with Marcel Stoetzler’s analysis of nineteenth-century German antisemitism. *The State, the Nation, and the Jews: Liberalism and the Antisemitism Dispute in Bismarck’s Germany* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 286.

¹⁰⁵ Feinberg reports that although some high-ranking communists held and acted upon antisemitic sentiments, “hesitation over the outpouring of anti-Semitism surrounding the trial came more commonly from party members who took the ostensible divide between Zionism and anti-Semitism seriously.” See “Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies,” 123-24.

antisemitic, particularly in the wake of the Slánský Affair.

So lived the majority of Czechoslovak Jews, whether so by descent or by religious conviction. Some fared far worse, particularly in Slovakia. In April 1953 the StB ordered the General Prosecutor to bring to trial the eleven Zionist leaders arrested in 1951 after the forced closure of the Central Zionist Union.¹⁰⁶ Their coerced testimony had establish the purported links between Slánský, his co-defendants, and an imagined, international, Zionist conspiracy. And now the proceedings of that first trial served, in the most circular of ways, as evidence in the case against its erstwhile witnesses.¹⁰⁷ On 8 August 1953, the court convicted the defendants of high treason and espionage. Josef Bűchler, the former head of the Central Zionist Union, received the second longest sentence of 23 years.¹⁰⁸

Just as the Slánský trial corroborated the assertion that reactionary elements had infiltrated the party, so too did the present trial establish as legal fact that Zionists had assumed control over Czechoslovakia's Jewish communities and that they had brought most of the country's Jews under their ideological influence. As noted in the StB's petition to the General Prosecutor,

Immediately after the liberation of Slovakia the Zionists established their Central Union, which led not only Zionist organizations but also Jewish organizations controlled by

¹⁰⁶ "Trestní oznámení na představitele nepřátelských sionistických organizací" [Criminal complaint against the representatives of the enemy Zionist organizations], (27 April 1953). NÁČR, KSC-ÚV-02/5, bundle 57, archival unit 155, point 9c.

¹⁰⁷ I use the word "imagined" with some hesitation. There certainly existed in the late 1940s and early 1950s an international network of Zionists organizations and individuals operating across Central and Eastern Europe with ties to the Israeli government and to its intelligence services. Particularly after 1949, they often worked against the wishes of the Soviet-Bloc leadership, with the goal of facilitating as much Jewish migration as possible to Palestine/Israel. Beyond this grain of truth, however, Czechoslovakia's allegations against the eleven defendants were based upon propagandistic machinations derived from Europe's most base, anti-Jewish traditions.

¹⁰⁸ For a brief synopsis of the proceedings from the perspective of the StB see Captain Vojtěch Ježek, "Zpráva o příběhů hlavního přelíčení," [Report on the course of the main trial] n.d. ABS, A2/1 1644.

Zionists, like the “League of Racially Persecuted [Citizens]” and “The Jewish Religious Community,” which brought together most citizens of Jewish origin on a bourgeois nationalistic basis. With the establishment of these organizations, as was proven through the investigation, the Zionists achieved legal positions, from which they carried out illegal and unlawful activities and pursued enemy exploits [emphasis added].¹⁰⁹

Although the StB official who wrote the petition referred only to Slovakia, the trial nonetheless confirmed for StB officials the danger they presumed to be lurking within every Jewish institution and individual, even in the Czech Lands. Indeed, in response to the trial, one StB chief wrote,

“In conclusion it may be said that the trial confirmed the enemy activities of the Zionists and [that] Zionism is agency of American imperialism.”¹¹⁰

In other words, the party declared Zionism to be an enemy ideology and then used coercive measures and a corrupt legal system to establish that dogma as fact.

The façade of legal and juridical propriety remained important to Czechoslovak political culture even during the most repressive years of Stalinism, as it did in the other satellite states. It offered the cover of legitimacy to murderous and plunderous bigotry, alleviated the anxieties of party-state officials regarding their actions, and rendered dissent almost impossible.¹¹¹ For this to work well, the defendants had to confess to their crimes. During the trial, however, Büchler attempted to explain that while he had, in fact, engaged in the activities for which he had been

¹⁰⁹ “Trestní oznámení” [Criminal complaint], 29.

¹¹⁰ Ježek, “Zpráva o průběhu hlavního přelíčení,” [Report on the course of the main trial], 3.

¹¹¹ Jiří Pelikán refers to this as a culture of “legal nihilism.” To do so, however, is to miss the central importance of performative jurisprudence and legislation to Central European communist culture as it was experienced, and also to ignore the faith that communists maintained in the party-state during its earliest years. Indeed, as Pelikán points out, the first attempt to construct a show trial in Hungary faltered on officials’ inability to abandon completely their commitment to the legal process. Just as in the Czechoslovak case, it took the intervention and mortal threats of Soviet advisors to break (or weaken) this culture. Pelikán *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 57-63 and 69-82. Disgust over the nature of the trials fueled the reform movement that emerged within the party after 1956 and took center stage in its polemics against the Stalinist order. See Chapter Four.

arrested, they had fallen within the scope of legal practices at the time. He spoke the truth. The prosecutor nonetheless lead him to confess by offering “evidence” of his criminality. Even so, the StB had misgivings about the trial. Apparently, one defense attorney “tried to apologize for Zionism and [his defendants’] actions, in the course of which he argued politically falsely.”¹¹² The StB could not abide such ambiguity because it depended upon the trial to legitimize its witch hunt and the extension of the scope of its activities to cover all citizens of Jewish origin and all aspects of Jewish life. Indeed, if the Communist Party had moved slowly at first in adopting a fully antisemitic position, the 1953 trial seems to have given the state security apparatus an even freer hand to act at will. Its agents remained stalwart in their suspicions and active in their persecution of Jews (along with many others) until 1989.

One thing that the trial did not do, however, was introduce new information or nuance to ideas about the relationship between Jews, the state, and the nation. The prosecution accused the former Zionist leaders of abusing emigration to tunnel capital out Czechoslovakia;¹¹³ collaborating with Fascist Slovakia and Nazi Germany;¹¹⁴ fighting in the Second World War alongside Czech and Slovak communists in order to penetrate the party, while avoiding dangerous missions;¹¹⁵ attempting to return the property of “Jewish capitalists;¹¹⁶ and participating in anti-party and anti-state conspiracies.¹¹⁷ This way of thinking about Jews and Zionism persisted for decades, particularly in security circles. What would change numerous times over those years, however, was how officials implemented them in practice.

¹¹² Ježek, “Zpráva o příběhů hlavního přelíčení,” [Report on the course of the main trial] 2.

¹¹³ “Trestní oznámení” [Criminal complaint], 27.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 29-30.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 31-34. For a fuller synopsis of the defendants’ alleged crimes, see Arava-Novotná, “Od antisemitismu k antisionismu,” [From antisemitism to anti-Zionism], 93-94.

Slovak Jews seem to have experienced far greater persecution at the hands of the party-state than their Czech counterparts, even if the vast majority of that region's committed Zionists had emigrated by 1950.¹¹⁸ The intensified persecution may have been due to a stronger tradition of vocal, violent, and exclusionary antisemitism in Slovakia and to the weaker integration of Jews there in general. Yet during the 1950s, it still took communistic form. The party-state sought vigorously to associate two of its greatest (semi-invented) enemies, "Zionists" and "Slovak bourgeois nationalists," by misrepresenting and exaggerating the collaboration of Jewish leaders with Slovakia's wartime fascist government.¹¹⁹ As late as 1977, the Secret Police exploited the horrific choices that Slovak fascists forced upon their Jewish compatriots in order to portray the latter as politically unreliable.¹²⁰ The party and the security apparatus paid less attention to similar phenomena in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, likely because they

¹¹⁸ Lendvai, *Antisemitism without Jews*, 247.

¹¹⁹ In early 1952, the StB in Slovakia commissioned an investigation into the supposed collaboration of Jewish leaders with the government of Fascist Slovakia in the genocide of that country's Jewish population. These allegations or, rather, distortions of the truth featured prominently in the trials of purported Slovak Zionists in 1953. See "Žaloba na skupinu slovaných buržoasných nacionalistů;" and "Zpráva o trestním stíhání Pavla Fleischera a spol." [Report on the criminal prosecution of Pavel Fleischer and co.] (3 March 1954). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/5, bundle 77, archival unit 201, point 18. For more on the trial see Arava-Novotná, "Od antisemitismu k antisionismu," [From antisemitism to anti-Zionism], 92-93. Security officers rediscovered the results of the 1952 investigation in 1959, in the course of investigating Slovak collaboration. They compiled lists of implicated Jews. Two years later, when Eichmann trial brought international attention to the aforementioned genocide, the Slovak StB composed additional reports on what they considered to have been Jewish collaboration. This amounted to a regression to Stalinist discourses which laid the blame for the Second World War and the Jewish genocide on a fascist-Zionist union. By demonstrating the collaboration of purported "Zionists" in the murder of Slovak Jewry, the StB hoped to exculpate "ordinary" non-Jewish Slovaks. For the reports, see the collection of documents in AB., H-425-365-5.

¹²⁰ "Zpráva o činnosti bývalých zaměstnanců Ústředny židů v Bratislavě a seznam býv. zaměstnanců ÚŽ s relacemi" [Report on the activities of the former employees of the Jewish Central Office in Bratislava and a list of the former employees with information] and "Seznam neztotožněných býv. zaměstnanců Ústředny židů v Bratislava" [List of the unidentified former employees of the Jewish Central Office in Bratislava], (1977). ABS, H-752.

tended to avoid discussing Czech collaboration in general.¹²¹

This is not to say that Czech Jews did not suffer persecution or experience the intimidation that accompanied it. Their tribulations extended well beyond the seven subsidiary trials that followed the Slánský Affair. For example, the highest echelons of the Ministry of National Security prevented Alexander Beer, a party member with a strong history of service and loyalty to the Soviet Union, from entering a factory which he was supposed to inspect. In response to an inquiry from the Ministry of Light Industry, the StB used Beer's Jewish background to destroy his character and end his career. It forwarded to the latter ministry a report which claimed that,

We have discovered that BEER Alexander was, during the time of his residence in Aš, a member of the General Zionists... As the national administrator of the textile works he abused that position and preferentially provisioned Jewish capitalists–businesspeople from the ranks of Zionists. His siblings are abroad and two of them were members of the Zionist organization Hashomer HaTzair.

His prewar membership in Komsomolu [a Soviet-Communist youth organization] is doubtful. In the International Division of the CPC he favored specific people and damaged others. At one committee meeting of the International Division of the CPC he tried to discredit the [Secret Police].¹²²

¹²¹ Michal Frankl, "The Sheep of Lidice: The Holocaust and the Construction of Czech National History," in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, eds. John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic (Lincoln, NE and London, UK: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 185-89. On early differences in the approach to Czech and Slovak collaboration, see Abrams, "Hope Died Last"; and Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 321-26. The theme of Czech-Jewish collaboration did appear in Czech literature during the 1970s and 1980s. František Kolář, *Sionismus a antisemitismus* [Zionism and antisemitism] (Prague, Czech Republic: Svoboda and Rudé Právo, 1970); and Josef Šebesta, *V zemi zaslíbené?* [In the promise land] (Prague, Czech Republic: Melantrich, 1986). Blanka Soukupová addresses these works in "Stát jako jeden z determinantů identity židovského náboženského společenství v období 'normalizace' (1969-1989)" [The state as one of the determiners of the identity of the Jewish religious community during the period of "normalization," 1969-1989] in *Premeny židovskej identity po holokauste* [The changes in Jewish identity after the Holocaust], ed. Peter Salner (Bratislava, Slovakia: Zing 2011), 38-42.

¹²² See collection of documents in ABS, A2/1-1498. For quote see, Andrej Keppert, Report on Alexander Beer (24 June 1952).

No amount of dedication to the party could have saved Beer from the StB agents' venal bigotry. No service could have outweighed the rewriting of his history that the party achieved during the first years of the 1950s. Many citizens of Jewish descent suffered similar fates, even if their stories have been lost to the archives.

In closing to this section, it must be noted that it took time for the old-new discourses on Jewish citizens fully to penetrate the party-state apparatus. Indeed, perhaps as much as the Slánský Affair stemmed from the intersection of Communism and antisemitism, it also constructed that axis for many Czechoslovaks. Karel Kreibich protested the anti-Zionist turn from Moscow in a daring letter to the Communist Party's Political Secretariat in December 1951.¹²³ He protested again ten months later with direct reference to the trial already in preparation. Others would join him, and not all from such protected positions. They composed, however, a minority.¹²⁴ Additional functionaries sought proactively to defend their Jewish compatriots against the suspicions of "Zionism." In January 1952, the Ecclesiastical Secretary of the Regional National Committee in Jihlava reassured the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs that,

In the Jihlava Region live about 30 families of the Jewish faith, spread out across the region, such that the possibility for close contacts is extremely limited. This mostly concerns families in which one member, either the man or woman, were of Christian or non-Semitic origin and therefore escaped victimization during the occupation or the worst of persecution. A good proportion of them are elderly and even though this generally concerns former private businesspeople—that is exploiters, they are in general harmless to today's administration. The younger members of the Jewish church who sympathized with Zionism emigrated in the years 1945-1948 to Palestine....

Among the Jews living in our region it has not been discovered that there were

¹²³ Karel Kreibich, letter to the Political Secretariat of the CPC (26 December 1951). NAČR, KSC-UV-100/45, bundle 13, archival unit 223. See also McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'?", 854.

¹²⁴ Otto Arie, "A Czech Study of the Slansky Trial and Antisemitism," *Bulletin on Soviet and East European Jewish Affairs*, vol., 4 (1969): 60-62.

members of cosmopolitan Zionism or that this movement has in any way spread here.¹²⁵ Even Kopecký had to use calculatingly manipulative language to cajole his fellow party heads to turn on their comrades of Jewish origin.¹²⁶ Once the culture shifted, however, particularly after November 1952, few rose in defense of citizens of Jewish origin. Whatever tradition of anti-semitism had existed in the party was, for the most part, lost—at least, temporarily.

Still, that does not mean that Jews faced persecution and bigotry from all quarters. Indeed, historians frequently recount the story told by Heda Margolius Kovaly, whose husband Rudolf hung alongside Slánský, of the sympathy shown to her in the hospital following his trial and execution.¹²⁷ The archival record is often blind to acts of kindness and bravery.

The Emigration Problem and the End of a Bargain

Since the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, the state compelled its citizens to make an official choice regarding their national identification, often corresponding to their primary language of communication. Citizens of the Jewish religion could identify as nationally Jewish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, German, or as members of another recognized nationality. After the Second World War, this choice became embodied and limited. National Jews were to emigrate to Palestine/Israel, while Czech and Slovak citizens of the Jewish religion were invited to remain in the country of their birth. The third factor which coalesced to make Czechoslovakia's anti-

¹²⁵ B. Souček, letter to State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs (4 January 1952). NAČR, SÚC Box 7, folder "64."

¹²⁶ See above and Mayer, "Czechoslovakia," 156. Svobodova argues that the architects of the anti-Jewish campaign in Czechoslovakia took great pains to present their racially motivated policies in class-related terms, in light of the association between antisemitism and Nazism. See "Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu" [Sources and manifestations of antisemitism], 33-44.

¹²⁷ Heda Margolius Kovály, *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968*, trans., Franci Epstein and Helen Epstein (Cambridge, MA: Plunkett Lake Press, 1986), 134-43; cited in Feinberg, "Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies," 120; and McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'?", 857.

Zionist turn so dangerous for domestic Jewry was the closure of the country's borders to emigration in late 1949 and 1950. As this policy eventually also applied to would-be Jewish immigrants to Israel, in September 1950, it meant that "national" Jews could no longer opt out of Czechoslovak citizenship and the informal demand for total assimilation that it implied.¹²⁸ If, however, Czech and Slovak Jews lost their right to chose their national affiliation, and to choose Jewish nationalism in particular, it did not mean that Czechoslovak notions of Jewish ethnic belonging had changed. Indeed, the idea that Jews belonged to the Czech and Slovak nations differently from their non-Jewish compatriots had intensified during the Second World War and continued to do so during the first postwar decade. Jews entered the nation by choice, whereas non-Jews were born into it.

Removing from citizens of Jewish origin the right to manifest this choice in action cast suspicion upon all Jews. After all, who could trust or know the inner convictions of Jews regarding their national identification in the midst of a terrifying witch-hunt for Zionists?! The removal of national choice from citizens of Jewish origin forced even those who identified privately as nationally Jewish to feign belonging to the Czech and Slovak nations. This compelled façade rendered even national Jews relatively invisible to those who would seek to distinguish them, particularly because most Jews, especially in the Czech lands, were fully acculturated.¹²⁹ It thus also cast doubt upon those who indentified in good faith as national Czechs and Slovaks and even communists. This problem of Jewish visibility—the inability to

¹²⁸ The Party-state permitted the emigration (and transmigration) of Jews to Israel for months after it had blocked emigration for the rest of its citizens. Hanková, "Změna postoje vládnoucích orgánů" [Changes in the position of the governing organs], 99-100.

¹²⁹ In her sociological study of Czech-Jews who came of age during communism, Alena Heitlinger explicates their strategies for "passing" as non-Jews and, alternatively "coming out" as Jewish to friends and fellows. *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 2-3, 15, 81-85, 93-96, and 196-202.

discern Jews from non-Jews, despite the *a priori* assumption of difference—lays at the heart of modern, European antisemitism. It drove official antisemitism in communist Czechoslovakia as well. In the words of Vladimír A. Bojarský, a Soviet advisor to Czechoslovak State Security, “Every Jews is a Zionist, and every Zionist is a spy!”¹³⁰ Indeed, the Slánský trial took as its victims the most assimilated of Jews, Communist Party members “of Jewish origin.”

Between one-half and two-thirds of the roughly 50,000 Jews who resided in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War had emigrated by the end of 1950. Some 20,000 moved to Palestine/Israel. A few thousand attempted to establish new homes in the West, at least 2,000 of them in the USA.¹³¹ After the termination of mass emigration and the implementation of strict restrictions on emigration to Israel, the latter state requested permission for the 4,000 Jews who had already begun the emigration process to be allowed to leave the country. This corresponded to nearly one-third of the combined membership of Czechoslovakia’s Jewish communities, and it was the direct result of campaign by the Jewish Agency for Israel among Jewish citizens in 1949.¹³² The Ministry of National Security responded by asking 1,030 of these

¹³⁰ Quoted in Martin Šmok, “‘Každý žid je Sionista, a každý Sionista je špion!’ Příběh distribuce sociálních podpor” [“Every Jews is a Zionist and every Zionist is a spy!” the story of the distribution of social-welfare support], *Paměť a dějiny* (April 2011): 29.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 29-34; and Petr Sedlák, “Židé v českých zemích v letech 1945-1949” [Jews in the Czech lands in the years 1945-1949], *Terezínské studie a dokumenty* (2008): 13-45.

¹³² On the Jewish Agency intervention see Kopal, “Zpráva StB o činnosti Palestinského úřadu v ČSR při vystěhování Židů české a slovenské narodnosti do Izraele pro ÚV KSČ” [An StB report on the activities of the Jewish Agency office in the Czechoslovak Republic during the emigration of Jews of Czech and Slovak nationality to Israel for Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia], reprinted from State Central Archive, fond 100/36, archival unit 484; in Marie Bulínová, et. al., eds., *Československo a Izrael, 1945-1956* [Czechoslovakia and Israel, 1945-1956], 240-243; Meyer, “Czechoslovakia,” 150-51; and Petr Sedlák, “Poté: Postoj a přístup k Židům v českých zemích po druhé světové válce (1945-1947/1953)” [Afterwards: The stance and approach to Jews in the Czech lands after the Second World War (1945-1947/1953)] (Ph.D. diss., Masarykova universita, 2008), 319-21. The StB closely followed the “Emigration Operation” and recorded the names of those who participated in it. See report on

individuals to apply for exit visas and passports in 1951. Only 464 did so, of which only eight received a positive response. The rest demurred. Israeli diplomats nonetheless pressed the cases of the remaining 3,000-3,500 for years. Party-state officials justified their constant refusals by claiming that allowing Jews to emigrate would disrupt the planned economy and by noting that their uniform emigration policy applied to all citizens.¹³³ Their reasons, however, also reflected a reluctance to appear sympathetic to Zionism and unwillingness to providing the State of Israel with additional soldiers and social capital.¹³⁴ Party-state officials also understood that permitting emigration to Israel had the potential to severely damage their country's relationships with Arab states. Only in the early 1960s and again in 1968, would citizens of Jewish origin leave Czechoslovakia in significant numbers.¹³⁵

“Vystěhovalecká akce Palestínského úřadu–opatření” [Emigration Operation of the Jewish Agency–measures] (16 October 1950). ABS, H-267, 25-51.

¹³³ Hanková, “Změna postoje vládnoucích orgánů” [Changes in the position of the governing organs], 100.

¹³⁴ For example, see “Izrael 1949–1956: Přehled o zahraničním obchodě a platební bilanci” [Israel 1949–1956: Overview of foreign trade and balance of payments] (1958), 74. NAČR, AN-Zahr., carton 109.

¹³⁵ Czechoslovakia permitted no fewer than 842 citizens to emigrate to Israel between 1962 and 1 October 1964. In response, Palestinian delegates at the United Nations complained to their Czechoslovak counterparts and the latter country brought an end to Jewish emigration. Report from the Passport and Visa Administration of the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Vystěhovalectví do Izraele” [Emigration to Israel], (11 November 1964); and Ministry of Foreign Affairs report, “Vystěhovalectví do Izraele” [Emigration to Izrael] (11 June 1964). MZV, TO-O 1960-1964, Israel, box 2. A good proportion of those who emigrated seem to have been from among the population of Jews who originally hailed from Sub-Carpathian territories that Czechoslovakia ceded to the Soviet Union (Ukraine) after the Second World War. They were, on the whole, more religious and held stronger Zionist convictions than culturally Czech Jews. This temporary policy shift corresponded to a similar relaxation of emigration restrictions upon ethnic Germans seeking “repatriation” to West Germany. On the one hand, it likely reflected an attempt by Czechoslovakia to improve relations with Israel and the West. On the other hand, it also may have been an Israeli-focused counterpart to an alleged Secret Police operation to disrupt West German intelligence operations against Czechoslovakia by flooding that country with potential double agents. Josef Frolík, *The Frolík Defection* (London, UK: Cooper, 1975), 77-84. This period also coincided with an increase in illegal emigration of both Jews and non-Jews who took advantage of the country's relaxed travel policies. Although exact

Beginning in 1950, with the closure of Czechoslovakia's borders, the Ministry of National Security began assembling lists of domestic "Zionists" in a covert operation codenamed "Family" (*Rodina*).¹³⁶ Its officers compiled information from the confiscated records of the domestic Zionist organizations which had facilitated Jewish emigration, the League of the Racially Persecuted in Slovakia, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.¹³⁷ They also culled data from the membership rolls of the Jewish communities, the state agencies which processed exit-visa and passport applications, and even Nazi-era records. Regional StB units sent lists of "Zionists" to the central office and warned each other of the movements of presumed "Zionists" to and from their respective territories.

Thus, the short-lived option to emigrate enjoyed by Czechoslovak citizens of Jewish origin and its cancellation became a liability for those who had either declined to exercise it or had who had been unable to do so. This applied particularly to individuals who had taken partial steps in that direction. Even simply having had a relative emigrate sufficed to place one on a list of "Zionists" and to draw the suspicion of the secret police. This was the case for Alexander Beer.¹³⁸ By the early 1960s, the StB had assembled a card catalogue of Czech and Slovak "Zionists," i.e. former members of Zionist organizations and their family members, comprising

numbers remain elusive, it is widely believed that roughly 6,000 Jews took advantage of Czechoslovakia's relatively open borders to emigrate in 1968 and early 1969, fleeing the Soviet-led invasion of 21 August 1968. Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném Československu" [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], in *Židé v novodobých dějinách: Soubor přednášek na FF UK, Uspořádal Václav Veber* [Jews in contemporary history: A collection of lectures at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, organized by Václav Veber] (Prague, Czech Republic: Karolinum, 1997), 159.

¹³⁶ Koutek, "Akce Pavouk" [Operation Spider] (n.d.). Archive of the author.

¹³⁷ Kopal, "Zpráva StB o činnosti Palestinského úřadu" [An StB report on the activities of the Jewish Agency], 240-243.

¹³⁸ See collection of documents in ABS, H-425. An annotated inventory is available at <http://www.abscr.cz/data/pdf/abs/inventar-425.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2013).

roughly 30,000 entries.¹³⁹

Too much should not be made, however, of this chilling tale of antisemitic surveillance. The collection of vast amounts of data on private citizens was endemic to the operation of Central Europe's would-be totalitarian states and was in no way unique to the Jewish case. Moreover, the practice of tracking Jewish subjects-cum-citizens in the Czech lands had begun long before the party putsch of 1948. It had roots in the attempts of the absolutist imperial state of the eighteenth century to compile comprehensive demographic data on all of subject, Christians and Jews alike.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Ministry of National Security did not stand alone in compiling lists of Czechoslovak Jews. The Joint Distribution Committee worked with (or alongside) the Israeli intelligence services to identify all of the Jews in communist Europe. They did so primarily to offer them protection, to send them material aid, and to facilitate their emigration. They also did so for espionage purposes.¹⁴¹ As Israel became a central battleground of the Cold War, in both ideological and military terms, the urgency to maintain such lists increased proportionately for all parties involved.

What matters then is not so much the fact that party-state officials attempted to track all

¹³⁹ Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism], 42.

¹⁴⁰ The Familiants Laws of 1726 and 1727 limited the number of Jews to be tolerated as residents of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, and inasmuch involved the compilation of lists. In 1784, under the rule of Emperor Josef II, the Austrian Empire mandated that all churches, including Jewish communities, keep records of births, deaths, and marriages for the state. The law only ceased to apply (in one form or another) in 1949. This was roughly the same time that the Ministry of National Security launched its own Jew-registration operation, which it maintained until 1961. On the 1784 law see Kolektiv pracovníků I. oddělení SÚA, *Židovské matriky HMBA 1784-1949 (1960)* [The Jewish registries HMBA 1784-1949 (1960)]. (Praha: Státní ústřední archiv, 1994), 3. On Jews and the Josephinian reforms see also Michael K. Silber, "Josephinian Reforms," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (16 August 2010). <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Josephinian_Reforms> (15 July 2014). See also, Ivo Cerman, "Familiants Law," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (6 August 2010). <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Familiants_Laws> (15 July 2014).

¹⁴¹ Beizer, "I Don't Know Whom to Thank," 115-16.

citizens of Jewish descent, but rather the reasons that its officials articulated for doing so and the ends to which they put the information that they collected. In this case, the weight of the reason, antisemitism disguised as anti-Zionism, far outweighed the impact of the actual operations. First, a close examination of the documents reveals the data collected to have been woefully incomplete and inaccurate. Some officials based their lists upon prewar records, rendered nearly useless by the Holocaust.¹⁴² Furthermore, even when security agents used postwar information, they still ended up compiling lists of individuals who had already emigrated. It took until the resumption of Jew-cataloguing programs in the 1970s for security officers to process the data efficiently—long after the days of Stalinism had passed. As far as the 1950s are concerned, I have found no records to suggest that StB agents systematically operationalized the data that they collected. Individuals certainly suffered for having their names appear on lists. When this occurred, however, it most often reflected the personal initiative of a venal officer or functionary.

Finally, it is doubtful that citizens of Jewish origin knew the extent of the Ministry of National Security's operations to track their existence and whereabouts. While the revelation of these facts cannot help but change how historians think about Jewish-state relations during the 1950s, it would be intellectually dishonest to project this knowledge—and its emotional implications—back upon the subjects of historical inquiry. To that end, it likely would not have surprised citizens to learn that the state knew of their backgrounds and that officials were prepared to use it against them. This is particularly true in light of the culture of collaboration and informing that persisted from the days of the Nazi Protectorate into the communist period. Czech and Slovak citizens of Jewish origin certainly lived in a terrifying world, but the contours of their fear belonged to their time alone and any description thereof should not be polluted with

¹⁴² Letter from the Regional Division of the Ministry of the Interior in Košice, Slovakia to the Ministry of the Interior in Prague (30 October 1953). ABS, H-425-365-8.

contemporary disgust at newly discovered information.

Other Victims and the Broader Context

Discourses on Jews and Zionism marked Czechoslovak-Stalinist political culture. Indeed, the centrality of these ideas to the Slánský Affair would set Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia on a relatively unique course in comparison to its neighbors. The anti-Jewish persecution of the country's first postwar decade must nonetheless be placed into a broader historical context.

The uses of political, juridical, and police terror to achieve control over national populations and to homogenize them—whether ethnically, racially, or socially—belongs to a set of practices that emerged in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s in Eastern and Central Europe.¹⁴³ The region's postwar communist parties adopted them as strategies for assuming and maintaining power over their citizens and states, while forcing them to undergo drastic socio-economic and cultural changes.¹⁴⁴ This has led one author to argue that the years 1948-1953 in Czechoslovakia should be considered in terms of continuities of thought and practice from the pre-communist period.¹⁴⁵ Narrowly in this case, the persecution of Jews and their re-presentation in their traditional roles as scapegoats and domestic “others” followed immediately after the violent expulsion of over two-million ethnic Germans from Bohemia and Moravia, which Czechoslovak officials considered reprisal for similar acts of racial and national violence. Indeed, the levels of

¹⁴³ Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester, UK and New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 2010); Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: A. A. Knopf, distributed by Random House, 1999); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands*.

¹⁴⁴ McDermott and Stibbe, “Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe,” 9-10. Jiří Pelikán notes “While the external influences were the stronger in providing the immediate impulses when action was first taken against leading Communists, internal factors—the precedent of the legal abuses of 1948-9 when non-Communist politicians were put on trial—created the right climate for the impulses to fall on fertile soil.” See *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ Spurný, *Nejsou jako my* [They are not like us], 337-43.

pre-communist ethnic and political violence in postwar Czechoslovakia far exceeded that of the post-1948 period.¹⁴⁶ This suggests that there may have been something quite understandable, if not normal, for Czechoslovak citizens about participating in or witnessing the persecution of Jews and other groups by a would-be totalitarian state under foreign stewardship.¹⁴⁷ To expect the general public to have reacted differently than it did may be to overestimate its empathy and

¹⁴⁶ In the campaign against Sudeten Germans alone, Czechoslovak courts handed down 723 death sentences of which they carried out 686. See McDermott, “Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia,” 102.

¹⁴⁷ Like Spurný, McDermott notes that such practices reached higher levels of intensity in the immediate postwar years, before the communist coup, and had their “medium-term origins... in the traumatic experiences of the preceding decade.” He also argues that the experiences of Nazi and Slovak-fascist rule exacerbated “pre-existing anti-Semitic moods and sentiments.” See “Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia,” 101-04. McDermott and Stibbe further support Richard Overy’s attribution of Stalinist excesses to the “exploitation” of a “war psychosis” in the conduct of domestic politics by newly established communist regimes. They write, “And anybody who had western—or Jewish— contacts was automatically under suspicion, even if they had several years or even decades of loyal service to the communist cause behind them.” The power of their analysis is that while attributing ultimate responsibility for the horrors of the late 1940s and early 1950s to those directly responsible for them, it also explains how those leaders found support for their politics among the general public. See “Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe,” 8; and Richard J. Overy, *Russia’s War: Blood upon Snow* (New York, NY: TV Books, distributed by Penguin Putnam, 1997), 317-18.

Jiří Pelikán, in contrast portrays the excesses of Czechoslovak Stalinism as foreign to the purported true nature of socialism and the Czechoslovak character. He attributes them to “a foreign centre and to men who even with the best will in the world have often failed to understand our way of thinking, our traditions, the nuances of our political life and the structure of our society.” Those protagonists, he argues, “had nothing in common with the mass of the Party members and officials, whose trust in the leadership was abused and who, since they bear no direct responsibility for these things, should be relieved of an unjustified sense of guilt.” See *The Czechoslovak Political Trials*, 20 and 40.

In this way Pelikán represents an older historiographical tradition, which has given way to more nuanced approaches. Historians have come to understand Pelikán’s writings, and those of his colleagues, as constituent elements of the same twentieth-century political-culture that they seek to analyze. One of the most important and recent transitions in Czech historiography, both domestic and foreign, has been that historians have abandoned the goals of uncovering the “crimes of communism” and attributing them to specific individuals and cadres. New studies, this one included, eschew the notion that the years 1948-1989 represented a deviation from the natural course of Czech history at the hands of a small cadre of communist criminals. They seek, rather, to understand the period on its own terms as period fully representative of Czech history, one which involved the entire population, and one with deep roots in its past.

its commitment to liberalism, humanism, and democracy in the early years following two terrible wars.

Furthermore, despite the visibility of anti-Jewish excesses in the context of the Czechoslovak anti-Zionist campaign, the vast majority of those whom the party-state persecuted were not of Jewish origin, nor were they communists.¹⁴⁸ As per above, the party began purging citizens of Jewish origin from its own ranks and from the state administration as early as 1949. One would expect to find a good number of communists of Jewish origin among the 278 high-ranking functionaries convicted of serious offenses during this period. Most Jews, by any definition, however, did not hold positions in the party-state apparatus. Conversely, most of the 1,200,000 of those purged from the party during the first decade of its rule were in no way Jewish.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Jews composed only a small fraction of the roughly 90,000 citizens whom the state charged with political crimes between 1948 and 1954.¹⁵⁰ Demographically, it could not have been otherwise.¹⁵¹ Most Jews did not fall prey directly to the purges and persecutions of the 1950s.

The party-state rather took a wide variety of victims in its drive to intimidate the

¹⁴⁸ Jan Foitzik argues against placing too much emphasis on the purges of high-profile, party-state officials when characterizing Stalinist terror. Instead, he emphasizes the fact that most victims did not come from that cohort at all. Foitzik, “Souvislosti politických procesů” [The meaning of the political trials], 11. For detailed information regarding the demographics of Stalinist oppression, see McDermott, “Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia,” 99-100 and 105-08. The latter work builds upon Karel Kaplan, *Political Persecution in Czechoslovakia, 1948-1972* (Cologne, Germany: Index, 1983), and adjusts its figures based upon new scholarship.

¹⁴⁹ Foitzik, “Souvislosti politických procesů” [The meaning of the political trials], 14.

¹⁵⁰ 22,000 citizens served time in labor camps. Courts handed a minimum of 404 death sentences during this period, of which 178 were carried out by the end of 1952. McDermott allows that secret courts may have tried, convicted, and even executed many more citizens. McDermott, “Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia,” 105-08.

¹⁵¹ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 125. Peter Brod offers a figure of 18,000 for the number of Czech-Jewish community members in 1968. “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 159.

population into submission, to manifest its ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism, and to Stalinize the Party.¹⁵² Despite its championing of the laboring classes, the overwhelming majority of the party's victims came from among the latter's ranks. State officials expelled thousands of families from city centers and resettled even more farmers in order to nationalize their lands. The Communist Party singled out the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches for particularly harsh persecution. Operation "P" involved the demotion and internment of "virtually all [Catholic] bishops and thousands of priests, monks and nuns, especially in Slovakia."¹⁵³ Indeed, the restrictive policies and regulations that the party-state later applied to the country's Jewish communities derived from those developed for subduing the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁵⁴ The party-state also persecuted Roma citizens.¹⁵⁵

None of these victim groups, however, achieved the same propagandistic profile as Czechoslovakia's "Zionists." It would have been impolitic for party-state officials to elevate working-class and Catholic victims to the symbolic stature of their Jewish counterparts. Alienating the former would have undermined the central message of the party and would have revealed it to have been far more interested in accruing power than protecting workers. Catholics

¹⁵² Foitzik, "Souvislosti politických procesů" [The meaning of the political trials], 12.

¹⁵³ McDermott, "Stalinist Terror in Czechoslovakia," 107-08.

¹⁵⁴ On the persecution of Catholics see Petr Fiala and Jiří Hanuš, eds., *Katolická církev a totalitarismus v českých zemích* [The Catholic Church and totalitarianism in the Czech Lands]; Jiří Hanuš and Jan Stříbrný, *Stát a církev v roce 1950* [The state and the church in 1950] (Brno, Czech Republic: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2001); and Karel Kaplan, *Stát a církev v Československu: v letech 1948-1953* [State and church in Czechoslovakia: in the years 1948-1953] (Brno, Czech Republic: Doplněk, 1993).

¹⁵⁵ Anna Jurová, *Rómská problematika 1945-1967. Dokumenty* [The Roma problem 1945-1967: documents] (Bratislava, Slovakia: Institute for Contemporary History, 1996); and idem., *Vývoj rómskej problematiky na Slovensku po roku 1945* [The evolution of the Roma problem in Slovakia after 1945] (Bratislava, Slovakia: Goldpress Publishers, 1993); Celia Donert, "The Struggle for the Soul of the Gypsy: Marginality and Mass Mobilization in Stalinist Czechoslovakia," *Social History*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2008): 123-44; and Věra Sokolová, *Cultural Politics of Ethnicity: Discourses on Roma in Communist Czechoslovakia* (Ph.D. diss., Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem, 2008). Many thanks to Jan Grill for his help on this topic.

simply composed too great a proportion of the general population to function as the national scapegoat. In 1950, 76.31% of Czechoslovaks (9,415,244 individuals) claimed membership in the Church.¹⁵⁶ The Constitution, moreover, guaranteed the freedom of religion, which at all times complicated the persecution of various churches under communism. The Roma, on the other hand, occupied too low a socio-economic position for anyone to have considered them a realistic threat to the nation-state. They also lacked sufficient allies in the West to function strongly as a contested symbol in the mounting Cold War.

Publicly targeting Jewish citizens, in contrast, offered the unique opportunity to focus national attention on an ethnic “other” that many already associated with the (former) German and Hungarian minorities and with the interwar bourgeoisie. Thus, by propagandizing about Jews, the party found a way to continue portraying itself as nationally and socially loyal, while, in fact, intimidating and oppressing the public as a whole. Doing so, moreover, resonated with the longstanding European tradition of assigning to Jews the very characteristics that non-Jews despised most about their own societies.¹⁵⁷ It made sense to many that Jews would have desired to undermine both the party and state, and that they had the capacity to do so. The party-state’s

¹⁵⁶ “Přehled náboženské příslušnosti podle sčítání lidu provedeného Státním úřadem statistickým ke dni 1.III.1950” [Overview of religious affiliation according to the census carried out by the State Office of Statistics on 1 March 1950], in report titled, “Výsledek šetření o religiozitě” [Results of the investigation of religiosity], n.d. NAČR, SÚC, box 193, 43. Additional statistical data on religiosity in the Czech lands in 1950 is available from the Czech Statistics Office. <[http://notes3.czso.cz/sldb/sldb.nsf/i/1CACA90179B23438C1256E660036CA77/\\$File/tab4_50.pdf](http://notes3.czso.cz/sldb/sldb.nsf/i/1CACA90179B23438C1256E660036CA77/$File/tab4_50.pdf)> (8 August 2013).

Arava-Novotná argues similarly regarding the Roman Catholic Church and why the party could not use it and its members as scapegoats as it did citizens of Jewish descent. “Od antitemitismu k antisionismu” [From antisemitism to anti-Zionism], 94.

¹⁵⁷ David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2013)

persecution of Jews thus differed significantly from its oppression of other groups.¹⁵⁸ The Communist Party, nonetheless, nearly missed the opportunity to select such a compelling scapegoat, when it initially sought to focus on Slovak bourgeois-nationalists.

The early 1950s could not have been anything but terrifying for Holocaust survivors who also carried fresh memories of postwar pogroms in Slovakia and discrimination in the Czech lands. Most of communism's other victims could not look back upon a similar history of persecution, both immediate and *longue-durée*. What made it even more difficult for Czechs and Slovaks of Jewish origin and faith was that unlike the anti-Jewish regimes of the past, the party denied both its own antisemitism and the ability of Jews to defend themselves on national grounds.

Conclusion:

During the years 1948 to 1953, Czechoslovak party-state officials developed a set of concepts and practices that would define Jewish-state relations in their country until 1989. They did so with steps taken, sometimes hesitantly, in response to Soviet directions. Yet their policies and rhetoric also served local ends and always drew upon domestic traditions and beliefs, yielding an idiosyncratically Czechoslovak approach to the re-integration (or not) of Jews after the Second World War. That is, they slowly and hesitantly hewed a Czechoslovak path along an over-determined Soviet course.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ cf. Paul Lendvai, who reminds his readers that once Jewish citizens entered the communist prison-camp network, they fared no worse than their non-Jewish counterparts. *Antisemitism without Jews*, 71.

¹⁵⁹ In the introduction to their edited collection of essays on "Stalinist terror" across Europe, McDermott and Stibbe lend their support to the contention of one of their contributors, Aldis Purs, who writes on the Baltics, that it was, indeed, "Stalinist in form, local in content." I cannot but agree. "Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe," 5.

At the intersection of its anti-Zionist campaign and its witch hunt for political enemies, the Communist Party and the state security apparatus established that one's being of "Jewish origin" mattered to their relationship with the party-state and to their place within its sibling Czech and Slovak nations. The Slánský trial and the attendant propaganda confirmed longstanding doubts about the loyalty and reliability of Jewish citizens. It also introduced a new language for expressing it. That discourse identified every citizen "of Jewish origin" as a potential "Zionist" and "cosmopolitan," working in the service of Western and Israeli interests. The end of thirty years of state-managed Jewish national choice in Czechoslovakia only made these fears more credible by rendering it impossible to distinguish between what were considered different types of Jews. The party-state thus achieved the *de facto* criminalization of Jewish descent in Czechoslovakia. Yet Party-state officials could neither anticipate nor control how their actions and propaganda would echo through society. During the early 1950s it provoked and lent legitimacy to populist and opportunistic antisemitism.

This definitional moment in Jewish-state relations stands somewhat outside the course of Jewish-state affairs in Czechoslovakia from 1954 through 1989; that is, from the main narrative of Jews under communist rule. The years 1948 to 1953, rather, belong more fully to those of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. It was, indeed, precisely the deep continuities of political practices and concepts from those earlier years and also from previous decades that made the first five years of party-rule understandable and even comfortable for many Czechoslovak citizens, despite the party's pretensions to revolution. Increasingly after 1954, the period from 1948 to 1953 served as a reference point for debates about the form that Czechoslovak communism should take in general and the nature of Jewish-state relations in particular. That ideas about Jews featured so prominently in Czechoslovak-Stalinist affairs also

resulted in their being used as rhetorical symbols for decades to come by reformers, conservatives, and dissidents alike.

The years 1945-1953 also introduced a certain tension into Jewish-state relations that remained a sight of contestation through 1989, both between Jews and the state and between various organs of the party-state. On one hand, Czechoslovakia generally supported the right of its citizens to join Jewish religious communities and to adhere to the precepts of their faith. Indeed, the state treated the Jewish religious communities relatively well in comparison with many of the country's other churches. On the other hand, the party-state, like the non-communist postwar state before it, subverted interwar Czechoslovakia's policy of recognizing Jews as a national minority group. This did not mean, however, that its officials had freed themselves of pre-communist, anti-Jewish sentiments which turned on the idea of Jewish national otherness. These traditions infused the party's anti-Zionist campaign with antisemitism. Indeed, it quickly grew into a domestic, anti-Jewish campaign, made all the more terrifying and pernicious by the denial of its antisemitic character.

Thus, a good many—it seems the majority—of StB reports on the topic of dissent within various churches failed to mention the Jewish communities. In fact, the authorities in charge of managing religious affairs, with important exceptions, generally found little fault with the Jewish communities during most years. Ironically too, the party's reports on ethnicity in Czechoslovakia regularly neglected to address, to any significant degree, the question of Jewish ethnicity, simply because the state had refused to recognize Jews as an official nationality group. Indeed, the compilers of those reports regularly ignored the data on Jewish nationality from interwar censuses, presumably because, in their eyes, they reflected a "bourgeois" system of

categorization.¹⁶⁰

More significantly, the offices and functionaries officially responsible for managing Jewish affairs, those in charge of religion and international relations, lacked purview over the single most important aspect thereof from the perspective of Jewish integration and modern history: the place of Jews in the Czech and Slovak nations and, in this case, Zionism, real and imagined. Those matters fell to the StB, whose influence over the other bodies competing to

¹⁶⁰ See collections of reports titled, “Usnesení a návrhy usnesení orgánů ÚVKŠČ k otázce národnostních menšin a cikánů” [Resolutions and proposals for resolutions of the organs of the CC-CPC on the question of nationality minorities and “Gypsies”] (1959-1962). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-10/5 bundle 17, archival unit 73, point 1; and “Materiály k celkové problematice národnostních menšin v ČSSR” [Materials for the general problem of nationality minorities in the ČSSR, 1957-1962] (1962). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-O5/3, bundle 32, archival unit 248. Of primary concern were often the socio-economic disparities between the Czech and Slovak regions and lingering tensions between those two nations. V. Biřák, “Tendence rozvoje národnostních vztahů a řešení národnostní otázky v ČSSR” [Tendencies in the development of nationalities relations and the solution of nationalities questions in the CSSR] (19 June 1966). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-10/5, bundle 7, archival unit 25, point 2; Idem., “Tendence rozvoje národnostních vztahů a řešení národnostní otázky v ČSSR” [Tendencies in the development of nationalities relations and the solution of nationalities questions in the CSSR] (before Nov. 1965). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-10/5, bundle 17, archival unit 73, point 1; J. Hendrych, “Základní teze k dalšímu propracování problematiky rozvoje a sblížení národů a národnostních skupin v ČSSR” [Basic theses for the further elaboration of the problem of the development and rapprochement of nations and nationality groups in the ČSSR] (14 March 1967). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/1, bundle 26, archival unit 28, point 8; and “Úkoly strany v oblasti národnostních vztahů a další cesty sblížení našich národů” [Party work in the area of nationalities relations and further paths towards the convergence of our nations] (28 April 1962). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/2, bundle 348, archival unit 439, point 8.

The only mention of Jews nationality that I found in all of these documents was the following admission, “In the early fifties a campaign was developed against cosmopolitanism. Although there were some positive elements, some exaggerated opinions eroded the workers’ education in the spirit of internationalism and allowed more perspectives from the positions of narrow [i.e., extreme] nationalism, respectively, antisemitism.” “Tendence rozvoje národnostních vztahů” [Tendencies in the development of nationalities relations] (19 June 1966), 30-31. In 1969, the nationalities curriculum for training Party-state functionaries included a session titled “Antisemitism, Zionism.” “Konceptce ideologické práce byra ÚV KSČ pro řízení stranické práce v českých zemích v oblasti národnostních vztahů, vlastenecké a internacionální výchovy” [A concept for the ideological work of the bureau of the CC-CPC for administering Party work in the Czech Lands in the areas of nationalities relations, patriotic and internationalist education] (21 May 1969). NAČR, KSČ-Byro pro čes. země-AÚV-02/7, bundle, archival unit 22, point 2.

determine Jewish affairs waned and waxed and then waned again between 1954 and 1989. As party-state officials and Jewish leaders soon learned, it was next to impossible to parse Jewish identification and practice neatly into religious and national categories. It helped little that the party-state could not transcend—or, perhaps, was prevented from transcending—the conceptual structures that it had established for thinking about Jewish citizens during the early 1950s. Instead, officials from its various quarters wrestled with each other, with Moscow, and with domestic and international Jewish leaders to redefine the contours of those ideas and their implications for statecraft. Those contests are the subject of the Chapter Seven through Nine.

The cultural construction of national identities demands not only that minority populations “forget” their pasts, as Helmut Walser Smith points out, but also that the majority population do so on their behalf as well.¹⁶¹ This proved impossible and, perhaps, undesirable for many in postwar Czechoslovakia with regard to Jews. In the following two chapters, I discuss the politics of commemorating and remembering the victims of the Nazi genocide of European and North African Jewry and the Czechoslovak losses of the Second World War. These practices demanded their national identification and therefore brought the politics of Jewish ethnic integration into the public sphere.

¹⁶¹ Helmut Walser Smith, *The Continuities of German History: Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77-83.

CHAPTER TWO

Terezín's Butterflies: Dual Narratives of Martyrdom, 1945-1968

The Second World War temporarily wiped Czechoslovakia off the map and it cost the lives of roughly four-fifths of its Jewish population in what we now call the Holocaust or the *Shoah*.¹

The Communist Party placed the war at the absolute center of a new foundational myth for the re-founded country, just as Czech Jews embraced their shared stories of survival and genocide as a central pillar of identification and solidarity in their restored communities.² Tensions between the two narratives complicated the tenuous processes of Jewish (re-)integration into the Czech nation and the Czechoslovak-communist state. They drew the attention of the international community and fell subject to broader, domestic contests over history, society, and socialism. Yet willful acts of narrative melding and compromise—even flights of creative liberty—also offered opportunities for the party-state, its Jewish communities, and other interest groups to use Holocaust commemorations to achieve mutually beneficial ends.

In the immediate postwar years, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, along with its counterparts across the Soviet Bloc, sought legitimacy for its rule in a particular interpretation of

¹ Czechs, including Jews, rarely used the term “Holocaust” to refer to the genocide of European Jewry. It first appeared in the Jewish community’s newsletter in 1978, but never came into vogue. Instead, Czech Jews preferred the terms “tragedy” and “catastrophe.” F. “K našim jarním tryznám” [Regarding our spring memorial], *Věstník*, vol. 40, no. 3 (March 1978): 1. For the sake of clarity and ease, I use the term “Holocaust” throughout this work.

² Blanka Soukupová, “Židé v českých zemích v šedesátých letech 20. století (léta uvolnění a opatrných nadějí v intencích reformního komunismu)” [Jews in the Czech lands in the sixties of the 20th century (Years of liberalization and cautious hope in the intentions of communist reform)], in *Reflexie Holokaustu* [Reflections on the Holocaust], eds. Monika Vrzgulová and Peter Salner (Bratislava, Slovakia: Zing Print, 2010), 54-56; Hedvika Novotná, “Židovská komunita v českých městech a její paměť. Několik poznámek k souvislosti pojmů Židé–paměť–město–identita” [The Jewish community in Czech cities and their memory. Some notes about the relationship of the terms Jews-memory-city-identity], in *Město Identitia Paměť* [City identity memory] eds. Blanka Soukupová, et. al., (Bratislava, Slovakia: Zing Print, 2007), 136.

the Second World War, which left little room for the public acknowledgement of the Nazi genocide of European and North African Jewry or of antisemitism. By no means did communists deny that the Germans and their collaborators, including fascist Slovaks, had murdered nearly six-million individuals which they identified as Jews. Out of political expediency and Marxist-Leninist conviction, however, they tended to ignore the “Jewish Question” in their propaganda and educational materials. Therein, they transformed Jewish victims from Czechoslovakia into martyred Czechs and Slovaks and attributed the Nazis’ atrocities to class, rather than racial enmity. In a time of heightened ethno-nationalism, loyalty and gratitude to the Soviet Union and its liberating armies, and widespread fear that surviving Jews would demand the restitution of their property, this elision of the way that the Nazis had selected their victims proved attractive to many Czech and Slovaks. The practice soon came to dominate public discourses on the Second World War. Dissenters, fearing the repercussions of non-conformity, either censored themselves or emigrated.

This posed a challenge to Jews—and also to Roma—who sought re-integration into Czech society after the Second World War, as citizens of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. They held recent memories of persecution, suffering, and murder which often painfully contravened the “official narrative” of the Communist Party. Even if Czech Jews could abide the historical elisions of communist memory politics in the public sphere, and even as many of them came to support and even join the Communist Party, they still required outlets for overcoming the war’s lasting legacies, including venues for mourning and discussing their shared traumas.

How did Czech Jews, the party, and the state bureaucracy address this narrative tension? How did they negotiate the presentation of the Second World War and the Jewish genocide internationally, in the domestic public sphere, and within more circumscribed, semi-private

forums like the Jewish communities? How and why did the place of the Holocaust in Czech political culture change during the decades of Communist-Party rule? What conditioned these processes and how did they relate to broader political trends?

1945-1955: The Holocaust in the Time of Stalin

Czech Jews began speaking and writing about the Holocaust immediately after the Second World War. They did so to reunite families, to participate in anti-fascist tribunals, and to apply for emigration assistance, social support, and restitution. Survivors published testimonies through both Jewish and veteran organizations concerned with inscribing the Nazi atrocities into historical memory.³ They also participated in the memorial services of the country's Jewish communities. The CJRC held its first memorial service in September 1945 and thereafter instituted semi-annual commemorations, which it observed through 1989.⁴

The February 1948 transition to communist rule did not precipitate an immediate change in how the public, both Jewish and non-Jewish, confronted the genocide of European Jewry. On the one hand, it took time for the Communist Party to bring all of the country's bureaucracies into alignment.⁵ On the other hand, even before it came to power, the party had already assumed

³ The pages of *Věstník* adequately attest to this. See also, Thomas C. Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 428; and Václav Běhonek, "Naše vězeňská literatura" [Our prison literature], *Kytice*, 2/9 (1947): 385-96.

⁴ Sarah A. Cramsey, "Saying Kaddish in Czechoslovakia," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 7:1 (2008): 35-6.

⁵ In 1947, the Communist Party installed "action committees" in workplaces and social organizations around the country, which attempted to bring them into line with communist doctrine. Vratislav Bušek, "Action Committees: A Case Study of the Application and the Use of Action Committees in the Czechoslovak Nationalist Socialist Party," in *Czechoslovakia Past and Present*, vol. 1, Political, International, Social, and Economic Aspects, ed. Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr., 296-333 (The Hague, Netherlands and Paris, France: Mouton for the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in America, Inc., 1968).

control of many of the state organs responsible for shaping public discourses related to the Second World War. These included the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of National Defense, and the majority of local and regional national committees, the bodies responsible for administering quotidian civic affairs. The party also held the loyalty of a plurality of citizens, particularly in the Czech lands, where it won more parliamentary seats in 1946 than any of its competitors.⁶ In addition, many non-communist Czechs considered the party a “progressive social force” and held the USSR in high esteem.⁷ After the war, Jewish citizens joined the Communist Party in disproportionate numbers, as they had during the interwar period, and many others were sympathetic to it for having experienced liberation at the hands of Soviet soldiers.⁸ The works of many Czech-Jewish authors, indeed, already conformed to communist (and

⁶ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation*. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, 103 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17-19.

⁷ H. Gordon Skilling, *Communism National and International: Eastern Europe after Stalin* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press in association with the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1964, reprinted in 1965), 85.

⁸ Most Czechoslovak Jews did not join the Communist Party. For an analyses of Jews joining the party, see Soukupová, “Židé v českých zemích v šedesátých léta” [Jews in the Czech lands in the sixties of the 20th century], 42-43; and idem., “Modely životných osudů českých Židů po šoa” [Models of the fates of Czech Jews after the Shoah], in *Židovská menšina v československu po druhé světové válce od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War from liberation to a new totalitarianism] (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008); Jana Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu v českých zemích 1948-1992* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism in the Czech lands 1848-1992], *Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR* [Notebooks of the Institute of Contemporary History], vol. 19 (1994), 41-42; and Petr Brod, “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], in *Židé v novodobých dějinách: Soubor přednášek na FF UK, Uspořádal Václav Veber* [Jews in contemporary history: A collection of lectures at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, organized by Václav Veber] (Prague, Czech Republic: Karolinium, 1997), 153-54. On Czech-Jewish affiliation with and sympathy for the interwar Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, see Vít Stroubach “Zamýšlení nad “rudou asimilací” českých Židů” [Musings over the “red assimilation” of Czech Jews] (Ph.D. Diss., Charles University, 2007).

nationalist) discourses, even before that became a necessity.⁹

What was the official communist position on the Jewish genocide in the early postwar years? The party held that history followed an inevitable and predictable course, which would culminate in the emergence of a socialist utopia, already underway in the Soviet Union. Marxist-Leninist historiography was thus teleological. Any interpretation of history that did not conform to its model had to be rejected.¹⁰ The party understood the Second World War as a decisive victory of the working class, led by the USSR, over the forces of capitalism and imperialism, in the guise of German fascism. In order for this to be true, however, it meant that the Nazis' fundamental objective had to lie in class warfare. Communists, therefore, rejected antisemitism as the underlying explanation for the murder of European Jewry. They argued instead that the Nazis had merely attempted to use racial discourses to divide the rising international proletariat and thereby to preserve and extend their imperialist rule over Europe.¹¹

Communist Parties across East-Central Europe deployed this reading of the Second World War to justify their rule and their draconian practices of governance. They portrayed that war as a turning point in the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and presented themselves and their Soviet sponsors as national heroes who had liberated their lands from

⁹ Lisa Peschel, "A Joyful Act of Worship": Survivor Testimony on Czech Culture in the Terezín Ghetto and Postwar Reintegration in Czechoslovakia, 1945-48," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 36/2 (Fall 2012): 209-228. This practice was not restricted to Jews. Even non-Jewish Czechs and Slovaks felt pressure to construct their own histories in accordance with the official, Marxist-Leninist interpretation of events. Pavel Kolář, "The Party as a New Utopia: Reshaping Communist Identity after Stalinism," *Social History*, 37/4, (November 2012): 403.

¹⁰ Kolář, "The Party as the New Utopia," 405; and Michal Pullmann, "Discussion: Writing History in the Czech and Slovak Republics: an Interview with Michal Pullmann," *Social History*, 37/4, (November 2012): 390. Fox, cited above, does not address changes in the culture of socialist historiography. Instead, he presents it as uniform and static. He treats moments of liberalization as deviations from a set norm.

¹¹ Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism," 420-425; and Zvi Gitelman, "The Soviet Union," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed., David S. Wyman (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 306-15.

capitalist fascists. Throughout the Cold War, the communist states propagandistically used the Second World War to raise domestic political support and to attack the West. As late as the 1980s, communists shamed the West for enabling Hitler at Munich, for failing to de-Nazify West Germany, and for rearming that country. They also warned the West's purported nuclear brinksmanship would lead to a second tragedy of even greater proportions.

Faalty to the Stalinist framework, however, did not necessarily entail eliding anything about Jewish experiences. Czech-Jewish-communist leaders, indeed, regularly framed the Holocaust in Marxist-Leninist terms for domestic and foreign audiences alike. Sometimes, this involved portraying Jewish victims as anti-fascist fighters. Often, though, it merely meant conceding—in good faith or bad—that the Nazis' antisemitism had been epiphenomenal to causes of the Second World War.¹² For example, even as the communist-Jewish historians Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka adopted a Marxist-Leninist framework to analyze the concentration-camp system, they never shied from noting that a grossly disproportionate number of its victims had been “citizens of Jewish origin” or “citizens marked with a Jewish star.” They thus remained loyal to the communist line, but also insisted upon the experiential significance of antisemitism to life under Nazism.¹³

Why then was so little done in most years to acknowledge Jewish suffering and death on

¹² One can find examples of this in nearly every issue of *Věstník*, especially during the periods of Stalinism (1948-1961) and normalization (1969-1989). Blanka Soukupová, “Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání po Šoa (k významům pamětních míst a míst v paměti). Léta 1945 až 1989” [Prague in Jewish collective memory after the Shoah (towards the meaning of memorial sites and sites of memory). The years 1945 until 1989] in *Neklidná krajina vzpomínání: Konkurenční společenství paměti ve městě* [Unsettled collective memory: the competition of society of memory in the city], *Urbánní studie*, vol. 1 (Prague, Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2010), 27.

¹³ Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka, *Noc a mlha* [Night and Fog] (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Naše vojsko–SPB, 1958), quotes on 57 and 87; on the utilization of antisemitism for the purposes of theft, 147-48 and 421-22; on Slavs, 9.

the site of the Theresienstadt Ghetto, to where the Nazis deported 73,608 Czech and Moravian “Jews,” along with roughly 70,000 additional individuals marked as Jewish from other countries? Why did most educational materials and national commemorations fail to acknowledge that “Jews” composed the vast majority of the country’s 300,000-plus wartime deaths, at 263,000 victims and fallen soldiers?¹⁴ How could Czechs ignore the fact the Nazis and their collaborators had expressly murdered most of those people due to their Jewish origins?

Even though Czechoslovak communists adopted this practice from their Soviet superiors, they had important local reasons for doing so.¹⁵ Acknowledging Jewish deaths had the potential to undermine the inscription of Czechoslovak history into the meta-narrative of communist triumphalism. The country could neither compete numerically with Poland in terms of anti-fascist martyrdom, nor had it suffered the same type of devastation as did the western regions of the USSR. Similarly, recognizing the disproportionate participation of Jews in the country’s foreign armies and in the Slovak Uprising had the potential to undermine the inflated grandeur of the Communist Party by implying the truth, that Czechs and Slovaks had fought for a variety of reasons, among them Jewish self-defense and hope for the restoration of the interwar political system.¹⁶

Czech nationalism and antisemitism played a role as well in the elision of Jewishness

¹⁴ Livia Rothkirchen, “The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: 1938-1945,” in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, eds. Avigdor Dagan, Gertrude Hirschler, and Lewis Weiner, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Philadelphia and New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America and the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 3-75. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum cites the total number of Czechoslovak victims.

<www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007324> (31 October 31, 2012).

¹⁵ On Soviet discourses, see Amir Weiner, “In the Long Shadow of War: The Second World War and the Soviet and Post-Soviet World,” *Diplomatic History*, 25/3 (Summer 2001): 443-56; and Idem., “The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity,” *Russian Review*, 55/4 (Oct., 1996): 648-60.

¹⁶ For a similar analysis with reference to the Soviet Union, see Gitelman, “The Soviet Union,” 315-16.

from official accounts of the Second World War. The fact that Jews had suffered unique fates during that war confirmed for many non-Jews that their Jewish compatriots belonged to a separate ethnic group. Indeed, wartime antisemitic propaganda seems only to have exacerbated interwar ambivalences about Jews among many Czech and Slovaks.¹⁷ Excluding Jews from the national body, however, posed a serious problem within the context of a European-wide culture of comparative victimization, wherein nations accrued moral capital by placing their suffering on display.¹⁸ Transforming murdered Jews into Czechoslovak victims of fascism mitigated these issues rhetorically.

On the other hand, Petr Sedlák suggests that party-state officials also referred to Jewish victims as Czechs and Slovaks in order to differentiate themselves discursively from the Nazis. He argues that in the immediate postwar years, Czechoslovak officials had come to see the question of Jewish integration as a zero-sum game. If the exclusion of Jews from the national body by the Nazis had led to mass murder, communists would not tolerate any language or policies that distinguished Jews from Czech and Slovaks on national terms. (The Allied Powers initially adopted a similar policy for administering displaced persons camps in Germany.)¹⁹ At the same time, Sedlák reaches the same conclusion as I do, that the refusal to recognize Jewish

¹⁷ See Chapter One for a thorough discussion of this topic. See also Jan Láníček, “The Czechoslovak Government-in Exile and the Jews during World War 2 (1938-1948)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southampton, 2010), 44-91.

¹⁸ Gernot Heiss, “Habsburg’s Difficult Legacy: Comparing and Relating Austrian, Czech, Magyar and Slovak Master Historical Narratives,” in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, eds. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 367-404; Muriel Blaive, “The Memory of the Holocaust and of Communist Repression in a Comparative Perspective: The Cases of Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic,” *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust*, European History and Politics, (Innsbruck, Austria: Studienverlag, 2011), 154-72.

¹⁹ Anita Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 137-42.

ethnic or national specificity enabled Czechoslovak officials to ignore Jewish concerns and to enact antisemitic policies, all the while deflecting charges of antisemitism.²⁰

Finally, too thorough a discussion of the Jewish tragedy had the potential to expose the failure of domestic courts to prosecute Nazi collaborators. This would have embarrassed the Communist Party in light of its protests that West Germany and its allied occupiers had failed to do just that.²¹ It would have been particularly damning in the Slovak case, as the Eichmann Trial of 1961 would later demonstrate. A thorough investigation into fascist Slovakia, moreover, also had the potential to disrupt what I perceive to have been the ahistorical projection of the Czech

²⁰ Petr Sedlák, “Poté: Postoj a přístup k Židům v českých zemích po druhé světové válce (1945-1947/1953)” [Afterwards: the stance and approach to Jews in the Czech lands after the Second World War (1945-1947/1953)] (Ph.D. Diss., Masaryk University, 2008), 149-66.

²¹ For an example of how ideologically loyal authors wrote about Czechoslovak de-Nazification see Táňa Kulišova, *Terezín: Malá pevnost, Národní hřbitov, Ghetto* [Terezín: Small Fortress, National Cemetery, Ghetto] (Czechoslovakia: SPB v Praze and KNV Ústí nad Labem, 1952), 46-47. On postwar justice and its shortcomings see Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On how antisemitism tainted postwar trials and investigations see Mečislav Borák, ed., *Povalčná justice a národní podoby antisemitismu: Postih provinění vůči Židům před soudy a komisemi ONV v českých zemích v letech 1945-1948 a v některých zemích střední Evropy* [Postwar justice and the national character of antisemitism: the punishment of wrongdoing against Jews before the courts and commissions of the county national committees in the Czech lands in the years 1945-1948 and in some countries of Central Europe] (Prague and Opava, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the Silesian Institute of the Silesian Regional Museum, 2002); idem., ed., *Retribuce v ČSR a národní podoby antisemitismu: Židovská problematika a antisemitismus ve spisech mimořádných lidových soudů a trestních komisí ONV v letech 1945-1948* [Retribution in the Czechoslovak Republic and the national character of antisemitism: the Jewish problem and antisemitism in the records of the extraordinary people's courts and criminal commissions of the county national committees in the years 1945-1948] (Prague and Opava, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the Silesian Institute of the Silesian Regional Museum, 2002); Radka Čermáková, “Poválečné Československo. Obnovený stát ve střední Evropě,” in *Židovská menšina v Československu po druhé světové válce: od osvobození k nové totalitě*, eds., Blanka Soukupová, Peter Salner, and Miroslava Ludvíková (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2009, 26-28 and 30-31; and Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln, NE and Jerusalem, Israel: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2006), 285-6.

wartime narrative of occupation and forced collaboration onto the entirety of Czechoslovakia.²²

The anti-Catholic party-state achieved this by portraying the crimes of independent, fascist Slovakia as having been solely the responsibility of a small clerical-fascist elite, under the leadership of President Jozef Tiso.²³

Nonetheless, it was not until the USSR disavowed the State of Israel in 1949 that it became taboo in Czechoslovakia to focus publicly on the Jewish origins of the Nazis' victims. Given the culture of comparative victimization, doing so had the potential to imply a moral basis for Zionism. Yet even this transition took time. In 1949, the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia released a book of documents and photographs that testified to the genocide of Slovak Jewry.²⁴ In that same year, Jiří Weil published his Holocaust-themed novel, *Life with a Star*, which established him as a *lieu de memoire* of the Czech Holocaust. 1949 also witnessed the premier of Alfréd Radok's expressionist masterpiece, *The Distant Journey*. The film focused on Jewish wartime fates and grappled with questions of Czech collaboration and resistance.²⁵ In 1950, the State Jewish Museum submitted a plan to transform Prague's Pinkas

²² Frommer, *National Cleansing*, 315-41. Blanka Soukupová argues that Czech Jews believed in a myth of Czech wartime innocence in "Židé a židovská reprezentace v českých zemích v letech 1945-1948 (Mezi režimem, Židovským a Judaismem) [Jews and the Jewish representation in the Czech lands in the years 1945-1948 (between the regime, Jewishness, and Judaism), in *Židovská menšina v československu po druhé světové válce od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War from liberation to a new totalitarianism] (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 57.

²³ Rothkirchen lists a number of historiographical attempts to achieve this dating from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s. This had the effect that it was easier to speak of the Slovak Holocaust than of the genocide of Jews in the Czech Lands. Livia Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 176-77.

²⁴ *Tragedie slovenských židů* (Bratislava, Czechoslovakia: The Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia, 1949).

²⁵ Alfréd Radok, dir., *Daleká cesta* [video recording] (Chicago, IL: Fascets Multimedia, 2005).

Synagogue into a memorial for Bohemian and Moravian Jewry,²⁶ and the Mír publishing house issued an expanded, second edition of *The Death Factory* by Kraus and Kulka.²⁷

In short time, however, the party-state's mounting anti-Zionist campaign intimidated both organizations and individuals into forgoing all commemorative and educational initiatives that had the potential to be perceived as challenges to the "official narrative." Communist leaders accused so-called "Zionists" of taking advantage of Czech sympathies for Jewish survivors in order to infiltrate the party. They further alleged that "Zionists" sought to delegitimize the Soviet Bloc's anti-Zionist campaign by attributing it to antisemitism rather than to sound political theory.²⁸ The proceedings of the Slánský Affair of 1952 and the propaganda that accompanied associated "Zionism" with fascism. The media even deployed Nazi symbols to attack the State of Israel and its close relationship with the "imperialist" West. Propagandists deployed classic antisemitic tropes and suggested a connection between the Jewish religion and Jewish nationalism which were both taboo in other arena of political-cultural discourse (Figure 1).

Although recent scholarship has challenged the received wisdom about the extent to which the public embraced this propaganda, it nonetheless created a culture of fear, especially

²⁶ Letter from the State Jewish Museum to the ecclesiastical division of the Ministry of Education (20 September 1956). NAČR, SUC box 211.

²⁷ "Továrna na smrt—druhé vydání," *Věstník*, vol. 12, no. 41 (13 October 1950): 475.

²⁸ W. Oschlies, "The Phases and Faces of Czech Antisemitism," *The Wiener Library Bulletin*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1970/1971): 25-26; Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism], 38-9; "Z vystoupení Václava Kopeckého na celostátní konferenci KSČ 16.-18. prosince 1952," reprinted from "Celostátní konference Komunistické strany Československa v Praze, ve dnech 16.-18. prosince 1952," *Rudé Právo* (1953): 102-04, in *Československo a Izrael, 1945-1956: Dokumenty*, ed. Marie Bulínová, et. al., (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Historical Institute of the Czech Army and the State Central Archives, 1993), 275-77.

among Jews, who faced high rates of political arrest and persecution.²⁹ Jiří Weil lost his membership in the Communist Party and his job.³⁰ Censors banned *The Distant Journey* in Prague, although they allowed it to play for some time in village cinemas.³¹ Finally, in 1952, the Regional National Committee in Ústí nad Labem blocked a proposal to install an exhibit on Jewish prisoners on the site of the former Theresienstadt Ghetto. Only a small part of the general exhibition in Theresienstadt's "Small Fortress" addressed Jewish fates.³²

In this terrifying environment, the custodianship of what today might be called "Holocaust memory" fell to a few closely monitored and officially recognized institutions, whose purviews and international visibility offered some protection from anti-Zionist persecution. These included the Jewish communities, the State Jewish Museum, the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, and the memorial at Terezín.³³ Those individuals who joined Jewish

²⁹ Kevin McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'? Czech Popular Opinion and the Slánský Affair," *Slavic Review*, vol. 67, no. 4 (2008), 840-65.

³⁰ Hana Hříbková, "Jiří Weil: A Scientist and Initiator of Exhibitions of Children's Drawings from Terezín," in *The Representation of the Shoah in Literature, Theatre and Film in Central Europe: 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Jiří Holý (Prague, Czech Republic: Akropolis, 2012), 55.

³¹ Antonín J. Liehm, ed., *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience* (New York, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974), 40.

³² Marie Křížková, "Stálé muzejní expozice Památníku Terezín" [The permanent museum exhibit of the Terezín memorial], *Terezínské listy*, vol. 2 (1971): 51; and Jan Munk, "Z historie Památníku Terezín" [From the history of the Terezín Memorial], *Terezínské listy*, vol. 21 (1993): 13-14.

³³ On Terezín, see Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 53-58; Křížková, "Stálé muzejní expozice Památníku Terezín" [The permanent museum exhibit of the Terezín memorial], 52-55; and Munk, "Z historie Památníku Terezín" [From the history of the Terezín Memorial], 11-13. The Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters published broadly on the Second World War and enjoyed tremendous political latitude to do so. In 1952, it co-published a short book with the Regional National Committee in Ústí nad Labem about Theresienstadt, which included a little over five pages (out of 45) on the wartime fates of Czech Jewry. Kulišova, *Terezín: Malá pevnost, Národní hřbitov, Ghetto* [Terezín: Small Fortress, National Cemetery, Ghetto], 42-46. For information on the exhibits of the State Jewish Museum, see Arno Pařík, "Exhibits at the Prague Jewish Museum, 1946-1992," *Review of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews*, VI (1993): 69-84; Hana Volavková, "The Jewish Museum of Prague," in *The Jews of*

communities found within them opportunities to mourn their dead and to receive medical and material assistance for damages incurred at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators. Those who lived in or traveled to Prague also benefited from the initiatives of the State Jewish Museum. Citizens of Jewish origin who either did not join or who withdrew from the Jewish communities, particularly those who resided outside of Prague, lived in a world which most often ignored the Holocaust in public—even if it was, to a significant degree, common knowledge among adults.

The communist system, nonetheless, still provided many more opportunity than have been acknowledged for Jews to memorialize their losses within their communities. At no point did the CJRC, its constituent communities, and their members stop grappling openly with the legacies and memories of the Holocaust. They did so in the pages of CJRC's newsletter, *Věstník*, in their religious spaces, and also in public view. From February 1948 through December 1950, the Czech Jewish communities installed eighteen Holocaust memorials in Jewish cemeteries around the region (Table I). Indeed, the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs (SOEA) considered the construction of these memorials and the services conducted at them to be religious rites deserving of state support.³⁴ Local officials, members of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, and even party representatives joined hundreds and sometimes thousands of Jews at memorial-unveiling ceremonies that featured readings from Jewish liturgy. Both Jewish and non-Jewish officials spoke at these events about the Jewish specificity of the genocide, which they used to

Czechoslovakia, vol. 3, ed., Avigdor Dagan (Philadelphia, PA and New York, NY: JPSA and the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 567-83; and Magda Veselská, *Archa paměti: cesta pražského židovského muzea pohnutým 20. stoletím* [The arch of memory: the path of the Prague Jewish museum through the heated 20th century] (Prague, Czech Republic: Academica and the Jewish Museum in Prague, 2012).

³⁴ The SOEA even permitted the Jewish Community in Kolín to divert money earmarked for supporting religious activities in Kutna Hora to fund a Holocaust memorial in their own city. Collection of documents and photographs. NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1950.

encourage support for the new regime among citizens of the Jewish religion.

Simply put, there was significant opportunity in Stalinist Czechoslovakia for Jewish citizens to commemorate the Holocaust as a Jewish tragedy, even if the memorial at Terezín failed to address it sufficiently as such. What emerged was a two-tiered, hierarchically weighted historiographical and commemorative system. One tier, often called the “official narrative,” ignored Jewish fates. The other, under the purview of the Jewish communities and with state approval, focused almost exclusively on them.

The cemetery memorials, some of them large works of marble and granite (Figures 2 and 3), became sites of annual pilgrimage for Jewish communities, individuals, and their esteemed guests.³⁵ Through their ceremonies, Czech and Slovak Jews transformed the country’s 800-plus Jewish cemeteries into sites of layered memory: for those buried therein, for murdered loved ones without graves, and for communities lost to genocide. In the face of exclusionary nationalism, they also offered proof of Jewish rootedness in the region.³⁶ One community member wrote that the cemetery in Hradec Králové “will remain the single memorial to the once thriving community, whose members were not fated, after their lives’ pilgrimage, to rest on the ground of their more fortunate fathers.”³⁷

Within the Jewish communities, the Holocaust was deeply politicized. CJRC publications and memorials conformed to the “official narrative” and propagated its lessons. Jewish leaders invoked the Jewish genocide in proclamations of loyalty to the party-state on the occasion of

³⁵ Cramsey, “Saying Kaddish in Czechoslovakia,” 35-50.

³⁶ On Czech-Jewish attitudes towards cemeteries see Soukupová, “Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 27. A few communities installed plaques in synagogues and prayer rooms. These were less attractive sites, however, because they lacked the protections of cemeteries. Once the buildings fell out of use, they had to be sold.

³⁷ Bedřich Norman, “Droby z dějin židovské náboženské obce v Hradci Králové” [Crumbs from the history of the Jewish religious community in Hradec Králové], *Věstník* vol. 11, no. 49 (2 Dec. 1949): 541.

major anniversaries and holidays.³⁸ This, however, was not only the result of outside pressure. After all, in March 1948, a Jewish-communist “Action Committee” had taken over the leadership of the CJRC and the Jewish community in Prague. The publications and commemorations of those institutions, after that point, reflected the political ideologies of that cohort, which identified as ethnically Czech and religiously Jewish, despite their atheism. They spoke in the name of Czech Jewry.³⁹

In light of the apparent tension between the wartime experiences and postwar proclamations of some Jewish leaders, it may be tempting to portray them as having been either cynical or pragmatic actors. To be fair, by deploying a Marxist-Leninist framework for discussing the Holocaust, Jewish leaders reassured their minders at the SOEA of their loyalty. They demonstrated that neither they nor their communities would seek to undermine the “official narrative.” Adopting that narrative also empowered Jewish leaders to hold the state accountable to its promises to eradicate antisemitism and to support the Jewish communities. Jewish leaders frequently recounted such guarantees during commemorations.⁴⁰

³⁸ Soukupová, *Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání* [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 25.

³⁹ Soukupová, “Židé a židovská reprezentace v českých zemích” [Jews and the Jewish representation in the Czech], 75-6. For a discussion of Jewish Communists in leadership positions and their beliefs about the Holocaust (and its non-uniqueness) see *idem.*, “Proměny reflexe šoa v politice židovské reprezentace” [Changes in the reflection of the Shoah in the politics of Jewish representation], in *Židovská menšina v Československu v letech 1956-1968. Od destalinizace k pražskému jaru* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia in the years 1956-1968. From de-Stalinization to the Prague Spring], eds. Blanka Soukupová and Miloš Pojar (Prague, Czech Republic: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2011), 115-17.

⁴⁰ Soukupová characterizes the party-state’s initiatives to shape popular understandings of the Second World War as “forceful manipulations of collective memory,” yet she admits that loyalty to the socialist state led Czech-Jews and their leaders to participate in this process. (*Ibid.*, 48.) She further acknowledges as genuine Jewish (and non-Jewish) feelings of gratitude to the Soviet Union for the liberation. (“Židé v českých zemích” [Jews in the Czech lands], 53.) Soukupová’s language, however, reflects an ambivalence to the phenomenon that she herself describes, but fails to analyze. She writes that the Marxist-Leninist/nationalist narrative “infiltrated” Czech-Jewish collective memory, and characterizes it as only one level of memory which lay above

I do not doubt that the adoption of the “official narrative” by Jewish leaders upset some individuals.⁴¹ Yet, neither the existence of narrative tension nor the adoption of expedient discourses necessarily implies bad faith on the former’s part. I suggest that the attempts by Jewish leaders to shape their communities’ discussions of the Holocaust in accordance with the “official narrative” reflected an attempt to achieve a “desired memory.” Their motivations lay in various combinations of commitment to socialism and Czech nationalism, gratitude to the Soviet Union, hope for a more secure future, and fearful submission to a coercive party-state. Instead of interpreting this striving towards a “desired memory” as inauthentic or forced, however, I see it as an attempt in good faith by some Jews to achieve fuller integration into Czech-communist society.⁴² This type of public self-reconstruction, often by functionaries in tenuous political positions, was a normal and constituent aspect of life in Stalinist Europe. Party members performed acts of public “self-criticism,” in which they acknowledged that they had remained beholden to pre-communist modes of thought and, thereby, manifested their transcendence of them. Thus, even Jews who may not have embraced communism in earlier years, stood in good company when sought to re-inscribe their memories and the history of the genocide into the communist master narrative. The fact that they did so as citizens of the Jewish religion, in Jewish spaces, and on behalf of the Jewish community, moreover, meant that they could do so without

“thus far unprocessed authentic experiences of the Shoah.” (“Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání” [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 46.) I do not agree that Czech-Jews left their memories unprocessed. I furthermore reject her tacit definition of “authentic” memory, which seems to privilege non-contextual acts of memory over recollection imbedded in specific political and cultural contexts. The latter seem to me the only form possible.

⁴¹ Unfortunately, I have not found a single document from that period which might suggest how non-communist Jews perceived these attempts to intervene into the collective memory of the Jewish community.

⁴² Petr Sedlák argues that Czech and Slovak Jews joined the party in postwar Czechoslovakia to manifest their feelings of belonging to the Czech and Slovak nations. “Poté: Postoj a přístup k Židům” [Afterwards: the stance and approach to Jews], 64-65.

eliding the Jewish specificity of the genocide, if only by implication. Jewish leaders could thus speak openly of the Holocaust without having to adopt the categories of its perpetrators. They mourned a racist, antisemitic genocide, without ever conceding that Jews composed a race or nation onto themselves—i.e., without drifting dangerously into what might have been perceived as Zionism. The official memory politics of the CJRC thus emerged from negotiations of power and language between its leadership and the party-state. The latter's narrative framework functioned as a Bakhtinian discourse in which the former could express ideas which would have been taboo if articulated in another way.

When the party-state's anti-Zionist campaign culminated in 1952 and 1953, the place of Czechoslovakia's Jewish citizens within the Czech and Slovak nations came into serious and public question. This, in turn, led to a decline in Holocaust-related cultural production. *Věstník* carried fewer articles on that theme, which pointed to differences between Jews and non-Jews. Its authors, instead, wrote feature pieces in which they focused on the long history of Jews in the Czech lands, meant to demonstrate Jewish rootedness in the region. This also explains, in part, why 1953 was the only year between 1948 and 1957 that did not witness the installation of at least one Holocaust memorial in a Jewish Cemetery. For Jewish leaders and intellectuals, the risks of calling attention to Jewish wartime suffering outweighed the benefits of commemoration.⁴³ The State Jewish Museum was similarly inactive in terms of the Holocaust in 1953.

The year 1953, nonetheless, lasted for only 12 months and was marked by the deaths in March of both Josef Stalin and his Czechoslovak counterpart and acolyte, Klement Gottwald.

⁴³ The slowing of pace after 1950 must also be attributed to factors such as high rates of Jewish emigration through 1949, the consolidation of Jewish communities, and the fact that so many memorials had already been erected in key Jewish population centers.

Though some scholars consider de-Stalinization in Czechoslovakia to have begun only at the turn of the 1960s, change manifested immediately in the field of Holocaust memory.⁴⁴ The first activities were not private affairs, as individuals remained fearful. Instead, the same institutions which had quieted themselves last, just one year hence, were the first to resume their commemorative activities in 1954 and 1955. Jewish communities installed memorials in Kyov, Liberec, and Ústí nad Labem in 1954 and another the following year in Tábor. Also in 1954, the director of the State Jewish Museum, Hana Volavková, published a book on the history of the Pinkas Synagogue, which announced the plans to transform it into a memorial.⁴⁵ Work on the site began in that year as well. In 1955, Volavková published her book in English, which helped to ensure that the project would reach fruition by making it an object of interest abroad.⁴⁶

Czech rabbis grew more audacious in 1955 as well. That year, Rabbi Feder used the

⁴⁴ The preeminent political scientist of Czechoslovakia, H. Gordon Skilling, describes Czechoslovak de-Stalinization as a decade-long process beginning between 1958 and 1963. “Stalinism and Czechoslovak Political Culture,” in *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, pp. 257-80 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977), 257; and idem., *Communism National and International*, 24-35 and 84-132; see also Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2012), 77-79; and Marci Shore, “Engineering in the Age of Innocence: A Genealogy of Discourse Inside the Czechoslovak Writers’ Union,” *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1998): 297-441.

⁴⁵ Hana Volavková, *Pinkasová škola: památník minulosti a našich dnů* [The Pinkas Shul: a memorial of the past and of our day] (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1954).

⁴⁶ Hana Volavková, *The Pinkas Synagogue: A Memorial of the Past and of our Day* (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1955). Volavková’s other project did not fare as well. She proposed turning Prague’s Michle Synagogue into a model ancient library to display over 1,500 Torahs collected during the Second World War. As late as 1958, she believed that her project would succeed. However, in 1964, the State Jewish Museum sold the scrolls to the Westminster Synagogue and the Michle synagogue became a warehouse. Volavková, “Z pražského Státního židovského musea” [From the Prague State Jewish Museum], *Věstník*, vol. 20, no. 1 (January 1958): 3; and Magda Veselská, “The Selling off of Items from the Collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague after the Second World War, with a Particular Focus on the Sale of Torah Scrolls in 1963-1964,” *Judaica Bohemiae*, vol. 42 (2007): 186-190.

precarious theme of the Holocaust to undermine the idea, promoted in party-state propaganda, that being fully Czech and “of Jewish origin” were mutually exclusive. He did so by intervening into the story of the “Family Camp,” which was a centerpiece of the Czech narrative of national resistance and martyrdom. On the night of 8-9 March 1944, the Nazis murdered nearly 4,000 Bohemian and Moravian Jews, whom they had deported from Theresienstadt and settled with their families in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The “official narrative,” of course, elided the victims’ Jewishness. It portrayed them, rather, as Czechs who had marched to the gas chambers singing the National Anthem. (This was likely the case, but they also sang the future Israeli National Anthem and the Communist International.) In a speech on the anniversary of the killings, Rabbi Feder reminded those assembled that the victims had been Jewish. This was not new. Rabbi Davidovič had made similar comments on the radio in 1951, perhaps a bold step at a time of mounting antisemitism. Feder’s innovation, just four years later, was to insist that the victims had been of “hybrid” Czech-Jewish identity, and thereby to undermine the system of national categorization that had divided Jews from Czechs, and to use the Holocaust to do so.⁴⁷

All of this, however, paled in comparison with two major events of 1955. In September, at the request of the Jewish community in Ústí nad Labem, the CJRC unveiled a large monument in Terezín’s Jewish cemetery, a site that held the remains of thousands of victims (Figure 3).⁴⁸ In time, Czech Jews would come to refer to their annual memorial services there as “*kever avot*,” “the grave of the fathers,” associating them with the yearly ritual of visiting one’s parents’ graves

⁴⁷ Cramsey, “Saying Kaddish in Czechoslovakia,” 40-43. On Czech narratives about the “Family Camp,” see Peter Halama, “Das ‘Lied der Toten’. Nachklänge einer Birkenauer Nacht in der tschechoslowakischen Erinnerungskultur” [“The song of the dead: echoes of one Birkenau night in the Czechoslovak culture of memory] (under review, 2012).

⁴⁸ “Odhalení pomníku mučedníkům terezíského ghetta” [Unveiling the memorial to the martyrs of the Terezín ghetto] *Věstník*, vol. 17, no. 10 (October 1955): 1-4; and Untitled article, *Věstník*, vol. 17, no. 8 (August 1955): 10.

before the High Holidays.⁴⁹ Party-state officials approved, attended, and even participated in the unveiling ceremony.

In his speech for the occasion, Rabbi Feder contrasted the Nazis' genocide of Jews with their treatment of other victims. He admitted that the Nazis had murdered members of many other nations, including Czechs and Slovaks. But he also insisted that

this can be no comfort for us, because they murdered Jews indiscriminately and without a single exception; they even killed our children, so that there would not remain any youth out of which new Jews could mature.⁵⁰

Feder thus used his protected role as rabbi and the safe setting of a memorial service to argue against the marginalization of antisemitism in the "official narrative." He also challenged thereby the prevailing hierarchy of victimization that attributed greater significance and worth to victims of political persecution than to those who suffered for racial reasons, i.e. which prioritized "Czechs" over "Jews."⁵¹

By invoking the murder of children, Rabbi Feder also called attention to the very aspect of the Czech Holocaust that would soon feature most prominently in the country's official representations of that tragedy. Indeed, the second major commemorative event of 1955 was an exhibition of children's drawings from Theresienstadt, organized by Jiří Weil and the State Jewish Museum for the 1955 *Spartakiada*. Weil hoped to warn his fellow citizens about the fates of children during times of violent conflict in the context of the Korean War.⁵² The exhibit's

⁴⁹ "Kever avot v Terezíně" [The grave of our fathers], *Věstník*, vol. 16, no. 10 (October 1964), 3-4.

⁵⁰ "Odhalení pomníku mučedníkům terezíského ghetta" [The unveiling of a memorial to the martyrs of the Theresienstadt Ghetto], 3.

⁵¹ On the hierarchy, see Sedlák, "Poté: Postoj a přístup k Židům" [Afterwards: the stance and approach to Jews], 103-06 and 159-66.

⁵² Hříbková, "Jiří Weil: A Scientist and Initiator," 56. The *Spartakiada* was a national sporting event organized in Prague every five years that celebrated socialist and national progress. Weil's exhibit protested the death of children in the Korean War.

success convinced officials to deploy it propagandistically around the world.

To review, the transition to Communist rule in 1948 did not immediately cause a major shift in the place of the Jewish genocide in Czechoslovak political culture. Though concerned about Terezín, Jewish leaders and their followers focused most of their energies on alleviating the Holocaust's persistent legacies. This included finding outlets for survivors to mourn their lost family members, friends, and associates, as well as entire communities. To do so, they developed particular cultural practices in coordination with state and local officials, centered primarily on transforming Jewish cemeteries into complex sites of memorialization. Mainstream publishing on the Holocaust continued for over a year after the transition to communist rule and persisted openly and relatively uninterrupted in the Jewish press through the fall of communism in 1989.

After 1949, Czechoslovakia's anti-Zionist turn intimidated individuals into silence, leaving almost all Holocaust-related public initiatives in the hands of a few protected institutions. Under these conditions, a two-tiered system of memory emerged, supported by the party-state. The "official narrative", founded on Marxist-Leninist philosophies of history and constructed to bring honor to the Czech and Slovak nations, elided the Jewish genocide in its tale of Czechoslovak martyrdom and class warfare. At the same time, the party-state offered Jews and historians limited space to commemorate, mourn, and record the Jewish tragedy as such, provided that their activities did not interfere with the propagation of the "official narrative." These spaces included the Jewish religious communities and the State Jewish Museum—and, of course, the apartments of Jewish families.⁵³ If state antisemitism threatened this system in 1953, it was restored only one year later. In 1954, the same institutions that had been the last to grow quiet, cautiously began to reassert the narrative of the Jewish genocide in the public sphere. In

⁵³ On the transmission of information about the Holocaust within Jewish families and between generations, see Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 67-104.

other words, despite the antisemitic propaganda and the very real danger to Jews, in terms of Holocaust commemoration, the years of Stalinism were not as repressive or as long as has been assumed. This stands to reason. Everyone knew what had happened just a few years earlier.

1956-1968: The Holocaust and the First International Turn

In 1956 the two-tiered system of memory and commemoration began to fall apart, as the party-state started to incorporate the story of the Holocaust into its domestic and international propaganda. This, in turn, offered citizens and institutions greater latitude to engage with the topic in the domestic public sphere. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore primarily the foreign-policy related motivations that lay behind this transition, and its repercussions, as these alone convinced Czechoslovakia's Stalinist leadership to reconsider its treatment of the recent past. In the next chapter, I address the concurrent domestic reasons for the shift in the political culture of memory, in the context of de-Stalinization and the emergence of a reform wing within the Communist Party.

In 1956, Czechoslovak authorities approved a joint proposal of the CJRC and the State Jewish Museum to participate on a grand scale in an international Holocaust commemoration in Paris. The event's success exceeded even the high expectations of the State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs, and, in doing so, convinced party-state officials to incorporate commemorations of the Czech Holocaust prominently into the country's international propaganda for the next 12 years. The practice improved Czechoslovakia's tarnished reputation in the West and yielded significant financial benefits both for the state and its Jewish communities. This new strategy developed out of cooperation between party-state authorities, the CJRC, and the State Jewish Museum, each of which was motivated by its own set of priorities

which overlapped for some time.

A brief anecdote from 1955 will serve to illustrate the political and cultural point of departure for this drastic transition in memory politics. On 18 January 1955, the *New York Herald Tribune* (allegedly) reported that the state administration had made the country's Jewish communities wait for seven years to receive the materials with which to repair Terezín's Jewish cemetery and that they had also made the communities solely responsible for undertaking that work.⁵⁴ The report implied that the state had shirked its duty to maintain the site as a memorial and thereby exacerbated the accusations of antisemitism leveled against Czechoslovakia in the West. It suggested a lack of empathy for Jews, a disregard for history, and a failure of the country's anti-fascist convictions.

When Jaroslav Knobloch, the SOEA official responsible for administering Jewish affairs, learned of the article he contacted the CJRC and the Regional National Committee in Ústí nad Labem for clarification. In his typical obsequious fashion, Rudolf Iltis, the CJRC's executive secretary, confirmed that no one at all had required the Jewish communities to work on the site.⁵⁵ Mr. Tichý, the national committee's ecclesiastical secretary, claimed that he had never received any requests for materials. He admitted, however, that the communities alone had been taking care of the cemetery since 1945.⁵⁶

This was only part of the story. Not only had the CJRC been paying two workers to maintain the cemetery, but it had also come to rely upon the labor of Jewish volunteers for the

⁵⁴ Memo: "Češi dovolují židům upravit terezínský hřbitov" [The Czechs are allowing Jews to fix the Terezín cemetery] (22 January 1954 [sic: 1955]), NAČR, SÚC, box 211. Despite the allegations of Czech officials, I found no such article in the *New York Herald Tribune* from 16–21 January 1955.

⁵⁵ Memo: "Češi dovolují židům upravit terezínský hřbitov" [The Czechs are allowing Jews to fix the Terezín cemetery].

⁵⁶ Ferdinand Tichý to Mr. Knobloch (1 February 1955). NAČR, SÚC box 211; and Knobloch, "Úřední záznam" [Office memo] (1 February 1955). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

same purpose. The CJRC raised money for the cemetery by selling grave markers to individuals with friends and relatives buried therein. It even sold picture-postcards of the site.⁵⁷ Despite the fact that the cemetery drew about 10,000 foreign and domestic visitors on an annual basis, it was only in 1958 that the national committee assumed the responsibility to pay the groundskeepers' salaries.⁵⁸ The cemetery, moreover, remained hard to access until 1969⁵⁹ and was it never incorporated into the national monument system.⁶⁰

On SOEA orders, Iltis responded to the *Herald Tribune* in the pages of *Věstník* and also over shortwave-radio.⁶¹ He first confirmed that the CJRC had taken excellent care of the cemetery since 1945. Then he attacked:

The authors of these false reports are crying crocodile tears for the “small community of Czechoslovak Jews.” Have they forgotten why the once numerous community became... so small? Surely, they have not. But it matters little to them. After all, it is exactly they and their bread-givers, the western imperialists, who fraternize [*bratříčkují*] with the hangmen of the Jews; they enter into pacts with them and once again provide weapons into their bloodstained hands!⁶²

If Iltis' reaction was sharper than usual, his vitriol, nonetheless, reflected his practice of aping Soviet-Bloc attacks on the West. CJRC leaders continued for years to deploy the Holocaust in

⁵⁷ “Terezínský hřbitov” [The Terezín cemetery], *Věstník*, vol. 11, no. 15-16 (15 April 1949): 178; “Beth chajim—dům života” [The house of life], *Věstník*, vol. 11, no. 26-27 (1 July 1949), 303; and “Zprávy z obcí” [News from the communities], *Věstník*, vol. 14, no. 11 (October 1952), 90.

⁵⁸ “RŽNO—předání hřbitova v Terezíně Národnímu památníku—zajištění finanční úhrady” [CJRC—the transfer of the cemetery to the Terezín National Monument—securing financial cover] (10 April 1957). NAČR, MŠK box 58, folder 3. As the budgets of the CJRC and the Ústí Jewish community ran through the SOEA, state officials technically could have argued that they had supported work at the cemetery all along—albeit unknowingly.

⁵⁹ Miroslav Pávek, “Co se děje na Židovském hřbitově v Terezíně?” [What is happening at the Jewish cemetery in Terezín?], *Věstník*, vol. 31, no. 6 (June 1969), 2.

⁶⁰ “Židovský hřbitov v Terezíně” [The Jewish cemetery in Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 14, no. 3 (March 1952), 22; cf. Soukupová, “Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání” [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 30.

⁶¹ Knobloch, “Úřední záznam” [Office memo].

⁶² “Lživá zpráva o terezínském hřbitově” [False reports about the Terezín cemetery], *Věstník*, vol. 17, no. 3 (March 1955): 7.

this propagandistic manner. Such practices, however, diminished in frequency and vehemence after the Paris event. 1955, in some ways, marked a transition.⁶³

On 25 October 1956, a four-member delegation from the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities arrived in Paris for the unveiling of the Memorial to the Unnamed Jewish Martyr, held under the auspices of the French President.⁶⁴ It was their first foray abroad since 1948. The SOEA had felt comfortable approving the trip and even paying for it because they knew that the Soviet Union had already accepted a similar invitation and that delegations from the other satellite states would be in attendance as well. In a memo to SOEA president Jaroslav Havelka, Knobloch explained the advantages of Czechoslovak-Jewish participation:

In light of the fact that in the West false reports are spread about the lives of Jews in the Czechoslovak Republic and that with relatively limited written contacts it remains extremely difficult to challenge them, the contributions [to the memorial] and the personal discussions of Dr. Sicher, [handwritten after the fact:] E. Katz, and Dr. Iltis will indubitably contribute to paralyzing the impact of enemy propaganda against us, and the trip of the Czechoslovak delegates to Paris will even be a positive contribution to matters of peace.⁶⁵

⁶³ Iltis and CJRC president František Ehrmann struck with similar venom in 1961, in response to Western concerns for the state of the Czechoslovak Jewish cemeteries. They blamed the situation on the Nazis and then concluded, “It remains only to regret that our American co-religionists did not express sufficient interest in the fates of Czechoslovak Jews during the period of World War II, and that they did not undertake effective steps to save Czechoslovak Jewry.” František Ehrmann and Rudolf Iltis, “Opis: Rada židovská náboženských obcí v krajích českých Praha 1” [Transcription: the CJRC, Prague 1] (10 May 1961). NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁶⁴ Rudolf Iltis, “Zpráva o cestě delegace československých židů do Paříže na slavnostní otevření mauolea neznámého židovského mučedníka” [Report on the trip of the delegation of Czech Jews to Paris for the celebrations of the opening of the mausoleum to the unknown Jewish martyr] (October 1956). NAČR, SÚC box 211, 1. For Soukupová’s analysis of the Paris event see “Proměny reflexe šoa” [Changes in the reflection of the Shoah], 125-26.

⁶⁵ “Návrh na uskutečnění cesty pražského vrchního rabína dr. Gustava SICHERA, a gen. tajemníka Rady židovských náboženských obcí a vedoucího redactora Věstníku ŽNO v Praze dr. Rudolfa ILTISE v říjnu t.r. do Paříže” (22 June 1956). [Proposal for executing the trip of Chief Rabbi Gustav SICHER and general secretary of the CJRC and the head editor of *Věstník ŽNO v Praze*, Dr. Rudolf Iltis in October of this year to Paris]. NAČR, SÚC box 211. Note that it was not only Czech and Slovak Jews who could not travel abroad. Czechoslovakia imposed some of the strictest travel restrictions upon its citizens out of any Soviet-Bloc country. Skilling, *Communism National and International*, 99.

Knobloch expected correctly that by participating in the Paris event Czechoslovakia would improve its image abroad. It could not have been comfortable for that country's leadership that Western propagandists relied upon its recent history to portray the entire Soviet Bloc as antisemitic, especially at a time when communist and capitalist countries were engaged in polemics about which of them were the true heirs to Nazi Germany.⁶⁶

The Czechoslovak-Jewish delegation made a strong impression. It distributed copies of *Jewish Studies*, a collection of essays in English dedicated to Chief Rabbi Sicher, with which they intended to demonstrate the continuing vitality of Czechoslovak Jewry under communist protection.⁶⁷ The delegates attended meetings with officials from the World Jewish Congress and the Société de Secours et Entraide, a Swiss, i.e. neutral, organization that distributed West German Holocaust reparations and other funds to survivors and Jewish communities in communist Europe.⁶⁸ Their talks initiated a period of cooperation and contact between Western Jewish organizations and Czechoslovak Jewry, which, among other things, brought hard currency into the economy.⁶⁹

The State Jewish Museum, represented by Volavková and Weil, also made a strong impression in Paris with an exhibit of children's drawings from Theresienstadt, adapted from

⁶⁶ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston and New York: Mariner, 2000), 85-102.

⁶⁷ Rudolf Iltis, ed., *Jewish Studies: Essays in Honour of the very Reverend Dr. Gustav Sicher Chief Rabbi of Prague* (Prague, Czechoslovakia: CJRC, 1955).

⁶⁸ Jaroslav Knobloch, "Poznámky k návštěvě vrchního rabína dr. G. Sichera a dr. R. Iltise u přednosty církevního odboru ministerstva školství a kultury s. ing. Plíhala dne 12. Listopadu 1956" [Notes on the visit of Chief Rabbi Dr. G. Sicher and Dr. R. Iltis with the head of the ecclesiastical division of the Minister of Education and Culture, comrade engineer Plíhal on 12 November 1956] (12 November 1956). NAČR, SÚC box 211; and Iltis, "Zpráva o cestě" [Report on the trip], 2 and 5-7.

⁶⁹ Jaroslav Knobloch, "Poznámky k návštěvě" [Notes on the visit]; and Rudolf Iltis, "Zpráva o cestě" [Report on the trip].

Weil's 1955 show. Though only attended by about 100 dignitaries, the exhibit itself generated significant international interest and called attention to the country's shifting politics.⁷⁰ It offered international observers a positive alternative to the Slánský Affair for thinking about Czechoslovakia and its Jews. In the years that followed, the State Jewish Museum sent modified versions of the exhibition to cities in Europe, Israel, and the USA, all with the state's permission and encouragement.⁷¹ In 1959, the museum published a collection of children's drawings and poems in English for sale internationally. One bore the title, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, which recalled a particularly touching poem.⁷² That March, a documentary film featuring the drawings, *Butterflies Don't Live Here*, premiered on Czechoslovak TV and won awards in both the Banská Bystrica (Slovakia) and Cannes film festivals.⁷³ Through these initiatives, American

⁷⁰ Iltis, "Zpráva o cestě," 6.

⁷¹ "Z pražského Státního židovského muzea" [From the Prague State Jewish Museum] *Věstník*, vol. 20., no. 1 (January 1958): 3; "Drobné zprávy" [Small reports], *Věstník*, vol. 22, no. 5 (May 1960): 11; "Kresby terezínských dětí žalují a varují" [The drawings of the Terezín children accuse and warn], *Věstník*, vol. 24, no. 3 (March 1962), 9; and "Ze Státního židovského muzea" [From the State Jewish Museum], *Věstník*, vol. 24, no. 4 (April 1964), 7. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hoped to use the exhibit in Israel to strengthen their Israeli allies, the League of Friendship (of) Israel-Czechoslovakia and the Communist Party of Israel. By naming them the exhibit's sponsors, they intended to demonstrate the superior anti-fascist commitments of the Israeli far left, relative to the ruling, left-wing MAPAI Party. The Soviet Bloc considered MAPAI an extension of American power and too lenient with West Germany. Memos dated 18 September 1959 and 29 July 1957 in MZV, TO-O 1945-1959, Izrael, box 5, folder 14. The ministry intervened again in 1963, when it sent an exhibit about the Czech Holocaust to Yad Vashem in honor of the League's fifteenth anniversary. It hoped to dissuade Israel from rapprochement with West Germany. Letter from Milan Jurza to MZV (20 August 1964). MZV, TO-O 1960-1964, Izrael Box 1.

⁷² Olga Herbenová, "Kresby židovských dětí z Terezína" [The drawings of the children from Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 21, no. 5 (May 1959): 4. Hana Volavková, ed., *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp, 1942-1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959); idem., ed., *Dětské kresby z koncentračního tábora Terezín* (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Státní židovského muzea v Praze, 1959).

⁷³ Rudolf Iltis, "Motýli nežijí tady v ghettu" [Butterflies do not live here anymore] *Věstník*, vol. 21, no. 2 (February 1959): 6; "Drobné zprávy" [Small reports], *Věstník*, vol. 21, no. 4 (April 1959): 10; and "Úspěch filmu o terezínských dětech v Cannes" [Success of a film about Terezín's children in Cannes] *Věstník*, vol. 21, no. 5 (June 1959): 5.

Jews gained unique familiarity with the Czech Holocaust.⁷⁴

Though of excellent quality, the exhibit also resonated internationally because it partook of an emerging trend in Holocaust memory. On both sides of the Atlantic, images of Jewish, yet de-Judaized, child-victims figured prominently in the first attempts to represent the genocide artistically for popular audiences.⁷⁵ *The Diary of Anne Frank* excited and inspired American audiences, particularly as a Broadway play in 1955 and a film in 1959.⁷⁶ Bruno Apitz's 1958 novel, *Naked among the Wolves*, about a Jewish child rescued by communist prisoners in Buchenwald, became a bestseller in East Germany and part of the school curriculum there in 1960.⁷⁷ Even the commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in Poland underwent a de-Judaizing process in the late 1940s.⁷⁸

Artists and consumers in the East and the West invested images of child-victims with an array of meanings. *The Diary of Anne Frank* spoke to American audiences in large part because the protagonist's negligible Jewishness meant that she could be a "Jew to Jewish audiences or simply a courageous girl" to a non-Jewish public still ambivalent about Jews.⁷⁹ *The Diary of*

⁷⁴ Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* 8 (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 8.

⁷⁵ Mark M. Anderson, "The Child Victim as Witness to the Holocaust: An American Story?" *Jewish Social Studies*, 14/1 (Fall 2007, new series): 1-22.

⁷⁶ Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*, The Samuel & Althea Stroum Lectures 14 (Seattle, Washington and London, United Kingdom: University of Washington Press, 2001), 17-19.

⁷⁷ Bill Niven, *The Buchenwald Child: Truth, Fiction, and Propaganda* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2007), 77-146.

⁷⁸ Marci Shore, "Children of the Revolution: Communism, Zionism, and the Berman Brothers," *Jewish Social Studies*, 10/3 (Spring/Summer 2004): 24-28.

⁷⁹ Anderson, "The Child Victim as Witness," 4. Rudolf Iltis, "Deník Anne Frankové" [The Diary of Anne Frank], *Věstník*, vol. 19, no. 2 (February 1957): 8; and Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 117-120. See also Soukupová, "Proměny reflexe šoa" [The reflection of the Shoah], 127-28.

Anne Frank, in all of its forms, helped to transform the Jewish genocide into “the ultimate standard for speaking of the victimization of people in the modern period in spheres that had no necessary connection to the Jews.”⁸⁰

The “Diary of Anne Frank” premiered in Prague as a play at the Central Theater of the Czechoslovak Army in June 1957.⁸¹ Rudolf Iltis took advantage of the occasion to intervene into American debates about the representation of Jewishness therein. He defended the play’s authors, Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich, against Mayer Levin’s accusations that they had de-Judaized the young protagonist. Iltis insisted that their script emphasized what he believed to have been the fundamental evil of Nazism, that it had sought to murder all Jews, regardless of their religious convictions. Iltis thus used “Anne Frank” to defend, by implication, the de-Judaized imagery of Czechoslovak commemorations and propaganda—and did so in the country’s official Jewish newsletter. (I wonder if Iltis, a representative of the Jewish religious community, appreciated the irony that he had also implied that it would have been more understandable if the Nazis had selected their victims based upon their religious convictions.)

Czech audiences perceived their child-victims with less abstraction than their American counterparts.⁸² They would have matured into fellow citizens had they survived. Their names and their artwork thus became nostalgic signifiers “for the unrealized dreams of the past and

The American-Jewish art critic Alfred Werner criticized the book of children’s drawings for eliding the artists’ Jewish identities. In “The Children of Terezín,” *Congress Bi-Weekly*, vol. 28, no. 16, pp. 13-14 (11 November 1981): 14. Diner sites this review on page 88.

⁸⁰ Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory*, 26.

⁸¹ “Československá premiéra hry ‘Deník Anny Frankové’ [The Czechoslovak premier of the play “The Diary of Anne Frank”], *Věstník*, vol. 19, no. 5 (May 1957): 10.

⁸² Werner imagined that a few of the Czech children artists might have matured into professional artists. For the rest, he envisioned lives, had they survived, as “young fathers and mothers, useful members of society.” Werner, “The Children of Terezín,” 14.

visions of the future that became obsolete.”⁸³ Of course, just what those visions of the future looked like differed from person to person, and particularly, between Jews and non-Jews.

Rabbi Feder hinted at a probable Jewish interpretation when he remarked “they even killed our children, so that there would not remain any youth out of which new Jews could mature.”⁸⁴ He, like Weil and Volavková, mourned not only those whom the Nazis and their collaborators murdered, but also the Czech-Jewish future that their deaths had foreclosed. As an erstwhile prisoner of Theresienstadt, Feder had ministered to many of the lost children himself. His vision of the precluded future, therefore, likely shone with the faces children whom he had known and whose ends he had witnessed.

The murdered children often represented something else to non-Jewish Czechs, particularly to the officials who approved the exhibitions. The children could have been saved for communist Czechoslovakia. With proper education, they, who knew horrors of fascism so well, would have had the potential to transcend their Judaism and to become the country’s “new socialist men.”⁸⁵ Of course, most of Theresienstadt’s 15,000 children never had this opportunity. In communist propaganda, therefore, they came to represent the integration that would have been, had the Nazis been stopped. Propagandists also deployed their deaths cynically to remind the world that the West had failed to act immediately against Hitler. Czech-Jewish leaders even referred to the children in the context of warning about the dangers of revitalizing and rearming

⁸³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), xvi. Boym does not address this phenomena directly, but her analytic framework is useful here.

⁸⁴ “Odhalení pomníku mučedníkům terezíského ghetta” [The unveiling of a memorial to the Theresienstadt Ghetto], 3.

⁸⁵ On the “new socialist man,” see Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*, 20-27; and David W. Paul, *The Cultural Limits of Revolutionary Politics: Change and Continuity in Socialist Czechoslovakia*, East European Monographs, XLVIII (Boulder, Colorado: East European Quarterly, 1979), 16-52.

West Germany.⁸⁶

Writing of *Naked among the Wolves*, Bill Niven notes the “bitter irony” of the “implication” that the communist system would have integrated the Jewish children had they survived, in light of the postwar persecution of Jews by the communist state.⁸⁷ Yet there was an even crueler irony at play. The emerging cult of the child-victim implied that Jewish children possessed a higher degree of innocence than their parents, precisely because they had not yet matured into Jews.⁸⁸ The exhibitions, though outwardly sympathetic, conformed to the idea prevalent in some Czechoslovak circles that adult Jewish victims had, in some ways, earned their fates, through their misplaced class and national loyalties and for their perceived wartime passivity.⁸⁹ This reflected a type of antisemitism, whose proponents (falsely) denied believing in any sort of inherited Jewishness.

Thus, much like *Anne Frank* did for Americans, the exhibit of artwork and poems from Theresienstadt helped Czechs to confront the Jewish genocide without having to interrogate their own attitudes towards Jews. By setting the moral standard for antisemitism not only at genocide, but at the mass murder of children, moreover, the exhibit threw the Slánský Affair into stark relief. It thereby helped party-state officials to eschew discussions about their own postwar

⁸⁶ For example, see “RŽNO souvěrcům v zahraničí” [From the CJRC to its coreligionists abroad] *Věstník*, vol. 13, no. 16 (18 April 1951): 182; and “Za mír! Proti remilitarisaci západního Německa” [For peace! Against the remilitarization of West Germany] *Věstník*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1 January 1955): 3.

⁸⁷ Niven, *The Buchenwald Child*, 113.

⁸⁸ Party-state administrators and leaders feared that Jewish youths would embrace Zionism. On concerns about children’s identities in general, see Matěj Spurný, “Political Authority and Popular Opinion: Czechoslovakia’s German Population 1948-1960,” *Social History*, 37/4, pp. 452-67 (4 November 2012): 458-59; and Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁸⁹ Sedlák, “Poté: Postoj a přístup k Židům” [Afterwards: the stance and approach to Jews], 166-68.

failures at Jewish reintegration. Memories of the Slánský Affair paled in comparison to visions of children-artists marching *en masse* to the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁹⁰

Despite differences in how various constituencies perceived and used images of child-victims, the theme's cross-cultural commonality offered an opportunity for coming together. It provided a new focus and set of symbols for political adversaries seeking rapprochement in the wake of the Slánský Affair. Western Jewish leaders interested in working in Czechoslovakia took the 1956 exhibit as a sign of the country's changing attitude towards its Jewish minority and as a gesture in their direction. At the same time, party-state administrators used the exhibit to redeem their country's tarnished reputation and to demonstrate before the entire world that their anti-Zionism did not mask a deeper antisemitism, as had been alleged (correctly) in the West. It took time, however, for this to translate into meaningful East-West cooperation. The initial contacts were first limited to semi-secret Holocaust reparation schemes, politicized displays of Czech-Jewish artifacts, and closely monitored meetings between Jewish leaders from either side of the Iron Curtain.⁹¹ These initiatives remained nearly invisible to most of the population, including some community members and certainly non-affiliated Jews.

Most other attempts to confront the Czech-Jewish tragedy on the world stage, yet still with the Soviet Bloc, failed. In 1959, the CJRC proposed unveiling the Pinkas Synagogue Memorial with an international anti-fascist conference in Prague to rival the Paris event of 1956. The Jewish leadership believed, with good reason, that the Ministry of Education and Culture would approve, particularly because the ministry's predecessor in the administration of Jewish

⁹⁰ Authors and propagandists frequently invoked this image. For example, in the introduction to their 1958 work, discussed above, Kraus and Kulka emphasize the guilt of Nazi war criminals still at large in West Germany as follows, "How is it even possible to conceive of a punishment for a man responsible for the murder of thousands of children?" *Noc a mlha* [Night and fog], 8.

⁹¹ Soukupová reaches a similar conclusion in "Židé v českých zemích" [Jews in the Czech lands], 48.

affairs, the SOEA, had permitted the State Jewish Museum to distribute flyers about the memorial in Paris.⁹² The CJRC was, indeed, correct.⁹³ Higher offices, however, rejected the plan “due to ecclesiastical-political barriers.”⁹⁴ They likely feared that Western Jews would take advantage of the event to indoctrinate their Czechoslovak coreligionists with Zionism and to reframe the Holocaust as a reason for supporting the State of Israel. Party-state administrators also likely wanted to avoid sending an erroneous message to their Soviet superiors and Arab trading partners that their commitment to anti-Zionism had flagged.

The authorities exercised similar caution in 1958 and 1959, in the context of designing the Czechoslovak pavilion for the Auschwitz museum. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters administered the project, and excluded both the CJRC and the State Jewish Museum from participating in it. At the insistence of the Union’s president, the design team, led by the Czech-Jewish historian, Erich Kulka, excluded from the exhibition

⁹² “Zpráva o cestě” [Report on the trip], 6. It was also mentioned in Rudolf Iltis, ed., *Jewish Studies*, 97.

⁹³ Ministry of Education and Culture, “Věc: Otevření památníku 77.297 židovských obětí nacismu–proti–fašistická manifestace” [Re: The opening of the memorial to the 77,297 Jewish victims of Nazism–anti-fascist manifestation] (17 January 1959). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁹⁴ Knobloch, memo (10 June 1957). NAČR, MŠK box 56, cited in Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 53. Heitlinger and Soukupová argue incorrectly when they insist that Knobloch (and the SOEA) was opposed to the Pinkas memorial. *Ibid.*, 52; and Blanka Soukupová, “Postoj státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968: Mezi konrolou, represemi, a ‘Blahosklonností’” [The position of the state with regard to the Jewish religious community in the Czech lands in the years 1956-1968: between control, repression, and “condescension”], *Lidé města/Urban People*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2012): 75-76; and *idem.*, “Židé a židovská reprezentace” [Jews and the Jewish representation], 102. When Knobloch inveighed against it, he sought only to prevent the Jewish community from collecting money for the project; in other words, to prevent Jewish money from going to projects beyond his purview. Knobloch, “Vyjádření církevního oddělení MŠK” [Remarks of the ecclesiastical division of the Ministry of Education and Culture] (10 June 1957). NAČR, MŠK box 58. After all, it was Knobloch, who granted permission to the CJRC and State Jewish Museum to distribute flyers about the Pinkas memorial in Paris. Letter from the State Jewish Museum to Ministry of Education and Culture (8 August 1956) and typed response on the reverse side by Knobloch. NAČR, SÚC box 211.

documents that attested to the deportation and murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews.

Ironically, the exhibition only acknowledged the Jewish identities of the Nazis' victims when it referred to those Jews whom the Nazis had interred in the "Czech Family Camp."⁹⁵

The political stakes were simply too high in Auschwitz and even in Prague for officials to permit the emerging co-narrative of Jewish suffering to share public space with the Marxist-Leninist/Czechoslovak-nationalist account of the 'official narrative'. Many in power, moreover, still clung to obscene hierarchies of victimization, rooted, at best, in a lack of empathy for Jews. Jan Vodička, the president of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, explained his orders to limit the representation of Jews as follows:

The goal of our exposition is to show the heinousness of the Nazi crimes. We do not, however, have an interest, with all deference to the memory of the fallen victims of Nazism, in the glorification of a group, which passively, without resistance were plunged into gas chambers.⁹⁶

Indeed, the country's official memory politics remained conservative and cautious, despite the ubiquity of Theresienstadt's "butterflies" and a renaissance of Czech Holocaust literature which began in the late-1950s.

The Trial of Adolf Eichmann and Public Recognition of the Holocaust

Substantial change required foreign impetus, which came in the guise of the 1961 trial in Israel of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi who coordinated the mass murder of Jews in occupied Europe. The

⁹⁵ Erich Kulka, "'Aryanization' of dead Jews" [The "Aryanization" of dead Jews], *Svědectví*, 11/42 (1971): 189-90; "Otevření československé expozice ve Státním muzeu v Osvětimi" [The opening of the Czechoslovak exposition in the State Museum in Auschwitz] (n.d., 1959). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4, bundle 181, archival unit 289, point 38; and "Vybudování čs. pavilónu v mezinárodním muzeu v Osvětimi" [The building of the Czechoslovak pavilion in the international museum in Auschwitz] (20 October 1958). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/2, bundle 181, archival unit 289, point 38.

⁹⁶ "'Aryanization' of dead Jews" [The "Aryanization" of dead Jews], 189.

trial posed serious challenges for Czechoslovakia. Its government and Communist Party were not alone in their objections to Israel's violation of Argentinean sovereignty, when its forces kidnapped Eichmann from that country in May 1960. They stood in the good company of the U.S. government when they questioned Israel's jurisdiction over Eichmann's crimes. Even the Anti-Defamation League, one of America's leading Jewish organization at the time, shared this concern.⁹⁷

The Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs fell into temporary crisis when the Israeli Legation in Prague asked it to procure documentary evidence for the case against Eichmann and to allow an Israeli investigator to work in the Czechoslovak archives. Not only did ministry officials fret over the trial's legitimacy, but they also raised concerns that Israel would politicize the event at the expense of the Soviet Bloc. They also worried that Israel would conduct the trial in such a way as to protect West Germany and the well-placed former Nazis in its government.⁹⁸ At the same time, however, the officials could not allow their country to be seen as standing in the way of bringing Eichmann to justice. Thus, together with the Communist Party, the officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs conceived a clever ruse. They arranged for the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, a non-governmental organization, to assemble evidence against Eichmann and to release it independently at an international press conference. Israel would thereby receive the documentation that it required without the official participation of Czechoslovakia in the

⁹⁷ David S. Wyman, "The United States," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed., David S. Wyman, 693-748 (Baltimore, MD and London, England: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 720; and Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 128-34.

⁹⁸ "Záznam z porady ze dne 4.7.1960 jednající o návrhu na postup ČSR v případě válečného zločince Adolfa Eichmanna" [Memorandum from the meeting on 7/4/1960 on the proposal for the approach of the CSR in the case of the war-criminal Adolf Eichmann] (5 July 1960). MZV, TO-T 1960-64, Israel, box 2.

preparations for the trial.⁹⁹ This was primarily a defensive strategy, in case that trial became a fiasco for the Soviet Bloc.

Czechoslovakia maintained this policy throughout the duration of the trial. In fact, wariness of the trial's political implications at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs increased as it unfolded.¹⁰⁰ The ministry declined an Israeli invitation to send a representative to Jerusalem as an observer.¹⁰¹ It also refused a request from the Ministry of Education and Culture to dispatch a videographer to Israel to film scenes for a forthcoming documentary on the Lidice massacre. Not even the opportunity to commemorate that event, which was the primary symbol of Czech, non-Jewish suffering under Nazi occupation, could justify collaborating with the Israelis.¹⁰² The officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even refused to provide Israeli diplomats directly with documentary evidence of Eichmann's personal responsibility for the Lidice massacre.¹⁰³ Of course, the Israelis had hoped that convincing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to cooperate on Lidice, would lead it, eventually, to provide information on the genocide of Czechoslovak Jews

⁹⁹ Ibid.; and "Záznam" memo attached to letter from the Israeli Legation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 5 January 1961 (13. February 1961). MZV, TO-T 1960-64, Israel, box 1.

¹⁰⁰ Miroslav Svoboda, a Czechoslovak diplomat in Israel, outlined his concerns about the trial after its proceedings concluded. They include: for-profit Israeli collusion with West Germany to protect Hans Globke; the failure of the prosecution to place Jewish resistance within a broader European context; propaganda portraying the Soviet Bloc as uncooperative and positioning Israel as the anti-fascist vanguard; and the purported attempts by Israel to use the Holocaust to excuse its mistreatment of its Arab minority and to lobby for the emigration of European Jewry. Miroslav Svoboda, "Mimořádná politická zpráva, věc: Proces s Adolfem Eichmannem" [Extraordinary political report, re: the trial of Adolf Eichmann] (11 September 1961, Tel Aviv). MZV, TO-T, 1960-64, Israel, box 2.

¹⁰¹ Collection of documents, "Pozvání zvláštního pozorovatele na proces s Eichmannem" [Invitation of a proprietary observer to the trial of Adolf Eichmann. MZV, TO-O 1960-64, Izrael box 1.

¹⁰² Collection of documents, "Vyslání kameramana Siegrota na Eichmannův proces do Izraele" [Sending cameraman Siegrot to the Eichmann trial in Israel]. MZV, TO-O 1960-64, Izrael box 1.

¹⁰³ Collection of documents regarding meetings of Israeli diplomats with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 7 February-11 August 1961. MZV, GS-T 1955-64, box 20, folder 12. See also memos of meetings dated 19 June 1961 and 2 February 1961. MZV, TO-T 1960-64, Izrael box 1.

as well.

Once again, Czech and Slovak Jewish leaders came to the assistance of party-state. They joined their counterparts from Poland, Hungary, and East Germany to protest in Berlin not only the continued freedom of Hans Globke, a major legal contributor to the Nazi state, but also his employment as the Director of the Federal Chancellery in West Germany. On the other hand, just like their state minders, Jewish leaders also hoped for Eichmann to face mortal justice. They followed his trial with publicly guarded optimism and excitement. They also encouraged Czech Jews to provide useful and damning testimony to the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters.¹⁰⁴

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, despite its cunning, could not prevent the Eichmann trial from having a profound domestic impact. The media carried the trial into the homes of citizens around the country, transforming the Jewish genocide into a subject of popular discussion and debate.¹⁰⁵ It reminded adults of events that they had either witnessed or heard about some fifteen years earlier—events that party-state institutions tended to ignore. In particular, the trial undermined the dominant narrative which tended to downplay the extent of popular collaboration and antisemitism (especially in fascist Slovakia), overstate the thoroughness of the country's postwar retribution tribunals, and lay blame for the Slovak-Jewish genocide upon a small clerical-fascist clique.¹⁰⁶ The trial, indeed, exposed so much about Slovakia's recent history that it paved the way for the production of *The Shop on Main Street*, an Oscar-winning film from 1965 which explored the various motivations behind the widespread collaboration of ethnic

¹⁰⁴ Soukupová, "Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání" [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 41-42; and idem., "Proměny reflexe šoa" [Changes in the reflection of the Shoah], 129-32.

¹⁰⁵ Already in June 1960, just a month after Eichmann's capture, Czechoslovak State Film included clips depicting Eichmann's crimes and the opening of the Pinkas Synagogue Memorial into its weekly program. "Pražská Pinkasova synagoga a doklady o Eichmannově vraždě činnosti ve filmovém týdníku" [The Prague Pinkas Synagogue and evidence of Eichmann's murderous actions in weekly films], *Věstník*, vol. 22, no. 9 (September 1960): 11.

¹⁰⁶ Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism," 429; and Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 176-78.

Slovaks.

The Eichmann trial also transformed the Holocaust for Czech Jews. Indeed, it had helped normalize the Holocaust in the Czech lands to such an extent, that by 1962, far earlier than many would have anticipated, Iltis could complain about what might now be called “Holocaust fatigue” among Czech Jews.¹⁰⁷ Their leaders had sanctified the provisioning of testimonies for the Eichmann trial, calling it a “holy responsibility, and that is a civic, human, and Jewish responsibility.”¹⁰⁸ Opportunities to testify in other trials and for research projects followed.¹⁰⁹ In 1964, for example, Iltis announced his plan to produce an edited volume of documents and photographs from Theresienstadt.¹¹⁰ This phenomenon coalesced in the 1960s with new opportunities to explore the Holocaust through literature and film to create an environment in which some Jews felt not only encouraged, but obligated to testify.¹¹¹ In 1964, Erich Kulka bragged in *Věstník* that he had been the first Czechoslovak witness in the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Rudolf Iltis, “Taková byla Osvětim” [So was Auschwitz], *Věstník*, vol. 24, no. 1 (January 1962): 5.

¹⁰⁸ František Ehrmann, Rudolf Iltis, and Benjamin Eichler, “Výzva ústředních organizací československých židů v záležitosti Adolfa Eichmanna” [Appeal of the central organs of Czechoslovak Jews in the affairs of Adolf Eichmann], *Věstník*, vol. 22, no. 8 (August 1969): 6.

¹⁰⁹ “Hledáme svědky proti dozorcům v Osvětimi” [We are looking for witnesses against the guards in Auschwitz], *Věstník*, vol. 23, no. 5 (May 1961): 5.

¹¹⁰ “Sborník ‘Terezín-Ghetto’” [Collection “Theresienstadt-ghetto”], *Věstník*, vol. 25, no. 7 (July 1964): 11. The appeals for materials and information did not indicate that the book would not come out in Czech. It was published only in the English (1965) and German (1968) editions, cited above.

¹¹¹ Lisa Peschel, “‘Structures of Feeling’ as Methodology and the Re-emergence of Holocaust Survivor Testimony in 1960s Czechoslovakia,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 22/2 (2012): 161-172.

¹¹² Erich Kulka, “Svědčil jsem!” [I testified!], *Věstník*, vol. 26, no. 6 (June 1964): 7-8.

Additional International Factors Influencing Memory Politics

Other international factors contributed as well to a radical change in domestic memory politics. The relaxation of travel restrictions to and from Czechoslovakia in the early 1960s and the courting of Israeli tourists by Czechoslovakia's official travel agency (because they brought hard currency into the economy) meant that Holocaust memorials, including the Jewish cemeteries, came under closer foreign scrutiny.¹¹³ This provided the impetus in 1966 for the Communist Party to order a major overhaul of the Terezín Memorial in light of its failure to address the Jewish genocide in specificity and detail.¹¹⁴ They did so, despite being fully aware that just one year earlier, the curators at Terezín had dedicated significantly more space within the museum's permanent exhibition to presenting the Jewish genocide to visitors.¹¹⁵ The party hoped to transform Terezín into a world-class memorial that could compete with similar Israeli institutions. Among other ideas, it suggested opening a documentation center in Terezín and improving access to its Jewish sites. These plans not only stayed in place, but reached partial fruition even after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which was intended to bring the liberalizing country back into the communist fold.¹¹⁶

Relaxed travel restrictions also meant that Czech-Jewish leaders could more easily meet with their counterparts abroad. This dovetailed well with the Communist Party's new strategy of

¹¹³ Collection of documents, "Izrael-turistika z Izraele do ČSSR" [Israel-Tourists from Israel to the CSSR]. MZV, TO-O 1960-64, Izrael box 1, slide 2989.

¹¹⁴ "Informativní zpráva o stavu a činnosti Památníku Terezín" [Informational report on the state of the activities of the Terezín Memorial] (4 August 1966). NACR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4, bundle 3, archival unit 4, bod 3.

¹¹⁵ Křížková, "Stálé muzejní expozice Památníku Terezín" [The permanent museum exhibit of the Terezín memorial], 58.

¹¹⁶ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 55-56; and Munk, "Z historie Památníku Terezín" [From the history of the Terezín Memorial], 16-17.

seeking potential allies in the West, particularly among progressive religious organizations.¹¹⁷ In 1964, with approval from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Jewish religious communities in Prague, Brno, and Ostrava established a shared “peace fund” to finance their leaders’ participation in international “anti-fascist demonstrations.” In the context of Jewish-state relations, this was a politically correct, yet transparent way to refer to Holocaust commemorations.¹¹⁸ From the ministry’s perspective, these gatherings offered opportunities for Czech- and Slovak- Jewish leaders to reiterate the messages of Paris-1956 and to seek more hard currency from Western-Jewish coffers.¹¹⁹ To the Czech-Jewish leaders, it offered opportunities to meet with Jewish luminaries from around the world and to find validation among them for their wartime (and postwar) experiences. They and their communities also benefited from their new allies’ desire to support Jewish cultural initiatives behind the Iron Curtain. This included a promise from the Memorial Fund for Jewish Culture to finance studies of the Holocaust in the Czech lands and Slovakia.¹²⁰

The Jewish genocide also functioned as the limit for Czech-Jewish initiatives and engagement abroad, at least as far as the state was concerned.¹²¹ The SOEA and the Ministry of Education and Culture had indeed acted relatively graciously in permitting Czech and Slovak Jewish leaders to participate in Holocaust commemorations abroad and to meet privately with

¹¹⁷ A tremendous cache of documents attesting to this change can be found in NAČR, SUC box 9.

¹¹⁸ Collection of documents, “Statut mírového fondu Rady židovských náboženských obcí” [Statutes of the peace fund of the CJRC] (August 1966). NAČR, MŠK box 56, folder 2.

¹¹⁹ Soukupová, “Postoj státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství” [The position of the state with regard to the Jewish religious community], 77.

¹²⁰ “RŽNO a ÚSZNO–žadost o souhlas k přijetí finančních příspěvků ze zahraničí na kulturní činnost” [CJRC and the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia–request for permission to receive financial contributions from abroad for cultural activities (2 March 1966). NAČR, MŠK box 57.

¹²¹ Soukupová reaches a similar conclusion as I do in “Postoj státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství” [The position of the state with regard to the Jewish religious community], 84.

their Western counterparts. Yet both organs joined the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in refusing to allow their country's Jewish communities to join the World Jewish Congress and to participate in its events. Party-state officials in Czechoslovakia uniformly considered the congress to be a Zionist organization in political alignment with the USA. It mattered little to them that Hungary had allowed its official Jewish community to join the World Jewish Congress as a constituent member or that the Polish government permitted its Jewish representatives to attend the congress's meetings as observers.¹²²

Conclusion

Beginning in 1956, Czechoslovak authorities entered into a tacit agreement with the CJRC and the State Jewish Museum. The two organizations would be permitted and encouraged to participate in and contribute to Holocaust commemorations abroad (Berlin, 1961; Warsaw, 1963; Dresden, Budapest, and Paris, 1965). In exchange, their representatives were to perform “ideological labor” on behalf of the state, by using these opportunities, as well as their newsletters, to repair Czechoslovakia's image abroad. They were also to lend their voices, as

¹²² The leadership of the CJRC claimed not to want membership in the WJC in 1967, in accordance with state policy. It did, however, request repeatedly to attend WJC meetings as observers, which the Ministry of Education of Culture also forbade. On the other hand, that ministry did allow the CJRC to work on an ad hoc basis with the congress. See “Mimořadný sjezd RŽNO” [Extraordinary congress of the CJRC] (31 January 1967). NAČR, MŠK box 56. In the immediate postwar and pre-Communist years, the CJRC, under the leadership of Ernst Frischer, declined an invitation of membership from the WJC. Arnošt Frischer, letter to Stephen Barber (24 October 1946). WJC box H99, folder 19. Kurt Wehle, the general secretary of the CJRC from 1945 to 1948, claimed that the CJRC became an “affiliate” of the WJC sometime before 1948. It is unclear what he meant by this designation. Wehle, “The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: 1945-1948,” in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, vol. 3, ed. Avigdor Dagan (Philadelphia, PA and New York, NY: The Jewish Publication Society of America and the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 516; and Jacob Ari Labendz “‘In unserem Kreise:’ Czech-Jewish Activism and Immigration in America, 1939-1994,” *Jewish Culture and History* (Forthcoming, Dec. 2014).

representatives of the Nazis' primary victim group, to whatever political campaign the Soviet Bloc was then waging.¹²³ For example, in 1967, they even used the Holocaust as a vehicle for protesting the Vietnam War.¹²⁴ This dynamic only intensified after the Eichmann Affair thrust the Holocaust, in all of its specificity, into the spotlight of international affairs.

Marshaling Jewish voices of remembrance indeed contributed to improving Czechoslovakia's image abroad, particularly among Western-Jewish constituencies. It also signaled a new framework for East-West cooperation. Western Jewish leaders and the State of Israel allowed the Slánský Affair to fade, temporarily, into history. The resulting cooperation also provided Czechoslovakia with the very financial benefits that the SOEA had so eagerly anticipated in 1956.¹²⁵ In contrast, the state's new memory politics did little to strengthen the appeal and effect of communist propaganda abroad. The interventions of Czech and Slovak Jews had little bearing on the status of West Germany in the eyes of the capitalist world and Westerners remained skeptical of Czechoslovakia's intentions to foster the redevelopment of Jewish life at home.

Flaunting the Czech Holocaust also had the unintended consequence of undermining the "official narrative" in the domestic public sphere, and with it, the two-tiered system of memory politics which had emerged at the onset of communist rule. Even if Jewish leaders presented the

¹²³ I have borrowed this term from Y. Michal Bodemann's analysis of Jewish politics in postwar Germany. "A Reemergence of German Jewry?" in *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature since 1989*, eds. Sander Gilman and Karen Remmler (NY: NYU Press, 1994). For its pertinence to the Czech case see Soukupová, "Postoj státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství" [The position of the state with regard to the Jewish religious community], 84.

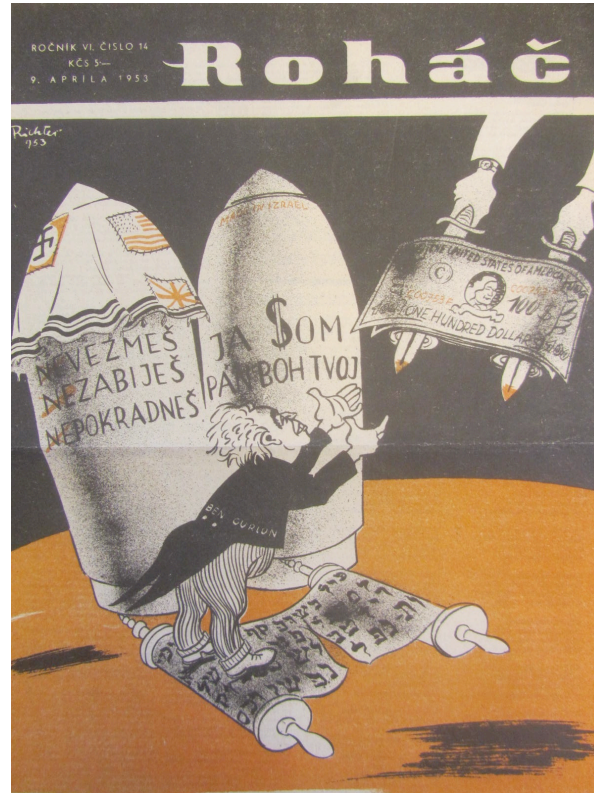
¹²⁴ František Fuchs and Otta Heitlinger, "Rezoluce miořádného sjezdu delegátů židovské náboženské společnosti v krajích českých a moravských" [Resolution of the extraordinary congress of delegates of the Jewish Religious Community in the Bohemian and Moravian lands] (29 January 1967); and "Mimořádný sjezd RŽNO" [The extraordinary congress of the CJRC] (31 January 1967). NAČR, MŠK box 56.

¹²⁵ For example, Knobloch, "Poznámky k návštěvě" [Notes on a visit].

Holocaust and the Second World War in party-loyal, Marxist-Leninist terms, both at home and abroad, the very fact of their Jewishness, particularly as spokespeople for the state, highlighted the wanton elisions of 1950s Soviet-Bloc memory politics. They and the exhibitions of children's drawings that they promoted focused attention on the fundamental place of antisemitism in Nazi politics and in the history of the Second World War.

In the coming chapter, I take this turn as a point of departure for an analysis of the shifting place of the Holocaust in Czech, domestic political culture from 1956 to 1989. During the early post-Stalinist years, the Communist Party's nascent reform wing encouraged a more honest relationship with history. This, along with the protections offered by the party-state's own propagandistic embrace of the Holocaust, offered new opportunities for individuals and organizations to engage more publicly with the Holocaust as a theme of cultural production—long before other taboos broke. In short time, reformers within the Communist Party settled upon the Holocaust as a vehicle for articulating lightly veiled criticisms of the party-state, Stalinism, and the political conduct of average Czechs and Slovaks. It turned on the shared association of both Stalinism and the Holocaust with antisemitism. Soon after, even the party-state began incorporating the Holocaust into its own domestic propaganda in a well-intentioned bid to benefit from its popularity and to mark its own political progress away from Stalinism.

FIGURE ONE¹²⁶



“~~Thou Shall Not Take; Thou Shall Not Kill; Thou Shall Not Steal; I am your Sovereign God~~”¹²⁷

¹²⁶ The editors of the Slovak political satire magazine *Roháč* [horn-beetle] chose this cartoon for the cover of the 9 April 1953 issue, which featured attacks on the USA, the Vatican, Israel, “capitalists,” and Great Britain. The cartoon depicts Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion (1886-1973) receiving what appears to be a new law from his American sponsors. The dollars represent the loan guarantees the USA provided to Israel and which, in this telling, led its leaders to trample upon their ethical commitments, embodied in the tattered Torah scroll. Large bombs replace the tablets of the Ten Commandments and the changes to its text reflect an inversion of the core principles of Judaism. Nazi, American, and British flags adorn the prayer shawl that drapes over one of the bombs. It associates fascism, capitalism, and Judaism. A caption, not displayed above, reads, “The holiest scripture from the faithful servant of [the] Lord (Eisenhower).”

When the Israeli Legation complained about this cartoon to the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its representative replied that the state’s commitment to a free press had tied its hands. He alleged, moreover, that the Israeli media was engaged in a similar anti-Czechoslovak campaign. Czechoslovak diplomats in that country, however, could not provide supporting evidence. MZV, TO-O 1945-59, Israel, box 1, folder 7; and MZV, Generalní sekretariat-A 1945-1954, box 155, folder 1953-1954.

¹²⁷ I took liberties with the translation in order to preserve the replacement of the letter “S” with a dollar sign. The text translate literally to “I am the Lord your God.”

FIGURE TWO

Picture postcard depicting the “Memorial to Jewish Heroes and Martyrs in Olomouc”¹²⁸



“Do not cry for the dead and do not pity them. Cry for, rather, and bemoan those who left in order that they not return and who no longer behold their homeland.’—So speaks the inscription on the memorial to us, the living.”

¹²⁸ *Věstník*, vol. 9, no. 45 (11 November 1949): 505

FIGURE THREE

The Memorial in Terezín¹²⁹



“Chief Rabbi Dr. Gustav Sicher unveils the memorial to the martyrs of the Theresienstadt Ghetto together with the regional ecclesiastical secretary, Ferdinand Tichý, and the regional rabbi, Dr. Bernard Farkaš. (The memorial was erected according to the design of architect Karl Lingge from Teplice.)”

¹²⁹ *Věstník*, vol. 17, no. 10 (1 October 1955): 3

TABLE I

Memorials Installed by Jewish Communities in Jewish Cemeteries in the Czech Lands

City	Date	<i>Věstník</i>
Česká Lípa	6/6/48	48-06-18, 303
Pardubice	9/5/48	48-09-10, 400
Prague	11/28/48	48-11-19, 520
Čáslav	5/22/49	49-06-03, 259
Nový Jičín	12/5/48	49-06-03, 259
Moravská Ostrava	5/25/45	49-07-15, 322
Praha	9/30/49	49-09-30, 441
Plzeň	9/11/49	49-09-30, 445
Liberec	9/26/49	49-11-11, 507
Olomouc	10/23/49	49-11-11, 509
Náchod	10/30/49	49-11-18, 521
Uherský Brod	2/5/50	50-03-17, 47
Kolín	4/23/50	50-04-14, 175
Brno	4/23/50	50-04-14, 175
Moravská Ostrava	5/14/50	50-06-02, 256
Hradec Králové	10/22/50	50-10-13, 473
Prostějov	10/8/50	50-10-27, 496
České Budějovice	10/15/50	50-11-03, 508
Plzeň	9/23/51	51-09-12, 438
Turnov	8/10/52	52-09-01, 82
Jičín	8/31/52	52-10-01, 90
Příbram	9/12/54	54-10-01, 74
Terezín	Sep-55	55-10-01, 1
Tábor	10/23/55	55-12-01, 5
Orlova	5/20/56	56-08-01, 9
Kyjov	8/19/56	56-10-01, 10
Bzenec	8/19/56	56-10-01, 10
Třebíč	10/27/57	57-12-01, 6
Hodonín	5/15/60	60-06-01, 9
Mikulov	4/20/75	75-05-01, 7
Mariánské lázně	10/1/80	80-10-01, 8
Prague	6/20/83	83-06-01, 1

Věstník was the official bulletin of the Jewish community in the Czech lands.
The number designates: year-month-day, page number.

CHAPTER THREE

“Liquidated Several Times”? The Holocaust and Public Culture, 1956-1989

There are today not a few people who are already oversaturated with the theme of the “concentration camp.” We find among them even those who themselves passed through the Nazi camps—and [they] desire to annihilate from thought completely the burdensome experience of the Hitler period.

- Rudolf Iltis, Secretary of the Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands, January 1962¹

There is also silence on the fact that our Jewish minority has actually been liquidated several times—not only *en masse* by Nazism but also by the subsequent inclusion of the Jews who survived under the category of Czech or Slovak nationality without regard to their ethnic and cultural differences.²

- Charter 77 [the major Czech dissident association], “The Tragedy of the Jews in Post-War Czechoslovakia,” April 1989

* * *

These quotes paint two very different pictures of the prevalence of Holocaust-related cultural production in communist Czechoslovakia and, therefore, raise a number of questions. How could Rudolf Iltis complain about “oversaturation,” just seven short years after the party-state abandoned its two-tiered system of memory politics, which had limited the representation of the Holocaust in the public sphere? What changed in the thirty-seven years following 1962, when Iltis published his statement, to motivate and justify Charter-77’s bombastic accusation of the party-state? What did these shifts in memory practices mean for Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs? What does this teach us about Jewish-state relations in communist Czechoslovakia and the

¹ Rudolf Iltis, “Taková byla osvětim” [Thus was Auschwitz] *Věstník*, vol. 24. no. 1 (January 1962): 5

² Charter 77, “The Tragedy of the Jews in Post-War Czechoslovakia,” Document no. 29/1989 (5 April 1989), annotated and trans. in Peter Brod, “Documents: Czechoslovakia: Jewish Legacy and Jewish Present,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1990): 64 for quote.

integration of Jews into the Czech nation between the decline of Stalinism in the 1950s and 1989?

I attribute the emergence and success of the Holocaust as theme of popular and political culture during the late-1950s to its usefulness as a symbol in the discourses of de-Stalinization and socialist reform. The theme then moved into relative public obscurity after 1972. During this period, the party-state sought to restore national memory politics to *status quo ante* of the mid-1950s. At the same time, non-Jewish Czechs no longer found the Holocaust useful as a metaphor for expressing their political ideologies. No longer concerned about the Holocaust's potential political uses and eager to court the sympathy of American Jews, state administrators permitted a limited resurgence of Holocaust-related cultural production in the 1980s. By situating Czech-Jewish Holocaust memory and commemoration in this a broader context, I seek to continue the discussion of the previous chapter regarding the negotiation of Jewish national integration in the public sphere. This provides a window, as well, into Jewish communal politics.

With this approach I depart from most accounts of Holocaust commemoration in communism Europe. These have tended to characterize Holocaust-memory work as inherently oppositional to communism and, in 1960s Czechoslovakia, merely the byproduct of the temporary relaxation of censorship.³ Such studies often employ a Manichean framework of

³ I have the following works principally in mind. Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews after 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 47-66; Livia Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 156-99; idem., *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln, NE and Jerusalem, Israel: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2005), 265-307; and Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném Československu" [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], in *Židé v novodobých dějinách: Soubor přednášek na FF UK, Uspořádal Václav Veber* [Jews in contemporary history: A collection of lectures at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, organized by Václav Veber] (Prague, Czech Republic: Karolinium, 1997), 147-62.

analysis, based upon static characterizations of communist ideology and culture, the premises of which dictate their conclusions. They offer little more than the exploration of the tautology that communist regimes repressed Holocaust memory because commemorating the Holocaust is good and the communists were bad. This, of course, depends upon understanding Stalinism as authentic communism and reform socialism as having been an aberration from it. Many authors have failed, therefore, to offer meaningful insights into the politics of Holocaust memory in communist Europe and related questions about postwar Jewish integration.

1956-1967: Changes in the Domestic Political Culture Associate with the Holocaust

The conspicuous proliferation of Holocaust-related cultural production in Czechoslovakia, which intensified between 1956 and 1969, evolving in tone and implication as it did, both reflected and constituted attempts to reform Czechoslovak socialist society from the inside, by party members, fellow travelers, and sympathizers. It was also a response to the increasing relaxation of

Blanka Soukupová engages more thoughtfully with the question of how non-Jewish and communist Czechs deployed the Holocaust as a political symbol, but fails to situate their activities sufficiently enough within the evolution of Czech political culture. Blanka Soukupová, “Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání po Šoa (k významům pamětních míst a míst v paměti). Léta 1945 až 1989” [Prague in Jewish collective memory after the Shoah (towards the meaning of memorial sites and sites of memory). The years 1945 until 1989] in *Neklidná krajina vzpomínání: Konkurenční společenství paměti ve městě* [Unsettled collective memory: the competition of society of memory in the city], *Urbánní studie*, vol. 1 (Prague, Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2010), 9-56; idem., “Židé v českých zemích v šedesátých letech 20. století (léta uvolnění a opatrných nadějí v intencích reformního komunismu)” [Jews in the Czech lands in the sixties of the 20th century (Years of liberalization and cautious hope in the intentions of communist reform)], in *Reflexie Holokaustu* [Reflections on the Holocaust], eds. Monika Vrzgulová and Peter Salner (Bratislava, Slovakia: Zing Print, 2010), 36-56; and idem., “Proměny reflexe šoa v politice židovské reprezentace” [Changes in the reflection of the Shoah in the politics of Jewish representation], in *Židovská menšina v Československu v letech 1956-1968. Od destalinizace k pražkému jaru* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia in the years 1956-1968. From de-Stalinization to the Prague Spring], eds. Blanka Soukupová and Miloš Pojar (Prague, Czech Republic: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2011), 119-40.

ensorship that culminated in its short-lived abandonment in 1968. Understandably, Jewish citizens took a lead role in authoring new works of literature,⁴ film,⁵ and scholarship,⁶ on the theme of the Holocaust, and in re-staging theatrical productions that originated in Theresienstadt.⁷ With these acts of creative testimony, they sought not only to reintroduce the

⁴ Scholars stress the paramount importance of Holocaust literature to Jewish-state relations in 1960s Czechoslovakia. Some of the most interesting and recent work on this topic can be found in the collections edited by Jiří Holý: *Holokaust-Šoa-Zagłada v české, slovenské a polské literatuře* [The Holocaust in Czech, Slovak, and Polish literature] (Prague, Czech Republic: Charles University–Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2007); *The Representation of the Shoah in Literature, Theatre and Film in Central Europe: 1950s and 1960s* (Prague, Czech Republic: Akropolis, 2012); and *Šoa v české literatuře a v kulturní paměti* [The Shoah in Czech literature and in cultural memory] (Prague, Czech Republic: Akropolis, 2011).

⁵ See my bibliography for a list of Czech Holocaust films. The most widely cited work on the subject avoids historical contextualization and focuses instead on questions of representation and memory. Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 52-89. Alice Aronová's MA thesis, though impressive, focuses too much attention on the failure of Czech cinema to depict the Holocaust accurately and entirely. "Obraz židů v českém hraném filmu" [The picture of Jews in Czech feature films] (M.A. Thesis: Department of Film Studies, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic 2002). Aronová provides exhaustive detail and better historical contextualization in her doctoral study of the portrayal of Jews on Czech television. She focuses, however, narrowly on the television industry, rather than making bold claims about Czech political culture. "Židovská tematika v české televizní hrané tvorbě" [Jewish themes in Czech television feature films] (Ph.D. Diss: Department of Film and Television, the Czech Academy of Performing Arts, Prague, Czech Republic, 2007). Omer Bartov includes a number of Czech films into his transnational study of cinematic representation of Jews. Although he offers a number of salient arguments, his thematic focus on antisemitism biases his interpretations of Czech films. Bartov's attempt to contextualize the films within Czech political culture fail to address its changing nature. *The "Jew" in Cinema: from The Golem to Don't Touch My Holocaust* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2005).

⁶ Michal Frankl, "Die 'Endlösung der Judenfrage' und die Narrative der tschechischen Geschichte 1945-1989" ["The solution to the Jewish question" and the narrative of Czech history, 1945-1989], in *Geschichtsschreibung zu den böhmischen Ländern im 20. Jahrhundert: Wissenschaftstraditionen, Institutionen, Diskurse* [Historiography on the Czech lands in the 20th century: academic traditions, institutions, discourses] (Munich, Germany: R. Oldenburg, 2006), 255-77; and idem., "Konečné řešení židovské otázky" v současných učenicích dějepisu" ["The final solution to the Jewish problem" in contemporary history textbooks], *Terezínské studie a dokumenty* (1999): 338-361.

⁷ Lisa Peschel, "The Prosthetic Life: Theatrical Performance, Survivor Testimony and the Terezin Ghetto, 1941-1963 (PhD Diss: University of Minnesota, 2009); and Lisa Peschel,

history of Jewish suffering into the public sphere, but also to renegotiate and normalize the terms of Jewish integration into Czech society. Non-Jewish citizens participated as well. Some did so out of sympathy for their Jewish compatriots and interest in their experiences. Others used the Holocaust as a means to enact a public refutation of Stalinism, to recast Czechoslovak society as politically and culturally reformed, and to call for further liberalization. Aside from works of art, interventions also took the forms of museum exhibitions and political demonstrations.⁸ The unique utility of the Holocaust to function as a vehicle for criticizing and transforming political culture derived much of its discursive force from the prominent place of antisemitism in Czechoslovak-Stalinist culture and the elisions of Jewish wartime experiences from the master-narrative of Stalinist historiography.

A crisis in communist attitudes towards history opened the door for more robust treatments of the Holocaust in the second half of the 1950s. Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 indictment of Stalin, along with the liberation of the first wave of wrongly incarcerated Czechoslovak political prisoners, shook the foundations of communist faith in Czechoslovakia and around the world. When the new Soviet leader blamed Stalin for corrupting socialism and when he rejected a once-celebrated decade, he undermined the Stalinist dogma that communism would evolve in a necessary and predictable way from social processes bound to and directed by historical law. Khrushchev introduced further contingency into communist philosophies of history by haltingly reviving Lenin's theory that each nation would chart its own path to

Dalibor Dobiáš, and Michael Wögerbauer, *Divadelní texty ze terezínského ghetta 1941-1945* (Prague, Czech Republic: Akropolis, 2008).

⁸ Arno Pařík, "Exhibits at the Prague Jewish Museum, 1946-1992," *Review of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews*, no. 7 (1993): 69-84; Hana Volavková, "The Jewish Museum of Prague," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, vol. 3, ed., Avigdor Dagan (Philadelphia, PA and New York, NY: JPSA and the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 567-83.

communism.⁹

Taking a queue from Moscow, communists around the world reconsidered their beliefs about history. Czechoslovak communists were no exception. They endeavored to save socialism from Stalinism by abandoning the teleological interpretations of human events that had characterized the previous decade and by re-engaging with historical inquiry. They sought the path to authentic Czechoslovak communism in local action and regional history, taking into account the particularities of the various “national, ethnic, confessional [and] religious identities,” which had reasserted themselves after 1956. The historian Pavel Kolář identifies this as a shift “from a programmatic to a processual form of utopia.”¹⁰ As such, he characterizes de-Stalinization as a “return to history.” He writes, “[t]he past was increasingly freeing itself from the yoke of the future, which had previously determined the Stalinist concept of history.” At stake was the very legitimacy of the Communist Party.¹¹

The slow abandonment of teleological, Stalinist philosophies of history lowered the stakes of presenting the Holocaust and Jewish wartime experiences to the public. After all, without a singular master-narrative of communist ascension to undermine, calling attention to widely known events of recent history—particularly after the Eichmann trial—posed little danger. The uses of the Holocaust in Czechoslovak foreign propaganda, moreover, offered a level of

⁹ On Khrushchev and the de-Stalinization of East Central Europe, see H. Gordon Skilling, *Communism National and International: Eastern Europe after Stalin* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1964). On his subsequent attempts to restore unity to the Soviet Bloc and deemphasize the national paths theory, particularly in matters of foreign policy, see Michal Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce: Zrod a počátky marxistického revizionismu ve střední Evropě 1953-1960* [Looking for the lost meaning of revolution: the genesis and beginnings of Marxist revisionism in Central Europe, 1953-1960] (Prague, Czech Republic: Argo, 2009), 44.

¹⁰ Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce* [Looking for the lost meaning of revolution] 405

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 106-19 and 410-13, see 413 for quote.

protection to Holocaust memory practitioners, as did the recognition that Western visitors expected a degree of Holocaust consciousness from Czechoslovak institutions. Finally, a silent rejection of the virulent domestic anti-Zionism of the first postwar years emboldened Czech Jews and others to intervene.

A few examples will suffice to illustrate the scope and contours of Holocaust-related cultural production between 1955 and 1959. In 1956, the State Jewish Museum and the Council of Jewish Religious Communities (CJRC) opened a joint exhibition in Prague's Maisel Synagogue which, for the first time, presented side-by-side accounts of persecution and cultural production in Theresienstadt.¹² Four years later, the museum opened a larger, two-part exhibit in the synagogues around Prague's medieval Jewish cemetery. The museum intended to shame West Germany for allegedly covering up Nazi war crimes and protecting those responsible for them.¹³ Already in 1955, František Kraus had published an autobiography, which told of his experiences as a Jewish prisoner in Theresienstadt and Auschwitz.¹⁴ In 1956, Arnošt Lustig published *Night and Hope (Noc a naděje)*, a collection of short stories based on his years as a boy in Theresienstadt. Two years later, he released *Diamonds of the Night (Démanty noci)*, a novel about two boys who escape from a Nazi transport. Jiří Weil reissued his novel, *Life with a Star (Život s hvězdou, 1949)* in 1957¹⁵ and one year later published *Elegy for the 77,297 Victims (Žalozpěv za 77 297 obětí)*. In 1958, Jan Otčenášek published *Romeo, Juliet and the Darkness (Romeo, Julie a tma)*, a novel about an ill-fated romance between a non-Jewish Czech boy and a

¹² "Výstava Terezín-Ghetto" [The exhibit Terezín-Ghetto], *Věstník*, vol. 19, no. 1 (January 1957): 4.

¹³ Soukupová, "Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání" [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 35; and Hana Volavková, "Co připravuje Státní židovský museum" [What is the State Jewish Museum preparing], *Věstník*, vol. 22, no. 1 (January 1960): 10.

¹⁴ "Nová kniha F. R. Krause" [A new book by F. R. Kraus], *Věstník*, vol. 18, no. 11 (November 1955): 4.

¹⁵ "Zajímavosti" [Of interest], *Věstník*, vol. 19, no. 3 (March 1957): 11.

Jewish Czech girl, set during the Nazi occupation. The following year, the director, Jiří Weiss, adapted that book into the first Holocaust-themed film to appear in Czechoslovak theaters since the censors banned Alfréd Radok's *A Distant Journey* in 1949. During these same years, the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters began paying greater attention to "victims of racial persecution" in its commemorative activities.

This non-exhaustive list, which covers only 1955-1959, demonstrates that the Holocaust went from being a taboo subject—or at least one confined to particular arenas—to a central theme of Czech popular culture in just a few years.¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that the political climate did not change overnight. Censors still forced Jiří Weiss to reshoot scenes from *Romeo, Juliet and the Darkness* which depicted Czech complicity in the Nazis' crimes. Someone even accused him publicly of having directed a "Zionist" film.¹⁷ In these early years, CJRC leaders understood that they could not ask too much of the authorities at Terezín, despite their desire for the memorial there to pay more attention to the history of the former Ghetto.¹⁸

The early emergence of Holocaust-related cultural production relative to the political liberalization of Czechoslovakia suggests that party-state authorities did not consider it to have been inherently oppositional in nature or threatening to the legitimacy of their rule.¹⁹ Had they believed this to have been the case, they certainly would have censored it. (That they did not is

¹⁶ Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 178-93.

¹⁷ Jiří Weiss, "Jiří Weiss," interviewed by Antonín Liehm (1969), in Antonín J. Liehm, ed. *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience* (New York, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974), 69. Censors cut similar scenes from Alfréd Radok's masterpiece *The Distant Journey*. Jiří Cieslar, "Living with the Long Journey: Alfréd Radok's *Daleká cesta*," in Toby Haggith and Joanna Newmann eds., *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933* (New York, NY: Wallflower Press, 2005), 222.

¹⁸ Collection of documents regarding the 1967 congress of the CJRC in Prague. NAČR, MŠK box 56; and "Mimořádný sjezd delegátů Židovských náboženských obcí v krajích českých" [The extraordinary congress of the delegates of the CJRC], *Věstník*, vol. 29, no. 3 (March 1967): 3-5.

¹⁹ Soukupová, "Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání" [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 56.

particularly shocking, because the renegotiation of the Holocaust's place in Czech political culture had considerable implications both for how its citizens understood Jews—and therefore Zionism—and for the country's foundational myth, which was based in a specific interpretation of the Second World War that had, heretofore, elided the Holocaust.) Indeed, the Czechoslovak Communist Party stood out among its counterparts across East-Central Europe for its resistance to political liberalization. Led by First Secretary Antonín Novotný, its leaders hampered the processes of de-Stalinization in order to protect themselves from the repercussions of having participated in the Slánský Affair and the associated trials.²⁰ In 1961, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union called for additional reform in Czechoslovakia. The party-state responded cosmetically. It renamed some streets and removed the enormous Stalin statue that overlooked Prague.²¹ Its paranoid leadership, nonetheless, took few steps to prevent the commemoration of the Holocaust or its representation in the public sphere. In short time, the party even incorporated Holocaust commemorations into its own arsenal of propagandistic tools for re-establishing its domestic legitimacy.

It therefore makes far more sense to evaluate instances of Holocaust-related cultural production in terms of the party's internal struggle to reform itself after 1956 and the reflection of those processes in society at large. Keeping in mind the “slowness of de-Stalinization as an intellectual process of changing language and therefore the possibility of new ideas,” it stands to reason that the initial forays into this new field of representation departed only hesitantly from the conservative-communist frameworks of the previous decade.²² This may explain the

²⁰ Skilling, *Communism National and International*, 89-98.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 89-104.

²² Marci Shore, “Engineering in the Age of Innocence: A Genealogy of Discourse inside the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, 1948-67,” *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1998): 430.

conformity and non-antagonistic tones of the earliest interventions by the museum, the CJRC, Kraus and Kulka, and novelists like Norbert Frýd.²³ Attributing their perceived shortcomings to pressure from the party-state alone, as some have, not only mischaracterizes the political culture of the Communist Party, but it also fails to recognize the struggles of Holocaust memory activists to balance their commitments to socialism and their country with the responsibility that they felt to tell the story of European Jewry.²⁴ Expecting them to think about the Holocaust in ways more typical of later years is to place an impossible and ahistorical burden upon them.²⁵

Moreover, even when authors, curators, rabbis, and filmmakers advocated for greater attention to be paid to the Holocaust, they did so from within the establishment. As Jonathan Bolton writes of the 1960s,

Not only were state publishing houses more willing to publish more provocative literature, but the more provocative authors were willing to publish their work with state publishing houses, rather than keeping it ‘in the drawer’ and waiting for better days.²⁶

²³ Jonathan Bolton argues that Frýd’s *Krabice živých* (*A Box of Lives*) “helped loosen the ideological restraints on Czech literature in the 1950s.” In this early works, Frýd hinted at the special fates of Jews during the Second World War by strategically choosing Jewish-sounding names for his characters. “Czech Literature,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Czech_Literature> (9 December 2012), cited and discussed further in Štěpán Balík, “Three Times Norbert Frýd: *Meš archandělů, Krabice živých, Lahvová pošta*,” in *The Representation of the Shoah in Literature, Theatre and Film in Central Europe: 1950s and 1960s*, ed., Jiří Holý, (Prague, Czech Republic: Akropolis, 2012), 43.

²⁴ c.f.: Arno Pařík, “Exhibits at the Prague Jewish Museum, 1946-1992,” *Review of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews*, VI (1993): 69-84. Pařík argues correctly that the state limited how the museum could present the Holocaust. He neglects, however, to comment on the extent to which museum employees might have agreed—or wished to agree—with the party’s official interpretation of that event. He further fails to recognize the significance of the phenomenon, which he himself notes, that the state preferred ideologically appropriate representations of the Holocaust to exhibits about other aspects of Jewish culture, history, and religious life.

²⁵ This argument was inspired by Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* 8 (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 376-77.

²⁶ Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2012), 98.

Provocation from within reflects not only a degree of shared commitments and values, but also the belief that the system itself has the capacity for positive reform.

When censors permitted these “provocations,” they did not only seek to co-opt and weaken challenging perspectives, but also to benefit from them. Indeed, the Communist Party, the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, and local, regional, and national organs of the state bureaucracy all took to commemorating the Holocaust around the turn of the 1960s. Doing so offered a unique opportunity to reestablish the legitimacy of the Communist Party, both within its ranks and among the general population. What better way to enact a break with Stalinism than to commemorate one of its most egregious, obvious, and painful historical elisions? Normalizing the Holocaust reflected empathy for survivors and excitement for the aforementioned “return to history.” It also helped to reassert the classical distinction between communist anti-Zionism and Nazi antisemitism, which a decade of party-led, anti-Jewish persecution and propaganda had called into question both at home and abroad. Finally, it signaled a rejection of Stalinist abuses by rehabilitating the memories and experiences of one of its most visible victim groups.

At first, commemorations simply introduced the Holocaust as an important aspect of the Second World War among others. This helped slowly to elevate the status of “victims of racial persecution,” i.e. Jews and Roma, in relationship to the statuses of antifascist fighters and “victims of political persecution.” Despite the prejudices of its president, the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters used its privileged position within society to lead the way. In March 1958, on the fourteenth anniversary of the liquidation of the Czech Family Camp, the union invited the Jewish historian, Erich Kulka, to deliver an address at the Klement Gottwald Museum.²⁷ In May, it

²⁷ “Vzpomínka na vyhlazení rodinného tábora BIIB v Birkenau” [Remembrances of the extermination of the family camp BIIB in Birkenau,” *Věstník*, vol. 20, no. 4 (April 1958): 7.

embellished its annual commemoration of the Second World War in Terezín with a wreath laying ceremony at the Jewish cemetery. Over 2,000 people attended.²⁸ Soon, the union began inscribing the names of Holocaust victims on the monuments that it erected to the Second World War, alongside those of fallen soldiers.²⁹ In 1964, the union even allocated funds from the national program for volunteer infrastructural improvement, Operation Z (*Akce Z*), to construct a memorial to Jewish women whom the Nazis murdered in a Gross-Rosen satellite camp in Trutnov. The CJRC deemed it “an exemplary deed.”³⁰

Other institutions also helped to normalize the Holocaust in Czech popular culture. The Ministry of Education and Culture opened the Pinkas Memorial (still under construction) for Museum Week in 1958.³¹ That same month, Czechoslovak TV aired *Motýli tady nežijí* [*Butterflies don't live here*, 1958], a film featuring children's drawings from Theresienstadt.³² In 1959, the Academy of Sciences incorporated information about the genocide of Czech Jewry into an exhibition on the German occupation.³³ Then, in 1960, Czechoslovak State Film included into its weekly feature program clips depicting Eichmann's anti-Jewish crimes and scenes from the opening ceremonies at the Pinkas.³⁴

Around 1960, non-Jewish discourses on the Holocaust began drawing the event more

²⁸ “Pietní akt u památníku mučedníka na židovském hřbitově v Terezíně” [Ceremony at the martyrs' memorial in the Jewish cemetery in Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 20, no. 7 (July 1958): 3.

²⁹ “Památce mrtvých, živým k výstraze,” *Věstník*, 22:8 (August 1960): 2.

³⁰ “Příkladný čin” [An exemplary deed], *Věstník*, vol. 26, no. 12 (December 1964): 4.

³¹ “Veřejnost poprvé spatřila znovozřízenou Pinkasovou synagogu” [The public catches a first glimpse of the remodeled Pinkas Synagogue], *Věstník*, vol. 20, no. 6 (June 1958): 9-10.

³² Rudolf Iltis, “Motýli nežijí tady v ghettu” [Butterflies do not live here anymore] *Věstník*, vol. 21, no. 2 (February 1959): 6.

³³ F. R. Kraus, “Výstava která varuje” [An exhibit that warns], *Věstník*, vol. 21, no. 7 (July 1959): 10.

³⁴ “Pražská Pinkasova synagoga a doklady o Eichmannově vraždné činnosti ve filmovém týníku” [The Prague Pinkas Synagogue and evidence of Eichmann's murderous actions in weekly films], *Věstník*, vol. 22, no. 9 (September 1960): 11.

fully into the official Czech narrative of the Second World War. Rhetorically, the commemorations echoed certain wartime discourses which united Jews and Czechs under the banner of Hitler's first victims.³⁵ Perhaps they drew as well upon even older ideas about Czech-Jewish similarity as small nations in need of "regeneration" after centuries of submission to foreign (German) rule.³⁶ Whatever the origin, by embracing Czech-Jewish losses as their own, non-Jewish Czechs found a more historiographically responsible and sensitive way to portray themselves as victims of the Nazi genocide.

A redacted list of such commemorations will illustrate how this worked. The Regional Committee of Czechoslovak Women in Ustí nad Labem planted 20,000 red roses in Terezín to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army. Not only did the committee allocate 5,000 of the flowers to Terezín's Jewish cemetery, but it also arranged for 500 of them to come from the women of Lidice—the town that symbolized Czech suffering at the hands of the Nazis.³⁷ Indeed, it soon became commonplace—particularly in Jewish circles—to refer to Terezín and Lidice in one breath.³⁸ In 1960, children carried sticks adorned with images of butterflies and a banner that read "butterflies do not live here" in the annual May Day parade held in honor of the Communist Party. Administrators chose that same slogan as the theme for that year's celebration of the international day of the child.³⁹ Also in 1960, the children's drawing exhibit toured the northern Bohemian towns of Litoměřice, Terezín,

³⁵ Jan Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938-48: Beyond Idealization and Condemnation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Martin Wein, *A Slavic Jerusalem* (in process).

³⁶ Hillel Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 198-216.

³⁷ Rudolf Iltis, "Lidické růže pro Terezín" [Lidice roses for Terezín], *Věstník*, vol., 22, no. 4 (April 1960): 6.

³⁸ Blanka Soukupová, "Proměny reflexe šoa" [Changes in the reflection of the Shoah].

³⁹ "Motýlí zde žijí" [Butterflies do not live here], *Věstník*, vol. 22, no. 9 (September 1960): 11.

Ustí nad Labem, and Teplice.⁴⁰ The next year, in honor of the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the Rococo Theater staged a performance of *The Last Cyclist* (*Poslední cyklista*), a play—of proper political orientation—written in Theresienstadt by a Jewish prisoner.⁴¹ Finally, in 1963, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liquidation of the Czech Family Camp, the State Jewish Museum and the Gallery of the Capital City of Prague jointly opened an exhibition in Prague’s Old Town Hall. It featured children’s drawings from Theresienstadt alongside contemporary works by the children of Prague’s third district. The curators hoped with the exhibit to showcase the civilizing progress achieved by communism and also to inspire vigilance against resurgent Western fascism.⁴² They drew Jewish and non-Jewish children close together as Czechs.

These examples attest to an intentional transformation of public discourses on the Holocaust over an extremely short period of time. In under a decade, the Holocaust emerged from its isolation as an event commemorated by the Jewish communities and the State Jewish Museum to become a major symbol of Czech political culture. Jewish wartime experiences eventually even received more attention in Terezín. Under these new conditions, Holocaust-themed cultural production continued to expand in scope and multiply in form during the 1960s. They featured prominently in works of literature, theater, and film. Indeed, Czech and Slovak directors released 10 Holocaust-themed films for the cinema and television between 1959 and 1969 alone—a unique phenomenon within the Soviet Bloc. Jewish artists took advantage of this

⁴⁰ “Drobné zprávy” [Small news], *Věstník*, vol. 22, no. 6 (June 1960): 11.

⁴¹ F. R. Kraus, “Poslední cyklista a terezínská hymna” [The last cyclist and the Terezín hymn] *Věstník*, vol. 23, no. 5 (May 1960): 10-11; and Lisa Peschel, “The Prosthetic Life: Theatrical Performance, Survivor Testimony and the Terezín Ghetto, 1941-1963,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2009), 198-208.

⁴² “Děti tenkrát—děti dnes” [Children then—children now], *Věstník*, vol. 25, no. 10 (October 1963): 5.

cultural moment and also helped to create it. It is thus understandable how, in both 1962 and 1965, CJRC executive secretary Rudolf Iltis could complain about (what might now be called) “Holocaust fatigue” among Czech Jews.⁴³ Indeed, in 1963, a CJRC representative complained for the first time about declining attendance at community Holocaust commemorations.⁴⁴

1963 was also the year that major divisions emerged within the Communist Party and within Czechoslovak society.⁴⁵ That year, members of the Czech and Slovak Writers’ Unions began sharply criticizing the slow pace of de-Stalinization. Among other changes, the writers

⁴³ “Taková byla osvětim,” *Věstník*, 24:1, pp. 5-7 (January 1962): 5; and Rudolf Iltis, “Utěk před žlutou hvězdou,” *Věstník*, 27:1 (January 1965): 3.

⁴⁴ František Ehrmann, “Zápis ze sjezdu delegátů židovské náboženské společnosti v krajích českých a moravských konaného dne 24. listopadu 1963” [Minutes from the congress of delegates of the Jewish religious community in the Bohemian and Moravian regions, occurring on 24 November 1963] (November 1963), 2, in collection of documents related to the 1963 congress. NAČR, MŠK box 56. Blanka Soukupová provides conflicting analyses of this complaint. In a 2010 article, she argues that Jewish leaders lodged this dubious complaint to demonstrate to their state minders that the CJRC and its members were not focusing too much on the exceptionality of the Jewish tragedy. In an article written one year later, Soukupová attributes the declining attendance—which she takes as true—to the inaccessibility of Terezín for many Czech Jews. I wholeheartedly disagree with the first explanation. The second likely contributed to the phenomenon of falling numbers, particularly due to the aging of the Jewish population and the decline in community membership. Soukupová, takes for granted that Czech Jews would have wanted to attend commemorations. I see the CJRC complaint as an honest statement which also reflected the changing attitudes of Czech Jews towards Holocaust commemoration in the context of its popularization and after the passage of nearly two decades time. See Soukupová “Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání” [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 31; and idem., “Proměny reflexe Šoa” [Changes in the reflection of the Shoah].

The proliferation of Holocaust-related cultural production during the 1950s and 1960s also suggests that Livia Rothkirchen was only partially right when she argued that the predominance of Holocaust-related articles in *Věstník* reflected the limitations that the party-state placed on Jewish cultural life. During these years, it also reflected the importance of the Holocaust as a theme of national popular and political culture. Rothkirchen, *Jews of Bohemia and Moravia*, 291-292.

⁴⁵ Until that point, it had been difficult to distinguish the “conservatives” from the “revisionists” at all but the highest levels of the Party. Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce* [Looking for the lost meaning of revolution], 117. Kopeček argues that even the term “revisionist” was artificial. Conservative communists applied it (often in retrospect) as a pejorative marker with which to brand a range of initiatives and individuals that threatened their control of the Party. Ibid., 46.

demanded fuller and more open investigations into the political trials of the 1950s, in which they felt themselves to have been complicit. (A number of them had written journalistic pieces supporting them.) Resistance from the leadership cohort around Novotný divided the Communist Party into opposing camps of conservatives and reformists. With rising public support, the latter achieved the semi-public rehabilitation of additional political prisoners.⁴⁶ The Novotný camp, however, continued to exercise strict control over how Czechs and Slovaks publicly discussed the 1950s and the pace of de-Stalinization. Culture workers resorted to metaphor and historical analogy to express what they could not say directly.⁴⁷ Often they deployed the Holocaust to this end. In doing so, they transformed the genocide into a powerful and complex symbol associated with the burgeoning communist reform movement which would take power in 1968.

Czech filmmakers in particular found the newly rehabilitated theme of the Holocaust useful for rejecting Stalinist political culture and criticizing their compatriots for their complicity in its development and preservation.⁴⁸ The Holocaust served well in this capacity because the

⁴⁶ Shore, ““Engineering in the Age of Innocence””; Skilling, *Communism National and International*, 106-29.

⁴⁷ H Dušan Hamšík, *Writers against Rulers*, trans. D. Orpington with an introduction by W. L. Webb (New York: Random House, 1971), 102-04.

⁴⁸ Despite the admission of filmmakers like Juraj Herz, Zbenedik Brynych, and Antonín Moskalyk that they intended for their Holocaust films to function as studies of totalitarianism—in general and in communist Czechoslovakia—few scholars have given the phenomenon the attention it deserves. Peter Hames, Jiří Holý, Petr Koura, and Antonín Liehm merely refer to it in passing without much analysis. Jiří Holý, “*Spalovač mrtvol (The Cremator)* as a Novel and as a Film,” in *The Representation of the Shoah in Literature, Theatre and Film in Central Europe: 1950s and 1960s* (Prague, Czech Republic: Akropolis, 2012), 143-52; Peter Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 95-111; and Petr Koura, “Obraz holokaustu v českém hraném filmu,” in *Holokaust-Šoa-Zagłada v české, slovenské a polské literatuře*, ed., Jiří Holý (Prague, Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2007), 227-37; and Antonín J. Liehm, ed., *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience* (New York: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974), 105. Andrew Horton offers thoughtful remarks on this topic in his introduction to the DVD version of *A pátý jezdec je strah* released by Fascets (Chicago, IL: 2006). For comments by the directors, see Juraj Herz, “Drowning the Bad Times: Juraj Herz Interviewed,” interviewed by Ivana Košuličová (Prague, December 2001)

party-state had been using it propagandistically to signal its own de-Stalinization.⁴⁹ It helped, moreover, that propagandists had constructed an analogy between Jews and Czechs in order to co-opt Jewish suffering into the national narrative. The analogy also worked because of how deeply antisemitism had marked Czechoslovak Stalinism. Not only did the Holocaust share a victim group with the Slánský Affair, but non-Jews could look back on both periods as ones of inaction—or even complicity—in the face of Jewish persecution. To be clear, none of the films espoused anti-communist or pro-western messages. Rather, when not wrestling with the issue of local collaboration or exploring Jewish experiences as such, the films address the phenomenon of totalitarianism in general and its relationship to postwar Czechoslovak political culture.⁵⁰ Directors ensured that their films would do so by limiting their scope to events that “took place” on Czechoslovak territory (except in two cases).

Zbyněk Brynych lodged a sharp critique of contemporary Czech society with his film,

Kinoeye New Perspectives on European Film, 2:1 (7 January 2002).

<<http://www.kinoeye.org/02/01/kosulicova01.php>> (16 June 2008); Josef Škvorecký, *All the Bright Young Men and Women: A Personal History of the Czech Cinema*, trans. Michael Schonberg (Toronto: John Deyell Limited, 1971), 119-20. On Moskalyk, see Aronová, “Židovská tematika” [Jewish themes], 28.

⁴⁹ Hames argues that the success of the Czech Holocaust films was due in part to their resonance with “official preoccupation with Nazi war crimes and the threat from the West.” *Czech and Slovak Cinema*, 99.

⁵⁰ A number of these films stand alone as unique meditations on Czech Holocaust guilt. *The Fifth Horseman is Fear* receives attention below. *The Cremator* takes liberties as a fantasy film to attribute the idea behind the Final Solution to a Czech man who embodies a negative caricature of Czechness. Each in its own way, the films, *Diamonds in the Night*, *Flirt se slečnou stříbrnou* [*A Flirt with Miss Silver*], and *Dita Saxová*, explore the “otherness” of Jews in postwar Czech society and the lack of empathy that Jews encountered from their compatriots in the 1940s. *Flirt* turns on the story of a non-Jewish man who abandons his Jewish love during the war. In this way, it provides a counter-narrative to *The Distant Journey*, which heralded Czech-Jewish wartime solidarity in the context of romantic love. On the failure to address Czech complicity in the Holocaust see Soukupová, “Proměny reflexe Šoa” [Changes in reflections on the Shoah], 113-14; and idem., “Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání” [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 13. On cinematic representations of love between non-Jewish men and Jewish women during the Holocaust see Doneson, Judith E. “The Jews as a Female Figure in Holocaust Films.” *Shoah: A Journal of Resources on the Holocaust*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 11-18.

The Fifth Rider is Fear (*A pátý jezdec je strah*, 1964). In it, he explores the moral and social consequences of collaboration with oppressive regimes—even in the context of existential fear. The protagonist, a Jew named Dr. Braun, remains alive during the Second World War by cataloguing and redistributing property confiscated from transported Jews. One day, his working-class neighbor convinces him to care for a wounded resistance fighter. The latter’s presence in the building induces a culture of mounting fear, which brings the Gestapo to their doorstep and results in Braun preemptively taking his own life. Only at the last minute, once it is too late, do the doctor’s neighbors learn the value of solidarity in the face of totalitarianism. The credits role to the sound of a toddler crying—Brynych’s symbol of the new day dawning.

With Ester Krumbachová, Brynych transformed this story—based on Hana Bělohradská’s realistic 1962 novel, *Bez krásy, bez limce*—into an allegory for life in socialist Czechoslovakia. They adapted the setting to appear more like 1960s Prague than the Nazi Protectorate. Brynych removed from the film nearly all direct references to Jews, Nazis, and the Holocaust. There are no armbands, no yellow stars, and no transports. Swastikas make only brief, compulsory appearances. Most amazingly, no character ever utters the words “Jew,” “Jewish,” or “Nazi”—although they do appear in the original subtitles.⁵¹ Indeed, Dr. Braun merely hints at his ethnicity by speaking of his own “strange nose.” To whom then does he refer when, disgusted by his own collaboration, he laments “We are liquidating ourselves?” Brynych answered this question in a discussion with the literary critic Josef Škvorecký: “I am convinced that [fascism] is an international disease; its symptoms may be traced in countries other than Germany; even in our

⁵¹ Producers added the word “Jew” to the subtitles at least five times, presumably to make it intelligible to foreigners. For example, when Braun first refuses to assist to the injured man, he explains, “I am not a surgeon and besides, I cannot practice medicine.” The subtitle reads, “Sorry, I’m not a surgeon and besides, as a Jew, I’m not allowed to practice (0:21:30).”

own country.”⁵²

While it may be impossible to assess accurately the reception of the Czech-Holocaust films among movie-going public, attendance figures suggest that they drew large audiences. They also received fantastic reviews.⁵³ This should not be surprising given the popularity of the Holocaust as a literary theme after 1956 and its prominent place as a symbol in the public sphere. Indeed, Czech filmmakers based most of their films on well liked, recently published novels. For present purposes, the most significant contribution of these films is that they provided opportunities for dissatisfied Czechs to think about and discuss the contemporary problems of their society without breaking political taboos. As Peter Hames argues, the Czech directors of the 1960s sought “a dialogue with their audience in terms not only of sophisticated nuance, but also of simple recognition.”⁵⁴ In other words, the Czech-Holocaust films succeeded as cultural critiques because of a shared frustration with the slow pace of de-Stalinization and a common understanding of the many uses of the Holocaust in Czech political discourses.

The Jewish community also intervened with more intensity into Czech memory politics after 1963, as Czech Jews grew more confident about the place of the Holocaust in Czech culture and less concerned with antisemitic persecution. They worked to manifest five priorities.⁵⁵ I

⁵² Škvorecký, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, 119-20; and Liehm, ed., *Closely Watched Films* 105.

⁵³ On the relationship between popular demand and the production of cultural and other goods in socialist economies, see Filip Pospíšil, “Youth Cultures and the Disciplining of Czechoslovak Youth in the 1960s,” *Social History*, vol. 37, no. 4 (November 2012): 487. For information on Czech films, including reviews, see *Český hraný film III, 1945-1960 / Czech Feature Film III, 1945-1960* (Prague, Czech Republic: National Film Archive, 2001); and *Český hraný film IV, 1961-1970 / Czech Feature Film IV, 1961-1970* (Prague, Czech Republic: National Film Archive, 2004).

⁵⁴ Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), 271.

⁵⁵ Soukupová identifies a sixth priority: to have society recognize Holocaust victims as individuals with names and stories of their own. See, “Proměny reflexe Šoa” [Changes in reflections on the Shoah], 117-20.

address the maintenance of Jewish cemeteries and the coordination of reparations programs in Chapters Five, Six, and Eight.⁵⁶ The CJRC also sought parity in cultural and legal terms for “victims of racial persecution” with the more highly esteemed and better treated “victims of political persecution” and anti-fascist fighters. They additionally worked to raise the profile of Terezín’s Jewish sites; to arrange for them to receive better care and to install new memorials.

CJRC leaders never publicly criticized the state for any of these perceived deficiencies until 1968, nor did they take independent action to rectify them. They preferred, instead, to work behind the scenes with the state bureaucracy and with partner organizations. As they did so, they maintained their faith that the general trends towards greater inclusivity and increasing acknowledgment of the Holocaust would continue. They persisted, inasmuch, in supporting the party-state and its politics; and even lavished praise upon it when it seemed poised to implement positive changes.⁵⁷ For example, despite Rabbi Feder’s privileged position,⁵⁸ he waited for the backing of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters to advocate publicly for changes to the status of Terezín’s Jewish sites. At a 1963 CJRC meeting he announced,

I would like to live long enough to see the elimination of the injustice that the Jewish cemetery and crematorium in Terezín were not able to be included into the National Memorial in Terezín. I am glad that the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters is changing its

⁵⁶ “Usnesení sjezdu delgátů židovské společnosti v krajích českých a moravských ze dne 24.11.1963 ke zprávě o činnosti RŽNO” [The resolution of the congress of delegates of the Jewish community in the Bohemian and Moravian regions from 24.11.1963 with regard to the report about the activities of the CJRC], in collection of documents about the 1963 congress. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁵⁷ In addition to articles in *Věstník*—too frequent to catalogue here—CJRC leaders used the Holocaust propagandistically to support the party-state’s politics in its proclamations and in the telegrams that it issued at their meetings. See the collections of documents associated with the CJRC congresses of 1963 and 1967. NAČR, MŠK box 56. See also Soukupová “Proměny reflexe šoa” [Changes in the representation of the Shoah], 137-38.

⁵⁸ See my discussion in Chapter Two and Blanka Soukupová, “Dr. Richard Feder (26. srpna 1875-18. listopadu 1970), legendární českožidovský rabín. Poválečné “brněnské” období” [Dr. Richard Feder [26 August 1875-18 November 1970), the legendary Czech-Jewish rabbi. The postwar “Brno” period], *Židé a Morava*, vol. 17 (2010): 252-73.

position on this matter.⁵⁹

At the next congress, in January 1967, rising CJRC president František Fuchs explained,

Patiently we bore [the fact] that the former Ghetto Terezín did not receive the type of memorial care it deserved and, in particular, we consider it a proper criticism that such places remained inaccessible as, for example, the spot at the Ohře where the ashes of over 20,000 urns were poured into the river.⁶⁰

By the time Fuchs spoke these words, the Communist Party had already called for improvements to be made to Terezín's Jewish sites, so as to address the "underestimation of the question of the life and fight of people in the Terezín Ghetto."⁶¹ That May, the CJRC co-sponsored a large peace rally in Terezín, attended by top officials from the government and from the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters. The program, for the first time, included a visit to the Ohře river, where the Nazis had dumped the ashes of Jewish prisoners. It even featured the installation of a small sign there.⁶² Multilateral meetings followed, which brought together representatives of the union, the CJRC, the Terezín Memorial, and still other organizations. Soon after, an inter-ministerial commission convened to devise a plan for improving Terezín, with active CJRC representation.⁶³

The timing of Feder and Fuchs' pronouncements reflected a fundamental political strategy of Jewish leaders in negotiating their community's relationship with the state. The two men only stepped forward publicly once they knew that they could expect support from either high-ranking officials or powerful organizations like the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighter. Whereas

⁵⁹ Speech by Rabbi Feder to the 23 November 1963 congress of the CJRC in the collection of documents about that meeting. NAČR, MŠK box 56; and Soukupová, "Proměny reflexe Šoa" [Changes in the reflection of the Shoah], 113; and quoted in idem., "Dr. Richard Feder."

⁶⁰ Speech by František Fuchs at the extraordinary congress of the CJRC in 1967 in the collection of documents about that meeting. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Soukupová, "Proměny reflexe šoa" [Changes in the Reflection of the Shoah], 135-36.

⁶³ P. Auersperg, report for a meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, "Informativní zpráva o stavu a činnosti Památníku Terezín," 2 (4 August 1966). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4: bundle 3, archival unit 4, point 3.

during the early 1950s this meant limiting Holocaust commemorative activities to the religious field alone, by the 1967 it had come to mean collaborating patiently with a steadily liberalizing party-state in order to achieve Jewish-community goals incrementally.

Czechoslovak Jews showed less patience when they sought recognition for the Jewish fighters of the Second World War.⁶⁴ Their traditional absence from the official narrative of the Second World War reinforced the stereotype that Jews had gone passively to their deaths. For the Jewish community this constituted not only a lowering of status, but also exclusion from the foundational myth of communist Czechoslovakia. Former Jewish fighters felt this slight most sharply. Nonetheless, until 1963, the general public had only heard of Czech-Jewish “spiritual resistance” in the form of cultural production in Theresienstadt.⁶⁵ This contrasted sharply with the heroic accounts of Polish-Jewry and the Warsaw Ghetto.

Jewish communities and individuals began introducing the history of Jewish armed resistance to the public in 1963. That year, the CJRC sent a letter of greeting to the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, with a reminder that

[t]he Nazi beast inflicted immeasurable losses upon us. But we were not only victims; rather, many of our members fought with weapons in their hands on the fronts of the Second World War. Even today we stand with you in one fighting front for uncovering

⁶⁴ Erich Kulka, “The Importance of Documenting the Role of Jews in the Czechoslovak Anti-Nazi Resistance,” *Review of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews*, vol. 5 (1992-1993): 63-68; idem., *Jews in Svoboda’s Army in the Soviet Union: Czechoslovak Jewry’s Fight against the Nazis during World War II* (MD: University Press of America, 1987; first published in Hebrew in 1977); and Yeshayahu Jelinek, “The Role of the Jews in Slovakian Resistance,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 15:3 (September 1967): 415-22.

⁶⁵ Some exceptions to this rule may be found in *Věstník*, various memoirs, the recorded eulogies for deceased fighters, and Holocaust commemorations. In 1956, the philosopher Emil Utitz defended Theresienstadt’s Jewish inmates from the accusations of a fellow former prisoner, Hans Günter Adler, who considered Jewish self-governance and cultural production in the Ghetto to have been a form of collaboration and self-persecution. Emil Utitz, “Terezín,” *Věstník*, vol. 18, no. 5 (May 1956): 7. Soukupová, “Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání” [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 13.

racist crimes and the followers of neo-fascism...”⁶⁶

In 1964 and 1965, both the CJRC and its Slovak counterpart included proposals to commission new historical works on Czechoslovak-Jewish participation in the fight against Nazism into their funding applications to the U.S.-based Memorial Fund for Jewish Culture.⁶⁷ Emil Knieža published two novels about Jewish fighters in Slovakia, *Šiesty prápor, na stráž!* in 1964 [Sixth battalion, on guard!; translated into Czech in 1966] and *Mušketieri žltej hviezdy* [Musketeers of the Jewish star] in 1967. Finally, in 1965, the CJRC sent a second exhibition to Paris about Czechoslovak-Jewish resistance. Its author, Karel Lagus, adapted its script into a series of articles for *Věstník*.⁶⁸

1967-1972: The Holocaust and the Prague Spring

The brief period of political and cultural liberalization in Czechoslovakia known as the Prague Spring, which lasted from January to August 1968, offered organizations and individuals the opportunity to redress more fully the deficiencies that they had identified during the 1960s regarding the place of the Holocaust in Czech culture. The Communist Party, under the leadership of the reform-minded Alexandr Dubček, responded positively. Indeed, the party considered achieving a more truthful and sensitive relationship with the past to be fundamental to

⁶⁶ Letter from the CJRC to Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters (25 November 1963), in collection of documents related to the CJRC congress of that year. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁶⁷ Memo from Benjamin Eichler and Jozef Lipa to Jan Kmet’ “Návštěva M. Uweelera z New Yorku” [The visit of M. Uweeler from New York] (1 September 1965) in a collection of documents sent from the CJRC to the Ministry of Education and Culture on 2 March 1966 “Návrh na podporu Nadace Memoril [sic: Memorial] Foundation for Jewish Culture” [Proposal for support from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture]. NAČR, MŠK box 57; and Erich Kulka, “Temata některých prací” [Themes for a few works], document included in an application compiled by the CJRC for the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture (29 November 1964). NAČR, MŠK box 57. Neither one of the books were published in communist Czechoslovakia.

⁶⁸ Soukupová, “Priměny reflexe Šoa” [Changes in the reflection of the Shoah], 137-39.

the processes of “democratic renaissance (*demokratické obrody*),” which it hoped to lead. The country’s cultural elite also contributed significantly to changing discourses on the Holocaust and, it seems, much of the public supported the transformations as well. This reconsidered relationship with the Holocaust felt obvious to many. It accorded well with the new political perspectives on history, socialism, and society that had emerged through the contested processes of de-Stalinization. Indeed, it took the post-invasion, Moscow-aligned party-state a number of years to renegotiate some sort of return to the *status quo ante*.

It is tempting to imagine that Czech Jews and their allies had always wanted to intervene into the party-state’s treatment of the Holocaust on exactly the same terms as they did between 1968 and 1970. This, however entails imagining that they held consistent beliefs and desires for twenty years, without regard to the culture in which they lived and actively participated. It means ignoring the faith that many of them had in the Communist Party, even during Stalinism, and the tensions that many felt between the often-conflicting desires to assimilate and to honor the past. Rather, it is more accurate to say that the particular evolution of Czech political culture during the 1960s shaped the terms by which Czech Jewish activists thought about history and their own experiences, as well as the relationship of these to contemporary life. The battles between reformists and orthodox Communists, the “return to history,” contact with Western and Israeli Jews, and the examples set by Czech culture leaders deeply conditioned Jewish political action throughout this period.

Just six months before the Prague Spring, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war engendered a major conflict between the Czechoslovak Writers’ Union and Communist Party, which thrust debates about Zionism, Stalinism, and the Second World War—and therefore the Holocaust—further into the public sphere. The party-state had joined the Communist Bloc, with the exception of

Romania, in adopting the Soviet Union's position on the war and in breaking diplomatic ties with Israel. It condemned that country as the conflict's sole aggressor and demanded that it retreat from its newly captured territories. In response, the Writers' Union convened a panel of four luminaries who expressed dissenting opinions. This had little influence upon the general public, however, because censors prevented the Writers' Union from publishing their statements in its weekly journal, *Literární noviny*. Later that month, debates about censorship and foreign policy took center stage at the Fourth Czechoslovak Writers' Congress. Party representatives chose to focus their criticism of the Union on the latter issue, rather than debating the role of censorship in post-Stalinist, socialist society with its preeminent authors. The plan backfired. In a now famous speech, the novelist Pavel Kohout defended the State of Israel by comparing its situation in 1967 to that of Czechoslovakia in 1938 after the Munich Accords. He thus seized upon a rhetorical comparison of Arabs to Nazis that had become prominent in Western-Jewish and Israeli propaganda, which also reinforced the discourses that had long portrayed Czechs and Jews as small nations united by a common fate.⁶⁹

After the Congress, the Communist Party installed a new directorate to the head the Writers' Union and closed down *Literární noviny*.⁷⁰ This was still, after all, 1967. On the other hand, the party could not control public opinion, which by and large accorded with the union's position. Many Czechs interpreted the party's renewed anti-Zionist campaign as evidence of the persistence of Stalinist culture in Czechoslovakia. It nonetheless took until Novotný's two-staged fall from power in January and March 1968 for the CJRC, the State Jewish Museum, and the

⁶⁹ On the comparison of Arabs to Nazis see Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, 316-20; and Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 146-59.

⁷⁰ For a transcript of Kouhot's speech, see *IV. Sjezd Svazu československých spisovatelů, Praha 27.-29. června 1967* [The 4th Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, Prague. 27-29 June 1967] (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Československý spisovatel, 1968), 39-44.

Terezín Memorial to join the Writers' Union in making firmer demands of the party-state. That is, they waited until their positions fell within acceptable political boundaries, even if they pressed them.⁷¹

In early 1968, the Terezín Memorial announced a public contest with cash prizes for designing new memorials for the Ghetto, the Ohře river site, and the Jewish cemetery and crematorium. This was a longtime coming. As per above, the Party had called for improvements in Terezín in 1966. Multilateral meetings followed. Soon after, an inter-ministerial commission convened to address the matter with active CJRC participation.⁷² What was new and significant in 1968, however, was the irrevocable act of announcing a public contest. It implicitly marked and constituted a drastic transformation of memory politics and, with it, the terms of Jewish (narrative) integration into the national body. The Czech-Jewish Holocaust, as a genocide of Jews, had become, finally, a Czech story as well as a Jewish story.

CJRC executive secretary Ota Heitlinger announced the contest in *Věstník* and used it as an opportunity to articulate his own perspectives on history and to make demands of Czech society. He sought to achieve a more powerful voice within the party-state's hegemonic system of memory politics and to empower his constituents to do the same. Heitlinger characterized as outdated the nationalist and antisemitic excuses that Czechs and Slovaks had used in the past for ignoring the history of the Holocaust. To wit, he rejected the classical Marxist-Leninist reasons for doing so. He wrote,

Not even one of these theses describes the crux of the matter. The extermination crusade of the Nazis against the Jews was of a special politics that does not allow for comparison

⁷¹ Alexander Dubček replaced Antonín Novotný as General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party on 5 January. Ludvík Svoboda replaced him as the President of Czechoslovakia on 30 March.

⁷² Ota Heitlinger, "Památník Terezín vypisuje soutěž" [The Terezín Memorial advertizes a contest] *Věstník*, vol. 30, no. 2 (February 1968): 3-4.

with anything that has yet occurred within human history. It did not have its roots in any other more fundamental drive, from which it was derived. Rather, it derived solely and exclusively from the Nazis' racial theories, which was the bedrock of the specific ideology of Nazi fascism.⁷³

In other words, he identified antisemitism as the sole motivating factor behind the Nazis' murder of Czech Jewry—a major historiographical revision. He concluded that

Czechoslovak educational training could only have forgotten about this fact and given up this unique font for the political education of our younger generation [i.e. the Jewish sites in Theresienstadt] because our historical sciences thus far have not fully appreciated the meaning of Terezín.⁷⁴

Heitlinger hoped that his community would contribute to rectifying this shortcoming. He expressed an optimistic vision of the future, wherein a history of common struggle against fascism—both cultural and physical—would unite Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs, despite the stark differences in their wartime experiences.

CJRC leaders grew bolder still as 1968 unfolded. Just eight days after Ludvík Svoboda replaced Antonín Novotný as the President of Czechoslovakia, the CJRC held a meeting with its Slovak counterpart at which each issued resolutions. The CJRC focused on three issues and their contemporary impacts: Holocaust memory, 1950s antisemitism, and Czechoslovak-Israeli relations. Engaging in hyperbolic and selective memory, the CJRC complained that Czechs had forgotten about the 4,000 Czech-Jewish inmates of the “Family Camp” whom the Nazis murdered during one night at Auschwitz-Birkenau:

That Bartholomew's night, however no one—except for our community—has commemorated and, thus far, never has a representative of the government participated in one of our commemorations [*tryzny*] with which we recall this most extensive execution of Czechoslovak citizens: with the song “*Kde domov můj*” [the National Anthem] on their lips [they] stepped into the gas chambers.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ota Heitlinger, “Památník Terezín” [Terezín Memorial], 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁷⁵ “Prohlášení Rady židovských náboženských obcí v krajích českých a moravských ze dne 7. dubna 1968” [The proclamation of the CJRC from 7 April 1968] *Věstník*, vol. 30, no. 4 (April

The CJRC then openly criticized the Ministry of National Defense for continuing to block the entrance to the Ohře-river site. Finally, it recalled the participation of Jews “everywhere that the Czech nation [had] fought against the Nazis.”

The CJRC’s proclamation culminated in six requests. Two of which concerned the Holocaust:

2. We request that in the laws which delimit social and health care, that racial persecution be ranked on the level of other political persecutions.
3. We request that the military administration immediately vacate forever and without restrictions the entrance to the place on the Ohře river where the ashes of about 20,000 prisoners were discarded.⁷⁶

The CJRC leadership truly believed that the party-state’s position on the past had changed. Thus, with their requests, they no longer sought to act upon it ideologically. Rather, they insisted that it adjust its legal and administrative systems to reflect recent developments of thought, in step with nationwide processes of communist reform. This would have been unthinkable just four months earlier.

The Jewish leadership did not stand alone. A non-Jewish collective took even more audacious action in May 1968. The employees of the Terezín Memorial’s historical division used their station as curators of Second-World-War memory to urge Jiří Hájek, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to reconsider the state’s position on the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and to re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel. In an open letter, in which they quoted from Kohout’s speech (published in 1968), the historians cleverly inverted Stalinist rhetoric on the intersection of Zionism and the Holocaust. They appealed first to the Minister’s sympathy for Theresienstadt survivors living in Israel, as well as

1968): 1. The “Bartholomew” reference was to the St. Bartholomew’s Day of 1572 Massacre in France.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

Czechs and Slovaks who fought under the command of Ludvík Svoboda and in the Czechoslovak Army in the West, and [who] today hold weapons in their hands against an enemy that once again threatens millions with murder.⁷⁷

The petitioners thus followed Kohout in comparing Arabs to Nazis in order to argue on behalf of Israel to representatives of the Communist Party.

The historians then concluded their open letter with the incredible assertion that the party-state's "unjust" position on Israel and its anti-Zionist campaign had, in fact, intensified domestic antisemitism.⁷⁸ In other words, rather than using Holocaust commemorations to demonstrate that communist anti-Zionism was not antisemitic—as had been common practice since 1956—these historians used Holocaust as an argument for Zionism and laid bare the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism in its Czechoslovak-communist form.

I cannot stress enough the significance that the historians composed and delivered their letter a full year after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Much like the CJRC leadership, they too waited until they believed that their interventions would be met with sympathy rather than opposition and persecution. Minister Hájek's response, indeed, demonstrates how deeply Czechoslovak political culture had changed in just one year. Rather than accuse the historians of Zionism or of having misunderstood the lessons of the Second World War, he acknowledged their concerns and promised to work for a peaceful solution to the Middle-East crisis "based in equality and

⁷⁷ The workers of the historical department of the Terezín Memorial, "Otevření dopis ministru zahraničních věcí ČSSR, prof. dr. Jiřímu Hájkovi" [An open letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Professor Jiří Hájek] (21 May 1968), 2. The historians sent copies their letter to eleven newspapers in response to an article published in the Party's main organ, in which the Hájek refused to re-establish ties with Israel, "K diplomatickým stykům mezi ČSSR a Izraelem," *Rudé právo* [Red right] (3 May 1968). MZV-GS 1965-1975, Folder 15—"Připomínky pracovníků historického oddělení Památiku Terezín k naší politice vůči Izraeli."

⁷⁸ The workers of the historical department of the Terezín Memorial, "Otevření dopis" [Open letter], 3.

mutual respect...”⁷⁹

These examples suggest that Holocaust-memory activists, both Jewish and non-Jewish, believed that the Communist leadership of 1968 would cast off the final vestiges of Stalinism and institutionalize the transformations of Czech memory politics that had taken root since 1956. Only thirteen years had passed since the first children’s drawing exhibition, but the demands of the CJRC and Terezín Memorial already seemed obvious and impending. They were meant merely to manifest in law and policy beliefs that had achieved popular acceptance, even within the party.

The new approaches to the Holocaust seemed so obvious and right that they persisted for three or four years after the Soviet-Bloc armies crushed the Prague Spring in August 1968.⁸⁰ To be fair, Moscow-aligned, Czechoslovak communists only slowly implemented their system of counter-reforms, police control, propaganda, and political vetting known as “normalization,” through which they sought to restore their country to its pre-1968 *status quo ante*.⁸¹ The film industry, for example, experienced a period of relative freedom throughout most of 1969.⁸² The confidence with which activists continued their commemorative activities and political interventions, however, also suggests that they envisioned a future in which the party-state’s official position on the Holocaust would not revert back to its Stalinist iteration. After over a decade of memory work and political rehabilitation, that would have been almost unthinkable.

In September 1968, the Post Office issued—it seems—a series of three stamps featuring

⁷⁹ Letter from Jiří Hájek to the historical division of the Terezín Memorial, (Prague, Czechoslovakia, 10 June 1968). MZV-GS 1965-1975, Folder 15—“Připomínky pracovníků historického oddělení Památníku Terezín k naší politice vůči Izraeli.” Hájek’s response demonstrated that the party-state’s (internal and unofficial) position on Israel had shifted in accordance with popular opinion.

⁸⁰ Rothkirchen, “Czechoslovakia,” 181.

⁸¹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 51-52.

⁸² Hames, *Czechoslovak New Wave*, 240.

children's drawings from Theresienstadt to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Munich Accords.⁸³ The Terezín Memorial continued to plan new Holocaust-themed exhibits through 1969, and likely through 1971.⁸⁴ Two provocative Holocaust-related films premiered in 1969, *Spalovač mrtvol* [The cremator] and *Flirt se slečnou stříbrnou* [A Flirt with Miss Silver]. The former offered a cynical portrayal of the Czech national character, attributing to Czechs the propensity to collaborate with fascism out of self-interest and willful self-delusion. The latter raised questions about Czech cowardice, complicity, and postwar silence. In 1970, the State Jewish museum announced that it would open a new documentation center for the study Jews under the Nazi occupation.⁸⁵

Most impressive of all, however, and most encouraging for the CJRC, was that President Svoboda participated in its annual Holocaust memorial service in the Pinkas Synagogue in March 1969—fulfilling Fuchs' wish from 1967. It would be the first and last time that a Czechoslovak President would do so for over twenty years. The museum's director Vilém Benda used the opportunity to attack the late president of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighter, Jan Vodiček—and anyone else—who perpetuated the myth of Jewish wartime passivity or who accorded less honor to the murdered Jews than to fallen anti-fascist fighters. He wrote,

In comparison with the children's tragedy, however, even the hero's fight is nothing. Indeed, the greatest fighters for the ideals of human freedom thought first of all about the

⁸³ Vilém Benda, "Zamyšlení nad poštovními známkami vůbec ne filatelické" [Thoughts about postage stamps, not at all philatelic], *Věstník*, vol. 30, no. 10 (October 1968): 6. This is the only evidence that I have found of the existence of these stamps.

⁸⁴ Miroslav Pávek, "Další terezínský krok" [Another Terezín step], *Věstník*, vol. 30, no. 12 (December 1968): 6; Marie Křížková, "Hmotné doklady o životě vězňů terezínského ghetta" [Material artifacts about the lives of the prisoners of the Terezín Ghetto], *Věstník*, vol. 30, no. 4 (April 1969): 5-6; and Pávek, "Co se děje na Židovském hřbitově v Terezíně?" [What is happening in the Jewish cemetery in Terezín?], *Věstník*, vol., 31, no. 6 (June 1969): 2. See also, Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 55-56.

⁸⁵ "Ze Státního židovského muzea" [From the State Jewish Museum], *Věstník*, vol. 32, no. 3 (March 1970): 6.

lives of defenseless children.⁸⁶

Benda understood that drastic changes awaited his country, yet he nonetheless remained confident that the nation would continue to commemorate the Holocaust, honor its victims, and speak openly of it. In 1969 Benda was not alone, nor was he correct.

1972-1989: The *Status Quo Ante*, Glasnost, and the International Turn

After 1972, the politics of Holocaust memory in Czechoslovakia returned to something like the *status quo ante* of the mid-1950s, through a combination of party-state intervention and popular self-censorship. The Communist Party hoped to signal its return to orthodoxy by restoring the official narrative of the Second World War to its pre-reform state. This entailed, of course, marginalizing and censoring representations of the Holocaust in the public sphere. Reactionary communists also sought to undermine the discourses associated with the communist-reform movement by doing the same.

Scholars have correctly attributed these changes in the politics of Holocaust-memory to the resurgence of anti-Zionism in the 1970s. Party-state administrators knew well that their Arab trading partners monitored Jewish affairs in Czechoslovakia and that they often interpreted displays of sympathy for Jews and their history as indicators of pro-Israel attitudes. By marginalizing the representations of the Holocaust—which occupied an increasingly prominent place in

⁸⁶ Vilém Benda, “Kdo koho vlastně rehabilitoval?” [Who really rehabilitated whom?] *Věstník*, vol. 31, no. 3 (March 1969): 2. One year earlier, Svoboda laid a wreath at a memorial to the Western soldiers who fell liberating Bohemia. His participation in both events should have signaled a final break with Stalinist interpretations of the Second World War. *Oratorio for Prague*, directed by Jan Němec and Claude Berri (1968; Chicago, IL: Facets Video, 2012), DVD.

Zionist discourses after 1967⁸⁷—party-state leaders and administrators sought to reassure the Arab states and also Moscow of their loyalty.

A general climate of renewed, semi-official antisemitism also contributed to the marginalization of the Holocaust as a theme of popular and political culture. Party-state propagandists, following Moscow's line, attempted to blame Czech "Zionists" for instigating the Prague Spring. The tactic reminded many at home and abroad of the Communist Party's strategic use of antisemitism during the early 1950s, and it had a similarly chilling effect. Although no show trials followed the 1968 invasion, individuals and organizations refrained from drawing negative attention to themselves by engaging in activities that could have been construed as Zionist, including Holocaust-memory work.

Thus, by the formal return to something like the *status quo ante* I mean the following. After 1972, the Jewish tragedy nearly disappeared as a theme of popular culture, with some exceptions. Ota Pavel's collections of short stories, based on his experiences as the child of a Jewish father during the war, ranked highly among them.⁸⁸ Jewish communal commemorations generally shrank in scale and reverted back to their original incarnations as semi-annual religious services. Jewish leaders ceased challenging the party-state's memory politics, yet continued using the Holocaust to advocate for the latter's political program and to support its propaganda.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History: The Jewish Tradition and the Myth of Passivity* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1986), 145-210; and Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 127-206.

⁸⁸ Ota Pavel replaced Arnošt Lustig the primary literary *lieu de mémoire* of Jewish suffering during the Second World War after the latter emigrated to Israel in 1968.

⁸⁹ Rabbi Daniel Mayer, Jiří Weil, and others protested against American nuclear brinksmanship and the neutron bomb in "N-Bombě: Nikdy! Prohlášení proti neutronové bombě" [N-bomb: never! A proclamation against the neutron bomb], *Věstník*, vol. 39, no. 8 (August 1977): 3; AS, "Pietní tryzna v Ostravě" [A reverent memorial in Ostrava], *Věstník*, vol. 40, no. 6 (June 1978): 5; Jiří Wehle, "Osvětim-Trvalé Memento: K 35. výročí osvobození Osvětimi Sovětskou armádou" [Auschwitz-a lasting monument: On the 35th anniversary of the liberation of

Most Holocaust-related exhibitions came to focus, once again, on the artists of Theresienstadt, both young and old. In contrast, discussions of Jewish military resistance became increasingly rare. No longer did party-state propagandists seek to incorporate the Holocaust into the nation's foundational myth. No longer did their rhetoric turn on the identification of non-Jewish Czechs with the fates of their Jewish compatriots. After 1972, indeed, only Czech Jews perpetuated the discourse linking Lidice and the Ghetto in Theresienstadt.⁹⁰ Instead, propagandists and party-state educators once again attempted to elide completely the Jewish specificity of the genocide in the public sphere. The state-run media even revived the antisemitic propaganda of the 1950s that wartime “Zionists” had collaborated with the Nazis.

Thus, under cynical pretexts, did the Terezín Memorial remove mention of the Ghetto from its permanent exhibit in 1971.⁹¹ The following year, it opened a small exhibition about

Auschwitz by the Soviet army], *Věstník* vol. 42, no. 1 (January 1980): 1; “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 45, no. 12 (December 1983): 2; Daniel Mayer, “Dokumenty, které varují” [Documents that warn], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 8 (August 1985): 4; “Mezinárodní forum za svět bez jaderných zbraní, za přežití lidstva” [The international forum for a world without nuclear weapons, for the survival of humanity], *Věstník*, vol. 49, no. 3 (March 1987), 1-2; and “Projev oblastního rabína Daniela Mayera na terezínské tryzně 20. září” [The speech of the regional rabbi Daniel Mayer at the Terezín commemoration on 20 September], *Věstník*, vol. 49, no. 11 (November 1987): 1. In 1985, the CJRC and the Prague community joined protesters around the world in condemning U.S. President Ronald Reagan for laying a wreath in the Bitburg Cemetery in West Germany where members of the Nazi Waffen-SS were interred. and “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 7 (July 1985): 2. Perhaps most strikingly, in 1978, Bedřich Bass invoked the Second World War to lobby against the Camp David peace accords at an international meeting of Jewish leaders in Vienna. “Zpráva z 35. zasedání Evropské rady pro služby židovským obcím /dale ER/ ve dnech 4.-6.1978 ve Vídni” [Report from the 35th meeting of the European Council of Jewish Communal Services] (21 November 1978). NAČR, SPVC box 236.

⁹⁰ J.L., “Lidice-Terezín,” *Věstník*, 34:6 (June 1972): 2-3; “O lidických dětech a nejen o nich” [About the children of Lidice and not only about them], *Věstník*, 39:6 (June 1977): 1-2; and V.R., “Trestný transport A.A.H” [Transport A.A.H.], *Věstník*, 39:7 (July 1977): 3; and “Terezínské děti o lidických ovečkách” [Terezín children on Lidice sheep], *Věstník*, vol. 44, no. 6 (June 1982).

⁹¹ Křížková, “Hmotné doklady o životě vězňů” [Material artifacts about the lives of the prisoners], 61-62; Jan Munk, “Z historie Památníku Terezín” [From the history of the Terezín Memorial], *Terezínské listy*, vol. 21 (1993): 17-20; and Marek Poloncarz, “K výstavní činnosti

Theresienstadt's Jewish artists that failed to situate their work in the broader context of genocide.⁹² In 1972, the Post Office release a series of stamps commemorating Second-World-War anniversaries. One featured a young boy's gaunt face behind barbed wire and the words "30 years since the creation of the Terezín Ghetto."⁹³ Although most Czechs would have understood that the boy was Jewish, the de-Judaized iconography suggested, once again, that it was an unimportant fact. That same year, radio and television programs referred to Theresienstadt's Jewish administrators as "Henchmen of the Gestapo."⁹⁴ If the Terezín Memorial's new journal, founded in 1970, first impressed the CJRC,⁹⁵ it soon became a vehicle for anti-Israeli propaganda. It also tended to marginalize the history of the Ghetto.⁹⁶ Finally, the return to the *status quo ante* also meant that the Pinkas Memorial, which had closed legitimately for repairs in 1969, would not reopen until after the fall of communism in 1989.⁹⁷

Commemorating the Holocaust, nonetheless, remained central to the activities of the Jewish communities and the State Jewish Museum. As had always been the case, these organizations continued accommodating the shifting parameters set by the party-state, both implicitly and explicitly. At the CJRC's memorial services, Jewish leaders of the survivor generation expressed concern that their younger co-religionists were not drawing the same

Památníku Terezín v letech 1947-1997" [Regarding the exhibition activities of the Terezín Memorial], *Terezínské listy*, vol. 26 (1998):12-13.

⁹² Karel Lagus, "Umění v Terezíně 1941-45" [Art in Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 34, no. 11 (November 1972): 5 and 7.

⁹³ Pictures of the stamps. <<http://www.filaso.cz/katalog-znamky/949/1972-vyznamna-vyroci>> (28 December 2012).

⁹⁴ Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 183-84, and 187.

⁹⁵ Rudolf Iltis, "Nové číslo Terezínských listů" [A new issue of *Terezín pages*], *Věstník*, vol. 35, no. 3 (November 1973): 3.

⁹⁶ Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 183-84. A "positive" review in *Věstník* from 1987 praised the journal for including "full articles or, at least, mention of Jewish prisoners." Josef Svítek, "Terezínské listy" [*Terezín pages*], *Věstník*, vol. 39, no. 6 (June 1987): 2 and 5, quote on 2.

⁹⁷ Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 51-53.

political conclusions from the Second World War that they had—and therefore were not evincing proper (obsequious) loyalty to the party-state. They blamed it on the fact that the youths had not experienced the politicizing effects of Nazism.⁹⁸

Rather than take issue with this accommodation of party-state politics or with the patronizing nature of some CJRC officials, dissenting Jewish activists expressed greater concern over the lack of Jewish religious, cultural, and historical awareness among the members of their communities.⁹⁹ While the state had never prevented or discouraged Jews from commemorating the genocide, its administration of the Jewish communities had, in fact, contributed to the emergence of a generation of Jews with little knowledge of Judaism. Activists, therefore, focused more on the future than on the past. They worried more about the destruction of Jewish cemeteries, which they felt constituted an erasure of the Jewish historical record, than the erection of new memorials for Holocaust victims. Rabbi Daniel Mayer, born in 1957, added his voice to theirs. He found in the Holocaust an imperative to restore Jewish cultural and religious

⁹⁸ “Ze Státního židovského muzea v Praze” [From the State Jewish Museum in Prague], *Věstník*, vol. 37, no. 6 (June 1975): 3-4; “Osvětimská tragédie” [Auschwitz tragedy], *Věstník*, vol. 40, no. 5 (April 1976), 1-4; H.H., “Pamětní kniha vypráví” [The memorial book speaks], *Věstník*, vol. 42, no. 8 (August 1980): 3; and S. Šteindler, “Pět koncentráků” [Five concentration camps], *Věstník*, vol. 48, no. 4 (April 1986): 4-5. The attitudes and behaviors of youth concerned not only Jews. During the 1960s, both the Party and the elder citizens worried that the country’s youths were at risk for having missed out on the politicizing influences of the Second World War. Pospíšil, “Youth Cultures and the Disciplining of Czechoslovak Youth,” 477-500. The participation of youths in the Prague Spring, the 1960s “underground,” and the emerging dissident movements of the 1970s compounded these fears, as did the passage of time since the war. See intra-Party report from 1977 “Zpráva o bezpečnostních opatřeních mezi mládeží” [News about the security measures among youths] (28 November 1977). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/1: bundle 58, archival unit 65, point 2.

⁹⁹ Bedřich Rona, remarks at a meeting of the executive board of the Prague Jewish Religious Community on 22 May 1985, attached to collection of documents “Záznam ze schůze představenstva židovské náb. obce v Praze dne 22.5.1985” [Report from the meeting of the presidium of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague on 22 May 1985]. NAČR, SPVC231-B-3; and Leo Pavlat, et. al., “Open Letter to the Leadership of the Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands,” trans. Peter Brod, “Documents: Czechoslovakia: Jewish Legacy and the Jewish Present,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 29/1 (1990): 66-68.

life in Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁰

This did not mean that the Holocaust disappeared entirely from the public sphere, especially for people in Prague who took an interest in it. Indeed, historians who portray instances of Holocaust-related cultural production in post-1972 Czechoslovakia as exceptional are misguided. Particularly after 1979, there were simply too many exceptions to support such a conclusion. Together, between 1972 and 1989, the State Jewish Museum, the Terezín Memorial, the CJRC, and the Jewish Religious Community in Prague exhibited the works of Theresienstadt's artists no fewer than eight times, often depicting their authors as antifascist resisters. In 1985, the museum even felt compelled to entice potential visitors with a promise of new materials.¹⁰¹ Regional institutions put on at least three similar exhibitions as well, twice in České Budějovice and once in Holešov. One of them opened in the Museum of the Workers Revolution Movement in Southern Bohemia, which was hardly a site of anti-Communist or

¹⁰⁰ “Dám jim památník s jménem: Proslov Daniela Mayera na tryzně v Terezíně 12. 10. 1982” [I will give them a memorial with a name: the speech by Daniel Mayer at the commemoration in Terezín on 12 October 1982], *Věstník*, vol. 44, no. 10 (October 1983): 7; and “Aktuality: Tradiční terezínská tryzna” [News: the traditional Terezín commemoration], *Věstník*, vol., 47, no. 11 (November 1985): 2.

¹⁰¹ The Terezín Memorial put on exhibits in 1972 and 1989. The PJRC held one in 1979. The SJM organized shows in 1975, 1978, 1985, 1987, and 1988. In chronological order see: “Památce terezínských mučedníků” [Memorial to the martyrs of Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 34, no. 10 (October 1972): 2-3; Karel Lagus, “Umění v Terezíně 1941-1945” [Art in Terezín 1941-1945], *Věstník*, vol. 34, no. 11 (November 1972): 5; “Ze Státního židovského muzea v Praze” [The State Jewish Museum in Prague], *Věstník*, vol. 37, no. 6 (June 1975): 3-4; A. F., “Umění v koncentračním táboře Terezín forma antifašistického odboje” [Art in the concentration camp Terezín, a form of anti-fascist resistance], *Věstník*, vol. 40, no. 7 (July 1978): 2-3; “Děti a Terezín” [Children and Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 41, no. 5 (May 1979): 2; CJRC, “Mimořádný ohlas výstavy Děti a Terezín” [Extraordinary acclaim for the exhibit, Children and Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 41, no. 6 (June 1979): 4; Jarmila Škochová, “Mládež v koncentračním táboře Terezín” [Youth in the concentration camp Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 7 (July 1985): 5; Daniel Mayer, “Karel Fleischmann, osobnost a dílo—nova výstava Státního židovského muzea” [Karel Fleischmann, personality and work—a new exhibit of the Jewish Museum], *Věstník*, vol. 49, no. 5 (May 1987): 2; Oliva Pechová, “Výstava Friedl Dicker-Brandejsová” [The exhibition of Friedl Dicker-Brandejsová], *Věstník*, vol. 50, no. 6 (June 1988): 6-7; and Oliva Pechová, “Výstava Petra Kiena v Terezíně” [The exhibition of Petr Kien in Terezín] *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 7 (July 1989): 7.

“Zionist” agitation.¹⁰² The CJRC and the Prague community, furthermore, held a joint exhibit on the history of the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1980.¹⁰³ The following year, the Terezín Memorial and the State Jewish Museum collaborated on a similar exhibition that premiered temporarily in Terezín’s Small Fortress. After traveling abroad to Sachsenhausen, the exhibit returned permanently to the Ghetto crematorium.¹⁰⁴

Thus, keeping in mind that the Holocaust reemerged as a theme of popular culture in the 1980s, it is more accurate to conclude that post-1972 Czechoslovakia offered a significant array of sanctioned commemorative and educational opportunities for those who sought them out—none of which were considered politically oppositional. Rather, they simply embellished, for the interested few, mainstream accounts of the Second World War, which almost universally ignored the Jewish tragedy. To be clear, by severely limiting the acknowledgement and representation of the Holocaust in the public sphere, the memory politics of the party-state posed a serious, national pedagogical problem and an even larger challenge to the integration of Jews into Czech-socialist society. Its suppression of information, however, was not nearly as complete nor always as malevolent as described in much contemporary historiography.

A study of Czech historiography from that period reveals a similar pattern. As would be expected, no major work on the Holocaust or even the Ghetto appeared in Czech after 1972.

Most studies of Terezín, the German occupation, and the Second World War continued to

¹⁰² “Výstava kreseb Karla Fleischmann” [Exhibit of the drawings of Karel Fleischmann], *Věstník*, vol. 36, no. 9 (September 1974): 4; “Dětské kresby z Terezína v Českých Budějovicích” [Children’s drawings from Terezín in České Budějovice], *Věstník*, vol. 42, no. 8 (August 1980): 2; J.S., “Výstava ‘Kresby z Terezína’ v Holešově” [Exhibition “Drawings from Terezín” in Holešov], *Věstník*, vol. 41, no. 7 (July 1979): 2.

¹⁰³ “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 42, no. 4 (April 1980): 2; “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 42, no. 5 (May 1980): 2; and H.H., “Pamětní kniha vypráví” [The memorial book talks],

¹⁰⁴ E.M., “Výstava v Terezíně” [Exhibition in Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 43, no. 10 (October 1981): 8; and Poloncarz, “K výstavní činnosti Památníku Terezín” [Regarding the exhibition activities of the Terezín Memorial], 16.

marginalize, often to the point of absurdity, the antisemitic focus and genocidal ends of the Nazi regime. For example, in *From “Protection” to “the Final Solution*, Oldřich Sládek provides documentary evidence of a Nazi plan to eliminate only the Czech nation. He mentions Jews only three times and egregiously fails to do so when discussing the 195,000 mostly Jewish Czechs and Slovaks whom the had Nazis murdered in concentration camps.¹⁰⁵

This confirms traditional accounts of Holocaust memory during the 1970s and 1980s. There were also, however, a number of significant exceptions to this rule. First, the official monographs of the Terezín Memorial never stopped including information on the Theresienstadt Ghetto. The Holocaust, similarly, remained a central theme of *Věstník* through 1989.¹⁰⁶ Second, from the mid-1970s through the 1980s, Czech historians, and Miroslav Kárný in particular, regularly published articles on the Czech-Jewish Holocaust in *The Czechoslovak Historical Journal* and the State Jewish Museum’s journal, *Judaica Bohemiae*.¹⁰⁷ Third, beginning in the 1980s, a number of museums and local chapters of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters included

¹⁰⁵ Oldřich Sládek, *Od “ochrany” ke “konečnému řešení,”* [From “protection” to “the Final Solution”] (Prague, Czechoslovakia: The Czech UAF, 1983). The Holocaust receives similarly scant treatment in a collection of documents related to Reinhard Heydrich’s career as the Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. Only three out of eighty-five documents concern his anti-Jewish policies. Lenka Linhartová, Vlasta Měšťanková, Jaroslava Milotová, *Heydrichova okupační politika v dokumentech* [Heydrich’s occupation politics in documents] (Prague, Czech Republic: Czech UAF, 1987). A book on Theresienstadt published in 1982 failed to include new information about the Ghetto available in Czechoslovakia after 1957. Otakar Vatoček and Zdenka Kostková, *Terezín* (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Odeon, 1982) in Jan Podlešák, “K nové publikaci o Terezíně” [On the new publication about Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 44, no. 3 (March 1982): 6.

¹⁰⁶ On the monographs, see Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 59.

¹⁰⁷ Frankl, ““Endlösung der Judenfrage”” [The Final Solution to the Jewish Question], 274-76; and Rothkirchen, “Czechoslovakia,” 183-84. The articles often focused on cultural life in Theresienstadt and employed a Marxian framework of analysis. Historians point out correctly that the State Jewish Museum published *Judaica Bohemiae* primarily for foreign readers. Articles ran in English, German, French, and Russian, but never in Czech or Slovak. They neglect to mention, however, that it was available to Czech citizens, that Czech Jews often spoke multiple languages, and that *Věstník* often carried summaries and lists of the articles in Czech.

significant information about—and by—Jews into their regional histories of the Second World War.¹⁰⁸ The Kroměříž Museum stood out in this regard, thanks to Josef Svátek, a regular contributor to *Věstník*.¹⁰⁹ There were also independent works of scholarship that addressed the Holocaust in more detail. For example, a reviewer in *Věstník* praised Zdeněk Huňáček for including substantial information about Jewish wartime experiences and deaths in his 1988 monograph, *Czech Antifascism and Resistance*.¹¹⁰ Finally, university students defended at least two dissertations on the Holocaust in the Czech Lands in 1983 and 1984.¹¹¹

It also took some years for state administrators to achieve the desired return to the *status quo ante* and doing so was an uneven process.¹¹² In 1972 and 1974 respectively, the Terezín Memorial unveiled new monuments at Terezín's Jewish Cemetery and on the banks of the Ohře

¹⁰⁸ The Jičín chapter of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters incorporated a thirty-page section on the “Jewish Catastrophe” into its book *The National Resistance at the Jičín District, 1939-1945*. Heteinger, *In the Shadows*, 60. The Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters in Kolín cooperated with the Kolín Regional Museum and the county-branch of the Communist Party to publish a similar, two-volume work, which included a chapter reprinted from Rabbi Feder's publications, as well as additional information on the Holocaust. Josef Svátek, “Vzpomínky na okupaci” [Recollections of the occupation], *Věstník*, vol. 49, no. 12 (October 1987): 2. The Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters in Strakonice included fifteen pages of Jewish names into its seventy-two-page publication listing local citizens who lost their lives to the Second World War. See HH “Z kultury” [From culture], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 6 (June 1985): 8. Finally, the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters chapter in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm published a list of local victims of Nazi racial persecution in 1988. “Seznam obětí rasové perzekuce v Rožnově pod Radhoštěm” [The list of the victims of racial persecution in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm], *Věstník*, vol. 50, no. 6 (June 1988): 4.

¹⁰⁹ Josef Svátek, “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 42, no. 7 (July 1980): 2; J. S. “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 38, no. 8 (August 1986): 2; and “Zajímavé články” [Interesting chapters], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 10 (October 1985): 2.

¹¹⁰ J. L., “Český antifascismus a odboj” [Czech anti-fascism and resistance], *Věstník*, vol. 50, no. 5 (May 1988): 2. See also Zdeněk Huňáček, et. al., *Český antifascismus a odboj* [Czech anti-fascism and resistance] (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Naše vojsko for ČSPB, 1988). A reviewer in *Věstník* praised František Nedbálek's book *Místa utrpení a vzdoru* [Places of suffering and defiance] for dedicating ten pages to Jewish sites. See J. L., “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 5 (May 1985): 2.

¹¹¹ J. F., “Nové diplomové práce” [A new master's work], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 10 (October 1985): 2.

¹¹² Rothkirchen dates this transition from 1974 in “Czechoslovakia,” 181.

River.¹¹³ For some years, prominent individuals even felt comfortable challenging the new direction set by the party-State. Karel Lagus complained in *Věstník* about the lack of attention to the Holocaust at the Terezín Memorial in 1972.¹¹⁴ In 1973 and 1974, CJRC president František Fuchs publicly refuted the state-run media's portrayal of wartime Jews as having either collaborated or remained passive victims.¹¹⁵

Fuchs thereby incited one of the only cases of state intervention into how the Jewish communities dealt with the Holocaust. In 1975, the Ministry of Culture's Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs (SEA) instructed the CJRC's leaders to

gradually reach a change in ideological attitudes to the evaluation of the national-liberation fight of the Czechoslovak people, which over-emphasise and immoderately interpret the part played by Jews in it[.]¹¹⁶

The SEA had already forced Fuchs to retire one year earlier, citing other offences.¹¹⁷ Bedřich

¹¹³ "Důstojná úprava památného místa na břehu Ohře" [A reverent repair to the memorial place on the banks of the Ohře], *Věstník*, vol. 35, no. 6 (June 1974): 6. One reason why the Terezín Memorial and the Army may have kept their promises to improve these sites may have been the international attention that they drew. See also Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 56. She dates the Ohře River monument from 1973.

¹¹⁴ Lagus, "Umění v Terezíně 1941-1945" [Art in Terezín 1941-1945].

¹¹⁵ "Našim mrtvým: Projev předsedy RŽNO ing. Františka na tryzně dne 11. března 1973" [Our dead: the speech of the president of the CJRC, František Fuchs on 11 March 1973], *Věstník*, vol. 35, no. 3 (March 1973): 1-2; 74-3 František Fuchs, "Před třiceti lety: Projev předsedy RŽNO Ing. Františka Fuchse na tryzně v Praze, konané dne 3. března 1974" [Thirty years ago: The speech of CJRC president Frantisek Fuchs at the commemoration held on 3 March 1973], *Věstník*, vol. 36, no. 3 (March 1974): 1-2.

¹¹⁶ Ministry of Culture, Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs, "Report on the Course of the Regular Congress of Delegates of the Jewish Religious Communities in the CSR, held on March 2nd 1975 in Prague, with a proposal of religious-political measures" (April 1975), report prepared for the [Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] by the Ministry of Culture in April 1975." MK-SPVC, box 231, "Sjezdy," trans. in Marie Crhová, "Jews Under the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia," 289. Original in NAČR, KSC-ÚV-02/4, vol. 98, archival unit 155, point: info 1.

¹¹⁷ Rothkirchen incorrectly asserts that state authorities suspended Fuchs for protesting the new memory politics in "Czechoslovakia," 183. A report submitted to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, presumably by the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs, in advance of the 1975 CJRC congress indicates that they had more complex reasons. "Zpráva o přípravách

Bass, his replacement, and the rest of the new leadership cohort took the SEA's warning to heart. For ten years after 1975, Czech-Jewish leaders no longer fought publicly to win the same respect for the victims of racial persecution as was accorded to antifascist fighters and the victims of political persecution. They also stopped working to introduce the stories of Jewish fighters into the national narratives of resistance and liberation. Rather, they simply followed the party-state's lead and portrayed wartime Czech Jews as victims who, if they survived, only came to political consciousness after the war.¹¹⁸ Although this accorded with the experiences of a plurality—if not most—of Czech Jews, it still represented collaboration in a willful elision of history, rooted in communist ideology and, to an extent, antisemitism. Of course, speakers continued to honor Jewish fighters at community functions—at least, in passing.¹¹⁹ In 1977 and 1978, *Věstník* even published short remembrances by a Jewish former combatant named Adolf Slonek, whose status as such offered both he and the CJRC a some political protection.¹²⁰

Despite their caution not to upset the authorities, Jewish leaders did not fail to protest on

řádného sjezdu Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR návrhy na opatření” [Report about the preparations for the regular congress of the CJRC, proposals for measures], 1-2, in “Opatření související s jednáním řádného sjezdu Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR” [Measures regarding the regular meeting of the CJRC] (20 February 1975). NAČR, ÚV-KSČ, bundle 81, Archival unit 145, point 17.

¹¹⁸ “Oslavy 31. výročí osvobození naší vlasti Sovětskou armádou v Praze a v Brně: Slavnostní projev předsedy RŽNO dr. Bedřicha Basse” [The celebration of the 31st anniversary of the liberation of our country by the Soviet army in Prague and Brno: the celebratory speech of the CJRC president, Dr. Bedřich Bass], *Věstník*, vol. 38, no. 6 (June 1976): 1-2. For a similar argument regarding East Germany, see Y. Michael Bodemann, “How Can One Stand to Live There as a Jew...’: Paradoxes of Jewish Existence in Germany,” in *Jews, Germans, Memory: Reconstructions of Jewish Life in Germany*, ed. Y. Michael Bodemann (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996), 19-38.

¹¹⁹ “Terezín—brána na cestě smrti” [Terezín—gateway to the path of death], *Věstník*, vol., 38, no. 9 (September 1976): 2; and K. “Vzpomínka na bojovníky a padlé” [Recollections of fighters and the fallen], *Věstník*, vol. 39, no. 12 (December 1977): 6.

¹²⁰ Adolf Slonek, “K 35. výročí vzniku Československé jednotky v SSSR” [On the 35th anniversary of the formation of the Czechoslovak unit in the USSR], *Věstník*, vol. 39, no. 3 (March 1977): 3; idem., “K 35. výročí boj u Sokolova” [On the 35th anniversary of the fight at Sokolov], *Věstník*, vol. 40, no. 3 (March 1978): 3.

the rare occasion when they felt that even the restrictive terms of national memory politics had been violated. In 1976 the leadership of the Prague community complained to the Mayor of Prague about the lack of progress in reopening the Pinkas Memorial and called into question the city's excuses for not having done so.¹²¹ In 1986, CJRC central secretary František Kraus sent a letter of protest to the president of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters about an article in that organization's main newspaper which claimed that Reinhard Heydrich was of Jewish descent.¹²²

I have argued thus far, in agreement with most historiography, that the politics of Holocaust memory in 1970s Czechoslovakia returned to something like the *status quo ante* of the mid-1950s. I also demonstrated, however, that this regression was not nearly as complete nor as systematic as some historians have portrayed it. I will attempt now to undermine my own claim even more significantly. Considerable changes in Czech demography and political culture between the 1950s and the 1970s resulted in overtly similar practices acquiring novel meanings and losing others the second time around. As Jonathan Bolton writes, "... one of the things that made the 1970s different from the 1950s was—the 1960s."¹²³

Most traditional accounts of citizen-state relations during normalization hold that after 1968 Czechoslovak citizens withdrew from the public sphere, ceding it to the party-state in exchange for increased freedoms in the private sphere and a higher standard of living.¹²⁴ The party, of course, was supposed to have made this contingent upon citizens performing loyalty through participation in demonstrations, the repetition of slogans, and the use of the party's

¹²¹ Letter from PJRC to Zdeněk Zuska (5 April 1976). NAČR, SPVC box 234.

¹²² Letter from František Kraus to Václav Hájek (23 December 1987). ZŇO.

¹²³ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 74-81, see 81 for quote.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

discourses in public.¹²⁵ Under this type analysis, the willingness of the overwhelmingly non-Jewish population to relinquish Holocaust memory to the party-state—and thereby to consign it to obscurity—reflected nothing more than collaboration out of fear and self-interest—and, perhaps, a lack of empathy for Jews.

An exciting new turn in Czech historiography, however, suggests a more complicated reason for why the nation acquiesced to the changes in memory politics enacted from above. A new generation of historians has revisited the question of citizen-state relations during normalization. Their present debate turns on differences in preference for two competing analytical frameworks, both of which restore political agency to so-called “ordinary” citizens. Some understand citizen-state relations during normalization to have functioned as a Gramscian hegemonic system, in which non-elites entered into negotiations of power and language with the party-state as its weaker partner.¹²⁶ Others see the language of normalization politics as a Bakhtinian authoritative discourse controlled by the party, which non-elite Czechs then

¹²⁵ Ibid., 221-38; Marci Shore, “The Sacred and the Myth: Havel’s Greengrocer and the Transformation of Ideology in Communist Czechoslovakia,” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1996): 163-182; Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010). As the titles of some of these works suggest, this interpretation of Czech political culture originated with an 1979 essay by Václav Havel, who imagined the political implications of a simple greengrocer refusing to participate in what we might now consider the Foucauldian exercise of power by the Communist Party. Through this allegory, Havel attempted to demonstrate that “ordinary” citizens could undermine it. Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945*, ed., Gale Stokes (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 1991, reprinted 1996): 168-74.

¹²⁶ Michal Pullmann, “Discussion: Writing History in the Czech and Slovak Republics: an Interview with Michal Pullmann,” *Social History*, vol. 37, no. 4 (November 2012): 398-400; Pavel Barša, “Normalizace mimo dobro a zlo: Pullmannova reinterpetace dějin pozdního komunismu trpí opačnou jednostranností než klasické výklady: ignoruje represí” [Normalization outside of good and evil: Pullmann’s reinterpetation of the history of late communism suffers the opposite bias from classical accounts: it ignores repression], *Lidové Noviny* (21 May 2011): 25, cited in Pullmann, “Writing History,” 399.

manipulated to articulate their own ideas and also to make demands of the state.¹²⁷

Regardless of the outcome of this debate, it suggests that the attitudes and behaviors of non-elite Czechs mattered to establishing the place of the Holocaust in normalization culture. Until 1968, Czechs had deployed the Holocaust as a complex symbol with which to debate, insist upon, and mark the de-Stalinization of Czechoslovakia and the reformation of its Communist Party. That, I contend, is one of the main reasons why reactionary communists sought to restrict Holocaust-related cultural production and commemoration after 1968. The restoration of Moscow-aligned rule, however, and the expulsion of reformers from the Communist Party made discussions of de-Stalinization and reform irrelevant. In this new and sudden context, the Holocaust lost its symbolic usefulness for most of the non-Jewish population. This does not mean that they grew less sympathetic towards their Jewish compatriots. It does suggest, however, why, after a decade of thinking with the Holocaust, non-Jewish Czechs abandoned the theme.

To that end, it bears noting a few obvious facts which will help to account further for the lack of uproar or even reaction by Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs to the relative disappearance of the Holocaust as a theme of popular and political culture during the 1970s. First, by that decade, a sizeable proportion of the population would have had little or no personal experience with the Second World War or the Holocaust. Second, as the war faded into history, battles over its causes and lessons lost relevance to people's daily lives and self-perception. Third, the authorities could not erase from memory the years of Holocaust-related cultural production before 1968 nor the vast amount of Communist-Party propaganda that had deployed the

¹²⁷ Michal Pullmann, *Konec experimentu: přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* [The end of an experiment: perestroika and the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia] (Prague, Czech Republic: Scriptorum, 2011).

Holocaust as a motif. Censors could ban the publication and distribution of new books, but they could not remove old ones from the libraries of private citizens. Even the party's attempts to restore cinematic discourses on the Second World War by fiat failed miserably.¹²⁸

In other words, by the advent of normalization, many citizens were already losing interest in the Second World War and had become, to an extent, saturated with Holocaust-related cultural production. That mattered little when Czechs could deploy the theme of the Holocaust to serve ulterior political ends. But it mattered very much when it could no longer serve such purposes. At that point, the theme of the Holocaust ceased to be of paramount interest to most non-Jewish Czech. This also helps explain why Jewish leaders may have curtailed their provocative interventions into Czech memory politics after 1975. Their preparedness to intervene had always depended upon the perception of support from other, more powerful interest groups. By the mid-1970s, they could not have perceived much support at all.

Finally, understanding the reason behind the decline in public interest in the Holocaust also helps to explain why the party-state allowed it to return as a theme of popular culture during the 1980s. Once authorities had determined that it no longer served reformist–now dissident–purposes, they had only to benefit from appeasing those who felt compelled to delve publicly into its history—provided that they kept to a strict set of parameters. There was also an international component to this. At the turn of the 1980s, party-state officials hoped to acquire advocates for Czechoslovakia from within America's Jewish communities, whose political influence they overestimated. They also sought hard currency from them, in the form of financial

¹²⁸ The films produced to their order received poor reviews and suffered low attendance. Petr Koura, "Filmy smíchu a zapomění: obraz 'Pražského jara' v českém hraném filmu z období 'normalizace,'" [Films of laughter and forgetting: the picture of the "Prague Spring" in Czech feature film from the period of "normalization"], *Soudobé dějiny*, vol. 15, no. 3-4 (2008): 575-606.

aid for the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities. In the 1980s, these concerns took precedence over appeasing Arab governments. They also motivated state administrators to support Holocaust-related initiatives that had the potential to be noticed abroad. After all, one of the charges leveled against the communist states by American Jewish activists was that they had ignored the Holocaust as a historical event.¹²⁹ The Holocaust, moreover, featured prominently in the rhetoric of U.S. activist who sought emigration rights for Soviet Jews.¹³⁰ Thus, even before Gorbachev encouraged greater freedom of expression with his *Glasnost* reforms, Czechoslovak party-state administrators had already begun to allow the Holocaust to reemerge in the public sphere.¹³¹

Věstník thus proudly and with savvy reported that thousands of foreign guests, along with party-state representatives, had visited the Holocaust exhibitions held in Prague's Jewish Town Hall in 1979 and 1980.¹³² The motivation to placate American Jewry also helps to account for the Terezín Memorial's aforementioned decision to open a permanent exhibition about the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1982, as well as the lack of party opposition to it.¹³³ In 1986, an U.S. film crew even received permission from the CJRC and the state to film a gathering of former

¹²⁹ Zvi Gitelman, "The Soviet Union," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 317.

¹³⁰ Yossi Klein Halevi, "Jacob Birnbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry," *Azure*, (Spring 5764/2004): 27-57. For example of such rhetoric, see Gunther Lawrence, *Three Million More?* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970). Many thanks to Shaul Kelner for his insights into this matter.

¹³¹ On *Glasnost* and Holocaust memory in Czechoslovakia, see Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 188-89. In the USSR, Gitelman, "The Soviet Union," 318-19.

¹³² "Děti a Terezín" [Children and Terezín], 2; CJRC, "Mimořádný ohlas výstavy Děti a Terezín" [Extraordinary acclaim for the exhibit "Children and Terezín], 4; "Aktuality" [News], *Věstník*, vol. 42, no. 4 (April 1980): 2; "Aktuality" [News], *Věstník*, vol. 42, no. 5 (May 1980): 2; and H.H., "Pamětní kniha vypráví" [The memorial book talks], 3.

¹³³ E.M., "Výstava v Terezíně" [Exhibition in Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 43, no. 10 (October 1981): 8; and Poloncarz, "K výstavní činnosti Památníku Terezín" [Regarding the exhibition activities of the Terezín Memorial], 16.

“Theresienstadt children.”¹³⁴

The new freedom to address questions related to the Holocaust offered Jewish leaders and others the opportunity to resume their efforts to raise awareness about Jewish participation in the fight against Nazi Germany and to challenge the myth that Jews had gone to their deaths as passive victims—like sheep. The CJRC’s proclamation of thanks on the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1985 paid greater homage to the fallen Jewish soldiers of the Soviet Army than had been common practice in the previous years.¹³⁵ Also in 1985, the CJRC unveiled a memorial in Prague “to the murdered and fallen” Jews of the Second World War. In his speech for the occasion, Rabbi Mayer emphasized Jewish contributions to the war against Germany.¹³⁶ That same year, *Věstník* carried another article on Jewish fighters. Two more followed in 1987.¹³⁷ In the final years of Communist rule, museum exhibitions in both Brno and Kroměříž covered the history of Jewish resistance as well.¹³⁸

Although technically unrelated, the fact that the Kroměříž Museum also took the bold

¹³⁴ Letter from Ivan, [illegible], Krátký film to Jelínek at the Ministry of Culture (3 September 1986); Letter from the CJRC to the Ministry of Culture (25 August 1986); and translation of letter from Dan Weissman and Zuzana Justmannová of Visible Pictures to Bohumil Heller and Rabbi Mayer (19 August 1986). NAČR, SPVC box 234. The “former Terezín children” declared their support for the “peace proposals of the Soviet Union and the other socialist states” and their hope for a coming together of East and West. “Prohlášení bývalých terezínských ‘Děti’” [Proclamation of the former Terezín children], *Věstník*, vol. 48, no. 12 (December 1986), 2.

¹³⁵ “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 7 (July 1985): 2.

¹³⁶ “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 6 (June 1985): 2; and Daniel Mayer “Pocta zavražděným a padlým: Projev při odhalení pomníku na židovském hřbitově v Praze” [A tribute to the murdered and fallen: the speech for the unveiling of the monument at the Jewish cemetery in Prague], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 6 (June 1985): 4.

¹³⁷ Josef Svátek, “Padli, abychom my žili” [They fell so that we may live], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 5 (May 1985): 2-3; idem., “Bojovali a padli za naši vlast” [They fought and fell for our homeland], *Věstník*, vol. 49, no. 5 (May 1987): 2; S.I., “Vzpomínáme” [We remember], *Věstník*, vol. 39, no. 8 (August 1987): 2.

¹³⁸ Josef Svátek in “Z kultury” [From culture], *Věstník*, vol. 47, no. 6 (June 1985): 8; and idem., “Výstava Morava v boji proti fašismu” [Exhibition of Moravia in the fight against fascism], *Věstník*, vol. 48, no. 1 (January 1986): 6.

step of addressing Czech collaboration with the Nazis in a 1987 exhibit demonstrates the significant extent to which the restrictions on what could and could not be said about the Holocaust and the Second World War had weakened during the second half of the 1980s.¹³⁹ This phenomenon articulated in popular culture as well. In 1979 and 1987, for example, Karel Kachyňa directed two films based on Ota Pavel stories.¹⁴⁰ Plays about the Czech-Jewish Holocaust, adapted from on the works of Pavel and Ladislav Fuks, also returned to Prague's theaters in 1987 and 1988.¹⁴¹ *Glasnost*, of course, helped to make this possible.

Not every branch of the party-state approved of these changes in memory politics. Sensing the rising threat to its control of political discourses, the Ministry of the Interior either ordered or permitted one of its officials, Josef Šebesta, to publish an antisemitic and anti-Zionist novel in 1986 called *In the Promise Land? (V zemi zaslíbené?)*. Predictably, it portrayed Zionists as genocidal fascists who perpetrated wanton crimes against humanity in founding the State of Israel. Livia Rothkirchen concludes that its

main objective was to denigrate the issue of the Holocaust and damage the reputations of the wartime Jewish leaders and personalities, accusing them of being Nazi collaborators.”¹⁴²

Today, anyone familiar with the ministry's security files can easily identify the sources of the author's venomous distortions of history.

Had Šebesta published his book in the 1970s, the story would likely have ended here. By

¹³⁹ “Expozice třídních bojů v Kroměříži” [Exhibition on class warfare in Kroměříž], *Věstník*, vol. 49, no. 8 (August 1987): 2. See also Rothkirchen, “Czechoslovakia,” 188-89.

¹⁴⁰ *Zlatí úhoři* [Golden eels] premiered on television in 1979. *Smrt krásných srnců* [The death of beautiful deer; distributed in English as *Forbidden Dreams*] first ran in Czech theaters in September 1987. I sense that Kachyňa used the Holocaust as an analogy with which to criticize Czech culture during normalization.

¹⁴¹ “Povídky Oty Pavla na jevišti” [The stories of Ota Pavel on stage], *Věstník*, vol. 49, no. 7 (May 1987): 7; and Marie Valtrová, “Čisté srdce” [Pure heart], *Věstník*, vol. 50, no. 1 (January 1988): 7.

¹⁴² Rothkirchen, “Czechoslovakia,” 188.

the late 1980s, however, the practice of deploying the Holocaust as a weapon against “Zionists” had lost much of its utility and, indeed, threatened to provoke negative reactions abroad. This helps to explain what happened next. One of Šebesta’s main targets was the historian Erich Kulka, who had emigrated to Israel in 1968.¹⁴³ Incredibly, after two years of litigation ending in September 1989, Kulka won a libel suit in a Czechoslovak court against Šebesta and his publisher, Melantrich.¹⁴⁴ The late 1980s thus not only offered Czechs additional opportunities to explore the history of the Holocaust, but it also witnessed a major shift in party-state practices as well. As is well known, politically relevant court decisions depended upon the whims of the Communist Party.

The extent to which the Holocaust had become de-politicized in the public sphere during the 1970s and 1980s is attested to by the fact that it was only in the last years of communist rule that Czechoslovak dissidents raised the issue of Holocaust memory. Their organizations did not normally avoid attacking the state for its perceived failings, even when it concerned sensitive matters. This suggests that most Czechs and Slovaks did not consider the treatment of the Holocaust in the public sphere to have been a cause for tremendous concern—even if they regretted the state of national memory politics. Perhaps too the reemergence of the Holocaust as a theme of popular and intellectual culture after 1980 and more intensely after 1985 made it seem like less of a problem.

It took until 1989 for Charter 77, the most prominent Czech dissident association, to

¹⁴³ The archival collection ABS H-665 likely provided Šebesta with all of the material he required. It contains files from “Operation Raven [Akce krkavec]” and other investigations into Kulka. Its content is emblematic of the type of spurious and hateful allegations that filled reports about prominent Jews.

¹⁴⁴ Lubomír Stejskal, “Izrael: Místo v srdci–výběr ze vzpomínek” [Israel: a place in the heart—a selection from recollections], part 6, *Lidové noviny* (22 August 2008) <<http://stejskal.bigblogger.lidovky.cz/c/46730/Izrael-Misto-v-srdci-vyber-ze-vzpominek-6.html>> (8 January 2013).

address the party-state's lack of attention to the Holocaust and, more broadly, to protest its destruction of Jewish monuments, neglect of Jewish history, and intentional disregard for the hope for a Jewish future—or even record—in Czechoslovakia. They drew inspiration from Leo Pavlat's open letter to the CJRC, delivered two months earlier, and from a similar, dissident protest from Slovakia issued in 1987.¹⁴⁵ Comparing the regime to its purported arch nemesis, Charter 77 wrote,

There is also silence on the fact that our Jewish minority has actually been liquidated several times—not only *en masse* by Nazism but also by the subsequent inclusion of the Jews who survived under the category of Czech or Slovak nationality without regard to their ethnic and cultural differences.¹⁴⁶

The “Chartists” also accused the party-state of inspiring two waves of Jewish emigration, in 1948 and 1968, which exacerbated the vanishing of Czech Jewry. Unlike its Slovak counterpart, however, Charter 77 did not raise the issue of Czech (rather than Slovak) collaboration. That topic remains subject to a taboo in the Czech Republic even today.¹⁴⁷

Finally, in March 1989—one month prior to the Charter-77 statement—the CJRC held an international symposium on the liquidation of Czech Family Camp to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of that tragedy. Its collaborators included the Terezín Memorial, the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, the State Jewish Museum, and the Central Committee of the National Committee, which both approved of and funded the event. Elite representatives of the Union of Youth, the Czech Peace Committee, the Army, and even the Communist Party attended the

¹⁴⁵ For analysis of the Slovak proclamations and a translation see Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, “Slovaks and the Holocaust: Attempts at Reconciliation,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1989): 57-68.

¹⁴⁶ Charter 77, “The Tragedy of the Jews,” 58-65, see 64 for quote. Charter 77 quoted from but did not cite Oldřich Sládek's book as for evidence of this practice.

¹⁴⁷ It had always been easier to address the Slovak Holocaust and the role of ethnic Slovaks therein because the Communist Party had used it from early on to portray the Roman Catholic Church as a fascist organization. The Eichmann trial only made this easier. Rothkirchen, “Czechoslovakia,” 177.

symposium, as did foreign diplomats and guests, like the Czech-Israeli authors Otto (formerly, Ota) Kraus and Ruth Bondy. They toured the former Theresienstadt Ghetto, visited the crematorium exhibit, and paid homage at the Ohře river. Cantor Viktor Fuerlicht concluded the event with Jewish prayers. All of the branches of the Czech media, including the Party's main print organ, *Rudé Pravo*, covered the symposium. Over the course of the following months, *Věstník* reprinted the symposium's closing declaration and main addresses.¹⁴⁸

The Czechoslovak Communist Party fell from power just over eight months after the symposium. The event, nonetheless, testifies—by way of culmination—to the drastic political and cultural shift that took place in the last years of communist rule regarding Holocaust commemoration, acknowledgement, and education. It reflected the relaxation of the Holocaust taboo around 1980, due to its domestic de-politicization, the attempt by officials to court the West, and the liberalization associated with *Glasnost*. Indeed, the symposium followed one year after a similarly groundbreaking memorial at Babi Yar, a site that had been for decades at the center of debates about the Holocaust memory in the USSR.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ “Aktuality” [News], *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 1 (January 1989): 2; Editor, “Aktuality: Mezinárodní symposium k historii terzínské rodinného tábora v Osvětimi-Birkenau” [News: the international symposium on the history of the Terezín family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau], *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 4 (April 1989): 2; “Závěrečná deklaráce terezínské sympozia” [The closing declaration of the symposium], *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 5 (May 1989): 1; Ota Kraus, “Dětský blok v kontextu posledních čtyř měsíců českého rodinného tábora v Birkenau” [The children's block in the context of the last four months of the Czech family camp in Birkenau], *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 6 (June 1989): 2; Stanislav Steindler, “K historii rodinného tábora” [On the history of the family camp], *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 7 (July 1989): 2; Jiří Steiner, “Pohled dítěte na rodinný tábor” [A view of the children in the family camp], *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 8 (August 1989): 2; Jiří Lom, “Vzpomínka svědka likvidace” [The remembrance of a witness to the liquidation], *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 9 (September 1989): 2; Ruth Bondyová, “Dokumentace o Terezínu” [Documenting Terezín], *Věstník*, vol. 51, no. 10 (October 1989): 2. See also the memo from the CJRC to Ministry of Culture, “Zpráva o akci k 45. výročí vyvraždění rodinného tábora” [Report on the happening for the 45th anniversary of the murder of the family camp] (13 March 1989). NAČR, SPVC box 233.

¹⁴⁹ Gitelman, “The Soviet Union,” 318-19.

Conclusion:

For the first twenty-five years after the Second World War, Czech-Jewish communities and individuals attempted to achieve fuller integration into the Czech nation and Czechoslovak state through acts of Holocaust commemoration and remembrance. This sounds counter-intuitive. The memory of the Holocaust, indeed, threatened to divide Jewish from non-Jewish Czechs by drawing attention to their divergent wartime experiences, raising difficult questions about postwar justice, and bringing into focus aspects of difference that most closely related to the concept of ethnicity. The Holocaust, understood as the genocide of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators for reasons of antisemitism, also stood to undermine Czechoslovakia's foundational myth propagated by its Communist Party.

It was the Party-state, however, which ultimately transformed the Holocaust into a significant theme of popular and political culture by incorporating it prominently into its foreign and domestic propaganda in order to improve its image abroad and regain its lost legitimacy at home. Beforehand, non-Jewish party members and cultural elites found in the story of the Holocaust a powerful tool for symbolically renegotiating the terms of Czechoslovak socialism and for marking their nation's abandonment of Stalinism. In time, those dissatisfied with the pace and quality of de-Stalinization began deploying a very similar set of symbols and discourses to criticize the party-state on its own terms. This suggests that even before the advent of normalization, the official culture of the Communist Party functioned as a Bakhtinian authoritative discourse, which offered citizens limited opportunities for articulating demands of that culture and, indeed, for challenging and changing the meanings of its constituent concepts.

Jewish collaboration and participation in this culture took very much the same form. That is to say that it was not simply a response to the possibilities offered for new expression by the

country's cultural liberalization—although that was a factor. Nor were Jewish interventions into Holocaust memory oppositional in nature with regard to the party, the state, or even national culture. Czech Jews, rather, took part in an emerging culture of Holocaust memorialization and, in doing so, adopted the frameworks set by the party-state and other, more powerful, segments of society. As the Holocaust became a Czech story told on particular terms, Czech-Jews could claim with it deeper modes of belonging to the Czech-socialist nation.

This was a bi-directional process, particularly because non-Jewish Czechs depended upon Jews to act as witnesses, symbols, and repositories of memory. This empowered Czech Jews carefully to challenge and transform popular ideas about Jewishness and Jewish history through telling the story of the Holocaust and by working with state authorities. Czech-Jews strove, for example, to undermine the portrayal of Jews as passive victims, which had distinguished them from their non-Jewish compatriots in earlier accounts of the Second World War. As they did this, however, they remained faithful to the parameters set by the party-state and the cultural elite. Even when Jewish leaders issued demands of the state in 1968, they did so as loyal citizens participating in the “democratic renaissance” of the Prague Spring.

This dynamic recalls the work of the Czech-Jewish philosopher Jindřich Kohn (1874-1935), who described assimilation as a multi-directional and continual process of adaptation between minority and majority populations, to their mutual enrichment.¹⁵⁰ He had in mind, of course, Czech-Jewish integration. By the mid-1960s, Czech Jews had reason to be optimistic about this process, despite the persistence of antisemitism—sometimes masquerading as anti-Zionism—in some quarters of the state administration and among portions of the population. After all, according to the State Jewish Museum, the traveling exhibition of children's drawings from

¹⁵⁰ See extended discussion on Kohn in the conclusion.

Theresienstadt ranked as “the most visited Czechoslovak cultural exhibit of all time [emphasis added].”¹⁵¹

The Soviet-led invasion of 1968 and the onset of normalization posed serious challenges to the terms of Jewish integration into Czech society. First and foremost, antisemitic, reactionary communists endeavored to reverse the progress achieved during the late 1950s and 1960s. As the Ministry of the Interior developed “Operation Spider,” a nation-wide, cover program for registering all citizens of Jewish origin, the Ministry of Culture instructed the CJRC to be more modest in its portrayals of Jewish participation in the armed resistance against Nazi Germany. The latter ministry, thus, sought the re-de-Judaization of the Second World War. If Jewish leaders acquiesced, their temporary abandonment of 1960s-style interventions into the public-political sphere did not distinguish them greatly from the rest of Czech society during the 1970s.

The other contributing factor—perhaps the more significant one—for why Jews ceased using the theme of the Holocaust to achieve fuller integration into Czech society during normalization was that non-Jewish Czechs had stopped deploying the Holocaust as a meaningful symbol within their debates about society, socialism, and the state. The theme thus no longer offered Czech Jews an opportunity to identify with their non-Jewish compatriots. They revived, instead, a strategy from the 1950s for claiming Jewish rootedness in the Czech Lands: maintaining (and dismantling) Jewish cemeteries. In the 1980s, the Jewish communities benefited by taking advantage of the party-state’s renewed interest in using the Jewish past to raise its international profile. Doing so offered them a sense of limited security, opportunities for financial gain, and public affirmation. Yet the relationship between Czech society and the Czechoslovak party-state had changed. Collaborating with the state in the production of its

¹⁵¹ Benda, “Zamyšlení nad poštovními známkami” [Thoughts about postage stamps], 6.

propaganda and seeking to benefit from doing so may have made Czech-Jews typically Czech, but it could not make them more Czech in the view of the non-Jewish majority.

By the 1970s, moreover, a new and fully acculturated generation of Czech-Jews had come of age. Its members had never lacked opportunities to commemorate the Holocaust. Some learned about it at home. Others attended the Jewish memorial services. All noticed its prominent place in 1960s Czech culture. What they did lack—and what the activists among them sought—was access to Jewish education and cultural knowledge. The return to the *status quo ante* during normalization never really threatened the memory of the Holocaust. It did, however, pose a serious challenge to those interested in maintaining a Jewish presence in Czechoslovakia. If the survivor generation had struggled with the question of whether as Jews they would be accepted as Czechs, their children worried that they and their descendants would not know enough about Judaism to remain Jews. In other words, Jewish integration during the latter decades of communist rule no longer depended as much on assimilating a divergent Jewish past as it did upon ensuring a Jewish presence in the future. Young Jewish activists in the 1980s feared precisely the same sort of absolute assimilation of Jews into Czechs as did their predecessor, Jindřich Kohn.

This chapter and the previous one have explored the terms of Jewish integration into the Czech nation and Czechoslovak socialist state through the lens of Holocaust memory. They make two fundamental points. First, the ways in which Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs represented the Holocaust and the Second World War not only reflected the terms of Jewish integration but also contributed to constructing them. Second, the politics of Holocaust commemoration in communist Czechoslovakia was not a zero-sum game, which pitted communists against Jews and their supporters. It emerged, rather, from constant negotiation

between multiple parties and within numerous, overlapping political fields. Similarly, the terms of Jewish integration into the Czech nation and Czechoslovak socialist state depended not only on the whims of a Communist Party set against the Jewish minority, but to a tremendous degree also upon Jewish decisions, upon the relationship between state and society in general, upon international affairs, and upon the evolution of Czech popular and political culture—just as it had since the beginning of the emancipation. It is no wonder, then, that the struggle around Jewish integration continued to resonate with the ideologies of Jindřich Kohn for decades after the Holocaust.

CHAPTER FOUR

“An Historic Day”: Jewish Religious Affairs and the State, 1948-1953

The Jewish Religious Community has equal rights with all other churches on the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic and develops its religious activity in agreement with the principles of the Peoples [sic] Democratic Order and the laws of the Republic.

- Preamble to the bylaws of the Council of the Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands, 1953.¹

Representatives of the Bohemian and Moravian Jewish communities gathered in Prague on 22 November 1953 to ratify new bylaws and elect leaders for the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands (*Rada židovských náboženských obcí v Českých zemích*, CJRC).² Chief Rabbi Gustav Sicher (1880-1960) declared it an historic day. He explained,

Today's convention, however, will be marked as especially important in the history of the religious Jewish community. As far back as during the First Republic, there was an effort of the existing so-called Supreme Council of the Federation of Religious Communities of

¹ Council of Jewish Communities in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, “Congress of the Jewish Religious Communities,” 3. NAČR, SUC box 210, folder RŽNO 1949-55. Translation in original.

² Czech Holocaust survivors and returnees from exile founded the council in mid-1945 as the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Bohemian and Moravian-Silesian Lands (*Rada židovských náboženských obcí v zemích České a Moravskoslezské*). With the new constitution the council also adopted a new name, for which it requested state approval on 23 June 1952. Letter from the Council to the SOEA (23 June 1952), NAČR, SUC box 210, folder RŽNO 49-55. For an account of the reestablishment of the Czech Jewish communities after 1945, see Kurt Wehle, “The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: 1945-1948,” in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, vol. 3, ed. Avigdor Dagan (Philadelphia, PA and New York, NY: The Jewish Publication Society of America and the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 499-530; and idem., “Addendum to an Essay: ‘The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia: 1945-1948,’” *Review of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews*, vo. 14 (1991-1992): 173-79. Blanka Soukupová, “Židé a židovská reprezentace v českých zemích v letech 1945-1948 (Mezi režimem, Židovským a Judaism) [Jews and Jewish representation in the Czech lands in the years 1945-1948 (between the regime, Jewishness, and Judaism), in *Židovská menšina v československu po druhé světové válce od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War from liberation to a new totalitarianism] (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 55-80.

Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, to unite the individual religious communities into one organizational entity based on a constitution. However, the fatal Munich events and the nazi [sic] Occupation, which culminated the work of destruction, made impossible any such efforts.³

The day was indeed historic. It marked the culmination of a five-year process through which Jewish communists, non-communist Jewish leaders, and the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs (*Státní úřad pro věci církevní*, SOEA) restructured the region's Jewish communal organizations. They brought them in line with new laws enacted in 1949 for managing the country's churches and integrated them fully into the party-state system. They also established policies and practices for addressing the particular challenges that Jewish communities and individuals faced in the wake of the Holocaust.

During these years, Jewish leaders developed the political strategies that they and their successors would employ to negotiate Jewish-state relations for nearly four decades. They accepted party-state control over all aspects of Jewish communal life and cultivated close relationships with high-level officials. They defended the state against allegations of antisemitism, both at home and abroad, and used their institutional platform to propagandize for the Soviet Bloc. Some Jewish leaders and community members served as covert and semi-secret informants for the secret police and the SOEA. The rest generally accepted this state of affairs and adjusted their behavior accordingly, even if it meant limiting their interpersonal relationships and living in relative fear during some years. In exchange, the Jewish communities and their leaders expected the state to guarantee their right to religious assembly, to defend Jewish communal property against the encroachment of other sectors of society, and to enable the Jewish communities to care for aging survivors and to educate the next generation of Czech Jews.

³ Council of Jewish Communities, "Congress of the Jewish Religious Communities," 3.

When Jewish leaders felt this bargain threatened, they had a number of tactics at their disposal, which they deployed in various combinations. They threatened, in turn, to besmirch Czechoslovakia's international reputation. They also warned that the state's failure to accommodate Jewish communal needs could engender dissatisfaction among Czech Jews and leave them vulnerable to Zionist indoctrination.⁴ Jewish communal leaders additionally exploited the laws, structures, and intra-ministerial conflicts of the party-state to make benefactors out of their minders at the SOEA and its successors—at least, until the early 1970s. They used this strategy most frequently to overturn decisions made by lesser and local authorities, including some by the highest powers in Slovakia. When all else failed, the Jewish leadership petitioned the President to enforce their Constitutional rights and to intervene on their behalf. They expected the President to be above the petty squabbles of local and ministerial officials and to be more concerned with maintaining Czechoslovakia's good name abroad. In most years, moreover, the President led both the state and the Communist Party, which Jewish leaders understood to mean that he could command near absolute obedience.⁵

Those Jewish leaders who came to power during the first years of communist rule and who negotiated this *modus vivendi* encountered and bested opposition from coreligionists who opposed collaborating with an atheistic and, later, an anti-Zionist state, known for antisemitism. The resisters also resented the non-democrat ascent of communists to leadership positions within the communities. These voices of dissent weaken in the years that followed, however, confronted with a number of startling Jewish political victories during the 1950s and the steady

⁴ Jacob Ari Labendz, "Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist: Managing 'Jewish Power and Danger' in 1960s Communist Czechoslovakia," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014): 84-108.

⁵ The only years in which different men occupied the posts of President and party leader were 1953-1957, 1968-1975, and 1987-1989.

improvement of Jewish-state relations that accompanied Czechoslovakia's political and cultural liberalization in the 1960s. It also proved futile to fight against the combined interests of the state and the CJRC. Dissent reemerged within the communities during the 1980s, however, in reaction to the Jewish leadership's complicity in the limiting of religious and social-welfare programs and the destruction of Jewish cemeteries for profit. The culture of these loose oppositional movements came to define post-communist Czech Judaism, particularly as their members assumed positions of institutional and cultural leadership after 1989.

The Jewish Communities after the Holocaust

During the second half of 1945, Jewish survivors and returnees from exile reestablished either fifty-eight or fifty-nine of the 153 Jewish communities that had existed in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia before the Second World War.⁶ They also celebrated, on 1 and 2 September of that same year, the foundation of the "Consortium of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech lands and Moravia-Silesia" (*Společenství židovských náboženských obcí v zemi České a*

⁶ Arnošt Frischer, the chairman of the CJRC between 1945 and 1948 reported to Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš that 59 communities had been reestablished by October 1945. The historian, Tomáš Pěkný, however, counted only between 57 and 58 reestablished communities. Jews in Slovakia re-founded an additional 105 communities. Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust and Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 19-20; Blanká Soukupová, "Židé a židovská reprezentace" [Jews and Jewish representation], 55-80; Wehle, "The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia," 499-530; Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném Československu" [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], in *Židé v novodobých dějinách: Soubor přednášek na FF UK, Uspořádal Václav Veber* [Jews in contemporary history: A collection of lectures at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, organized by Václav Veber] (Prague, Czech Republic: Karolinum, 1997), 147-62; and Tomáš Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě* [The history of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia] (Prague, Czech Republic: Sefer, 2001), 657. See also Jaroslav Kadlec, "Rada židovských náboženských obcí - politika židovské organizace" [The CJRC - the politics of a Jewish organization] (M.A. Thesis: Masaryk University, Czech Republic, 2009); and Monika Hanková, "Kapitoly z poválečných dějin židovské komunity v Čechách a na Moravě (1945-1956)" [Chapters from the postwar history of the Jewish community in Bohemia and Moravia (1945-1956)] (M.A. Thesis: Charles University, 2006), 24-37.

Moravskoslezské), which they would later rename the Council of Jewish Religious Communities.⁷ The combined membership of the Czech Jewish communities rose from 15,000 in 1945 to nearly 25,000 in 1948. Both of these figures included roughly 5,000 so-called “category B” Jews, individuals of Jewish descent who either declined to identify as religiously Jewish or who did not meet the criteria for doing so according to Jewish law. The arrival in the Czech lands of between 8,000 and 12,000 Jews from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia (contemporary Ukraine), along with 2,000 Jews who had spent the war years abroad and still more who had served in the Soviet Army, accounts for this rapid increase. The newcomers helped offset attrition due to voluntary withdrawal from the communities, death, and emigration. By 1947, nonetheless, the number of communities in the Czech lands fell to fifty-three, primarily because smaller communities lacked sufficient members to operate effectively.⁸

The political, cultural, religious, and linguistic differences which had divided Bohemian and Moravian Jewry before the Second World War and which persisted among refugees from those territories in England, reemerged within the reestablished Jewish communities in the Czech lands.⁹ They manifested in the reconstitution of political organizations from the interwar period, and in their mutual recriminations regarding who bore the responsibility for the recent and tragic course of Jewish history.¹⁰ Jewish nationalists, or “Zionists,” outnumbered and overpowered the

⁷ Hanková, “Kapitoly z poválečných dějin” [Chapters from the postwar history], 33.

⁸ Kadlec, “Rada židovských náboženských obcí” [The CJRC], 55.

⁹ In his seminal lecture-cum-essay of 1997, Petr Brod established the framework in which scholars have discussed the reemergence of Jewish politics in the Czech lands after the Second World War. Brod divides Czech Jews into three categories: “Zionists,” “Assimilationists” (including the Orthodox), and “Activists,” i.e. communists. “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 153-54. Brod draws upon Wehle, “The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia,” 504-06.

¹⁰ This holds true, even if survivors re-founded most of organizations for the purpose of restituting their property and transferring its ownership to the Jewish communities, as determined in their prewar statutes. Jiří Křesťan, Alexandra Blodigová, Jaroslav Bubeník, and Dana

Czech-Jewish, or “assimilationist,” faction. They successfully elected their candidates to the top leadership positions at the CJRC. The “assimilationists,” however, drew significant support from the semi-official political party of the ultra-Orthodox refugees from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, *Agudas Yisroel*, which rejected political Zionism on religious grounds.¹¹ With the latter’s help, the Czech-Jewish faction elected Karel Stein to chair the Prague community.¹² Jewish communists composed a third political group, their numbers swollen by returning Soviet soldiers and Holocaust survivors, loyal to their liberators.

As Blanka Soukupová argues, however, the dividing lines between these political factions and other modes of Jewish differentiation were incredibly fluid, particularly as individuals reconsidered their convictions and identities in light of the Holocaust and the new postwar order.¹³ Community members of various backgrounds and of divergent persuasions found new unity in their shared experiences of wartime and postwar trauma and in their missions to rebuild their decimated communities and to offer assistance to those in need. Most of them joined the communities for non-political reasons. Some hoped that the communities might

Marvalová, *Židovské spolky v českých zemích v letech 1918-1948* [Jewish associations in the Czech lands, 1918-1948] (Prague, Czech Republic: Sefer, 2001), 73-76.

¹¹ Brod, “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 153-54; and “Wehle, “The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia,” 506.

¹² “Wehle, “The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia,” 506.

¹³ Soukupová, “Židé a židovské representace” [Jews and the Jewish Leadership], 58-61 and 70-75. After refuting Brod, Soukupová offers seven typologies (or, at least, examples) of political and identificational change and stasis among Jews in the Czech lands after the Second World War. Idem., “Modely životných osudů českých Židů” [Models of life stories of Czech Jews], in *Židovská menšina v Československu po druhé světové válce. Od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War: from liberation to a new totalitarianism], eds., Blanka Soukupová, Peter Salner, and Miroslava Ludvíková (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2009), 81-106. The Jewish prisoners of Theresienstadt formed bonds based upon personal ties and access to resources, rather than political affiliations. Their wartime experiences and their various postwar options led many survivors to rethink their national and political orientations after the war. Ana Hájková, “To Terezín and Back: Czech Jews and their Bonds of Belonging between Theresienstadt and Postwar Czechoslovakia,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2014): 38-55.

replace their murdered families and offer a venue for performing and experiencing ethnic solidarity. Others sought various forms of support and the opportunity to fulfill their religious obligations. This included the procurement of *kosher* food and religious artifacts like phylacteries, which had been lost during the war.

Ethnic solidarity in particular reflected in the activities of Jewish leaders in Prague, many of whom considered the communities to be “political organizations” for addressing the needs of postwar Jewry, in cooperation with the Czechoslovak government.¹⁴ Jewish nationalist and Czech-Jews united to lobby for the restitution of properties stolen during the Second World War.¹⁵ They lobbied the government to combat antisemitism.¹⁶ They even joined forces to secure citizenship rights for their coreligionists who faced or feared facing discrimination for being identified as belonging to the German or Jewish nations. (This included most of the refugees from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia.)¹⁷ It mattered little in the postwar years that these choices, when they were made, often reflected serious political cleavages among Czechoslovak Jews.

¹⁴ “In its formal aspects, the [CJRC] was the successor of the prewar *Nejvyšší Rada* (Supreme Council of Federations of Jewish Religious Congregations of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia), but in fact it was intended as a political organization rather than as a strictly religious body.” Wehle, “The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia,” 513.

¹⁵ It would be interesting to think about the positions taken by Jewish communists, who were active in the communities, regarding the nationalization of formerly Jewish personal property after the Second World War. I have not encountered any work on this question, nor have I found any documents that might help me offer any insight. This leads me to suggested, quite hesitantly, that some communist community members may have decided to choose their battles wisely and avoid entering into conflict with their coreligionists on this sensitive issue. Others may have been too ambivalent to act, torn between their commitments to achieving justice for individuals and social equality across society.

¹⁶ Wehle, “The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia,” 509-12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 509-10. Radka Čermaková, “Poválečné Československo: Obnovený stát ve střední Evropě” [Postwar Czechoslovakia: a renewed state in Central Europe], in *Židovská menšina v československu po druhé světové válce od osvobození k nové totalitě* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War from liberation to a new totalitarianism] (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2008), 26-30; and Soukupová, “Židé a židovská reprezentace” [Jews and the Jewish representation], 67-72.

The leaders of the Jewish communities in the Czech lands, along with many of their members, were also united in expressing official optimism for the future of Jews in Czechoslovakia. Despite considerable postwar antisemitism in that country, which culminated in mass violence and murder in Slovakia, the Jewish communities seized upon a fantastic image of the Czech nation and its reconstituted state as inherently tolerant and innocent of collaboration with the Nazis.¹⁸ This reflected in a non-sectarian Czechoslovak discourse which had developed during the Second World War, both on the territory of the former state and among its leaders in Western exile. (The latter included Ernst Frischer, the only Jewish representative in the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, who later served as the first postwar chairman of the CJRC.) For various reasons, both Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs promoted a narrative of shared exceptionality as Hitler's co-first-victims.¹⁹ Many within the communities embraced this idea in good faith and also cultivated a memory of interwar Czech-Jewish relations as having been exemplary.²⁰ Others saw paying lip-service to these myths (or exaggerations) as the price of re-entry into Czechoslovak society. Jewish leaders, in later years, deployed these narratives strategically to demand of Czechoslovakia that it live up to its promises.

¹⁸ Blanka Soukupová, "Postoj státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968: Mezi kontrolou, represemi, a 'Blahosklonností'" [The position of the state with regard to the Jewish religious community in the Czech lands in the years 1956-1968: between control, repression, and "condescension"], *Lidé města/Urban People*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2012): 75-76; and idem., "Židé a židovská reprezentace" [Jews and the Jewish representation], 57 and 65-66.

¹⁹ Jan Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and Jews, 1938-48: Beyond Idealization and Condemnation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Martin J. Wein, *A Slavic Jerusalem* (in process).

²⁰ Blanka Soukupová, "Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání po Šoa (k významům pamětních míst a míst v paměti). Léta 1945 až 1989" [Prague in Jewish collective memory after the Shoah (towards the meaning of memorial sites and sites of memory). The years 1945 until 1989] in *Neklidná krajina vzpomínání: Konkurenční společenství paměti ve městě* [Unsettled collective memory: the competition of society of memory in the city], *Urbánní studie*, vol. 1 (Prague, Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2010), 11-14.

It must be reiterated that not all citizens of “Jewish origin” chose to join or remain members a Jewish community. That, indeed, is one of the primary challenges to offering a satisfactory answer to the question of how many “Jews” lived in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War. Some individuals, whom the Nazis had identified and persecuted as Jews, had never considered themselves Jewish at all. Others, who had considered themselves Jewish, in some fashion, before the Second World War, sought to hide their roots in its aftermath and, particularly, after the Slánský Affair. They feared additional persecution. Terror of this sort ran deep.²¹ One man, a member of the Communist Party, even had his children baptized in the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, so that their documents would eventually read “without religion, formerly Czechoslovak Hussite,” rather than “formerly Jewish.”²² Still other individuals declined to join a Jewish community because they had adopted new religious, political, or nationalist convictions through the war. Finally, some people joined communities only temporarily. Between 1945 and 1946, 243 withdrew from the Prague community alone. These individuals had likely joined to benefit from its services and to locate friends and family. Once they had established new lives, they withdrew. Blanka Soukupová offers a number of additional reasons why they may have done so.²³ The salient point here, however, is simply that when I write of the Jewish communities and their politics, I am commenting on a specific set of individuals who chose, for a variety of reasons, to join the postwar Jewish communities and thereby to identify publicly as Jewish by religious conviction.

²¹ Ecclesiastical secretary of the Prague’s 2nd district, “Zpráva za měsíce listopad 1952” [News from the month of November 1952] (30 November 1952). NAČR, SÚCbox 60.

²² Pavel Stránský, interviewed by the Shoah Foundation.

²³ Soukupová, “Zidé a židovská reprezentace” [Jews and Jewish Representation], 62-63. These include the stigma of (forced) collaboration with the Nazis that, fairly or not, adhered to some of the postwar Jewish leadership. I am less convinced by Soukupová’s suggestion that the leftwing orientation of the leadership alienated some Jews.

A Jewish-Communist Putsch: The Origins of a Political Strategy

At the immediate onset of communist rule, a small cohort of communist-Jewish activists played a decisive role in determining the character that Jewish-state relations would take in the Czech lands for four decades. They developed political strategies for working with party-state officials. Though always the junior partner in negotiations, the communist-Jewish leaders still deserve credit for the relatively good relationship which pertained between the CJRC and the state, particularly during the first postwar decades. Their strategy not only drew upon, but embellished to the point of caricature the well-worn Jewish political tactic of forming allegiances with the highest authorities, also known as the “vertical alliance.”²⁴ The ascent to power of the communist-Jewish leadership cohort, nonetheless, began with an act of coercion that alienated many community members. By 1954, however, intra-communal tensions abated significantly. On the one hand, the antisemitism associated with the Slánský Affair of 1952 had intimidated potential oppositionists into silence. On the other hand, the year 1954 also saw a major transformation in the party-state’s approach to “ecclesiastical politics,” which opened new

²⁴ Since the Middle Ages, Jewish leaders and luminaries have sought guarantees of protection for their communities from kings, popes, emperors, and ministers, whom they believed would shield them from the encroachment of more local powers. In retrospect, some have drawn parallels between the Jewish leaders who collaborated with the Nazis and their counterparts who worked with the state during the period of communist rule. No one, however, in 1948 could accurately predict the change in Czechoslovak Jewish-state relations that would take place after 1949. On the “vertical alliance,” see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in Shebet Yeuhda* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College, 1976), 35-66; and Pierre Birnbaum, *Geography of Hope: Exile, the Enlightenment, Disassimilation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 357-93; and John M. Efron, “Interminably Maligned: The Convention Lies about Jewish Doctors,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, eds. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers, (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 301. See also Michael Brenner, *A Short History of the Jews* (Munich, Germany: Verlag C.H. Beck oHG, 2010), 100 and 153; and, of course, given the context of cooperation with a regime noted for its antisemitism in many decades, Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1963).

possibilities for community development that persisted through 1969.

On 27 February 1948, shortly after the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, Jewish communists formed an “Action Committee” (*Akční výbor*) and assumed control over the CJRC and the Prague community.²⁵ The committee immediately demanded of the those institutions that they submit to it lists of the members of their highest organs,

and that they see to it that they be individuals of whom it can be assured that their activities in the defined field of action will be directed towards supporting the constructive (*budovatelský*) program of our new government.”²⁶

The Action Committee further insisted that all CJRC and Prague community employees join the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (*Revoluční odborové hnutí*).

On 1 March 1948, the Action Committee rescinded its initial offer to negotiate with the leadership of the CJRC and the Prague community. Instead, it unilaterally assumed ultimate control over those institutions in a proclamation that read,

We have obeyed the orders of the day and established the Action Committee of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech and Moravian-Silesian lands. We have joined ourselves thoroughly to the program announced by our new government, such that the Jews of the Czech lands will henceforth be led in the spirit of true democracy and socialism.

Our Action Committee was established with the authorization of the District Action Committee in Prague and initiated its activities on 27 February 1948. We are equipped with the authority which pertains to the action committees established in all enterprises, offices, corporations, and institutes. We are fully aware of our responsibilities and we will fulfill our work with full dedication.²⁷

The Action Committee thus aligned itself with the program of the Communist Party and rested its own authority on that party’s comprehensive takeover of Czechoslovak society.

²⁵ For a first-person account of the Action Committee’s takeover by the Secretary General of the CJRC from 1945-1948, see Wehle, “Addendum to Essay,” 174-78. He and Blanka Soukupová claim that the Action Committee formed on 26 February. Soukupová, “Židé a židovská reprezentace” [Jews and the Jewish representation], 77.

²⁶ “První aktivní práce akčního výboru zaměstnanců” [The first active work of the Action Committee of the employees], *Věstník*, vol. 10, no. 10 (5 March 1948): 110.

²⁷ Action Committee, “Provolání” [Proclamation], *Věstník*, vol. 10, no. 10 (5 March 1948), 110.

The Action Committee closed its proclamation with an intimidating request for calm, discipline, and the continuation of business as usual. The committee saw itself as “born in the days of revolution, a carrier of the revolutionary spirit, and a guidepost of socializing democracy.” It anticipated dissent.²⁸ One day later, the Action Committee attempted to mitigate that dissent with a combination of threats and assurances delivered at a mandatory meeting of CJRC and Prague-community employees. Josef Schwarz, a secretary of the Revolutionary Trade Workers’ Union, explained that the establishment of the committee was necessary for preventing “reactionary and subversive elements” from undermining the achievements of the “working people,” and thereby, for preempting the outbreak of “fratricidal battle” in Czechoslovakia. Schwarz continued, however, to reassure those assembled that

Into the Action Committee will come people without regard to political party, of whom we have an assurance that they will be defenders of the People’s Democratic government, that they will stand behind that government, and that they will be upstanding trade unionists.

Schwarz then warned the existing leadership and functionaries not to stand in the way of the committee’s directives. Yet he also apologetically explained,

Do not think, however, that the Action Committee is something that has no relationship to democracy: We will not tolerate any settling of personal affairs; everyone, regardless of what party they come from, if they are of upstanding disposition, let them remain and work.²⁹

Schwarz’s message rang clear, despite his shifting tone. The Action Committee had unilaterally assumed the right to lead the Jewish religious communities and it would tolerate neither dissent nor impediment. It would, however, welcome Jews of other ideological persuasions to remain in their posts and active in their communities, provided that they acquiesced to its leadership and

²⁸ “Akční výbor RŽNO se přestavil” [The Action Committee of the CJRC introduced itself], vol. 10, no. 11 (12 March 1948), 117.

²⁹ Ibid., 117.

followed its directives.

This internal affair of the Jewish religious communities introduced and normalized the political strategy of submitting to party-state power which persisted and predominated with little interruption until 1989. In exchange for doing so, community members enjoyed the possibility of practicing their religion and even of caring for elderly and disabled Holocaust survivors.³⁰ The motivations behind the adoption of this strategy were complex, however, and differed from cohort to cohort. Many Jewish citizens, like those who formed the Action Committee, supported the Communist Party out of political conviction and hoped to bring their religious communities in line with its politics. Others may not have identified fully with the political philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, but supported the Communist Party nonetheless. They felt gratitude to the Soviet Union for liberating Czechoslovakia and believed that they could depend upon the Communist Party to protect them from further racial persecution, even if it came at a high price.

František Fuchs, a left-leaning CJRC vice president, urged his ideologically unconvinced coreligionists to adopt this perspective at the meeting of 2 March.³¹

For whomever, rather, who thinks clearly and deeply it must be clear what we are now living through. Anyone who does not stand clearly in the progressive camp, who does not support that progressive camp with all of their might, supports the reaction. We all know that the reaction always ends in hostility (*nepřátelství*) to Jews. Henceforth, however, every act and every hostile deed, every manifestation of antisemitism will be considered as a manifestation of the reaction... The progressive line we see clearly before us. I say this with full knowledge that many of us must overcome childish thoughts and fears and realize that there is no one here who wants to hurt Jews. When we walk it, we will find our way.³²

Fuchs acknowledged both the Communist Party's intimidating tactics and the opposition to its

³⁰ Soukupová, “Židé a židovská reprezentace” [Jews and the Jewish representation], 78.

³¹ At the time, Fuchs belonged to the Social Democratic Party. Three months later, the Communist Party forcibly absorbed that party into its ranks. Fuchs became and would remain a Communist Party member. “Informativní zpráva” [Informative report] (20 December 1966), 1. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

³² “Akční výbor RŽNO se přestavil” [The Action Committee of the CJRC introduced itself], 118.

program among many of those assembled. He also suggested a strategy for how the latter might find peace with the community's new direction. He urged them to focus on the greater danger—or, at least, their greater fear—of fascist resurgence. Fuchs could justifiably expect a positive reception. If those assembled actually feared a resumption of German, fascist, antisemitic aggression, they would have been justified in following the Czech nation into submission to the party—a party which outwardly adopted an anti-antisemitic position and which they associated with the liberators of the Red Army.³³ It is significant to note here that this transition at the community occurred well in advance of the Soviet Bloc's anti-Zionist and antisemitic turn.

Notwithstanding Fuch's appeal, three of the most dynamic Czech-Jewish leaders, with long histories of service, fled the country immediately after the assembly. Arnošt Frischer, the chairman of the CJRC, returned to London. In the interwar years, he had chaired Czechoslovakia's Jewish Party.³⁴ Kurt Wehle, the secretary general of the CJRC emigrated to New York via Paris, where he worked for the United Restitution Office and co-founded the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews in 1961. For a few years in postwar Prague, he had also served as the chairman of the Zionist Action Committee and as the vice president of the Mapai Labor Zionist Party.³⁵ In 1947, both Wehle and Frischer joined representatives from the Slovak Jewish communities in a meeting with President Beneš to protest against the violent antisemitism in Slovakia and obstructions to the restitution of Jewish property in the Czech

³³ Soukupová, "Praha v židovské krajině vzpomínání" [Prague in Jewish collective memory], 11-14.

³⁴ Kateřina Čapková, "Židovská Strana," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (12 November 2010). <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Zidovska_Strana> (16 July 2014).

³⁵ "The Authors," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, ed. Avigdor Dagan, vol. 3 (Philadelphia, PA and New York, NY: Jewish Publication Society of America and the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 613-14.

lands.³⁶ Karel Stein, the chairman of the Prague community, left for Israel just two days after the Action Committee's assembly. Yet, only one month earlier, he had stood up to the Communist Party to protest their intention to appoint an assimilated communist "of Jewish origin" the Commissar for Jewish Affairs.³⁷ During the Second World War, it was Stein who had convinced the Nazis to collect in Prague all of the Bohemian- and Moravian-Jewish artifacts that they would confiscate in the process of deporting Jews from the Protectorate. The thousands of items that they catalogued now form the basis of the uniquely expansive collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague. Throughout their careers, Frischer, Wehle, and Stein fought for their communities in the face of grave danger. In the end, however, it was pressure from within those very communities that drove the three men into self-imposed exile. They were not, by far, the only Jewish leaders to leave.³⁸

The Action Committee took advantage of this flight to install Jewish communists, fellow travelers, and pliant non-communists into leadership positions. By 1950, very few of the original CJRC and Prague community board members remained in their posts. Some had been forced the resign. The newly installed leadership immediately

discontinued all political activities in the field of rehabilitation and, as early as March, 1948 waived all Jewish claims for indemnification, notably its claims to the funds from the Terezín assets.³⁹

³⁶ Wehle, "The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia," 524.

³⁷ "Wehle, "Addendum to Essay," 176.

³⁸ Wehle, "Addendum to Essay," 177-78.

³⁹ Ibid., 177-78. Anecdotal evidence and comments by Wehle suggest that by 1950, the Action Committee had almost completely replaced the entire lay and executive Jewish leadership that had served in Prague until 1948. See a memo sent from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Karlový Vary, "Věc: zaslaný protokol výborové schůze, konané dne 14.VII.t.r." [Re: the protocols sent from the committee meeting that took place on 15 July of this year] (20 July 1950). NAČR, SUC, box 119, folder "1950." By 1953, nine out of the eleven members of the CJRC's presidium were Communist Party members, as were nineteen out of twenty-five members of its full board. SOEA, "Situační zpráva o ŽNS - návrh nové ústavy" [Situational report on the Jewish Religious Community - proposal of the new bylaws] (27 May 1953).

At the behest of the SOEA, this new Jewish leadership oversaw the consolidation of the Czech Jewish communities, the trimming down of its workforce, and the adoption of the new CJRC bylaws with which I introduced this chapter.

This communist transition of the Czech Jewish communities began in Prague and remained, for a short time, relatively constrained to that location.⁴⁰ Indeed, a degree of active dissent emerged in some of the “outlying” communities in 1949 and 1950, to which the CJRC responded quickly and decisively. A case could even be made that one of the primary reasons why the CJRC passed new bylaws in 1953 was to reassert and formalize its authority over all aspects of Czech Jewish affairs.

In mid-1949, the Jewish Religious Community in Ostrava, which counted only 649 members before the Jewish emigration wave of 1948,⁴¹ refused to grant the CJRC access to its financial records, claiming that the latter organization lacked the authority to make such demands. Its officers cited legal formalities to support their claim. Not only did the CJRC turn to the SOEA (through the Ministry of Culture) for support, which it received, but it also made two potentially dangerous allegations regarding the financial conduct and loyalty of the Ostrava community. It alleged that the latter, like unnamed others, had been providing excessive financial support to Israel-bound émigrés without informing the CJRC and, thus, also the government. The

NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder “Inv. č. 141.” I have not been able to find information regarding which members of the Jewish leadership either resigned or emigrated after March 1948. I have similarly not been able to compile a complete list of those whom the Action Committee removed from positions of influence, as they did Kurt Heller, a representative from Prague to the CJRC, in 1948. “První aktivní práce akčního výboru zaměstnanců” [The first active work of the Action Committee of the employees], 119.

⁴⁰ An Action Committee formed within the Jewish Religious Community in Brno in 1948. “Akční výbor RŽNO se představil” [The Action Committee introduced itself to the CJRC], *Věstník*, vol. 10, no. 11 (12 March 1948): 118.

⁴¹ Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě* [The history of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia]; 657; and Soukupová, “Židé a židovská reprezentace” [Jews and the Jewish representation], 62.

CJRC additionally claimed that the Ostrava community had given half-a-million crowns, that had been allocated for synagogue construction, to the Haganah, the forerunner of the Israeli Army, which had trained in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and 1949.⁴²

In 1950, a board member of the Jewish Religious Community in Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) similarly challenged the CJRC's authority. Unlike his counterpart from Ostrava, however, he brazenly called into question the means by which the new leaders had assumed power. The CJRC responded directly by post to the community leadership:

[The board member] also misinformed the board, that no single member of the former [pre-March] council is on the current council; nevertheless even if that were the case, [he] seems to have forgotten that in the year 1948 there was the Victorious February, that Action Committees were formed, that had the right and the responsibility, to make order in ever enterprise and every institution.⁴³

The CJRC had grown confident in the authority granted to it by the party-state. Dissent persisted in Karlový Vary nonetheless. The board member, for one, continued to contest the CJRC's authority and to demand documentation of the new board's legitimacy.⁴⁴

Strife between the communist and non-communist members of the Jewish Religious Community in Karlovy Vary persisted for years. That division served as a framework within which personal disputes gained articulation, making it difficult to parse the personal from the political. That tension, I believe, reflects a fundamental aspect of how those involved experienced the conflicts within the communities. Space does not permit me to elaborate fully

⁴² Letter from the CJRC to the Ministry of Culture, Education, and Art, "Věc: Otázka práva kontroly u přičleněných náboženských obcí" [Re: question of audit rights at the affiliated religious communities] (8 July 1949); and copy of letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Ostrava to the CJRC (n.d.). NAČR, SUC, box 119, folder 1949.

⁴³ CJRC memorandum to the Jewish Religious Community in Karlový Vary, "Věc: zaslaný protokol výborové schůze, konané dne 14.VII.t.r." [Re: the sent protocols of the committee meeting that took place on the day of 14 July of this year] (20 July 1950). NAČR, SUC box 119, folder 1950.

⁴⁴ "Protokol ze schůze výborové konané dne 28. září 1950" [Protocols of the committee meeting taking place on the day of 28 September 1950]. NAČR, SUC box 119, folder 1950.

upon the particular conflict which tore apart that community, but an overview thereof will help to illustrate some basic trends in Jewish-state relations.

In 1952, a jilted, former community president used the occasion of a state audit to exact revenge upon his successor, by alleging that he had embezzled and misdirected funds. When, in 1954, the former felt his political advantage waning, he called a meeting of the communist members of the community's board. This strategy might have worked a few years hence, but by 1954, even the communist-Jewish leadership thought it heavy-handed and in poor form. The revolutionary moment had passed and both the community and the state sought stability. Indeed, in 1954, the CJRC worked tirelessly with the community in Karlovy Vary and state auditors to disprove and settle the long-standing allegations of financial malfeasance which had begun to plague Jewish-state relations.⁴⁵

In the following year, Jaroslav Knobloch, the SOEA official in charge of Jewish affairs, intervened with regional authorities to find a quiet solution to the problem that the CJRC's lay president, Emil Neumann, had failed to pay his taxes. He wrote,

From an ecclesiastical-political perspective the whole affair is delicate because Neumann is the highest lay representative of the Jewish community in the Czech lands. Also Neumann comports himself positively and energetically advocates for the Neolog line and sharply fights against the unwanted tendencies of the orthodox way. He has considerable authority and is well liked.⁴⁶

By 1954, Knobloch and the SOEA had achieved control over the Jewish communities, by

⁴⁵ Letter from the Regional National Committee in Karlovy Vary to the SOEA (11 October 1952). NAČR, SÚC, box 119, folder 1952; and collection of documents in NAČR, SÚC, box 119, folder 1954.

⁴⁶ Jaroslav Knobloch, "Úřední záznam" [Office memorandum] (3 November 1955); in collection of documents, "Neumann, ředitel obrazárny v Poděbradech, zvolen úřadujícím místopředsedou Rady ŽNO v Praze – šetření o osobě a činnosti" [Newmann, director of a picture-store in Poděbrady, elected executive vice-president of the CJRC – investigation of character and activities]. NAČR, SÚC box 211. Neolog refers to a particular branch of the Jewish-religious reform movement that was popular in Central Europe.

overseeing the installation of pliant and loyal leaders therein. After that point, they sought only to maintain control over them and to avoid conflicts that had the potential to become international affairs on the order of the Slánský Trial.

Indeed, the Slánský Affair drastically transformed the nature of Jewish-state relations at the community level and, ironically, brought some stability to it. The communist-Jewish activists who used the party's coercive powers to install themselves at the helm of the Jewish community in 1948 had to contend with internal dissent for a few years, until the illusion of democratic rule gave way to more sober perceptions of the political landscape. The anti-Zionist and antisemitic turns of 1949-1952 terrified the opposition into submission. This was particularly the case since Jewish citizens also lost the option to emigrate during those same years, leaving them vulnerable to political and police pressure. The anti-Zionist campaign even intimidated the communist-Jewish leadership. In 1952, it met with Deputy Prime Minister Zdeněk Fierlinger to discuss the wave of popular antisemitic excesses that had spread throughout the country. Just a few months later, at the 1953 CJRC congress, the leadership expressed confidence in the promises of the Czechoslovak President and other high functionaries that “for antisemitism there is not nor will there be a place among us.”⁴⁷ The party-state thus positioned itself as both persecutor and defender of its Jewish minority. Thus, the years 1948-1954 witnessed a subtle transformation of Jewish-state relations, whereby the “vertical alliance” of old came more closely to resemble a protection racket.

⁴⁷ Report beginning with the words “Zpráva dnes Vám podávaná” [The report that I am giving you today] (n.d.), 1. NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder “RŽNO 1949-1954,” sub-folder “1953.” See also “Situční zpráva o ŽNO - návrh nové ústavy” [Situational report about the Jewish religious community] (27 May 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder “RŽNO 1949-1954,” sub-folder “Inv. č. 141.”

The Development of Ecclesiastical Policies in Communist Czechoslovakia

Communist Czechoslovakia had a fraught relationship with religion, as did the rest of the Central European satellite states. As a political philosophy, communism was both atheistic and materialistic. Its adherents were supposed to understand the world through empirical means alone: through science and through the study of political economy. Marxist-Leninist historians criticized institutionalized religion for its purported role lending legitimacy to the domination of the laboring classes by the nobility and then by the bourgeoisie. They further attributed the proletariat's complacency in the face of that exploitation and its attachment to religion in general to doctrines that held out promises of postmortem rectification for earthly suffering. Communists therefore believed that by building a society free of class differentiation and economic exploitation, they would remove the socio-economic bases for religious belief and ecclesiastical affiliation. They looked forward to a time when the satisfied masses would give up their faiths and embrace Marxism-Leninism and its atheistic worldview.

The communist parties of postwar Central Europe, nonetheless, felt obligated to maintain and defend religious liberty in the countries that they came to rule. Their leaders understood that failing to do so would have undermined their claims to legitimacy, which they had justified, even among and to themselves, by portraying communists as defenders of freedom and democracy. The stakes were high where religion was concerned, as the vast majority of Central Europeans, including many communists, belonged to one church or another. According to the census of 1950, this included 8.3 million people in the Czech lands, or 94% of the entire population.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Czech Statistical Office, "Přítomné obyvatelstvo podle náboženského vyznání a národnosti k 1.3. 1950" [Residing population according to religious affiliation and nationality on 1 March 1950]. [http://notes3.czso.cz/sldb/sldb.nsf/i/1CACA90179B23438C1256E660036CA77/\\$File/tab4_50.pdf](http://notes3.czso.cz/sldb/sldb.nsf/i/1CACA90179B23438C1256E660036CA77/$File/tab4_50.pdf) (15 June 2014).

Thus, despite promoting atheism and vilifying the role of churches in society, the communist states officially defended the rights of their citizens to join churches and practice their religions.

Yet communists also feared that the persistence of religion in society had the potential to undermine socialistic progress and strengthen the hands of their “reactionary” opponents. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia looked with particular suspicion (and jealousy) at the Roman Catholic Church. Not only did the latter maintain vast property holdings, but it also claimed nearly 6.8 million members in the Czech lands alone, which corresponded to 76% of the population.⁴⁹ Attachment to the Catholic Church was even stronger in Slovakia, where 31% of the population attended mass every Sunday in 1954.⁵⁰ Communist officials additionally feared the Vatican’s international network. These concerns motivated a sustained bureaucratic and police assault against the Church from 1949 to 1953.⁵¹ The state also persecuted the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren and the Greek Orthodox Church. It attempted to merge the latter forcibly with the Uniate Church. Smaller sects, like the Seventh Day Adventists, suffered as well.

The Czechoslovak Constitution of 9 May 1948 reflected these tensions. Ratified only three months after the communist seizure of power, it guaranteed freedom of conscience, declared all faiths and “lack of confession” equal before the law, and protected both believers and non-believers from discrimination. It stipulated, however, that religion “may not be a reason

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰ Jiří Jirásek, “Výsledek šetření o religiozitě” [Results of an investigation into religiousness] (n.d.), 1. NAČR, SÚC box 60.

⁵¹ In a series of operations, the SOEA, in collusion with the Communist Party and the StB, attempted to permanently disrupt links between the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. The state dissolved the country’s monastic orders, removed non-collaborating clergy, appointed its own bishops and high-ranking Church officials, and seized tremendous amounts of assets. Karel Kaplan, *Stát a církev v Československo: v letech 1948-1953* [State and the church in Czechoslovakia: in the years 1948-1953] (Brno, Czech Republic: Doplněk, 1993).

for someone to decline to fulfill [the] civic responsibility assigned to him by law;” that religious activity “not be in conflict with the public order, even in minor ways;” and that the right to religious practice may not “be abused to [serve] non-religious ends.”⁵² The Constitution failed, however, to provide instructions for how the state was to manage ecclesiastical affairs.

The government resolved that question on 14 October 1949 with the passage of two bills which established a system for administering the country’s churches. It endured for four decades. Couched in ideological and overtly beneficent tones, the laws subordinated the country’s churches to the state and made religious freedom conditional upon the primacy of Marxism-Leninism. The party and its puppet-legislators wrote the laws, moreover, with overt reference to the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, much of the state’s approach to ecclesiastical affairs in general, and therefore also to Jewish matters, derived from its attempt to weaken and constrain that church in particular.

Law 217/49 established the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs, which was to operate on a ministerial level and oversee all aspects of religious life in Czechoslovakia. The government charged the SOEA with ensuring that

... church and religious life would evolve in concert with the Constitution and the principles of the people’s democratic order, and also to ensure for all, the Constitutionally guaranteed right of freedom of religion, founded upon the principles of religious tolerance and the equality of all religions.⁵³

The order of these propositions reflected the party’s perspective on ecclesiastical affairs. They attributed the extension of religious liberty to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism as enshrined in the Constitution. Yet they also established those same tenets as the limiting conditions of said rights.

⁵² Czechoslovak Constitution (1948), acts 15-17 and 37.

<http://www.psp.cz/docs/texts/constitution_1948.html> (9 October 2013).

⁵³ Czechoslovak law 217/49, §2. The government established the Commissariat for Religious Affairs in Slovakia as a subordinate body to the SOEA.

Thus, the state pledged to tolerate and administer religious life, provided that it conformed to the communist transformation of Czechoslovakia.

With law 218/49, “Concerning the Economic Safeguarding of the Churches of the Czechoslovak State,” the government made the state responsible for underwriting all of the expenses associated with administering the country’s churches. This included paying for salaries, maintaining properties and offices, publishing books and newsletters, and purchasing religious objects and supplies. The stated intention behind the law was to free the country’s churches from the burden of meeting their financial requirements

so that they may freely and fully develop their activities and focus primarily through them on their religious and moral mission, away from which material concerns had earlier [i.e. before the toppling of capitalism] led them.⁵⁴

Yet the framers of law 218/49 also had ulterior motives for attempting to free religion from its quotidian bounds. Once again, communist of this period believed that the public’s affinity for religion derived from the particular socio-economic conditions which prevailed under capitalism. Indeed, the explanatory text attached to the law began with an historical excursus that implicated the Roman Catholic Church in the exploitation of the Czech and Slovak masses, along with other purported crimes. In removing the country’s churches from all spheres of direct economic exchange, party-state officials hoped to weaken the churches hold over the public, whose ideological transformation it sought to achieve through education, intimidation, and economic progress.

Despite these idealistic underpinnings, the October laws also provided the state with considerable means for intervening into ecclesiastical affairs. They transformed the churches into “budget organizations,” whose incomes and expenses the SOEA carefully controlled. Although

⁵⁴ “Důvodová zpráva” [Explanatory report] for Czechoslovak law 218/1948, 2. NAČR, KSČ-Klement Gottwald, bundle 47, 71. Microfilm.

this meant that the state would have to meet any budget shortfalls that the churches might incur, it also gave the SOEA the right to limit the activities and expenditures of those same churches, regardless of their wealth. Surplus income and assets were to be administered by the SOEA and could be allocated for extraordinary expenses not covered in the budget, and only with its permission. The churches additionally had to seek SOEA approval if they wanted to sell real estate or other types of property. Paying the salaries of church officials, moreover, afforded the SOEA the right to oversee the appointment of clergy and executive personnel. Those individuals who received SOEA approval still had to sign loyalty oaths to the state and the “People’s Democratic Order,” which could be held against them if they did not collaborate.

The SOEA’s powers did not end there. Its officers intervened directly into the elections of lay leaders and into major church decisions. They attended church meetings and intimidated into silence those who may have wanted to speak against the party-state. Through such measures and by threatening to withhold funds, they demanded of clergy and lay leaders alike that they publicly support the state, the party, and the politics of the Communist Bloc, thus integrating them fully into the party-state’s propaganda machine.⁵⁵

These strategies for control and intervention increased in significance after 1953, when party-state officials determined that the more stridently coercive measures that they had been applying to the Roman Catholic Church in particular were not having the desired effect. In 1954, for example, the state ceased recording the religious affiliation of citizens on public documents, including identification cards. Instead of intimidating believers into leaving their churches, the inclusion of such data into the public record had made it difficult for those who had actually

⁵⁵ Kaplan, *Stát a církev v Československo* [State and the church in Czechoslovakia].

desired to withdraw to do so without attracting scornful attention from their coreligionists.⁵⁶ Similarly, the major initiatives taken against churches in the late 1940s and early 1950s had, in some ways, strengthened the resolve of many of their members to resist the will of the party. Thus, between 1954 and 1989, the party-state sought to control and weaken the churches primarily from within, powers afforded to them in 1949 by laws 217/49 and 218/49. Of course, the secret police continued to harass church members and leaders throughout this entire period.

The Transformation of the Jewish Communities

Communist Czechoslovakia extended to its citizens and residents of the Jewish religion the right to organize themselves for the purposes of worship and education, even as it rejected Jewish nationalism and persecuted “citizens of Jewish origin” as potential “Zionists.” This apparent contradiction was due to the official policy of considering nationality and religion to be wholly separate categories, regardless of their unique conflation in the Jewish case. The Czech and Slovak Jewish communities thus fell subject to the same administrative system as the country’s other churches and, specifically, under the purview of the SOEA’s second division, which oversaw non-Catholic denominations.

The ethnic aspects of Judaism, nonetheless, presented serious challenges to the officials who oversaw Jewish religious affairs. (This was particularly the case after 1953, when the communities became the only recognized Jewish organizations in the country. Many joined the communities to meet ethnic, rather than religious needs.) The ethnic aspects of Judaism brought the communities both advantages and disadvantages. Those institutions fared relatively well in

⁵⁶ Havelka, “Návrh, jak prakticky bude prováděno zrušení evidence o příslušnosti k církvím ve státních dokumentach” [Proposal for how it will be practically accomplished to remove the documentation of religious affiliation from state documents] (23 June 1954). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/2, bundle 3, archival unit 3, point 23.

comparison with many of the region's other churches. After all, the danger that many officials perceived in Jews rested not in their religious practices and beliefs—as it did with Christians—but in their national loyalties.

Upon taking over the administration of the Jewish religious communities in 1950, the SOEA demanded that the CJRC and the Jewish Religious Community in Prague drastically reduce the number of their employees, which stood at about 115 and 200 respectively. Dr. Šimšík of the SOEA noted that roughly one-third of the former were women and elderly men, implying that their jobs were non-critical. Both the CJRC and the Prague, indeed, offered simple employment as a means of social support to survivors who could not provide for themselves or who lacked pensions.⁵⁷ By 1951, the CJRC had laid off about eighty-five people, and the Prague community had brought its workforce down to ninety-one employees, forty of whom worked in social care.⁵⁸ The following year, employment at the CJRC and the Prague community dropped to fourteen and about fifty respectively, with additional cuts planned for the future.⁵⁹

In 1952, the SOEA took the bolder step of demanding that the CJRC reduce the number of its constituent communities. As per above, their number stood at 53 in 1947. Most of the communities, however, lack sufficient members and clergy to function as religious institutions.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Dr. Šimšík, “Židovská náboženská společnost” [The Jewish religious community] (15 December 1950). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1950.”

⁵⁸ Karel Böhm, *Záznam o návštěvě Rady židovských náboženských obcí a Židovské náboženské obce v Praze* [Memo about the visit to the CJRC and the Jewish community in Prague] (5 March 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1953.”

⁵⁹ SOEA second division to the legal division, first page of collection of documents labeled, “Zprávy o revisích v Radě židovských náboženských obcí v Praze 1/ z března 1951 a 2/z července 1952” [Report on the audit of the CJRC in Prague 1) from March 1951 and 2) from July 1952] (6 November 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder “RZNO 1949-1955,” sub-folder “Židovské spolky.”

⁶⁰ Knobloch (Kn.), “Restrikce židovských náboženských obcí v českých zemích” [Restricting the Jewish religious communities in the Czech lands] (1952). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder “Inv. c. 141.”

Inasmuch, they posed a number of vexing problems for the SOEA and for local administrators. They demanded significant and disproportionate attention from the regional and district national committees, the organs responsible for quotidian civic administration. These bodies had to approve community budgets and activities, provide general oversight, and manage restitution claims. The existence of so many communities, moreover, reflected poorly upon the SOEA, entrusted by the state and party to reduce the footprint of ecclesiastical life in the country. Lowering the number of the communities so that it reflected the actual number and geographical distribution of Jews in the country, offered them an easy victory. Some officials, like the ecclesiastical secretary of the County National Committee in Moravská Budějovice, also hoped that the consolidation of the Jewish communities would prevent contact between Jews.⁶¹

The proliferation of infeasible Jewish religious communities posed a more complicated problem for their members and for the CJRC. In some cases, individual communities merged with one another on their own initiative. In 1950, for example, the Jewish Religious Community in Prostějov absorbed its smaller counterpart in Kroměříž, due to the latter's miniscule and still declining membership.⁶² By 1952, the number of Jewish religious communities in the Czech lands had fallen to forty-seven through similar arrangements.⁶³ On the other hand, most of the Jewish religious communities and their members resisted dissolution. The communities stood as

⁶¹ Memo from the ecclesiastical secretary of the County National Committee in Moravská Budějovice to the Ecclesiastical Division of the Regional National Committee in Jihlava (7 February 1952). NAČR, SÚC, box 210, folder, "Inv. c. 141."

⁶² The Jewish community in Prostějov, "Přidělení obvodu ŽNO v Kroměříž ŽNO v Prostějově" [Attaching the territory of the Jewish religious community in Kroměříž to the Jewish religious community in Prostějov] (1 January 1950). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder "Inv. č. 141."

⁶³ Letter to SOEA "Hlášení o počtu židovských náboženských obcí v českých zemích" [Announcement of the number of Jewish religious communities in the Czech lands] (29 March 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder "RŽNO 1949-1954;" and Knobloch (Kn.), "Náboženská společnost židovská" [The Religious community Jewish] (n.d). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder "Inv. č. 141." The following report lists 49 communities. Idem., "Restrikce židovských náboženských obcí" [Restricting the Jewish religious communities].

living testaments to the long history of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia and served as the custodians of their most important physical artifacts, their cemeteries. To some, their demise would signify the success of the Nazi campaign to destroy European Jewry and many, therefore, resisted.

The Council offered to reduce the number of communities to twenty-nine, with twenty-four associated sub-communities, but the SOEA balked.⁶⁴ It insisted that the CJRC reduce the total number to nine, not quite one for each of the thirteen Bohemian and Moravian regions. The CJRC had no choice but to acquiesce, although internal debates persisted about which communities would remain whole and which would count among the thirty-eight (eventually thirty-seven⁶⁵) reduced to the status of a synagogue congregation (*synagogaľní sbor*).⁶⁶ The latter would be allowed to manage their own internal religious affairs, however their accounting and all administrative matters would fall to their parent community and to the district and regional national committees to which the latter reported. Over time, as the Jewish minority dwindled, four of the nine remaining communities would also fall to the administration of larger counterparts.

An unintended consequence of the community consolidation process enabled the SOEA to take fuller control of the CJRC and the Prague community, by installing an obsequious leader at their helms. SOEA officials received numerous complaints about Erich Kohn, the general secretary of the CJRC, from within the Jewish communities. On 4 February 1952, the SOEA sought permission from the StB to replace him with Rudolf Iltis, the editor of *Věstník*, the CJRC

⁶⁴ Knobloch (Kn.), “Náboženská společnost židovská” [The Religious community Jewish].

⁶⁵ Document beginning with words “Počet věřících: v Čechách a na Moravě” [The number of believers: in Bohemia and Moravia] (n.d). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder “RŽNO 1949-1954.”

⁶⁶ SOEA, “Situační zpráva o ŽNS–návrh nové ústavy” [A situational report about the Jewish religious community–proposal of a new constitution] (27 May 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder “Inv. č. 141.”

newsletter.⁶⁷ Four days later, the SOEA included questions about Kohn's competency into a request for information related to the consolidation of the Jewish communities sent to the ecclesiastical secretary of each of the regional national committees. In response, the SOEA received confirmation that many of the members of the "outlying" communities resented Kohn's "dictatorial style." The ecclesiastical secretary of the Regional National Committee in Gottwaldov added that Kohn's public pronouncements of his own atheism had made his coreligionists uneasy. Harsh reports arrived from Brno, Teplice, Ustí nad Labem, and Karlovy Vary as well.⁶⁸ These reports, however mediated and concise, demonstrate the persistence of dissent within the "outlying" communities. Further details, however, remain elusive. As the ecclesiastical secretary from Gottwaldov continued,

After the Slánský Affair the members of the Jewish Religious Community here appear as if shaken and are extremely careful with every word, timid, so it is not possible to acquire more detailed reports.⁶⁹

Soon, however, and with SEOA support, Jewish leaders from around the country attacked Kohn. In doing so, they inadvertently furthered the SOEA's plans to take greater control over the country's Jewish communities.

On 28 April 1952, at a congress of Jewish community presidents, the head of the Jewish community in Ústí nad Labem, Maximilián Goldberger, expressed his lack of confidence in Kohn. His counterpart from Karlovy Vary followed suit on the next day. This led Kohn to seek

⁶⁷ Kn. to the Secretariat of the SOEA (20 May 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁶⁸ See collection of documents in NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder "Inv. c. 141." The communities and local administrators took particularly strong stances against Kohn in Brno, Gottwaldov, Teplice, and Karlovy Vary.

⁶⁹ Ecclesiastical secretary of the Regional National Committee in Gottwaldov to SOEA, "Věc: Součení ŽNO-zpráva" [Re: combining the Jewish religious communities—Report] (22 March 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder "Inv. č. 141."

immediate medical leave, from which he promised not to return.⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, on 24 November 1952, Kohn and his wife committed suicide together. It was the very same day that Otto Fischl testified during the Slánský trial.⁷¹ In an internal report, the SOEA later claimed responsibility for removing Kohn from his position. This suggests that the office may have orchestrated the entire affair.⁷² Indeed, at the elections which followed, the office worked strenuously to ensure that Goldberger would be elected to the presidium of the CJRC.

The CJRC hoped to replace Kohn with its legal officer, František Flašner, who had temporarily taken over many of the former general secretary's responsibilities.⁷³ The SOEA, however, refused the appointment. Despite the fact that Flašner had been positively reviewed by an organ of the Communist Party, Knobloch still doubted that he "would fulfill the tasks given to him appropriately, according to the political line." Knobloch further noted that Flašner had spent the Second World War in London and that his wife had relatives in England and Canada. These were simple facts that Knobloch could turn into political weapons if he so chose.

SOEA officials met repeatedly with the CJRC leadership to convince them to install Rudolf Iltis as the general secretary.⁷⁴ The latter had assumed the same position at the powerful Jewish Religious Community in Prague on 12 August 1952 and he still served as the editor of

⁷⁰ Kn., "Výpis ze situační zpráva KCT v Ústí n. Labem za měsíc červen" [Extract from the situational report of the regional ecclesiastical secretary in Ústí nad Labem for the month of June] (22 July 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁷¹ Biography of Gustav Sicher in folder "Gustav Sicher." NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Knobloch, "Výkaz práce za den 25.VII.1952" [Report of work on 25 July 1952]. NAČR, SÚC box 211; and Emil Neumann to SOEA (1 July 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder "Inv. č. 141."

⁷⁴ Knobloch (Kn.) to Personnel division of the SOEA, "Věc Obsazení místa tajemníka Rady ŽNO v Praze" [Filling the post of the CJRC secretary] (24 October 1952); and idem., to the CJRC "Věc: Personální opatření v Radě ŽNO v Praze" [Re: personnel measures at the CJRC] (29 October 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder "Inv. č. 141."

Věstník.⁷⁵ The CJRC resisted the SOEA's demands for some time, but eventually capitulated. As part of the deal, Iltis lost his official function within the Prague community. The SOEA, however, secured a guarantee from the CJRC that Iltis would retain "oversight" over Prague and insisted that his position there not be filled.⁷⁶ The CJRC approved this plan officially on 9 November 1952.⁷⁷

The SOEA thus vested Iltis with near complete control over Jewish affairs in the Czech lands. Their choice of Iltis, however, had little to do with his political convictions. The SOEA had earlier praised the ideological commitments of the Jewish leadership installed after 1948 and, therefore, presumably had a number of candidates from which to choose.⁷⁸ Iltis, however, received less than glowing reports from the local Communist Party. Though a party member, he did not participate in political events, nor did he involve his wife or daughter in such affairs. "Dr Iltis, rather, lives for himself and his family," wrote one official.⁷⁹ In 1953, in response to dissatisfaction with Iltis at the community, the Communist Party of Prague's first district wrote to the SOEA that Iltis,

... always proudly claimed membership in the bourgeoisie, never knew other circles, and never had any contact with the working class. He always sympathized with Zionism, met with noted Zionist organizers... No one at the Jewish community will give you information, face-to-face, about Iltis' behavior regarding today's regime, because everyone fears him... When you leave such a man at the head of the Jewish religious community and you cannot then wonder why that community is boycotting Iltis. This

⁷⁵ Letter from CJRC to the SOEA (26 August 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁷⁶ Knobloch to CJRC "Věc: Personální opatření v Radě ŽNO" [Re: personnel measures at the CJRC] (October 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁷⁷ Dr. Suchomel to CJRC "Věc: Úprava požitků dr. Iltise a Arnošta Franka" [Adjusting the benefits of Dr. Iltis and Arnošt Frank] (28 November 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁷⁸ Šimšík, "Židovská náboženská společnost" [The Jewish religious community].

⁷⁹ Jiráňková, "Kádrový posudek" [Personnel evaluation] (24 February 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

casts a very poorly light upon your administration.⁸⁰

This did not concern the SOEA. What that office sought and found in Iltis, rather, was someone through whom its officers could control the Jewish communities and who would propagandize well on behalf of the party-state. In 1956, an SOEA official noted that Iltis,

dependably and tactically guarantees all of the commands and suggestions that this office has regarding the activities and life of the Jewish religious community and he expresses himself very well in publicity.⁸¹

In Iltis, the SOEA had found its man. Indeed, Iltis regularly reported to the SOEA—and likely to the StB—about his colleagues’ political missteps. In 1954, for example, he informed the SOEA that CJRC president, Emil Neumann, maintained close ties with the Israeli Legation in Prague, even after the Czechoslovak government had expelled the last Legate in 1953. Iltis suggested that the SOEA either remove Neumann from his position or keep closer tabs on his actions, alleging that he also met with “unfamiliar” people at the community and supported himself through unknown means.⁸²

It remains an open question why Iltis collaborated with the SOEA and the StB, particularly in their most oppressive moments. To that end, it bears mentioning that Iltis also worked as a laborer for the Council of Jewish Elders in Prague, which administered the Jewish communities of Bohemia and Moravia at the behest of the Nazi Protectorate.⁸³ Fear of the repercussions of non-capitulation motivated Iltis, who sought through collaboration to protect his community from persecution, even at the expense of individual members. Yet Iltis was no

⁸⁰ Eger, “Týka se postavení Dr. Rudolfa Iltise na ŽNO v Praze” [Regarding the position of Dr. Rudolf Iltis at the Jewish religious community in Prague] (21 August 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁸¹ “Kádrový posudek: Dr. Richard Iltis” [Personnel report: Dr. Richard Iltis] (5 September 1956). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁸² Šimšík, “Židovská náboženská společnost” [The Jewish religious community].

⁸³ Rudolf Iltis, “Životopis” [(auto)biograph] (6 June 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

ordinary quizzing. During the cultural liberalization of the 1960s, he took an early leadership role in raising public awareness of the Holocaust. Iltis may, in fact, represent something paradigmatic about postwar Czech-Jewish politics. He embodied a shifting admixture of fear, hope, and conviction that so many survivors experienced upon return. He had committed himself to adapting his community to life under communism.

Even after the SOEA had secured near-absolute executive authority for Iltis, it continued meddling in the internal affairs of the community, in order to ensure that its lay leadership would follow its instructions and support the communist line. SOEA officials were particularly concerned about elections to the CJRC presidium, which were to be held immediately after the CJRC approved its new bylaws in 1953. With the help of the national committees, the SOEA vetted all of the nominees.⁸⁴ It disqualified two whom Chief Rabbi Gustav Sicher had nominated, because they had once belonged to Zionist organizations.

The SOEA also feared that its candidate from Ústí nad Labem, Maximilián Goldberger, would not receive sufficient votes, because he had recently accused the sitting leadership of engaging in “bourgeois-nationalist and anti-popular ‘rabbinic’ politics.” They sought his appointment to the presidium because

While... Dr. Iltis and even heretofore vice president Neumann, who has been nominated as the new president, are a guarantee of the [CJRC’s] positive attitude towards the people’s democratic order, it would be advantageous, nonetheless, to have control [i.e., to monitor] even their conduct [*vystoupení*], which Goldberger would secure.⁸⁵

The SOEA, therefore instructed Iltis to investigate surreptitiously—and unwittingly—Goldberger’s electoral prospects. In the end, Goldberger won a spot on the presidium, which had been

⁸⁴ See collection of reports from the regional national committees in NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder “RŽNO 1949-1955.”

⁸⁵ Jirásek, “Příprava sjezdu delegátů RŽNO” [Preparations for the meeting of the CJRC] (n.d., 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

enlarged to accommodate the demands of non-Prague-based leaders.⁸⁶

Chief Rabbi Sicher spoke correctly, then, when he called 22 November 1953 an historic day for Czech Jewry. It marked the complete transformation of the region's Jewish institutions and their full integration into the new party-state system. The events of 1948-1953 also established the framework in which Jewish leaders and state officials would negotiate one aspect—and the only official aspect—of domestic Jewish-state relations for decades. Following the CJRC congress of that day, the newly elected Jewish leadership sent telegrams of support to the highest organs and personalities within the party-state system. They also proudly announced their new bylaws to the international community. In doing so, they performed what Y. Michal Bodemann has called “ideological labor” on behalf of the state, designed to deflect charges of antisemitism and, more broadly, lend credence to its political program. Particularly after 1956, propagandizing in this way became one of the most important responsibilities of Czech-Jewish leaders.⁸⁷ They propagandized at home as well, often to demonstrate and enforce proper ideological and political conviction within their communities. Indeed, at the conclusion of the 22-November congress, Maximilián Goldberger called for the CJRC to recognize the ongoing month of Soviet-Czech Friendship.⁸⁸ It was a fitting coda to five years of Czech-Jewish transformation.

Jewish-State in the Ecclesiastical Field in Comparison with Other Churches

None of the foregoing constituted exceptionally poor treatment of the Jewish religious

⁸⁶ “Sjezd delegátů židovských náboženských obcí” [The congress of the delegates of the CJRC], *Věstník*, vol. 15, no. 12 (7 December 1953): 89-95.

⁸⁷ For a collection of letters and telegrams sent after the CJRC congress in 1953, see NAČR, SÚC, box 210, folder “RŽNO sjezd 1953.”

⁸⁸ “Sjezd delegátů židovských náboženských obcí” [The congress of the delegates of the CJRC].

communities at the hands of the state when compared to its dealings with other churches. In fact, many measures taken to weaken the hold of religion over the population had very little impact upon Jews. The SOEA restricted the performance of public rituals, such as Catholic processions and pilgrimages, and forbade churches from engaging in non-worship and non-educational activities in order to mitigate their ability to attract new and younger members. The SOEA sought to curb the inter-generational transmission of religiosity further with operation “Religious Education,” through which they imposed hurdles to enrolling students in religion classes and pressured parents not to associate their children with their own churches.⁸⁹ A few Jewish children in Prague attended such classes on the premises of the Jewish Religious Community. In 1954, two of the 3,148 students in the second district and only one of the 3,819 students in the sixth district who attended religious-education classes were Jewish.⁹⁰ Outside of Prague, few opportunities existed for Jewish students to enroll in such courses. The operation to persuade parents not to provide religious instruction to their children most often did not affect Jews. In a series of operations lasting until 1953, the SOEA, in collusion with the Communist Party, attempted to break Czechoslovak Roman Catholic ties with the Vatican. They dissolved monastic orders, removed non-collaborative clergy, and seized vast Church assets.⁹¹ Once again, these operation did not directly concern the Jewish religious communities.

A number of demographic, cultural, political, and even financial concerns convinced officials at the highest levels of the state and Communist Party that attacking the Jewish religion,

⁸⁹ On efforts to restrict religion and religious education, see NAČR, SÚC box 6.

⁹⁰ District national committee in Prague 2, “Zpráva za měsíc září 1952” [Report for the month of September 1952] (n.d.). NAČR, SÚC box 60, folder “ONV Praha 2.” Šimáčková, district national committee in Prague 6, “Zpráva o činnosti za měsíc červenec 1953” [Report on the activities for the month of July 1954] (28 July 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 60, folder “ONV Praha 6.”

⁹¹ On the closure of monasteries through “Operation B” (*Akce B*), see NAČR, SÚC box 6.

as such, was unnecessary and even counterproductive. The Nazi genocide had devastated the Jewish minority, reducing a prewar population of 350,000 to between 40,000 and 56,000 in 1945. Massive waves of emigration followed, leaving the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities with a combined membership of roughly 15,000, of whom 8,232 lived in the Czech Lands in 1954.⁹² The community, moreover, was disproportionately elderly. Few Jewish children had been born during the war and those born immediately before it rarely survived. After the war, young people emigrated in much higher numbers than their older coreligionists, who were less prepared for the hardships of such an endeavor. Even the considerable Jewish baby-boom of 1945-1948 could not offset the demographic losses incurred through genocide and emigration.

Replenishment of the Jewish communities through conversion would have been virtually impossible, despite the fact that young converts would later feature prominently among the Jewish dissidents of the 1980s. European Jewry lacked a proselytizing tradition and few Czechs or Slovaks without Jewish roots would have been drawn to the country's only non-Christian faith. This was particularly so because of its association with an ethnicity that many perceived as foreign and dangerous. Indeed, as per above, the antisemitism of the late 1940s and the anti-Zionist campaigns of the 1950s discouraged even citizens "of Jewish origin" from joining the Jewish religious communities. State administrators in the first postwar years thus justifiably anticipated the impending disappearance of the Jewish religion from the Czech lands.

The internal and semi-independent processes of alignment with the Communist Party at

⁹² The present statistics based upon reports from NAČR, SÚC, box 193. By their own admission, in 1952, both the SOEA and the CJRC lacked accurate figures for the number of Jews by religion in the Czech lands. The State Office of Statistics counted 7,875 in 1950. The following year, the CJRC estimated that its constituent communities boasted a combined membership of 10,486 members, despite not registering a major increase in membership over the previous twelve months. The SOEA determined to use the figures provided by the Statistical Office, perhaps because it meant that they could allocate less money to the Jewish communities. Knobloch (Kn.), "Náboženská společnost židovská" [The Religious community Jewish].

the CJRC and the Prague community, along with the successful interventions by the SOEA to bring those organizations under further control, also explain the relative benevolent treatment of the Jewish communities as institutions. SOEA officials also trusted the Czech rabbinate to temper the demands of the region's religiously Orthodox Jews and to fashion Czech Judaism as a liberal and progressive creed. It helped too, of course, that the anti-Zionist turn had intimidated potential dissidents into silence.

If SOEA officials believed they had little to gain from violating the Constitution and placing undue restrictions on the practice of the Jewish religion, they also perceived a danger in doing so. They worried that mistreating the Jewish religious communities—or even failing to treat them well—would strengthen the hand of Western propagandists, who sought to portray the countries of the Soviet Bloc as the heirs to Hitler's antisemitism. It could have also undermined the party-state's attempt to portray itself as a bulwark against resurgent fascism in Europe. Sympathy for Holocaust survivors, particularly for the elderly among them, also motivated SOEA officials to acquiesce to Jewish religious demands. On 24 November 1952, in the middle of the Slánský trial, Knobloch cited such considerations into his directive to the Ministry of Internal Trade to allow Jewish nursing homes to exchange their lard rations, which were not *kosher*, for other forms of fat, that were permissible to consume according to Jewish law.⁹³

These considerations held less sway at the municipal and regional levels, where officials often placed greater pressure on the Jewish religious communities. Sometimes the former sought to take control of unused their properties. At other times, they simply acted out of antisemitism. In these cases, local Jewish leaders often turned for support to the CJRC, which enlisted the help of SOEA officials to rectify the matter. For example, in 1955, the District National Committee in

⁹³ Note on reverse side of letter from the CJRC to Knobloch (19 November 1952). NAČR. SÚC, box 210, folder "RŽNO 1949-1955," sub-folder "ŽNO košer strava."

Prague One sought to prevent the Jewish religious community there from holding its annual Purim festivities on the grounds that it forbade similar celebrations to other churches.⁹⁴ That national committee had had a tradition of antisemitism. In 1953, its ecclesiastic secretary wrote,

The Jews are a race in it for themselves alone. They know how to live, they know how to create for themselves pleasant surroundings and to separate themselves from others. In meetings with them they are overly accommodating, attentive, noble [this can have a negative connotation], but they do not let [one] penetrate their internal concerns.⁹⁵

Never mind that the secretary reiterated traditional anti-Jewish tropes of clannishness and conspiracy, she should have known better than to refer to Jews as a race. This same official penned the evaluation of Iltis, which characterized him as living “for himself and his family.”

The SOEA overturned the national committee’s decision on Purim. It explained,

The Jewish holidays of “Hanukah” and “Purim” and the forms of their celebration,” it insisted “comprise a part of the Jewish religion, and therefore it is impossible to compare these holidays to appropriately similar undertakings that other churches might well organize.⁹⁶

The official had in mind the traditional carnivals and prizes prepared for small children at synagogue. The SOEA could have insisted that the Jewish community in Prague limit its observances to the minimum requirements set forth in Jewish law, which does not mandate the type of party that it threw. As was common in the 1950s, however, a time of persistent anti-Zionist propaganda and antisemitism, the SOEA took a benevolent or, at least, permissive approach to administering the Jewish religion.

⁹⁴ Jiráková, “Zpráva církevního oddělení na ONV v Praze 1, za měsíc únor” [Report of the ecclesiastical division at the district national committee in Prague 1 for the month of February] (1 March 1955), 2. NAČR, SÚC box 60.

⁹⁵ Jiráková, “Měsíční zpráva církevní odd. na ONV v Praze 1, za červen” [The monthly report of the ecclesiastical department of the district national committee in Prague one for June] (1 July 1957), 2. NAČR, SÚC box 60.

⁹⁶ SOEA to the district national committee for Prague 1, department of culture (28 February 1955), in folder “Židovský svátek “Purim”, sdělení” [The Jewish holiday of “Purim,” advice]. NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1955.”

Indeed, the SOEA was even prepared to grant certain liberties to Jews that it denied to other sects. In 1951, for example, an SOEA official intervened to ensure that *Věstník* would not publish an announcement that citizens of the Jewish religion would be guaranteed the right to take off from work on Jewish holidays. The previous year, the SOEA had given permission for Jews and Seventh Day Adventists to negotiate flexible schedules with their employers so that they would not have to violate their holidays and their Saturday Sabbaths. The SOEA insisted, however, that this was not a right, because work fell under the category of civic obligations which limited religious freedom in the Constitution. In 1951, Chief Rabbi Sicher negotiated a stronger statement of support from the SOEA for religious Jews who wanted to take off on their holidays, which framed the practice as a right. The SOEA official who intervened into the newsletter's content expressed concern that Adventists might take advantage of the announcement and demand similar concessions. State administrators tended to view the Adventist Church as a cult, rather than a legitimate religion like Judaism.⁹⁷

Thus, at least on the national level, officials did not perceive the Jewish religion as threatening. Quite to the contrary, they established a close working relationship with the Jewish communities and even enlisted the support of some Jewish leaders in their fight against domestic "Zionism." Indeed, party-state officials believed that the greatest Jewish threat lay in activities, ideologies, and organizations that lay beyond the purview of the communities. Placing undo pressure on those communities, they feared, would strengthen their true adversaries by pushing citizens "of Jewish origin" into their hands.

Administering the Jewish Religion in Light of Jewish Ethnic Particularity

⁹⁷ Chmelař, "Věc: pracovní volno o židovských svátcích" [Re: time off over the Jewish holiday] (12 September 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

The ethnic and national aspects of Jewish cultural complicated the administration of Jewish-religious affairs. The authors of most of the StB reports on the topic of religion paid scant attention to the Jewish communities. StB agents were far more concerned with identifying “Zionists” and disrupting their activities. Yet when it came to administering the communities, it proved quite difficult to ignore the ethnic aspects of Judaism. For example, the youth cohorts that emerged in the 1960s and which cultivated ethno-cultural bonds with one another first came together at holiday celebrations like the ones described above.⁹⁸ These young beneficiaries of the SOEA’s permissiveness with regard to Jewish religious practice, however, soon found themselves subject to police accusations of “Zionism.” On the other hand, the very imperative to protect these same youngsters from (foreign) “Zionist” influences also convinced state administrators to approve the Prague community’s proposal to provide special programming for them in the mid-1960s.⁹⁹

Many more areas of administration, beyond those concerning the younger generation, demanded that the Jewish-religious communities, their supervisors at the SOEA, and even the StB take ethnic issues into consideration. Particularly in the first postwar decades, the communities directed a significant amount of their financial and executive capacities to providing assistance for elderly and infirm Holocaust survivors. Yet, the very fact the Nazis and their collaborators had perpetrated their genocide against individuals whom they had identified

⁹⁸ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 103-04. I interviewed Alena Heitlinger, Petr Brod, and Michal Wiener in the summer of 2009. They comment to this effect as well. Interviews may be available through the Jewish Museum in Prague.

⁹⁹ In 1951, representatives of the communist-Jewish residents of Prague’s two Jewish youth homes petitioned the SOEA not to close their institutions as the latter office had planned. They insisted that only their Jewish-specific programming would effectively indoctrinate young Czechs “of Jewish origin” into the communist fold and protect them from “Zionists” who also vied for their allegiances. The overture failed, but it set a precedent for the future. Jacob Ari Labendz, “Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist: Managing ‘Jewish Power and Danger’ in 1960s Communist Czechoslovakia,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014): 93-94.

as racially Jewish also meant that the community's purview had to extend beyond the sphere of those survivors who identified as religiously Jewish. As the CJRC explained to the SOEA in 1950,

The social activities of the [CJRC] is a particularly Jewish problem and cannot be compared with the social activities for the rest of the citizenry. No other part of the Czechoslovak citizenry was so stricken by the occupation as was the Jewish community. Only one member returned from nearly every family, so we are required to stand in for the families of these coreligionists.¹⁰⁰

No other church in the Czech lands could make such a claim about its relationship and responsibilities to its members, nor about the relationship of its members to one another.

Tending to the needs of survivors also demanded of the communities that they seek financial assistance from Western Jewish organizations, which they did without interruption from 1956 through 1989. These contacts, like the youth programming, worried StB agents who were surprisingly well acquainted with the Zionist orientations of the CJRC's Western-Jewish partners. The concerns were not unfounded. As a former officer at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee commented, "... but still, having the permission to send in money, that's the key. As long as we can send in money, they would also let someone in just to look at the bills."¹⁰¹ Party-state officials may have depended upon this foreign capital to meet their budgets, support the economy, and even to line their own pockets, but they also perceived a danger in working with Western organizations. In the context of Jewish-state relations, it meant acquiescing to the penetration of the Jewish Religious Communities by foreign, Zionist organizations.

Issues related to Jewish ethnic solidarity and politics even complicated something as

¹⁰⁰ CJRC to SEOA (8 June 1950). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1951."

¹⁰¹ *Father of Refugees*. Documentary series, *Between Star and Crescent*, directed by Martin Šmok and Petr Bok (Prague, Czech Republic: Verafilm, 2003), DVD. Minute 18:15-28.

simple as procuring *kosher* food.¹⁰² On 13 February 1953, the Prague community approached the District National Committee with a request to re-open the *kosher* cafeteria that had operated on its premises until 1949. The community felt confident that it would receive approval for the project, since it had the backing of both the CJRC and the SOEA. Approval, however, was not immediately forthcoming. Rather, the national committee refused the proposal, and, in doing so, sparked fourteen months of intense negotiations that eventually came to involve the CJRC, the SOEA, the Central National Committee of the Capital City of Prague, and even the Ministry of Internal Trade. On 16 April 1954, the Central National Committee overturned the district committee's decision (and its own initial refusal of the Prague community's first appeal).¹⁰³

The final letter from the Prague community to the Central National Committee, dated 8 April 1954, illuminates how deeply issues related to Jewish ethnic identification complicated the administration of Jewish-religious affairs. The unknown author noted that the national committee had objected to reopening the cafeteria on four grounds:

1. that issuing a permit would be in contravention of the law regarding the five-year economic plan.
2. not in the public's interest.
3. that it is not in solidarity with today's regime that the citizenry be divided in cafeterias according to religious rites,
4. and finally, that ritual food may be arranged in any collective eating [feeding] establishment.¹⁰⁴

The author then responded to the objections one by one:

re: 1. We do not understand how setting up a small ritual kitchen could significantly

¹⁰² Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 20-26; and Labendz, "Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist," 92-93.

¹⁰³ Collection of documents in NAČR. SÚC 210, folder "RŽNO 1949-1954," sub-folder "ŽNO košer strava."

¹⁰⁴ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Prague to the Central National Committee of the Capital City of Prague (8 April 1954), 2. NAČR. SÚC 210, folder "RŽNO 1949-1954," sub-folder "ŽNO košer strava."

interfere with the five-year plan, which was, anyway, already successfully fulfilled on 31 December 1953.

re: 2. The decision of the [Central National Committee] in no way explains how the operation of a small cafeteria, run by a public institution could be in contravention of public's interest.

re: 3. It is exactly this reason [or problem], the conspicuous separation of consumers in collective cafeterias according to religious rites, that we want to avoid by establishing our own cafeteria, which would not be possible if [your reasoning] is accepted.

re: 4. regarding the possibility of collective eating in some of the already existing collective eating concerns.

Reason (4) is in sharp contradiction to reason (3), irrespective of the fact that [(4)] is, in practice, almost infeasible for the following reasons.¹⁰⁵

The author proceeded to list all of the steps that non-*kosher* cafeterias would need to take in order to accommodate clients who practiced Judaism devoutly.

In the context of a culture wherein employees often ate their main, warm meal of the day in workplace cafeterias—considered part of their fair compensation—adherence to Jewish law threatened to divide citizens of the Jewish religion from their non-Jewish compatriots, publicly and in spaces that were supposed to have lain beyond the religious sphere. The Central National Committee capitulated primarily due to pressure from the SOEA and the Ministry of Internal Trade. Yet it also had accepted the argument of the Prague community. Indeed, producing *kosher* food on a miniscule scale presented major challenges to a command economy organized at the national level. This was also the case because the directors of various state-run enterprises had little interest in associating themselves and their operations with Judaism (i.e., “Zionism”). By the mid-1950s, the CJRC had begun importing much of its *kosher* food from foreign producers, some in Hungary, but also from factories and organizations in the West and in Israel.¹⁰⁶

These solutions to fundamentally religious problems had serious repercussions for the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁶ For example, see collection of documents on MŠK-56-1-3; and SÚC 210, folder “RŽNO 1949-1954,” sub-folder “ŽNO košer strava.”

party-state's attempt to root out domestic "Zionism." The *kosher* cafeteria soon became a central meeting point for individuals "of Jewish origin" in Prague, regardless of their religious convictions. Indeed, Iltis seems to have underestimated when he predicted that the cafeteria would initially feed between fifteen and thirty individuals, and some fifty more "through popularization campaign."¹⁰⁷ After 1956, the cafeteria also became the place where Czech Jews met with Western and Israeli visitors. This deeply concerned StB agent, who worried about ideological indoctrination and espionage. Importing *kosher* food from the West was similarly problematic. In April 1976, the Ministry of Culture accused the *Société de Secours et d'Entraide*, a Swiss-Jewish charitable organization, of manufacturing a shortage of *kosher* wine in Hungary, in order to force the Czechoslovak communities to order their wine from Israel "in the interests of supporting the Israeli state and its expansive pro-imperialist politics."¹⁰⁸

The party-state never closed the cafeteria in Prague, nor did it ever forbid the CJRC from importing *kosher* food, tariff free, from the West. These steps would have been too disturbing both at home and abroad, not the least for violating the state's self-imposed obligation to meet the religious needs of its citizens. Facilitating *kosher* consumption in communist Czechoslovakia, nonetheless, frequently disturbed Jewish-state relations on ethno-national and purportedly "Zionist" grounds. The same, of course, can be said for educating young Jews and for providing aid to Jewish seniors. Similarly, when Czech-Jewish leaders invoked the Holocaust in support of party-state policies and politics, they occupied complex subject positions that mediated between their official roles as religious functionaries and their statuses as survivors of a genocide perpetrated on racial grounds. The practice undermined the false division of Jewishness

¹⁰⁷ "Židovská rituální kuchyně zpráva" [The Jewish ritual kitchen - report] (n.d.), SÚC 210, folder "RŽNO 1949-1954," sub-folder "ŽNO košer strava."

¹⁰⁸ Director of the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs "Záznam" [Memo] (April 1976). NAČR, SPVC box 233.

into distinct ethnic and religious categories.

Conclusion:

Between 1948 and 1953, communist-Jewish activists and party-state officials worked independently and together to bring the Jewish communities in line with the communist order and the state's policies for administering ecclesiastical affairs. Their initiatives set the framework in which stakeholders would negotiate this aspect of Jewish-state relations for nearly four decades. The state recognized the CJRC as the umbrella organization of the Jewish communities in the Czech lands and officially limited its purview to the religious sphere. Despite considerable initiatives of the communities to conform to the new political order, the SOEA took advantage of legislation passed in 1949 to take fuller control of Jewish affairs and to monitor the communities closely. SOEA agents, however, tended to take a relatively permissive approach to managing the Jewish religion and even defended the interests of the CJRC and its constituent communities against the encroachment of other organs of the party-state.

Blanka Soukupová frequently refers to such beneficence as “condescension” (*blahosklonnost*).¹⁰⁹ To do so, however, is to underestimate the sympathy that some state administrators had for Jews. I cannot agree with Soukupová when she attributes the improving relationship between the party-state and the Jewish communities primarily to political calculations on the part of the former. Much of the improvement derived from contradictions between the state's insistence that Jewishness was a religious category only and the reality that Jewish identification and practice incorporated significant ethno-national components. Ethnic

¹⁰⁹ Soukupová, “Postoj státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství” [The position of the state with regard to the Jewish religious community], 73. Soukupová translates *blahosklonnost* as “condescendence.”

factors presented the communities with both liabilities, in the form of StB attention, and assets, in the guise of administrative leniency.

Some authors have referred to the transformation of the Jewish communities between 1948 and 1953 as a “*Gleichschaltung*.”¹¹⁰ In doing so, they draw a tenuous and, I think, dangerous comparison between Nazism and Czechoslovak Stalinism where Jewish matters were concerned.¹¹¹ It is one thing to seek continuities of political strategy from one period into the next. It is quite another to compare the transformation of the Jewish communities to the extension of Nazi rule throughout the Czech lands. To my mind, it implies a unfair association of the Czech-Jewish leadership of the communist years with the *Judenräte*, or Jewish councils, of the Second World War. This is problematic, even if it is left aside that collaboration with the Nazi regime often entailed complicity in genocide, which was never the case for Jews in communist Czechoslovakia.

It is undisputable that the leaders of the Jewish communities were the junior partner in their negotiations with party-state officials and that the framework established by the state severely limited the development of Jewish culture in most years. This did not mean, however, that Czech Jewish leaders lacked power completely or that they did not have the capacity to improve the conditions of Jewish life in their country. Indeed, until 1968, Czech Jewish leaders had every right to believe that they would succeed in that regard. This makes even allusions to the Nazi years inadvisable at best.

In the next two chapters, I explore Jewish-state relations in the ecclesiastical sphere through a study of the political economy of Jewish communal properties. In Chapter Five, I

¹¹⁰ The first mention seems to be in Brod, “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 159.

¹¹¹ I discuss comparisons between communism and Nazism in the conclusion.

attempt to show that the restitution of vast real estate holdings to the communities helped facilitate a culture of mutuality between community leaders and the officials in charge of ecclesiastical life. It extended well beyond the limited bounds of religious affairs. In Chapter Six, however, I seek to show how this culture of mutuality came to an end after the 1968 Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia and the effects of this change upon Czech-Jewish politics and the culture within the communities.

CHAPTER FIVE

Synagogues for Sale: Jewish-State Mutuality in Property Relations, 1945-1970

Visitors to Habry during the 1980s who bought a ticket to the cinema paid to sit in a former synagogue. Young locals, however, may have thought about their town's new theater, established in 1979, more so as a former church.¹ The large baroque building, erected in 1825 to replace a smaller synagogue, had, indeed, served the needs of the local parish of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren from 1942 until 1965. How could this have been? The Ministry of Labor Protection and Welfare (*Ministerstvo ochrany práce a sociální péče*) had returned the former synagogue building to the Jewish community in 1947.² Three years later, the newly established State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs (SOEA) sided with the Jewish community in its appeal to invalidate a contract of sale, signed in 1939, between the community and the church. It did so the midst of heated controversy and in defiance of local and regional administrators, not to

¹ The official website of the Town of Habry dates the cinema from 1979. Other sources contend that it opened in 1968. First mentioned in the year 1101, the town of Habry lies almost exactly between Prague and Brno. At its height, in 1850, it had 2,136 residents, of whom nearly a quarter were Jewish. Records attest to continuous Jewish settlement there from the first half of the seventeenth century until the Nazi occupation. One source, however, dates it from the fourteenth century. The town's Jewish cemetery hails from the early seventeenth century, which is when the Jewish community erected its first synagogue. "Historie: Město Habry" [History: The Town of Habry]. <<http://www.habry.cz/historie-mesta/d-1005/p1=1006>> (1 April 2014); Blanka Rozkošná and Pavel Jakubec, *Židovské Památky Čech: Historie a památky židovského osídlení Čech / Jewish Monuments in Bohemia: History and Monuments of Jewish Settlement in Bohemia* (Brno, Czech Republic: ERA, 2004), 137; Hugo Gold, *Židé a židovské obce v Čechách v minulosti a v přítomnosti* [Jews and Jewish communities in Bohemia in the past and in the present] (Brno and Prague, Czechoslovakia: Židovské nakladatelství, 1934), 143.

² Letter from Ministry of Labor Protection and Welfare to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: ŽNO v Kolíně - vynětí nemovitosti z národní správy" [Re: the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín - removal of properties from national administration] (13 January 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

mention the church itself.³

What brought the interests of the Stalinist state in line with those of the Jewish community? How did Jewish leaders think about the properties that they had reclaimed after the war, in light of the genocide of Czech Jewry, their responsibilities to reestablish communal institutions and to care for Holocaust survivors, and the vast financial and personnel resources that maintaining the properties demanded? How did the Habry synagogue end up and remain in church hands and how could it have been transformed subsequently into a movie theater?

This chapter explores the political economy of Jewish communal property in the Czech lands from 1945 through roughly 1970. During the first postwar years, the Czech Jewish communities re-acquired hundreds of properties in restitution, primarily synagogues and cemeteries, but also office buildings, residences, and more. The Holocaust and postwar emigration had rendered the synagogues ritually superfluous from a demographic perspective, as did the consolidation of the Jewish communities in 1953. Wartime and postwar damage, misuse, and neglect, moreover, had rendered many of them unusable and even hazardous. While some cemeteries had emerged from the war and its aftermath relatively intact, many others suffered devastation wrought of vandalism and theft. These last factors remained a persistent problem for decades.

Administering these properties occupied a considerable amount of the time and resources of the Jewish communities and their leaders. It also comprised a good deal of the interactions between the Jewish communities and ecclesiastical officers at all levels of the state administration. Property affairs also extended this close interaction, officially in the ecclesiastical sphere alone, into other areas of the economy and state administration. Contemporary popular

³ Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, “Věc: Synagoga v Habrech” [Re: synagogue in Habry] (24 April 1951). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

and academic circles alike have associated the countries of communist Central Europe with the continued alienation and destruction of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, which began during the Nazi occupation. Most studies have focused on the fact of destruction alone, rather than upon the systems that led both to the destruction and preservation of Jewish heritage sites.⁴

The case of Habry offers a window into the political-economy of Jewish communal property during the first decades of communist rule in the Czech lands. I concede, in advance, that Habry is a relatively non-provocative, even uninteresting case. I offer it intentionally, however, to balance what I perceive to be the selection of only the most egregious of stories by authors looking for antisemitism—which was prevalent—and who have relied too heavily upon that same factor to explain the losses they enumerate. In the Czech lands, as in territories across the region, strong popular sentiments had, indeed, emerged in the immediate postwar years in opposition to the restitution of Jewish properties and their preservation as sites of Jewish heritage. Yet while the transition to communism may have done little to change popular, non-Jewish attitudes regarding the restitution and preservation of these properties, it profoundly restructured the system in which Jewish leaders and state officials negotiated their ownership and management.

A closer look at this system and the conflicts that it engendered reveals that the Jewish

⁴ Blanka Soukupová, “Poměr státu a veřejnosti k osudu synagog, židovských hřbitovů a židovských budov v českých zemích po Šoa (léta 1945-1956): rekonstrukce na základě vybraných pramenů i odborné literatury” [The attitude of the state and of the public towards the fates of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and Jewish buildings in the Czech lands after the Shoah (years 1945-1956): a reconstruction on the base of selected sources and expert literature], *Slovenský národopis*, 60/2 (2012): 133-150; Jan Podlešák, “K otázkám genocidy českých Židů, komunistického antisemitismu a záchrany židovských památek,” in *Totalitarismus ve 20. století: Československé zkušenosti* [Totalitarianism in the 20th century: the Czechoslovak experience], eds. Milan Valach and Radovan Rybář (Brno, Czech Republic: Masaryk University in Brno, 2002), 172-86; and Jaroslav Spurný, “A nikdo se neptal ani pozůstalých: Židovské hřbitovy v Čechách před rokem 1990” [An no one even asked the bereaved: Jewish cemeteries in Bohemia before the year 1990], in *Věstník*, vol. 6, no. 6 (June 2008): 6-9.

communities and the state ecclesiastical authorities reached a tacit agreement in their mutual best interest for how to administer Jewish communal properties of all types. It remained in place until the early 1970s and thereby simultaneously facilitated the preservation of hundreds of cemeteries and the alienation of hundreds of former synagogues. Indeed, as long as the Jewish communities had a surplus of unused buildings, which could be sold or rented, the state ecclesiastical administration found defending Jewish communal property rights to their advantage. They extended this protection to Jewish cemeteries as well, not only for the sake of consistency, but also out good faith and a commitment to guaranteeing religious freedom. This cooperation helped reinforce the strong relations that pertained between the ecclesiastical administration and the Jewish communities during the first two decades of communist rule.

Evaluating these dynamics in detail also presents an opportunity to examine the perspectives and priorities of Jewish leaders (and others) with regard to the properties that their communities had reacquired after 1945 and the challenges that they posed. In general, the Jewish communities prioritized the preservation of cemeteries over former synagogues, and often sacrificed the latter to save the former. This did not mean, however, that Jewish community leaders took a dispassionate approach in determining the future of empty synagogues. To the contrary, they cooperated with the state administration to secure the most reverential uses for them, within a limited range of options. While Jewish leaders preferred that former synagogues served non-religious, cultural purposes, they also readily conceded to the installation therein of churches. They preferred that synagogues serve as churches, rather as than shops, sties, and storehouses.

Finally, setting this aspect of Jewish-state relations into the broader contexts of the economy and other spheres of the state administration reveals the important role played by local

cultures and politics in determining the fates of Czech sites of Jewish heritage. Central, regional, and local authorities struggled with each other and with state-run corporations to advance different agendas. The resolution of their conflicts depended upon a wide range of factors which often lay outside the strict bounds of Jewish-state relations. This exploration thus seeks to complicate the heretofore monolithic image of communist Czechoslovakia that prevails, particularly in popular circles, with regard to matters Jewish. This study of intra-state competition reveals not only a rarely explicated site of Jewish-state mutuality, but also points to its limits, imposed at the local level.

Charity and Genocide in Habry, 1939-1945:

On 14 April 1939, just one month after the Nazi-German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, the Jewish community in Habry signed a contract with the local Ecclesiastical Church of the Czech Brethren. The latter agreed to purchase the former's synagogue for twenty-thousand crowns. The fact that the building sorely needed repairs does not adequately account for the fact that the sale-price reflected no more than one-fourth of the building's value. The sale was a mere fiction, designed to protect the synagogue from desecration and to avoid the eventual seizure of Jewish communal funds by the Protectorate. No money ever changed hands and the church even agreed to hide a box of Jewish ritual items, including a number of silver artifacts.⁵ At the time of the sale, no one anticipated the Holocaust and no records remain to suggest the future that either of the parties to it foresaw. What is clear, however, is that county authorities, under Nazi control, did not recognize the sale. Instead, they transferred ownership of the building to the Emigration

⁵ The Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren performed a similar service for the Jewish Religious Community in Heřmanův Městec during the war. Letter from the church to the Jewish Religious Community in Pardubice (8 January 1946). ŽNO folder "Heřmanův Městec."

fund for Bohemia and Moravia. In other words, the Protectorate had assumed ownership of the synagogue.⁶

Beginning in the last quarter of 1941, the Nazis began deporting those Bohemian and Moravian individuals whom they had identified as Jewish to concentration camps and ghettos. The deportations, primarily to Theresienstadt, intensified through 1942. In that same year, the Evangelical Church in Habry moved into the synagogue building, into to which it subsequently invested at least 15,000 crowns for repairs. The church paid another 50,000 crowns in insurance costs.⁷ Its leaders anticipated correctly that few, if any, Jews would return to Habry. At the end of the war, like so many other individuals and organizations that had, by means both nefarious and charitable, come into the possession of Jewish property, they believed that it would remain their own.

The Postwar Restitution of Jewish Communal Properties

The struggles of Jewish individuals to restitute private property after the Second World War has been well discussed.⁸ The war led many Czechoslovak citizens and politicians to reject the multi-nationalism that had characterized their interwar state, in favor of an ethno-nationalist model of

⁶ Letter from the National Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders (*Národní správa židovské rady starších*) to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín (8 November 1946); and “Spisový záznam sepsaný s panem Smetanou, farářem českobratrské evangelické církve ve Vilémově [File memo written with Mr. Smetana, the pastor of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren in Vilémov] (6 November 1956) ŽNO folder “Habry.”

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Eduard Kubů and Jan Kuklík, “Reluctant Restitution: The Restitution of Jewish Property in the Bohemian Lands after the Second World War,” in *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, eds. Martin Dean, Constantine Goshler & Philipp Ther, Studies on War and Genocide, ed., Omer Bartov (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2007), 223-239; and Šarka Nepalová, “Die jüdische Minderheit in Böhmen und Mähren in den Jahren 1945-1948” [The Jewish Minority in Bohemia and Moravia 1945-1948], *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* [Terezin Studies and Documents], 6 (1999): 332-50 and 356-58.

political organization. Even if many sympathized with Holocaust survivors, in the context of the postwar expulsion and misappropriation of the German minority, it seemed natural that Jewish properties too should fall to Czech and Slovak hands. Some non-Jewish Czechs and Slovaks understood their ill-gotten gains as compensation for their own wartime suffering and participation in the resistance. For those who still associated Jews with Germans, these notions came more easily.

The first postwar years also saw the widespread nationalization of commerce and industry, which intensified and neared completion after the transition to communist rule. The logic behind this transformation also helped justify the usurpation of Jewish communal properties to meet public needs, particularly when they could no longer serve their original purposes or when smaller quarters would suffice. With regard to Jewish property, my sense is that most non-Jewish Czechs and Slovaks saw the postwar *status quo* as the new normal. Indeed, the Czech-Jewish leader and member of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, Arnošt Frischer, urged his fellow Jews to exercise patience in asking for restitution after the war.⁹ In contrast, although they soon disappointedly relinquished such fantasies, many postwar Jews hoped for a return to the interwar *status quo ante*. They recalled the First Czechoslovak Republic in halcyon tones as a place of relatively unique acceptance and philosemitism.

⁹ “Address by Mr. Ernest Frischer, Member of the Czechoslovak State Council, London, England,” in *Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak Jews: Addresses Delivered at the Meeting of the Czechoslovak Jewish Representative Committee Affiliated with the World Jewish Congress, November 18, 1944 at the Community Center, New York, N.Y.* (New York: Czechoslovak Jewish Representative Committee, 1945), 18-32. See also, “Výtah z úvodního proslovu p. ing. A. Frischerera v studijní komisi pro poválečné hospodářské problémy čs. židovstva, dne 11. dubna 1943” [Excerpt from the introductory remarks of Mr. Engineer A. Frischer in the study commission for the postwar economic problems of [Czechoslovak] Jewry, on the day of 11 April 1943] and “Projev ing. A. Frischerera ve Státní radě dne 6. října 1943” [Speech of Engineer A. Frischer in the State Council on the day of 6 October 1943]. NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-100/45, svazek 11, a.j. 197.

Unlike Poland and, more complexly, the German Democratic Republic, postwar Czechoslovakia recognized its Jewish communities as the legal successors to their prewar iterations and confirmed their right to restitute stolen and lost properties.¹⁰ Czech Jews reestablished fifty-nine communities in 1945, out of a prewar total of 136. That count dropped to fifty-three by 1947, due to insufficient membership. The Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands (CJRC) then consolidated those into nine communities in 1953, at the behest of the SOEA. Czech Jews also reestablished seventy-six civic associations between 1945 and 1950.¹¹ They did so often with the indentation of dissolving them upon the completion of restitution, so that they could leave their property to the local Jewish community, as per their prewar statutes. By 1953, none of the associations remained. In the end, the properties that fell to the nine remaining communities included hundreds of synagogues, over four-hundred cemeteries, and many other buildings. Most lay in areas with few Jewish residents, particularly after the emigration of over twenty-five-thousand Jews in 1948 and 1949.

Administering the properties posed serious challenges the Czech-Jewish communities, which at their height boasted no more than 10,000 members. This pertained particularly to cemeteries. In 1949, the CJRC complained to the Ministry of Education, Science and Art about their costs associated with maintaining them:

The proceeds from the cemeteries that are still functioning [as active burial sites] do not nearly cover the amount that is spent for upkeep. The majority of cemeteries, however, are not functioning and are maintained only for the reasons of piety and religious proscriptions. The money for these cemeteries must be paid out exclusively from our own

¹⁰ On property relations in East Germany and Poland see Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹¹ Jiří Křest'an, Alexandra Blodigová, and Jaroslav Bubeník, *Židovské spolky v českých zemích v letech 1918-1948* [Jewish associations in the Czech lands in the years 1918-1948] (Prague, Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Sefer and the Institute for the Terezín Initiative, 2001), 83.

funds.¹²

In 1963, the secretary general of the CJRC, Ota Heitlinger explained,

... our cemeteries cause us the greatest concern. We have total of 395 [of them], and if we consider that we have about 800 members, [it means that] to every twenty [of them] falls one cemetery.¹³

In 1971, the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň declined an order from the Prague community to repair the cemetery in Prčice with the simple statement, “we regret [it], however, we have enough of our own *tzuris* [Yiddish: “troubles”] with cemeteries.”¹⁴

On the other hand, the communities also benefited from inheriting hundreds of properties. They derived income (and thereby curried favor with state ecclesiastical administrators) by renting and selling buildings, including former synagogues. Later, as per the next chapter, they sold cemeteries and even gravestones to increase their budgets. The cemeteries, while a source of constant tension, also served the communities as sites of layered memory and venues for Holocaust commemoration.

A Postwar Impasse in Habry, 1945-1947:

After the war, the closest, functioning Jewish community to Habry was located in Kolín. At the insistence of the Nation Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders, which administered Jewish properties in the immediate postwar years, the Kolín community appealed to the

¹² Letter from the CJRC to the Ministry of Education, Science and Art (30 June 1949). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1949.

¹³ Paraphrased in the minutes of the board meeting of the Jewish Religious Communities in Plzeň (15 December 1963). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

¹⁴ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň to the Jewish Religious Community in Prague (3 June 1970). JM-PP inventory no. 16, carton 4, folder “1969-1970.”

Evangelical Church in Habry to discuss the synagogue.¹⁵ Even if they had not yet secured restitution, they hoped to receive past-due rent and sign either a lease or new bill of sale.¹⁶ In November, after months of silence, the church's pastor insisted that the original contract was still valid, which meant that the sale would be complete upon the transfer of funds. The pastor then reminded the community that its predecessor had asked the church to withhold payment in 1939, due to the Nazi occupation. He also noted that the church had already invested 15,000 crowns into the building and had spent another 50,000 crowns to insure it. Finally, the pastor reminded the Kolín community that his church had hidden Jewish ritual items during the war.¹⁷ Inasmuch, he subtly implied a wish that the community would make a gift of the former synagogue to the struggling church. He hoped to maintain the postwar *status quo*.

The National Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders expressed sympathy for the pastor's position in a letter to the Kolín community, but the latter insisted on receiving compensation for its lost property.¹⁸ It therefore made a counter offer, suggested by the National Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders, that the church pay the original 20,000 crowns, plus 5% interest for the five years that had passed since they had signed the contract. The community considered this sum low in relation to the actual value of the building, but it also

¹⁵ Letter from the National Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders to the Jewish Community in Kolín, "Věc: Synagoga v Habrech" [Re: The synagogue in Habry] (13 August 1946). ŽNO folder "Habry."

¹⁶ Letter from the National Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders to the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (13 August 1946).

¹⁷ "Spisový záznam sepsaný s panem Smetanou, farářem českobratrské evangelické církve v Vilmémově" [Memorandum written with Mr. Smetana, the pastor of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren in Vilémov] (6 November 1946). ŽNO folder "Habry."

¹⁸ National Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (8 November 1946). ŽNO folder "Habry."

understood that it would never serve as a synagogue again.¹⁹ The Jewish community leaders wanted more than money. They wanted an acknowledgment that their interwar rights and properties had been restored.

Counter Claims in Restitution Cases:

Individuals and organizations that sought to avoid paying for the continued or prospective use of Jewish communal properties, or relinquishing them to restitution, often made counter claims, like the one made by the church in Habry.²⁰ Sometimes they demanded compensation in amounts greater than the value of the buildings for costs incurred during and after the war: for repairs and for payments to banks and insurance companies, as well as for outstanding mortgages.²¹ In more

¹⁹ National Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders to the CJRC, “Synagoga v Habrech” [The synagogue in Habry] (21 November 1946). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

²⁰ In 1954, for example, the County National Committee in Frenštát pod Radhoštěm asked the SOEA to transfer the ownership of the former synagogue in Ostravice from the CJRC to that City National Committee in Ostravice. One year earlier, the Ostravice committee had agreed to rent the building from the CJRC for an annual fee of 4,800 crowns. It installed a school therein. By April of the next year, however, it demanded to be awarded the building free of charge. Through the County National Committee, it argued that “... the [CJRC] will not be harmed in any way. The maintenance costs for the building will eat up any rental income.” In this case, the SOEA defended the CJRC’s right to decide how to dispose of its own property. Letter from the County National Committee in Frenštát pod Radhošť to the SOEA (12 April 1954). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1954. The national committees that administered Ostravice hoped to acquire a building free of charge. As rental payments in communist Czechoslovakia did not reflect “market value,” it often happened that projected maintenance costs exceeded expected rents. The committees’ argument, however, was flawed. If they believed that the costs of maintaining the building would exceed the rental payments, it would have behooved them to honor the contract with the CJRC. Interpreting this as an example of state antisemitism, however, would require more evidence. The simpler explanation is that the national committees sought to achieve greater control of their finances and to streamline their bureaucracy.

²¹ In 1951, the Jewish Religious Community in Trutnov agreed to accept only a portion of its prewar properties in restitution. The city had erected new buildings upon the land that had been confiscated from the community during the war and still carried a mortgage from that project. The postwar community also agreed to assume responsibility for the portion of the mortgage corresponding to the properties that it did receive in restitution and to forgo past-due rent. See

venal cases, some organizations tried to hold the communities responsible for damages incurred during the war due to antisemitic violence.²² The state also seized properties “in the public interest.”²³ Jewish leaders could do little in such cases except to demand compensation. They

“Trutnov, náboženská obec židovská, restituce nemovitostí” [Trutnov, Jewish religious community, restitution of immovable property] (19-20 June 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 119.

²² In 1949, for example, the Fund for National Renewal (*Fond národní obnovy v Praze*) and the National Administration of the Property Remainder of the Emigration Fund (*Národní správa majetkových podstat vystěhovaleckéh fondu*) sued the Jewish Community in Ostrava for 800,568.10 crowns, plus five percent interest, for payments made by the Emigration Fund after April 1946 (the date of restitution) on a mortgage which the wartime Emigration Fund (*Auswanderungsfund*) had taken out on the Ostrava synagogue (or, rather, on the plot of land where the building had stood before the Nazis destroyed it) in 1944. This was tantamount to making the Jewish community pay for damages born of antisemitic violence. Indeed, the Fund for National Renewal argued that the CJRC “cannot prove that it was the *Auswanderungsfund* which, through its representative organs, carried out the arson of the synagogue.” The [CJRC] countered that the community in Ostrava had already spent 195,519.33 crowns to cart away what remained of the synagogue, which had incurred 2,500,000 crowns in damages. The CJRC assessed the plot of land that Ostrava received in restitution in 1946 at a mere 53,600 crowns. Letter from the Fund for National Renewal to the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs (31 July 1950) and the response from the Council of Jewish Religious Communities also to the Ecclesiastical Office (20 February 1950). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1950. The Ostrava community eventually leased the land for free to the city for use as a playground. Soukupová, “The State and Public and the Destiny of Synagogues,” 147, note 47.

In 1951, Czechoslovak Insurance attempted to recover 246,802.60 crowns in damages from the CJRC for expenses incurred by its predecessor organizations in 1939 and 1946. In 1939, after the Nazis and others had burned a number of Bohemian and Moravian synagogues to the ground, the Nazi-controlled courts ruled against the Jewish communities’ insurance claims. The insurance companies countersued successfully but could not recover any damages because the Jewish communities had already been stripped of their assets. Seven years later, a consolidated concern attempted to recover the damages from the reestablished Jewish communities. This put the latter in a difficult position. In order to achieve restitution, they had to claim successor rights to the prewar communities. Yet, here, they also had to deny having a relationship with the wartime Jewish leadership. In the end, it seems that the CJRC and Czechoslovak Insurance agreed upon a reduced payment of 70,000 crowns. See the petition filed by Josef Kubišta, representing Czechoslovak Insurance, with the SOEA (received 28 May 1951) and the response from the CJRC (29 June 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 119. Soukupová, “The State and Public and the Destiny of Synagogues,” 141.

²³ The state and its subsidiaries reserved the right to confiscate properties “in the public interest.” For example, local administrators in Dvůr Králové decided to demolish the town’s synagogue in order to build a new road. Letter from the County National Committee in Dvůr Králové to the SOEA (9 June 1950). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1950. With the passage of law no. 88 in 1959, the state gave greater rights to organs of the socialist sector to claim ownership over the

often decided of their own accord to transfer ownership of devastated synagogues to the state, when their projected repair costs exceeded any income that they could have expected to receive from either renting or selling the properties.²⁴

The Cemetery at the Center of Prolonged Negotiations in Habry, 1947-1949:

On 13 January 1947, the state officially restituted the Jewish properties in Habry to the Kolín community. The latter resumed negotiations with the church on that same day. In the process, it introduced a new condition which would set it at an impasse with the church for years. In addition to paying the 20,000 crowns plus interest, the community asked the church to assume the responsibility for “caring for the [Jewish] cemetery [in Habry]” (*pečovati o hřbitov*). The church offered to transfer the 20,000 crowns immediately, but declined the new condition. It pointed, once again, to the heavy investments that it had already made into the former synagogue and to its own flagging capacity. The church had only one-hundred members, including children,

buildings that they occupied, but which belonged to non-socialist-sector entities like the Jewish communities, provided that they pay fair compensation in amounts no greater than 50,000 crowns. The nationalization of synagogues followed shortly thereafter in Plzeň, České Budějovice, Volyně, and other locations. See the minutes of the board meetings of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (1 November 1960; 30 April 1961; 31 May 1961; and 17 September 1961). See also the minutes of a meeting between the board of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň and Mr. Urban from the Ministry of Education and Culture (8 December 1960). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 4. On the term “public interest” [veřejný zájem] and for a number of examples, see Soukupová, “Poměr státu a veřejnosti k osudu synagog” [The state and public and the destiny of synagogues], 140.

The state confiscated more Jewish cemeteries than synagogues “in the public interest.” Whereas the Jewish communities only reluctantly relinquished the ownership of their cemeteries, they demonstrated a willingness to sell unused synagogues for profit and to give away for free those which proved to be financial liabilities. Cemeteries, moreover, as relatively barren plots of land, could be more easily built upon than synagogue sites, which made them more attractive to local bureaucrats unaware of—or unmoved by—the Jewish religious proscription which prohibited such construction.

²⁴ This was the case in Terešov in 1959 and in Rožemberk in 1967. Minutes of the board meeting of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (12 November 1961 and 16 May 1966). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 4.

and lacked a benefactor. The pastor, however, did offer to watch over the cemetery, if the community made all of the necessary repairs, which he estimated would cost between 10,000 and 15,000 crowns.²⁵ In response and at the insistence of the CJRC, the community in Kolín offered to forgo the interest payments if the church would agree to repair the damaged cemetery, maintain its landscaping, and report any future damage.²⁶ The church, once again, declined. So began a game of real estate chicken.

The Jewish Religious Community in Kolín attempted to gain the upper hand by calling into question the validity of the original contract, which it believed had been signed under the duress of racial persecution and which the county administration had never approved. A law from 1946 rendered such transactions invalid.²⁷ The community furthermore threatened to rescind its offer to sell the former synagogue to the church. That would have meant that the latter would have to lease the building from the community, for which it lacked sufficient funds. Thus, with the backing of the CJRC and the implicit threat of a sale to a third party, the Kolín community demanded the original 20,000 crowns from the church, along with a commitment to care for the cemetery. (The CJRC also prepared the Kolín community to use the church's tactics against the church, by arguing that any investments that the latter had made into the building

²⁵ Letter from Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the CJRC, "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [The synagogue in Habry] (13 January 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

²⁶ Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: Synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (28 January 1947); Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: Synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (4 February 1947); and Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren in Vilémově, "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (7 February 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

²⁷ Law 128/1946, "Zákon o neplatnosti některých majetkově-právních jednání z doby nesvobody a o nárocích z této neplatnosti a z jiných zásahů do majetku vzcházejících" [Law regarding the invalidity of certain property-rights meetings from the period of un-freedom and the entitlements derived from this invalidity and from other interventions into property].

should be considered payment in lieu of past-due rent.²⁸) When the church balked, the CJRC insisted that the community in Kolín forgo even the 20,000 crowns, and offer the synagogue to the church free of charge, in exchange for cemetery care.²⁹ The CJRC leadership believed that the church would eventually capitulate to their demands. It therefore instructed the community in Kolín to avoid making any improvements to the cemetery on its own and even insisted that it decline offers from the local branches of the state administration to discuss possible assistance in making those repairs.³⁰

In December, the church hired a new lawyer, who insisted upon the validity of the original contract. Dr. Juda claimed that the community had sold the synagogue of its own free will, in light of its small membership and the building's dilapidated condition. All that the contract lacked, he argued, was approval from the county administration. Inasmuch, Juda

²⁸ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the church, "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (23 July 1947); Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the CJRC "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (10 August 1947); Letter from the CJRC to the community in Kolín (13 August 1947); and Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the church in Habry (*Kazatelská stanice církve českobratrské evangelické v Habrech*) (20 August 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

This was not an isolated incident. Although the Communist Party wielded nearly unchecked power, the state still operated according to a system of laws, which even the Jewish communities could exploit. In 1951, for example, the CJRC attempted to prevent the First Brno Machine Works from nationalizing a building which had once belonged to a B'nai B'rith lodge in Brno. The CJRC argued, in part, that the process would be extremely complicated because the Jewish community had already invested 170,000 crowns into the building and had also been making mortgage payments since 1945. Letter from CJRC to the Ministry of Heavy Industry (17 April 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder 1949-1955, sub-folder "Žid. Spolky."

²⁹ Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (5 November 1947); and Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: Habry - synagoga stav. parc.č.[sic: parc.č.] kat.58, poz.parc.č.6627 zahrada" [Re: Habry - synagogue building parcel registration number 58 and land parcel number 6627 garden] (24 November 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

³⁰ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the CJRC, "Věc: hřbitov v Habrech" [Re: the cemetery in Habry] (24 November 1947); Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: Hřbitov v Habrech" [Re: the cemetery in Habry] (4 December 1947); Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the CJRC, "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (22 December 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

rejected the community's condition that the church also assume responsibility for repairing and maintaining the Jewish cemetery. He pleaded with the community, "I do not understand why you want to cause difficulties for the parish, which had restored the building at great expense."³¹

Dr. Juda failed to move the leaders of the Kolín community, who continued to insist upon payment for the synagogue and cemetery care.³² On 2 January 1948, they responded to Juda's letter by reiterating their claim that the contract had been signed under duress. They also attempted to explain their apparent stubbornness to the church's lawyer, who had expressed his consternation in clear terms. Indeed, if both parties had negotiated politely and in good faith until this point, the church's lawyer sought to win his case with acrimony. The community wrote,

Due to no fault of our own, conditions have changed, such that this commitment [to care for the cemeteries] is for us the most important consideration in new meetings about the alienation of [the] property. We think that your clients should have a deep understanding for the fact that we would like, at least, for the Jewish cemetery to be maintained in good order, when the people who would have been able to pray in the synagogue no longer live.³³

This petition reflects a dynamic fundamental to postwar Czech-Jewish culture, introduced above, which had tremendous repercussions for the political-economy of Jewish property and for Jewish-state relations more generally: the primacy, in Jewish communal eyes, of abandoned cemeteries over unused synagogues.

³¹ Letter from Cyril Juda to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín (18 December 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

³² In a letter to the CJRC, the Kolín community repeated its objection to making a gift of the synagogue. Indeed, it suggested that the CJRC empower it to seek restitution in an amount no less than 30,000 crowns. Letter to the CJRC, "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (22 December 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

³³ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to Dr. Cyril Juda (2 January 1948). ŽNO folder "Habry." The CJRC had supplied the community with the text of the letter just two days earlier. Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín (31 December 1947). ŽNO folder "Habry."

Prioritizing Cemeteries over Synagogues:

Synagogues and cemeteries differed fundamentally in terms of their value to the Jewish communities. Their members certainly looked nostalgically upon both types of property. Yet they transformed their cemeteries alone into sites of layered memory: for those buried therein, for murdered loved ones without graves, and for communities lost to genocide. Moreover, whereas Jewish law permits the sale of synagogues to non-Jewish owners, it demands that cemeteries be maintained in perpetuity. The related prohibition against building upon cemeteries, which the state generally respected, though not always, rendered them relatively worthless from an economic perspective. So too did laws that protected sites established before 1850 as historic landmarks. Due to legislation passed in the eighteenth century, which restricted the number of Jews permitted to live in towns and cities, Jewish settlement proliferated throughout the Bohemian and, to a lesser extent, Moravian countryside.³⁴ As a result, hundreds of cemeteries dotted the Czech landscape. Some 222 of them (and likely 20 more) fell under the state's protection due to their age and, therefore, demanded constant care and investment from the Jewish communities.³⁵ Indeed, the communities incurred great expenses due to rampant theft and vandalism at their cemeteries, which local authorities frequently blamed on children or "Gypsies" (*Cikany*), even if they and the Jewish plaintiffs knew better.³⁶ There were graver

³⁴ Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918* (Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 10-13.

³⁵ Compiled by author based upon data from Samuel Gruber and Phyllis Myers, *Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments in the Czech Republic: A Report to the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad* (New York: Jewish Heritage Council, World Heritage Fund, 1994), 92-125.

³⁶ In 1954, the someone vandalized the Jewish cemetery in the northwestern Bohemian city of Žatec, which lay adjacent to grounds used by the Czechoslovak Army for training purposes. The County National Committee in Louny, which investigated the matter, blamed the incident on unknown "Gypsies," and further insisted that the damages only affected the garden next to the cemetery. The wife of the cemetery groundskeeper characterized their conclusions as false.

dangers as well. In 1968, the CJRC warned a stonework's cooperative not to re-process Jewish gravestones, which were available on the black market.³⁷

Thus, in many cases, Jewish leaders sold empty synagogue buildings at reduced rates or even relinquish them free of charge, on the condition that their new owners promised to care for the local cemetery.³⁸ This did not always guarantee their protection. In 1957, the Plzeň

Memo from the County National Committee in Louny to the SOEA (7 April 1954). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1954.

At a meeting on 3 April 1948, following the restitution of the former synagogue in Hroubovice by the National Administration of the Jewish Council of Elders, the local authorities insisted that they could not be held financially responsible for its broken windows. They blamed the damage on “unknown assailants, presumably children.” Some cases pertaining to children seem to have had bases in truth. In 1955, young teenagers vandalized a Jewish cemetery in the Slovak city of Turčianske Teplice. Four years later, a group of children broke a window of the “old synagogue” in Plzeň. In the Slovak case, the authorities claimed that nothing could be done, except for the community to repair their cemetery. In Plzeň, where the Jewish Religious Community had a stronger relationship with the local bureaucracy, the parents of the assailants assumed financial responsibility for the damages. Minutes from a meeting held at Municipal National Committee in Hroubovice (3 April 1948). ŽNO, folder labeled “Hroubovice, 1948-1959;” collection of documents beginning with a letter from the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs in Bratislava to the SOEA (26 October 1955), re: “Sťažnosť na pustošenie žid. cintorínov v Turč. Tepliciach” [Complaint regarding the vandalism at the Jewish cemetery in Turčianske Teplice]. NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1955; and the minutes of the board meeting of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (1 September 1959). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

³⁷ Minutes of the board meeting of the Plzeň community from 15 November 1964. JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

³⁸ On 10 October 1945, the Council of Elders of the Czechoslovak Church in Skuteč approached the Jewish Religious Community in Pardubice with a request either to rent or purchase the former synagogue in Hroubovice for use as a church. After seventeen months of what seem to have been genial negotiations, the church acceded to the Jewish community's demands. It offered, at its own expense, to repair both the synagogue and cemetery in Hroubovice and to find a caretaker to maintain the latter. In exchange, it requested to lease the synagogue building for fifty years at the annual price of one crown. For some reason, the deal never materialized. In 1955, the Municipal National Committee in Hroubovice approached the Synagogue Congregation in Pardubice (under the administration of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague) on behalf of an agricultural collective which sought to take over the synagogue building. The Jewish community agreed to transfer ownership of the devastated synagogue to the collective, and again insisted that the new owner assume responsibility for repairing and maintaining the cemetery as well. Both parties agreed and the associated work seems to have been carried out responsibly. The cemetery wall remains intact today. In 1992, Vlastimila Hamáčková and Jiří Fiedler reported that between 20 and 100 gravestones remained on the site.

community complained to the regional national committee that the Czechoslovak Church in Strakonice had not fulfilled its promise to maintain the cemetery there.³⁹ In 1960, the same community sold the former synagogue building in Hluboka to the Czechoslovak Church, again with the same condition.⁴⁰ Four years later, it resolved to remind the church of its neglected responsibility.⁴¹ The outcome of such arrangements seem to have been more positive in other locations, like Březnice and Hroubovice.⁴²

A newer guidebook reports that the cemetery hold 250 stones dating from 1788 to 1966. Collection of documents in the folder labeled “Hroubovice, 1948-59.” ŽNO. For the report by Fiedler and Hamáčková, see Gruber and Myers, *Survey of the Historic Jewish Monuments*, 101. See also Rozkošná and Jakubec, *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia*, 158.

In 1955, the CJRC insisted that the Jewish Religious Community in Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) accede to the demands of the Ministry of Finance and withdraw its petition for the restitution of the former synagogue building in Žlutice. Casting doubt upon whether or not the state would ever fulfill its obligation to provide the community with national bonds in the value of the building—which had been converted into apartments during the war—the CJRC argued, “Given these facts and in view of the fact that your financial needs are covered by the state, we are of the opinion that you should not insist upon compensation for this property. Rather, you could donate it to the town by giving up your rights to restitution. If it is the case that in the vicinity of the defendant there is still some Jewish cemetery, you could stipulate that the town in question, to whom you are donating the property in such a way, will keep the Jewish cemetery in order and will not allow it to be destroyed completely. Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Karlovy Vary (15 September 1955). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1955.” Recalling an earlier discussion, the Ministry of Finance attempted to dissuade the community in Karlovy Vary from insisting upon restitution by arguing that the community would be responsible for covering any damages that the building had incurred during the war and for covering any subsequent investments into the building made by the local authorities. Letter from Dr. Kunderát of the Ministry of Finance to the SOEA (26 March 1955). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1955.”

³⁹ Minutes from the board meeting of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (3 December 1958). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

⁴⁰ Minutes from the meetings of the Jewish Religious community in Plzeň (19 July 1959 and 3 February 1960). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

⁴¹ Minutes of the board meeting of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň on (15 November 1964). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

⁴² On Březnice, see the minutes from the board meetings of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (9 October 1958; 6 November 1958; 3 December 1959; 7 January 1959; 11 March 1959; 1 April 1959; 3 June 1959; 5 August 1959; and 1 September 1959). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3. On Hroubovice, see the collection of documents in the folder labeled “Hroubovice.” ŽNO.

More generally, Czech-Jewish leaders soon came to view the region's former synagogues as assets to be rented or sold to cover a wide range of expenses, but primarily cemetery care. At least 221 former synagogues still stood in the Czech Republic in 1994. By that point, the vast majority of them, well over 200, had come to serve a variety of cultural, industrial, educational, and commercial purposes. Fifty-four had been converted into residences. Thirty-nine served as churches. Twenty-five lay empty and twenty-two functioned as warehouses. Six were ruins and eight were undergoing reconstruction.⁴³

On the other hand, the synagogues also presented a number liabilities to the communities and also faced destruction at the hand of state administrators. Between 1938 and 1945, the Nazis, their collaborators, and sympathizers destroyed at least sixty-four of the roughly 360 Bohemian and Moravian synagogues.⁴⁴ Many of those which escaped such devastation, nonetheless incurred damaged during the war due to direct violence, armed conflict, and misappropriation by various non-Jewish enterprises and government institutions. The three years between 1945 and the onset of communist rule witnessed the destruction of an additional five synagogues. Even if these figures are added together, however, they amount to fewer synagogue demolitions than occurred during the four communist decades. Six synagogues vanished from the Czech lands in 1948 and 1949 alone. The authorities razed twenty-one more in the 1950s and, again, in the 1960s, most often with the permission of the Jewish communities. Sixteen demolitions followed in the 1970s and another ten in the 1980s. This brings the total number of synagogues destroyed during communism to seventy-four. At least thirty-one of them, and likely a few more, dated from before 1850 and, therefore, should have come under state protection. The authors of the

⁴³ For a complete list of Bohemian and Moravian synagogues and their present uses, see Gruber and Myers, *Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments*, 37.

⁴⁴ About half of them were located in the Sudeten Region, which Czechoslovakia ceded to Germany after the Munich Accords of 1938. *Ibid.*, 24-28.

report from which I culled this data explained the demolitions well,

Some of these had to be razed because of their poor structural condition. Others gave way to modern urban renewal (Benešov, Brtnice, Bučovice, Dašice, Horní Cerekev, Náchod, Pardubice, Postoloprty, Přeštice, Strakonice, Švihov, Teplice). In most of these cases, however, it was unnecessary to demolish the buildings. Indifference and even antagonism to the Jewish past and the Jewish architectural legacy were the root of these demolitions.⁴⁵

Postwar neglect exacerbated the damages incurred by synagogues during the war and led to the slow decline of others that had survived the conflict in relatively good condition. The high costs of repairs, the communities' inability to receive a return on those investments should they have made them, and pressure from various quarters of the party-state convinced community leaders to agree to and even, in some cases, seek the demolition of tens of synagogues. Dilapidated buildings reflected poorly on local authorities and presented serious potential liabilities to the communities as their owners.

Party-state officials, indeed, acted with indifference to the non-monetary value of Jewish sites when determining their future. Michael Meng noted a similar tendency among East German conservationists, whose primary criterion for preserving synagogue buildings was their age, rather than their historical, artistic, or cultural significance.⁴⁶ This does not, however, necessarily imply "antagonism to the Jewish past." At base, it reflects a dogmatic reliance upon legal formulas for considering which sites merited protection. It is furthermore hard to imagine what an alternative response to the problem posed by the hundreds of empty and often crumbling synagogues might have been. The country lacked the financial capacity and the popular will to

⁴⁵ Ibid., 30-33. These figures must be taken as rough estimates. Often times, the exact date when a particular cemetery was destroyed is unclear. The source for these figures, moreover, contains a number of inconsistencies.

⁴⁶ Michael Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question: The Return and Preservation of Jewish Sites in East Berlin and Potsdam, 1945-1989," *Central European History*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2005): 623.

transform all (or even most) of them into museums or sites of memory, as administrators did in Holešov and nearly did in Březnice and Nečtiny.⁴⁷ The task would have been tremendous. It also would have meant investing vast amounts of state funds into buildings that did not belong to the state (unlike its castles and some churches) in order to repair damages caused by fascists, the party-state's purported nemeses. Most of the synagogues, moreover, did not qualify for state protection by virtue of their age. Unlike the cemeteries, most dated from the second half of the nineteenth century,

reflecting the extraordinary growth and prosperity of the Czech Jewish community in that period, and the fact that a larger percentage of newer building is likely to survive.⁴⁸

Faced with few options, Jewish community leaders attempted to sell those synagogues that were in good condition for as much money as possible and to give away those in disrepair. State administrators, as will be demonstrated, sought to profit from this as well.

⁴⁷ In 1964, the State Jewish Museum installed a permanent exhibition about the history of Jews in Moravia in Holešov's "Šach" Synagogue. Jiří Fiedler, *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia* (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Svoboda, 1991). In 1959, the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň donated its synagogue in Březnice to the municipal national committee there, with the understanding that the latter would turn it into a museum for the town's well-preserved and nearly 400 year-old Jewish ghetto. Municipal officers were supposed to have entered subsequently into negotiations with the CJRC and the State Jewish Museum. Whether they did so or did not remains unclear to me, but the former synagogue became and a warehouse and remained so for the duration of communist rule. In 1971, the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň offered the synagogue in Nečtiny to the County Museum in North Plzeň on the conditions that the latter repair the building, use it "exclusively as a reverential hall with a focus on the Jewish population of the region," and install thereup a plaque noting its history. Minutes of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (5 August 1958; 9 October 1958; 6 November 1958; 3 December 1958; 7 January 1959; and 11 March 1959. JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3. Fiedler, *Jewish Sites of Bohemia and Moravia*, 53-54; Blanka Rozkošná and Pavel Jakubec, *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia: History and Monuments of the Jewish Settlement in Bohemia* (Prague, Czech Republic: ERA group, 2004), 92-93; and a letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň to the County Museum in North Plzeň, "Synagoga v Nečtinech" [The synagogue in Nečtiny]. JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6.

⁴⁸ Gruber and Myers, *Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments*, 34

Negotiations in Habry Await Bureaucratic Change, 1948-1949:

Dr. Juda, the lawyer for the church in Habry, eschewed the Kolín community's request for sympathy regarding the cemetery. He conspired, instead, with county administrators to have the original contract of the sale retroactively approved on 5 May 1948.⁴⁹ This indebted the church to the Kolín community, but limited their liability to twenty-thousand crowns alone. More significantly, it left the community without grounds to demand that the church maintain its cemetery.⁵⁰

The Kolín community also took a more proactive approach. In September, at the suggestion of the CJRC, it ordered an appraisal of the former synagogue building, which came in at 81,000 crowns.⁵¹ The following month, a representative of the community visited the site and met once again with the pastor. The representative reported upon the good condition, not only of the building, but also of the five Torah scrolls kept therein and other moveable properties. The pastor reiterated the offer to pay 20,000 crowns for the building.⁵²

Still unsure whether or not the county administration had approved the original contract, the CJRC insisted that the Kolín community reject the offer. Instead, it ordered the community to insist upon a payment of 81,000 crowns and to stop negotiating about the cemetery.⁵³ The CJRC likely thought that the threat of financial ruin would lead the church to reconsider its opposition

⁴⁹ Copy of a letter from the County National Committee in Čáslav to Cyril Juda, "Věc: schválení převodu nemovitostí ve smyslu vládn. nař. č 218/1938 Sb." [Re: approval of the transfer of the property in accordance with the government directive no. 218/1938 (collection of laws)] (5 May 1948). ŽNO folder "Habry."

⁵⁰ Memo from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, likely to the CJRC, "Věc: Synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (18 August 1948). ŽNO folder "Habry."

⁵¹ Zpráva ing. Weisze o prohlídce nemovitostí v Habrech /obvod ŽNO Kolín/ dne 21. 9. 1948" [Report of engineer Weisz regarding the inspection of the properties in Habry /district of the Kolín community/ on 21 September 1948]. ŽNO folder "Habry."

⁵² Letter to the CJRC (16 October 1948). ŽNO folder "Habry."

⁵³ Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: Synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry]. ŽNO folder "Habry."

to maintaining the cemetery. On the other hand, if the community received 81,000 crowns from the church or another buyer, it would be in an excellent position to finance the repairs and maintenance of the cemetery on its own.

The Kolín community only received word from the County National Committee in Čáslav on 31 December 1949 about the retroactive approval of the original contract. This led to some confusion, however, because Dr. Juda had insinuated that the approval had been given in 1939, which it had not.⁵⁴ Upon clarifying this matter, the community complained to the national committee that it had not been invited to participate in the negotiations.⁵⁵ In February, the community sued the church for monetary restitution at the County National Committee in Čáslav. Against its lawyer's advice, the community claimed that its interwar predecessors in Habry had signed the contract under the duress of racial persecution, which, as per above, should have rendered the sale it invalid.⁵⁶ Yet, while community could only point to the coincidence of the sale and the Nazi occupation, the church was able to find numerous witnesses to attest that contract had been drawn up in good faith, due to the community's declining membership—just as the community's lawyer had predicted. Dr. Juda claimed that the community had not been holding services in the synagogue at the time of the occupation. He further argued that the

⁵⁴ Letter from the County National Committee in Čáslav to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, “Věc: synagoga v Habrech - informace” [Re: the synagogue in Habry - information] (3 December 1948); and letter from Cyril Juda to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín (6 December 1948). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

⁵⁵ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the County National Committee in Čáslav, “Věc: synagoga v Habrech” [Re: synagogue in Habry] (5 January 1949). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

Cyril Juda conceded this point and offered to resume negotiations. He may already have been aware that the County National Committee in Čáslav either had or would refer the matter to the regional authorities in Pardubice. Letter from Juda to the community's lawyer, Josef Smrčka (9 March 1949). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

⁵⁶ County National Committee in Čáslav, “Věc: Schvalení převodu nemovitosti ve smyslu vlád. nař. č. 218/1938 Sb.” [Re: Approval of the transfer of property in accordance with government decree no. 218/1938 (collection of laws)]. ŽNO folder Habry.

community and the church had agreed upon the low price of 20,000 crowns because the synagogue was in need of repairs. Indeed, Juda reported that the church had subsequently invested 80,000 crowns into the building, which was 65,000 more than the church had claimed earlier.⁵⁷

In March, the County National Committee in Čáslav forwarded the community's protest to their superiors at the Regional National Committee in Pardubice for adjudication.⁵⁸ Two weeks later, the latter ordered their subordinates to revisit the case and to rule in favor of the Jewish community.⁵⁹ Complications born of redistricting and a lack of will prolonged the affair until 1950. At that point, a drastic change to the state bureaucracy shifted the course of events in Habry.⁶⁰

The Establishment of the SOEA and Its Effect Upon Property Relations:

At the turn of 1950, the Czechoslovak government established the State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs (SOEA) and vested it with the authority to oversee all transactions involving church

⁵⁷ Untitled and unaddressed letter from the church in Habry, likely to the Regional National Committee in Pardubice (1 September 1949); and letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the CJRC (8 February 1949). ŽNO folder "Habry."

It seems that the Jewish community in Habry had been attempting to negotiate a sale for decades. Industrialization and urbanization had led to a sharp decline in Habry's population. Between 1850 and 1950, it fell from 2,136 to 1,149. Jewish citizens moved away at higher rates than their non-Jewish neighbors. In 1850, nearly a quarter of the town professed the Jewish religion. By 1900, only ninety-nine Jews remained. That number fell to twenty-six by 1930, far too few to warrant and maintain such a large synagogue. Rozkošna and Jakubec, *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia*, 137; and <www.habry.cz/historie-mesta/d-1005> (16 July 2014).

⁵⁸ Letter from the Regional National Committee in Pardubice to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín (23 March 1949). ŽNO folder "Habry."

⁵⁹ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Pardubice to Rabbi Feder in Kolín, "Věc: synagoga v Habrech" [Re: the synagogue in Habry] (21 November 1949). ŽNO folder "Habry."

⁶⁰ The community thus began working to repair the cemetery. Letter from Josef Kořínek to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín (20 June 1949); and letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to Otta Brod (6 September 1949). ŽNO folder "Habry."

properties.⁶¹ As the state had made the office responsible for managing and meeting the budgets the country's churches, it unintentionally provided the SOEA with the impetus to defend Jewish communal property against the encroachment of other sectors of the state and economy.

Ensuring that the Jewish communities received fair compensation for their properties brought the office revenue, which, in turn, decreased the amount of money it had to request from the state budget for those same communities. The act of protecting Jewish communal property rights also established the office as a powerful force within a system that had a strong bias towards the industrial and security sectors of the state. Defending Jewish communal property rights provide the SOEA and its successors with rare opportunities to overrule their more influential counterparts.⁶² Defending Jewish properties even raised the office's international profile, as the

⁶¹ The parliament established the SOEA with laws 217 and 218/1949. It established the procedures for managing the finances of churches with law 223/1949.

⁶² In 1955, the Education Division of the Central National Committee in Prague attempted unilaterally to dissolve two Jewish charitable associations, dating from the interwar period, in order to nationalize the buildings that they had owned. The SOEA responded exactly as the committee expected. It overturned their ruling, confirmed the pending dissolution of the associations, and insisted that their properties be included into "an account, the income from which will be transferred regularly into the account of [the Prague community] and from its principle assets, with the prior approval of the [SOEA], the extraordinary expenses of the religious community will be covered." Letter from the Educational Division to the Jewish Religious Community in Prague (9 September 1955); and Copy of a letter sent by the SOEA to the Educational Division of the Central National Committee of the Capital City of Prague (5 October 1955). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1955, collection of documents labeled, "Nadace ve správě židovských náboženských obcí v Praze, zrušení" [Foundations under the administration of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, dissolution]. The associations in question were the Franz Josef Jubiläumsstiftung für Sieche [Emperor Franz Josef Jubilee Foundation for the Infirm] and Med. und Chir. Dr. David Seegensche Stiftung zur Errichtung eines homöopathischen Kinderspitals [Foundation of Doctor Surgeon David Seegensche for the Establishment of a Homeopathic Children's Hospital]. It is likely that national committee intervened in reaction to an attempt by the Jewish community in Prague to dissolve the aforementioned associations and thereby to receive their properties in restitution.

In 1953, a coalition of ministerial, regional, and local organs asked the Jewish Community in Roudnice to transfer a dilapidated former synagogue building and two additional properties to the state, free of charge, for use as a school. The community's representative responded that they "were amenable to selling the aforementioned objects, however they would

state frequently pointed to its maintenance of Jewish heritage sites to refute Western accusations of antisemitism. Finally, it should not be overlooked that when SOEA officers supported Jewish property rights they often did so out of a sense of propriety and a commitment to the rule of law.

Thus, after 1949 and for roughly twenty years, the Jewish communities found common interest with the state in the field of property relations. The communities soon came to rely upon the SOEA for support in their negotiations with various interest groups. Of course, not even the SOEA could help the Jewish communities repair and preserve all of their former synagogues as memorials to Czech-Jewish history. The communities never expected them to. Instead, the partnership, limited as it was, provided the communities with a revenue stream that they could allocate for cemetery care and for additional work in the fields of religious-cultural and social-welfare programming.

The SOEA support for the Jewish communities' efforts to determine the future of their properties also, I believe, helped restore the faith of Jewish leaders in the central government. It may have made up in some small way for the incomplete restitution of private property to Jewish citizens (and others) in the immediate postwar years. It may even have tempered the feelings of

not agree to the complimentary transfer of the properties, because that sort of transfer would be equivalent to a confiscation, i.e., appropriation without compensation..." When the Ministry of Local Economy approached the SOEA for support in procuring the synagogues, the latter insisted that they wait for a proposal from the community. In doing so, the SOEA not only upheld the law in the interests of the community, but also demonstrated its dominance over other centers of power, albeit within a highly circumscribed field of affairs. Minutes from a meeting on 28 September 1953 at the technical department of the Local National Committee in Roudnice nad Labem; and the comments on the reverse side of a letter from the Ministry of Local Economy to the SOEA (3 October 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1953.

The SOEA likely also considered its own finances in determining to support the Jewish community. It would not be disappointed. In 1953, the Jewish Religious Community in Ústí nad Labem, which had assumed control over the properties of the former community in Roudnice, sold the synagogue for 73,000 crowns. Those funds "were... included into [their] budget for 1954, and so the state subsidy was reduced by that income..." Letter from the Regional Ecclesiastical Secretary in Ústí nad Labem to the SOEA (24 February 1954). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1954."

dread that had pervaded the Jewish community in the wake of the Slánský Affair. On one hand, the virulent anti-Zionist and antisemitic rhetoric of the early 1950s posed a serious and public challenge to the place of Jewish citizens in the Czechoslovak nation-state. On the other hand, those same citizens seem to have interpreted the state's defense of their communal property rights, part of its broader commitment to supporting the Jewish community as a religious collective, as an affirmation of the lawful place of Jews in the Czech and Slovak lands. Indeed, this field of sustained, mutually beneficial interaction provided a structural basis for the continuation of good relations between the CJRC and SOEA, which began with the communist coup at the former in 1948 and strengthened after its restructuring in 1953.⁶³

The justifiable perception among Jewish community leaders, at least those in Prague, that they could rely upon the SOEA to uphold the rule of law lent them confidence in their interactions with local authorities and with other centers of power. In 1953, for example, the Prague community refused to make a gift of a former synagogue building in Mělnice to a small agricultural collective. It insisted, instead, that the latter find a way either to purchase or rent the structure. The community explained,

Inasmuch as churches and religious communities are required to operate financially according to a budget approved by the SOEA, they cannot give up their properties free of

⁶³ In part, this was by design. The Jewish leadership of the 1950s established a good working relationship with the SOEA. Yet SOEA had played a significant role in selecting the Jewish leaders with whom its employees would collaborate. In the discussions about the consolidation of the CJRC in 1952, for example, the ecclesiastical secretary of the County National Committee in Pacov expressed support for choosing Jihlava, rather than Pacov, to be the site of the only Jewish community in the region. This meant lowering the status of the Pacov community to that of a synagogue congregation and subordinating it to Jihlava. The secretary noted that the current president of the community in Pacov had already obstructed efforts to turn one of the synagogues in that county into a library and to demolish another that was already crumbling. Letter from the ecclesiastical secretary of the Regional National Committee in Jihlava, "Zřízení mateřské obce židovské v Jihlavě - vyjádření" [Establishing a mother Jewish community in Jihlava - an opinion] (7 February 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 210, inventory no. 141.

charge.⁶⁴

Thus and in other ways, Jewish leaders quickly learned how to manipulate the new bureaucracy to their advantage and to do so with SOEA backing.

The SOEA, its successors, and the CJRC even found common ground in seeking new owners for synagogue buildings who promised to use them in more reverential ways. CJRC president František Ehrmann gave voice to this priority at the CJRC congress of 1963. He explained,

There is a similar problem with cultic buildings in places where today there is no longer a Jewish religious community. In many cases our community has succeeded in finding parties interested in those building, who guarantee that they will not serve purposes that would be to the detriment of their dignity. It is necessary, however, that all of the communities begin initiatives along this line, so that it does not have to come down to the demolition of former synagogues.⁶⁵

At the next congress, four years later, Chief Rabbi Richard Feder expanded upon this,

He suggested to the functionaries of the CJRC that they influence the national committees... so that the synagogues which the CJRC gave away, would not be used as a warehouse, etc., but will be used for dignified purposes, in particular cultural [ones].⁶⁶

Even during this period of political and cultural liberalization, the CJRC leadership never dreamed of transforming their synagogues into empty shrines. They did, however, desire their preservation, both physical and, as far as possible, in spiritual manner as well.

One of the SOEA's preferred ways of dealing with empty synagogues was to arrange for

⁶⁴ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Prague to the Local National Committee in Mělnice (12 June 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder 1953.

⁶⁵ "Zápis ze sjezdu delegátů židovské náboženské společnosti v krajích českých a moravských konaného dne 24. listopadu 1963" [Minutes from the congress of the delegates of the Jewish Religious Community in the Czech and Moravian Regions held on 24 November 1963], 2. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁶⁶ "Informace o průběhu mimořádného sjezdu delegátů RŽNO 29. ledna 1967 v Praze" [Information about the proceedings of the extraordinary congress of the delegates of the CJRC 29 January 1967 in Prague], in collection of documents labeled "Mimořádný sjezd RŽNO" [Extraordinary congress of the CJRC], 1. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

their sale—often at full price—to other churches.⁶⁷ This simultaneously relieved the Jewish community of a liability and helped the SOEA to meet the needs of another church. The transfer of properties between churches also ensured that the SOEA would remain the sole arbiter of those transactions and that it could structure them to suit its budgetary and political needs. Finally, and this was a final consideration, ensuring that synagogue buildings would continue to serve reverent ends enabled the SOEA to fulfill the wishes of Jewish community leaders. I hesitate to interpret this cynically. The SOEA had little reason to kowtow to Jewish interests in this area. It appears, rather, that they felt responsible to act in good faith, whenever doing so coincided with their higher priorities.

The installation of churches into former synagogue buildings was so prevalent during the period of communist rule that in 1994, at least forty of the remaining 221 synagogue buildings in the Czech lands housed churches.⁶⁸ The actual number of churches that came into the possession of former synagogues, however, was likely much higher. The records from 1994 do not include cases, such as Habry, wherein the churches that had taken over synagogue buildings subsequently closed. Local authorities thereafter put the buildings to new uses and, in those cases, with little care for their origins as Jewish houses of worship. Sometimes, I expect, they demolished them as well.

As Blanka Soukupová notes, the SOEA preferred to arrange for the Czechoslovak Church (now the Czechoslovak Hussite Church), above all others, to purchase, rent, or simply

⁶⁷ In casual conversations, a number of scholars have expressed to me their impression that the state systematically cheated the Jewish communities out of the full value of their synagogues. While this certainly occurred, I have also identified a number of instances when state officials sought to ensure that the communities received payment in full.

⁶⁸ Gruber and Myers, *Survey of the Historic Jewish Monuments*, 37-40. The authors list forty synagogue sites, but report their total as 39.

take over former synagogue buildings.⁶⁹ Indeed, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church occupied thirty-one of the forty former synagogues that still served as churches in 1994.⁷⁰ The Czechoslovak Church broke from the Roman Catholic Church shortly after the emergence of independent Czechoslovakia following the First World War. At that time, one of intense nationalism, many Czechs and Slovaks associated the Roman Catholic Church with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and thus also with foreign occupation.⁷¹ This nationalist orientation made the Czechoslovak Church an attractive partner for both the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the SOEA, particularly during their war on the Roman Catholic Church between 1949 and 1953.⁷² The Czechoslovak Church, in turn, officially aligned itself with the Communist Party after the Second World War, just as the CJRC had done.⁷³ By 1950, the young church already

⁶⁹ Soukupová, “The State and the Public and the Destiny of Synagogues,” 140. In 1950, the Unitarian Church in Prague sought to purchase the former synagogue building in Jičín from the Jewish Religious Community in Turnov. The SOEA subsequently blocked the sale, despite the fact that the church had reached an agreement with both the Turnov community and the CJRC. It had even received approval from the local and county national committees. The SOEA forbade the transaction on two grounds. The first was that there were only fifteen members of the Unitarian Church living in Jičín at the time, which the SOEA felt did not warrant purchasing and repairing a building with state funds. The second reason was that the president of the CJRC had reported that the former synagogue building did not require the 300,000 crowns worth of repairs, that the Unitarians claimed. This meant that alternative solutions to a cheap sale could have been found. Collection of documents labeled “Náboženská společnost čsl. unitářů–koupě synagoga v Jičíně” [Religious community Czechoslovak Unitarians–Purchase of the synagogue in Jičín] (8-9 August 1950). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1950.”

⁷⁰ Gruber and Myers, *Survey of the Historic Jewish Monuments*, 39-40.

⁷¹ There are significant doctrinal differences between the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

⁷² Karel Kaplan, *Stát a církev v Československu, 1948-1953* [State and church in Czechoslovakia, 1948-1953] (Brno, Czech Republic: Doplněk, 1993), 73-121.

⁷³ Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 199-233. See also “Některé církevní otázky” [A few ecclesiastical questions], in the minutes of the expanded Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia from 8 February 1949, 16-19. NAČR 02/1, bundle (*svázek*) 11, archival unit (*archivní jednotka*) 178, point (*bod*) 3.

claimed 946,497 members in the Czech lands, equivalent to 10.6% of the population.⁷⁴ This suggests that it may very well have experienced a shortage of facilities at precisely the moment when hundreds of former synagogue buildings lay empty.

The pro-communist orientation of the leadership of the Czechoslovak Church did not prevent it from working closely with the Jewish communities or from expressing an interest in the preservation of material sites of Czech-Jewish heritage. In 1951, for example, the Czechoslovak Church appealed to the SOEA to assist them in finalizing their negotiations with the Jewish community in Jihlava regarding the purchase of a former synagogue building in Třešť. The church felt pressured to complete the transaction after learning that the national committee in that town was seeking to demolish the building, which, though severely damaged, dated from 1826. They wrote,

We believe that we can achieve the same [successful restoration and conversion of the building into a church] in the shortest time in Třešť, where the preservation of the synagogue will also be connected with honoring the memories of the martyred citizens of Třešť of the Jewish religion, whom the synagogue served until the year 1938 as a prayer-room. Aside from the Jihlava [Synagogue], the Třešť synagogue is the most beautiful and memorable [synagogue] in the entire Jihlava Region. The Nazis destroyed the Jihlava [Synagogue]... It is a matter of honor for us, the citizens of the People's Democratic Republic of Czechoslovakia, that we save this second synagogue from destruction as a testament to the tolerance of our times.⁷⁵

At a celebration on 17 June 1951, marking the purchase of the former synagogue, Rabbi Richard Feder praised the Czechoslovak Church. He lauded in particular their decision to install

⁷⁴ Czech Statistical Office, "Obyvatelstvo hlásící se ke jednotlivým církvím a náboženským společnostem" [Population professing membership in individual churches and religious groups] (6 August 2003). <http://www.czso.cz/csu/2003edicniplan.nsf/o/4110-03--obyvatelstvo_hlasici_se_k_jednotlivym_cirkvim_a_nabozenskym_spolecnostem> (8 April 2014).

⁷⁵ Letter from the Parish Office of the Czechoslovak Church in Jihlava to the SOEA (12 June 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1951."

thereupon a memorial plaque for the town's murder Jews.⁷⁶ The 1950s may have been a time of state and public antisemitism in Czechoslovakia, but a counter-discourse of liberalism, tolerance, and anti-Nazism prevailed as the party-state's official narrative. Within this moral framework, the CJRC and its subordinate communities found a partner in the Czechoslovak Church, whose material interests aligned with their own.⁷⁷

Just how comfortable the members and leaders of the Czech Jewish communities felt installing churches into former synagogue buildings remains an open question. They embraced the possibility, if it meant that they would win a protector for their cemeteries. When cemeteries were not a factor, however, they displayed greater ambivalence. Negotiations tended to drag on for years, just as they did in Třešť. Some Jewish leaders, moreover, held that selling former synagogues directly to churches contravened Jewish law. Inasmuch, they sometimes insisted upon third-party-buyer mediation, and, at least on one occasion, the SOEA accommodated them.⁷⁸ Furthermore, as per above, despite having praised the Czechoslovak Church in Třešť for

⁷⁶ Memo from the Regional National Committee in Jihlava to the SOEA, "Přezvetí motlitebny obce židovské církvi ČSL" [The taking over of the prayer-room of the Jewish community by the Czechoslovak Church] (21 June 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1951." For months after the sale and ceremony, the Municipal National Committee in Třešť sought to demolish the former synagogue in the name of public safety and planned improvements to the town square. They failed in the face of opposition from the State Monuments Office and the Czechoslovak Church. The latter completed the repairs on the former synagogue building and began using it in 1959. Letter from the Local National Committee in Třešť to the SOEA, "Zakoupení domu čp. 411 v Třešti od židovské nábož obce" [Purchasing building number 411 in Třešť from the Jewish Religious Community] (7 December 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1951." See also Feder, *Jewish Sites of Bohemia and Moravia*, 187. Note that Feder dates the synagogue from 1825.

⁷⁷ cf. Soukupová, "The State and the Public and the Destiny of Synagogues," 140. Soukupová implies that the Czechoslovak Church was complicit with the party-state in a systematic process of misappropriation and neglect, through which the Czech Jewish communities lost control over their material heritage.

⁷⁸ In 1951, the Jewish Religious Community in Olomouc insisted that a third-party buyer mediate the sale of their former synagogue building in Přerov to the local Orthodox Church. The SOEA permitted the community to sell the building to a private individual, who, in turn,

its sensitivity, Rabbi Feder seems also to have preferred putting empty synagogues to “cultural” rather than Christian uses. On the other hand, the communities preferred turning synagogues into churches, rather than allowing them to serve as warehouses, animal sties, or auto-clubs.⁷⁹ Many within the predominantly secular communities trusted the churches to maintain the reverent and holy character of the buildings. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that whereas the Jewish communities would have preferred not to sell former synagogue buildings to churches, they also preferred that option to most others. It is also clear that their concern for cemeteries rendered such nuances nearly irrelevant.

completed the sale to the church. In 1949, the Prague community seems to have objected on similar grounds to an offer from the Czechoslovak Church to purchase a synagogue building in the Libeň neighborhood. As Soukupová notes, the church complained to the SOEA that their negotiations with the Jewish community had broken down due to “religious reasons.” It is possible, however, that the Prague community simply felt more uncomfortable installing a church into a former synagogue building within their own city limits than they did in areas without a significant Jewish presence. On Přerov, see the collection of documents labeled, “Přerov, židovská náboženská obec, prodej synagogy Petru Chrastinovi. Církevní obec pravoslavné církve, koupě této synagogy o P. Chrastiny. On Libeň, see the letter from the Parish Office of the Czechoslovak Church in Prague-Libeň to the Central National Committee in Prague (8 May 1949). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1949.” Soukupová, “The State and Public and the Destiny of Synagogues,” 140-41.

⁷⁹ Sometime before 1955, an agricultural collective transformed the former synagogue building in Mělník, a village just outside of Prague, first into a pigsty and then into a barn for cattle. They neither informed the Prague community of their actions nor did they offer remuneration. When the agricultural collective attempted to acquire yet another building in the area from the Prague community, the latter angrily declined. Prague Jewish leaders accepted the transformation of the synagogue as a *fait accompli*, and they did not inform the rabbinate. Collection of documents labeled, “Židovská náboženská obec v Praze–prodej domku v Mělníce–zjištění” [The Jewish Religious Community in Prague–sale of a building in Mělník–ascertainment]. NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1956.”

In 1955, the Plzeň community decided to sell its synagogue in Radnice to the Western Bohemian Auto Collective in Plzeň, which had already been using it as a repair-shop. “Inspekční cesta Dr. L. Tanzer a A. Fischle, dne 31.VII.1955” [The inspection trip of Dr. L. Tanzer and A. Fischle on 31 July 1955]. JM-PP inventory no. 75, carton 66.

A Resolution in Habry in (Short-Term) Jewish Favor, 1949-1979

This prolonged excursus into the bureaucratic changes of 1949 and 1950 provides the framework for understanding the conclusion to the story of Habry. The decision whether or not to honor the contract from 1938 suddenly fell to the SOEA, rather than the Regional National Committee in Pardubice. Surprisingly, the latter urged the SOEA to rule in the favor of the church and to recognize the original contract. (It may well have been that the Jewish Religious Community in Pardubice did not understand the situation well, when it reported to its counterpart in Kolín that the regional authorities had ruled in their favor.) The Regional National Committee in Pardubice explained,

From our perspective, this is not about renewing a synagogue as a cultic building, because there isn't a single family of the Jewish religion in Habry at this time. Rather, it is about raising the price for the synagogue, as reflected in the protest of the Jewish religious community.⁸⁰

In the entire course of this affair, this sentence stands out as the only one that may have been motivated by antisemitic prejudices. This time, regarding Jewish greed. On the other hand, it also reflected the reality that the Kolín community had, indeed, sought as much money as possible from the church, once the latter had refused to take responsibility for the cemetery. In fact, a letter from the Kolín community to the CJRC from 19 July 1950 subtly frames the request for 80,000 crowns in terms of retribution.⁸¹ Just six months earlier, however, a representative of the Kolín community had explained to the CJRC that

... all of our meetings heretofore with the church have been very polite (*slušné*) and we

⁸⁰ Letter from the Regional National Committee in Pardubice to the SOEA, “Věc: Habry židovská náboženská obec, zcizení synagogy-odvolání” [Re: Habry Jewish religious community, alienation of the synagogue - appeal], in file labeled, “židovská náboženská společnost - zcizení synagogy v Habrech, odvolání” [The Jewish religious community - alienation of the synagogue in Habry, appeal]. NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1950.”

⁸¹ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the CJRC (19 July 1950). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

would be happy to come to an beneficial agreement even with them.⁸²

Indeed, until the intervention of the lawyers, both partners to the affair seem to have conducted themselves kindly and in good faith. Neither one had the resources to meet their own needs, let alone the other's. This lack, and not antisemitism, led the church to seek the alienation of Jewish property without (much) compensation and to ignore the pleas of the Jewish community regarding its cemetery. A similar lack motivated the community's attempts to coerce the church into capitulation. The system of property relations in postwar Czechoslovakia, both pre-communist and communist, as it intersected with ecclesiastical politics, constructed these difficulties in Habry. The centralization of ecclesiastical affairs, in this case, offered a way out of a five-year impasse.

The leaders of the Kolín community wrote a series of letters to the CJRC in 1950, expressing their concern that the SOEA would rule in favor of the church. Not only did they worry that they would not receive sufficient compensation for their property—enough to finance the maintenance of the cemetery and more—they also worried that they would have to pay for all of the court and lawyer fees associated with the affair.⁸³ The leaders of the Kolín community failed to understand that the SOEA would derive no benefit from placing a financial burden upon the Jewish community. As one CJRC representative explained, “in the end the [SOEA] will pay this or that church, directly or indirectly, for the losses of this conflict.”⁸⁴ With no financial

⁸² Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the CJRC, “synagoga v Habrech” [Synagogue in Habry] (30 January 1950). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

⁸³ Letters from the Kolín community to the CJRC (30 January 1950; 19 July 1950; and 5 April 1951). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

⁸⁴ Jewish leaders often deployed this argument to be exempted from various budgetary increases. The state had committed itself to meeting all of the expenses of the CJRC and its subsidiary communities. This meant that when another sector of the state or the state-controlled economy sought to extract money from the Jewish communities, those funds would, in the end, have to come from the coffers of that same state. For example, Jewish leaders deployed this argument in

motive to take a particular side, the SOEA upheld the rule of law and supported the Jewish community's appeal against the recognition of the contract from 1939.⁸⁵ That choice, in fact, may have been politically motivated. While the SOEA had already established a close working relationship with the CJRC, it tended to fear the Evangelical Church and perceived it as a source of dissent.⁸⁶

The ruling ultimately did not work in favor of the Jewish community. The end to bilateral negotiations meant that the Kolín community could not coerce the church into caring for its cemetery. As the CJRC indicated in 1950,

... if the [church] is not voluntarily prepared to assume the guardianship of our cemetery there, we cannot in any way force it to do so. It is a matter of piety and feeling. We will

Ostrava, in 1958, when local administrators attempted to assess fees from them for using an apartment for non-residential purposes. The CJRC petitioned the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Culture (the successor to the CJRC), "It appears to us, of course, that the rendition of these fines to the regional national committee by the community, and their payment to the local national committee will appear like pouring money from one pocket to the other..." The subtext, however, was that if the Jewish communities were to pay the new fees, the Ministry of Culture and Education would be forced to request more money from the state, while the local authorities would appear more efficient. Letter from CJRC to the Dept. of Education and Culture of the Ministry of Education and Culture (24 April 1958), 2, in collection of documents labeled "ŽNO, místní poplatek z modlitebny a provozních místností" [(Jewish Religious Community), local fees from the prayer-room and the function rooms]. NAČR, SÚC box MŠK 57.

⁸⁵ Collection of documents in the file labeled, "židovská náboženská společnost – zcizení synagogy v Habrech, odvolání" [The Jewish religious community - alienation of the synagogue in Habry, appeal]. See also the letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, "Věc: Synagoga v Habrech" [Re: synagogue in Habry] (24 April 1951). ŽNO folder "Habry."

⁸⁶ At this point, it seems that the Evangelical Church had made sufficient overtures to the party-state to secure a level of trust. By 1956, however, the party, the StB, and even the ecclesiastical authorities expressed deep concern about the political loyalty of elements within that church. This would increase significantly through the 1960s, when the party-state began labeling the Evangelical church the "most reactionary" of all non-Catholic churches. Hendrych, "Zásady církevní politiky v ČSR" [The bases of ecclesiastical politics in (Czechoslovakia)] (13 May 1957). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/2, folder 139, archival unit 182, point, 7. See also Peter Dinuš, "Československá církev evangelická v agenturním rozpracování STB [The Evangelical Church of the Czech brethren in the elaboration of the agents of the StB] (Prague, Czech Republic: Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu, 2004).

attempt, however, to inspire that pious feeling among the authoritative men of the [church] through the ecclesiastical offices. Of course, they will have to pay the new estimated price [for the synagogue].⁸⁷

Although the church never purchased the synagogue from the community, it continued to use it until 1965.⁸⁸ If it paid rent at all, it would have been nominal.

The Prague community took over the administration of the Jewish properties in Habry and Kolín, after the consolidation of communities in 1953. As late as 1958, it still received notices from local administrators ordering them to pay thousands of crowns to repair the cemetery and the synagogue. Rather than seeking a professional—more often than not professionals were unavailable when approached by the Jewish communities—they asked Ota Brod, the sole surviving Jew in Habry, to lead volunteers to fix the cemetery.⁸⁹ Brod was also the one to whom the church had entrusted the prewar, Jewish ritual objects—with the exception of the silver items, which the community never recovered.⁹⁰ The cemetery in Habry persists until today with over 250 gravestones. In 1979, the town converted the synagogue into cinema. Then, in 1994, the Czech Republic returned the building to the Federation of Jewish Communities.⁹¹ It is now, once again, available for purchase.⁹²

⁸⁷ Letter from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín, “Věc: Synagoga v Habrech” [Re: Synagogue in Habry] (20 July 1950). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

⁸⁸ Rozkošná a Jakubec, *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia*, 137.

⁸⁹ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Kolín to the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, “hřbitov Habry” [Habry cemetery] (31 July 1953). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

⁹⁰ Letter from Ota Brod to the Kolín community (11 September 1949). ŽNO folder “Habry.”

⁹¹ Rozkošná a Jakubec, *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia*, 137.

⁹² See the online offer by the Matana company at <http://www.matana.cz/index.php?option=com_properties&view=properties&task=showproperty&cid=4:pronajem&tid=2:nebytovy-prostor&id=18:habry&Itemid=57> (3 April 2014). Note that Matana dates the conversion of the synagogue into a cinema in 1975.

Location, Location, Location!

To the foregoing must be added one final and important contour of Jewish-state relations as they pertained to the administration of former synagogue buildings in the possession of the postwar Jewish communities. Location mattered. Local and county authorities consistently sought to alienate Jewish communal properties at no cost to themselves. So too did various ministries, when the need for facilities arose. In 1948, the state coerced the leaders of the Jewish community in Prague to transfer the ownership of their retirement home, Hagibor, to the Vinhorady Hospital, citing public interest. The state offered the community compensation in kind, in the form of the Klinger Hotel in Mariánské Lázně, which it renamed *Krym* (Crimea). The building's condition deteriorated over time, until the city demolished it in 1967.⁹³ In 1953, the Ministry of National Defense successfully enlisted the SOEA to pressure the CJRC and the Jewish community in Brno to relinquish free of charge the latter's ownership rights over a large building in that city, which had served security purposes for years.⁹⁴

⁹³ The Jewish community founded the institution in 1911 and it served as a retirement home and hospital until the Second World War. Towards the end of that conflict the Gestapo converted it into a prison for so-called mixed-breed children (*Mischlinge*), the products of what the Nazis perceived to have been Jewish and non-Jewish unions, and for people living in what they considered mixed marriages. Richard Švanderlík, *Historie Židů v Mariánské Lázních* [The history of the Jews in Mariánské Lázně] (Mariánské Lázně, Czech Republic: Art Gallery Nataly and the City Museum of Mariánské Lázně, 2005), 47-49; and Zuzana Schreiberová, "Tragédie pronásledování, romance úspěchu. Historické narativy a politiky identity současných pražských židovských komunit" [The tragedy of oppression, the romance of escape: historical narratives and the politics of identity of the contemporary Prague Jewish community] (M.A. Thesis, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague, 2013), 89-90. See also, letter to the Ms. Nemcová, Department of Retirement Pensions (*odbor důchodkového zabezpečení*), Western-Bohemian National Committee, "Liquidace DD. 'Krym' v Mariánské Lázně" [The liquidation of the *Krym* retirement home in Mariánské Lázně] (17 November 1969). JM-PP inventory no. 18, carton 5.

⁹⁴ Letter from the Ministry of National Defense (*Ministerstvo národní obrany*) to the SOEA, "Věc: Brno–Stalinova 57, přezvěti od židovské náb. obce" [Re: Brno - Stalinova (Street) 57, taking over from the Jewish religious community] (19 May 1953); and attached comments. NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1953;" and Kn. [Jaroslav Knobloch], "Uřední záznam" [Office

In this context, there was a limit to the SOEA's beneficence. Its employees regularly yielded to serious and well placed opposition. Such was the case in both Ostrava and in Karlovy Vary, major cities with strong local governments, where a lack of proper facilities plagued the postwar Jewish communities for decades.⁹⁵ It would be a mistake, however, to lay too much blame on the SOEA and its successors for the outcome of these affairs and to overlook their efforts to ameliorate the problems faced by those communities and others like them. The town of Holešov offers a compelling example how this worked.

memo] (10 November 1952); and attached notes. NAČR, SÚC box 210, folder "RŽNO 1949-1955."

⁹⁵ As per above, after losing the battle to receive the land upon which their synagogue had stood before the war, the Ostrava community began holding religious services and administering their affairs in an apartment that they rented with money from the SOEA. New laws and measures adopted in 1956 and 1957 raised their rent significantly, along with all other non-residential occupants of apartment spaces. At the time, they sought more spacious accommodations to meet their religious and communal needs. It seems that despite promises of assistance, local administrators gave priority to a different church. Collection of documents labeled "ŽNO, místní poplatek z modlitebny a provozních místností" [(Jewish Religious Community), local fees from the prayer-room and the function rooms]. NAČR, SÚC box MŠK 57; and collection of documents beginning with a letter from the CJRC to the Ecclesiastical office of the Ministry of Education and Culture (20 November 1957). NAČR, SÚC box MŠK 58.

Issues regarding cemeteries and burials in Ostrava proved more challenging. In 1961, the city health department prohibited the Jewish community from conducting burials in their cemetery and, in 1965, founded a new cemetery for them on a plot of land that the community had already received in restitution. The department insisted that the dilapidated ceremonial hall on the grounds of the original cemetery be demolished for reasons of safety. In the late 1980s, however, the Jewish community in Ostrava was still begging the city to erect a replacement ceremonial hall at the new cemetery. It took until 1988 for the city to concede. Until that time, funerals were conducted in an unsanitary and dangerous building at the old cemetery, after which the community would transport their dead across the town to the new one. Collection of documents labeled, "ŽNO-výstavba obřadní síně ve Slezské Ostravě" [(Jewish Religious Community) - erection of a ceremonial hall in Silesian Ostrava]. NAČR, SÚC box SPVC 236.

On Karlovy Vary, see Soukupová, "The State and Public and the Destiny of Synagogues," 136-37. The archives of the SOEA and its successor organizations contain myriad documents about the challenges that the Karlovy Vary community (synagogue congregation) faced in attempting to securing adequate facilities from 1945 through 1989.

Restitution in Holešov, 1949-1952: The Limits of Mutuality

In 1949, with the tacit support of the Ministry of Justice, both the Local National Committee in Holešov and the Ministry of Technology attempted to block the restitution of Jewish communal properties in Holešov in the name of the public good.⁹⁶ They sought to retain ownership of a building that had been housing a technical training school since 1945 and also of the plot of land where the town's synagogue had stood until its destruction in 1942. The SOEA refused to grant their petition on the grounds that the laws pertaining to the administration of schools provided sufficient protection to ensure the continued operation of the training facility. The SOEA argued further that the city's persistent neglect of the empty (former synagogue) lot betrayed its claim that it wanted to use it as a park. In a letter to the Ministry of Justice, the SOEA concluded,

Just the opposite, it is in the public's significant interests that both properties be restituted to their original owners—the Jewish Religious Community in Holešov, which legally continues to exist... If a pronouncement were made... that the return of the aforementioned properties would endanger a significant public interest, it would be baseless and would, without grounds, sanction the measures of the Nazi occupation organs [to remove the buildings from Jewish hands].⁹⁷

Adversaries commonly compared each other's positions to Nazi policies as a political tactic in the first postwar decade. In this case, however, it appears that the SOEA was sincere. The

⁹⁶ Soukupová reports that the Ministry of the Interior sided with the Ministry of Technology and the Municipal National Committee against the Jewish community. This may have been the case. At the beginning, however, that ministry had committed to following the path decided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Art (i.e., the SOEA). Internal memo labeled “čti předchozí spisy!” [Read the foregoing documents] in a collection of documents labeled “Žádost MNV v Holešově o vydání prohlášení podle §6, odst. 1 restituč. zákona pro nemovitosti žid. náb. obce v Holešově...” [Request of the (Municipal National Committee) in Holešov for the pronouncement according to article 6, paragraph 1 of the restitution law for the properties of the Jewish Religious Community in Holešov...]. NAČR, SÚV box 119, folder “1949.”

⁹⁷ Draft for a letter from the SOEA to the Ministry of Justice (3 December 1949) in a collection of documents labeled “Žádost MNV v Holešově o vydání prohlášení podle §6, odst. 1 restituč. zákona pro nemovitosti žid. náb. obce v Holešově...” [Request of the (Municipal National Committee) in Holešov for the pronouncement according to article 6, paragraph 1 of the restitution law for the properties of the Jewish Religious Community in Holešov...]. NAČR, SÚV box 119, folder “1949.”

original draft of their letter, preserved in the archives, continued as follows,

This would [negatively] affect the interest of the Jewish religion, which would contravene not only the laws, but also the spirit of the entire state administration of the people's democracy.⁹⁸

At the same time, the SOEA had additional impetus to protect the Jewish community's right to receive its properties in restitution. The school building would have been a source of rental income for the Holešov community and, therefore, indirectly for the SOEA. The SOEA also raised the possibility (internally only) that the Jewish community in Holešov might request to build a new synagogue.⁹⁹ Leaving the empty lot where the former synagogue had stood in the community's hands would have made this an easier challenge to meet, should it have arisen.

In February 1950, the Ministry of the Interior lent its support to the Municipal National Committee and the Ministry of Technology. Seven months later, the SOEA partially conceded:

For practical reasons (so that the restitution process may be brought to a successful end, when even other ministries have, in part, stepped back from their original positions) it is recommended to insist on the restitution [of the building] only, as the plot where the Jewish synagogue had earlier stood and which now forms a part of the [town] square, is not necessary for the Jewish Religious Community. This way we will conform to the position of the central offices. [Emphasis added.]¹⁰⁰

Once SOEA functionaries had ascertained that the Jewish community did not intend to build a new synagogue in Holešov, it behooved them to acquiesce to the alienation of the barren plot of land without restitution. They and the Jewish community would otherwise have been responsible for clearing and maintaining the site. The SOEA hoped, moreover, to appease its opponents with a concession and to thus end a protracted conflict.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Internal memo labeled "čti předchozí spisy!" [Read the foregoing documents].

¹⁰⁰ Internal memo on the reverse side of a letter from the Ministry of Justice to the SOEA, "Žádost o vydání prohlášení podle §6 odst. 1 zák. čís. 128/46 Sb. - vl. č. 183 a 268 Holešov" [Request for a pronouncement under article six, paragraph 1 of law number 128/46 - enclosures number 183 and 268 Holešov] (25 June 1951). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1951."

Not even this gesture satisfied the SOEA's opponents, however, who petitioned once again, in July 1951, to have the building exempted from restitution. One month later, the SOEA gave in to their demands, but not before securing a guarantee from the Jewish community that it would not insist upon restitution *in natura*. Of course, in its communication with the other ministries, the SOEA never mentioned that the Jewish leadership had agreed to change its position. That would have robbed the SOEA of any political capital that it had hoped to gain through capitulation.

The SOEA expected to accrue financial capital as well. On 30 October 1952, the county court in Holešov awarded compensation in the amount of 127,073 crowns to the Jewish community for their properties, plus an additional 2,520 crowns in lieu of unpaid rent for the school. The community, however, never received any money¹⁰¹ In sum, the SOEA had fought a prolonged battle against both local and ministerial authorities on behalf of very small Jewish community, and it only capitulated when it deemed that wrestling with other ministries was a waste of resources and political capital.

Plzeň vs. České Budějovice—Local Cultures Mattered:

Location also mattered because much depended upon the decisions of the regional national committees and their ecclesiastical secretaries. The latter administered local and county ecclesiastical affairs as subordinates of the SOEA and its successors. Inasmuch, they enjoyed similar (structural) relationships with the regional Jewish communities (and their subordinate synagogue congregations) as the did the SOEA with the CJRC. This often worked to the benefit

¹⁰¹ Ruling by the Regional Court in Uherské Hradiště (22 January 1953). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1953." The court overturned the judgment from 1952, citing numerous grounds for lowering the compensation due to the Jewish community. It returned the matter to the lower court.

of the Jewish communities, for reasons of mutual interest, which are by now familiar.

Until 1977, the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň consistently balanced its budget with the income that it generated from leasing and selling properties.¹⁰² This, in turn, lowered the amount of money that the Western Bohemian Regional National Committee had to request from the state on its behalf, via the SOEA and its successors. The party-state prized, though rarely achieved, efficiency in all matters, and its central leadership further loathed spending state capital on institutions, like churches, whose missions it considered antithetical to its own. Thus, in meeting its own budget, the Plzeň community ingratiated itself to the local and regional authorities. Indeed, in 1968, the latter rewarded Jiří Held, the community's president, with a bonus of 600 crowns for his cost-effective management.¹⁰³ The regional national committee also regularly provided state funds to repair and maintain Jewish cemeteries and other properties. The law, as it was commonly interpreted, did not obligate it to do so. And the community depended upon this support. In 1965, it had no more than six-hundred, mostly elderly members, yet it bore the responsibility to care for at least 117 cemeteries.¹⁰⁴ This ratio of members to cemeteries significantly exceeded the one that Rabbi Feder had complained about in 1963. The Plzeň community would not have been able to care for the cemeteries under its purview—to the extent that it actually could—had it not been for state assistance.

¹⁰² Letter from the Plzeň community to the CJRC, “Rozpočet” [Budget] (13 November 1980). This likely only refers to the budget of the community in Plzeň and not to its subordinate congregations. The text does not provide sufficient information. It is clear, however, that in 1978, the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň predicted a budgetary shortfall of 57,891 crowns because their cemetery chapel needed 80,000 crowns in repairs. “Hřbitovní fond” [Cemetery fund] (1978). JM-PP inventory no. 77, carton 66.

¹⁰³ Letter from Regional National Committee, Department of Education and Culture to the Jewish Religious Community in Prague (12 December 1968). JM-PP inventory no. 18 carton 5.

¹⁰⁴ Number of cemeteries: “Návrh na úpravu židovských hřbitovů v českých krajích” [Proposal for repairing the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands] (n.d., likely 1975). ŽNO bundled files (*vaz. desky*) 36. Number of members: minutes of the meeting of the board of the Plzeň community (3 May 1964). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

Along with the synagogue congregations in its own region, the Plzeň community also came to oversee Jewish affairs in the Southern Bohemian Region as well. The national committee there took a far less gracious and more calculating approach to negotiating the fates of Jewish communal properties than their counterparts in Western Bohemia. In February 1964, for example, it was they and not the Plzeň community that insisted that United Brush-Works (*spojené kartáčovny*), a national enterprise (*národní podnik*), pay the full “market” price for a former synagogue building in Nová Cerekev.¹⁰⁵ This helped the national committee’s bottom line. Yet in March of the following year, the region’s ecclesiastical secretary refused to approve the budgets submitted to it by the Plzeň community for the congregations in České Budějovice (Budweis), Tábor, and Písek. The secretary objected that the Plzeň community had violated its promise to use the income from the sale of the former synagogue in Milevsko to offset the region’s expenses.¹⁰⁶ The community had indeed announced, just four months earlier, that the 45,000 crowns that it had received from the Czechoslovak Church in exchange for that building “will be transferred to the Southern Bohemian Region for credit and will be drawn upon to cover the overhead payments of this region.”¹⁰⁷

The secretary continued, however, to make an additional demand, that all of the income from similar properties sold in his region be used to offset the community’s expenses therein.¹⁰⁸ It may have been the prerogative of the Plzeň community to allocate its income as it saw fit, but the regional authorities which competed for those funds also attempted to control the flow of

¹⁰⁵ Minutes from the board meeting of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (9 February 1964). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from the ecclesiastical secretary in the Southern Bohemian Region to the Prague community (24 March 1965). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the board meeting of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň on (15 November 1964). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from the ecclesiastical secretary in the Southern Bohemian Region to the Prague community (24 March 1965). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6.

capital as best they could. In this case, the secretary feared that the Plzeň community would decide to spend its income elsewhere, forcing the Southern Bohemian Region to request more from the state. This stood to reason, as one year later, in 1966, the congregation in České Budějovice ceased all ritual activities due to its declining membership.¹⁰⁹ The Plzeň community, moreover, had additional impetus to resent officials from the Southern Bohemian Region and their subordinates at the county and local levels. No one there had supported the community's request, in 1961, to have a memorial plaque installed upon a building that was to be erected on the site of a former synagogue in České Budějovice for use by the county national committee.¹¹⁰

The respective relationships between the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň, on the one hand, and the regional ecclesiastical secretariats in Western and Southern Bohemia, on the other, shared a fundamental structural basis. The differences between them, therefore, must be attributed, at least in part, to other factors. I see no reason to doubt the sincerity and convictions of those officials who administered their respective regions fairly and graciously. If such conduct also served ulterior motives, it is helpful to remember that the interests of the state are supposed to align with those of its citizens. This applied at the municipal level as well, and perhaps even more so. The outcome of property negotiations at that level often depended upon the attitudes of local individuals and groups to the sites of Jewish heritage in their midst and also upon their feelings about the Jews who had once lived among them and, in some instances, still did. This pertained especially to questions of cemetery preservation, wherein the possibility of putting

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of the meeting of the board of the Plzeň community (6 November 1966). The synagogue congregation in České Budějovice ceased to exist in 1970. Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Prague to the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň, "Věc: Likvidace synag. Sboru v Čes. Budějovicích" [Re: the liquidation of the synagogue congregation in České Budějovice] (18 June 1970). JM-PP inventory no. 16, carton 4.

¹¹⁰ Minutes of the Board meeting of the Plzeň community (1 May 1961; 17 September 1961; 12 November 1961; and 7 January 1961). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

those sites to other uses (initially) played a much smaller role in deliberations than it did in negotiations about former synagogue buildings.

The Preservation of Jewish Heritage Sites under the Touristic Gaze

One final note is required with regard to the role of location in determining the fates of the synagogues and cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia. Ecclesiastical authorities at both the state and regional levels believed that it was in their best interest to invest heavily into those sites of Jewish heritage and practice that were most visible to tourists. In 1955, the state invested over 100,000 crowns into the famous Old-New Synagogue in Prague, so that it would not appear neglected when visitors from around the Communist Bloc and across the country arrived for the *Spartakiada* celebrations of that year.¹¹¹ As westerners began travelling to Czechoslovakia in greater numbers through the 1960s, their gaze loomed large in the imagination of party-state officials eager to refute western charges of antisemitism and fearful of exacerbating them. Westerners tended to focus more on cemeteries than on former synagogue buildings.

Conclusion: Antisemitism Reconsidered in Light of Mutuality

Throughout this chapter, I could have cited numerous examples of state and regional authorities, even those in Plzeň and Western Bohemia, declining to intervene on behalf of the Jewish communities and in defense of their properties. Having done so, I would have stood in the good company of many thoughtful scholars. The point that I have been trying to make here, however, is that at all levels of state, the political economy of Jewish communal property was far more complex than most authors have acknowledged and was, moreover, often a site of Jewish-state

¹¹¹ “Zpráva pro II. odbor” [Report for the 2nd department], (received 11 May 1955). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1955.”

cooperation and mutual self-interest.

Interpreting the destruction and repurposing of synagogues as antisemitic acts or even acts motivated primarily by antisemitism implies a retroactive demand of the state that it should have maintain hundreds of synagogues as memorials or, at least, have exempted them from the sphere of normal property relations. I consider that approach unrealistic, unreasonable, and, moreover, too grounded in the anti-communist rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s to lead to useful insights into those decades and into the ones that preceded them. It should be reiterated, for example, that many of the synagogues demolished during the period of communist rule had sustained severe damage during the Second World War and the immediate postwar, pre-communist years.

On the other hand, antisemitism and less overtly hostile forms of ethno-nationalism surely contributed to the lack of sensitivity on the part of non-Jewish citizens and state officials in determining the future of synagogues emptied by genocide. Simply put, the overwhelming majority of party-state officials seem not to have considered Jewish heritage sites as belonging to the architectural canon of Czech cultural history. This was only exacerbated by the lack of reverence that many communist officials felt for religious sites in general. To continue with the same example from above, in many instances, it is impossible to tell when a report about a given synagogue's condition was exaggerated in order to have it removed from the list of protected monuments, if it was constructed before 1850, or to circumvent the objections of Jewish leaders to local plans. If, moreover, the laws for the protection of historical monuments could not have been adjusted to protect Jewish properties, the state surely could have invested a minimum of effort to install memorial plaques upon repurposed synagogues and at the sites where synagogues had once stood. When such plaques did appear, they were most often the result of local

initiatives or acquiescence to Jewish demands, rather than pressure from the central state authorities.

Ethno-nationalism and antisemitism notwithstanding, the political-economy of Jewish communal property in the communist Czech lands offered the communities and the central (and regional) ecclesiastical authorities systematic opportunities to cooperate in their mutual self-interest. Indeed, the very same system that led to the tragic and often wanton destruction of Jewish heritage sites, upon which much scholarship has seized, also accounted for the successful, if temporary, protection of Jewish cemeteries and the reverential repurposing of at least some former synagogue buildings. It furthermore empowered individual Jewish communities and the CJRC to establish positive working relationships with local and regional administrations. Thus, I see many of the instances of synagogue alienation, and the general system of alienation as well, as evidence of strong Jewish-state relations, rather than the oppression of the Jewish communities by the state.

To that end, this explication of Jewish property relations in the early communist Czech lands strongly suggests that “communist Czechoslovakia” cannot serve as a holistic unit of analysis. Indeed, the pressure to demolish, repurpose, and obfuscate the traces of Jewish communal properties often came from non-state actors or from the lowest, i.e., local, levels of the state administration. In some cases, local officials seem to have believed that central ecclesiastical administrators were working in league with the Jewish communities and against local priorities. Jewish leaders, on the other hand, knew that if they were to find a protector of their communal property rights, it would most likely be at the ministerial or even Presidential level.

In the next chapter, I turn to the challenges faced by both state officials and Jewish

leaders with regard to the maintenance, protection, and demolition of Jewish cemeteries. That class of property offered fewer economic incentives to the ecclesiastical authorities and therefore rendered them a lower priority for state functionaries in the vast majority of cases. The trends in the management of the Jewish cemeteries of Bohemia and Moravia thus fell subject more easily to the broader currents of Jewish-state relations. The SOEA generally defended the right of the communities to maintain ownership over their cemeteries through the 1960s—even if they declined to provide them with adequate funds for their maintenance. When called upon, the SOEA actively (or, reactively) protected them from the encroachments of other sectors of the state and the economy. Increasingly after 1970, however, the central authorities colluded with local interests to transform the cemeteries, so cherished by the Jewish communities, into tools for their exploitation. This coalesced, of course, with a decline in the Jewish communities' stock of former synagogue (and other) buildings, which they could monetize. It also coincided with a renewed anti-Zionist campaign across the Soviet Block. Of particular interest will be the reactions of various Jewish community leaders to these new politics and their divisive reverberations within the communities and beyond.

CHAPTER SIX

“To Decay with Dignity”: Jewish Cemeteries and Exploitation, 1956-1989

... the Jewish cult and ritual does not recognize any decomposition period [*tleci doba*] or leasing of the grave through decomposition. A grave in a Jewish cemetery is the indisputable, eternal resting-place of the dead. It is the property of the dead. Everything that the deceased possesses in his final resting place is his eternal property. It cannot be withdrawn or alienated... Therefore there are so many cemeteries in the Czech lands, where Jews have lived for at least 1,000 years, of which many are historically valuable monuments.

- Rabbi Gustav Sicher, 1955¹

... the Jewish cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia are a record today of an already sealed chapter in the history of the Czech lands and its citizens of the Jewish religion, because during the period of Nazi persecution the last remnants of Jewish settlement became extinguished in the vast majority of localities, where Jewish cemeteries now can be found... These cemeteries are unequalled documents in the Czech lands of an extinguished culture. They are a place of piety for the remaining witnesses of older times, but also a unique memorial to the history and culture of a type of village Jewish settlement that no longer exists today, with its own, predominantly populist-people's [*lidová*] culture...

The preservation of these cemeteries also has its moral-educational meaning for the future generations, for whom it should be a cautionary lesson about the horrors of the Nazi government in our land.

- Council of the Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech lands (CJRC), 1979²

Brother Heller further familiarized those in attendance with the practice of selling gravestones. The [CJRC] closed an customer-supplier contract with the firm Štuko.

- Minutes from the meeting of the [CJRC] cemetery commission, 23 July 1985³

¹ Letter from Chief Rabbi Gustav Sicher and CJRC President Emil Neumann to SOEA, “Věc: nařízení ministerstva zdravotnictví o pohřebnictví - výklad ustanovení o správě pohřebišť” [Re: ordinance of the Ministry of Health regarding burial - comments on the provisions regarding the administration of cemeteries] (15 June 1955), 1. NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1955.”

² Letter from CJRC to František Jelínek (n.d., after 14 June 1979). JM-PP inventory no. 78, carton 66.

³ “Zápis ze schůze hřbitovní komise konané dne 23.7.1985” [Minutes from the meeting of the cemetery commission occurring on 23 July 1985]. JM-PP inventory no. 71, carton 66.

Introduction:

In 1956, Chief Rabbi Gustav Sicher successfully demanded of the state that Jewish cemeteries of Bohemia and Moravia remain the inalienable property of the Czech Jewish communities. He even extended the protection offered to them by Jewish law to individual gravestones. During the decades that followed, however, scores of Jewish cemeteries disappeared from Bohemia and Moravia. For a time, the primary responsibility for this destruction lay with local officials, state administrators, and other actors. Then, during the final years of communist rule, the Jewish leadership in Prague institutionalized the for-profit sale and destruction of a significant, though unknown number of cemeteries and their remaining gravestones. How was this possible, given the state's official policy of respecting Jewish communal property rights and the precedent of a rabbinical injunction? What accounts for the shift at the communities, not only in policy, but also in culture? How was this change received within those communities (and beyond), given the attachment of Jews to their cemeteries, as per the previous chapter?

The destruction of Central Europe's Jewish cemeteries began during the Second World War and continued during the period of communist rule. For many observers, it suggested a painful continuity of antisemitism from one period into the next, and, therefore, drew the attention of Jewish individuals and organizations around the world. Religious groups expressed concern for the graves of venerated rabbis, and individuals worried about the final resting places of their relatives and friends. Western Jews feared that communism would lead not only to the disappearance of the Central and Eastern European Jewish communities, but also to the vanishing of all traces of their historical presence in those regions. The Czech case came to be of particular interest in the USA and Canada after the Precious Legacy exhibit of Czech-Jewish artifacts toured North America in the mid-1980s. How did the interventions of Western-Jewish

organizations and individuals affect the policies and practices associated with the preservation and destruction of Jewish cemeteries both at the state and Jewish communal levels?

Many Central European Jews likewise felt deep anguish at the destruction of their cemeteries and understood it on similar, if more immediate terms. This was certainly the case in the Czech lands, where the question of how to administer and preserve Jewish cemeteries posed a vexing problem for the communities, even before the Second World War.⁴ That challenge, however, paled in comparison with the devastating burden that fell to those concerned Jewish citizens who remained in Czechoslovakia after the Holocaust and postwar emigration had literally decimated the minority. Persistent vandalism and theft exacerbated the problem, as did pressure from local administrators more interested in demanding that the Jewish communities maintain their cemeteries than in helping them to do so. In many locations, particularly those in which Jewish cemeteries had sustained the greatest damage and in which few Jews lived, local administrators and others hoped to put the cemetery plots to other uses in contravention of

⁴ The first attempts to catalogue all of the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands antedate the Second World War. The Jewish population in Bohemia and Moravia experienced a disproportionate rate of urbanization in the second half of the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth, in the contexts of industrialization and emancipation. As communities and individuals moved, they abandoned their former settlements and, by the 1930s, had ceased using roughly half of their original cemeteries. Initiatives to document them, with a primary focus on the transcription of gravestone texts, began in the 1920s and 1930s, but was cut short by the Nazi invasion. The Jewish Museum only succeeded in recording data from about 10% of the region's Jewish cemeteries. Indeed, that organization was formed, in part, out of the concern to preserve Bohemian- and Moravian-Jewish material culture at a time of increasing Jewish integration, assimilation, and urbanization. In 1933, the Supreme Council of the Union of the Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia (*Nejvyšší rady svazu židovských obcí náboženských v Čechách, na Moravě a Slezku*) published Czech and German versions of a book entitled *O židovských památkách v Československé Republic / Die jüdischen Denkmäler in der Tschechoslowakei* [On the Jewish monuments in the Czechoslovak Republic], based partly upon this research. Jan Heřman, "Dokumentace židovských hřbitovů v Čechách" [The documentation of Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands], *Památková péče* [Conservation] (1966), 212-17; idem., "Židovské hřbitovy v Čechách" [Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands], *Památková péče* [Conservation] (1967), 97-106; and idem., *Židovské hřbitovy v Čechách a na Moravě* [Jewish cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia] (Prague, Czechoslovakia: CJRC, 1981).

Jewish law. Throughout the forty-one years of communist rule, the problem of the Jewish cemeteries occupied a place of prominence in Jewish-state relations at all levels of administration. Smaller communities, like Plzeň devoted an increasingly disproportionate amount of their energies to resolving cemetery-related matters as the decades passed.

Despite the centrality of the cemetery issue to Jewish-state relations in the postwar Czech lands, despite the fact the fate's individual cemeteries often became matters of international interest and intervention, and despite the iconic status of cemetery destructions in Western-Jewish, anti-communist discourses, this topic has failed to attract comprehensive scholarly attention. A number of Czech researchers have published reference and guidebooks with information about the Jewish sites of Bohemia and Moravia, both during and after communist rule, in Czech and in English translation.⁵ In 1994, the Jewish Heritage Council published a report based upon the findings of some of the same Czech researchers which similarly provides excellent information about individual cemeteries and further distinguishes itself by focusing on the communist years.⁶ The authors, nonetheless, left the processes, policies, and politics that led to the destruction and the preservation of Jewish cemeteries largely un-interrogated. Together, these informational works testify to the regional and international interest in the history and condition of East-Central Europe's Jewish cemeteries. The few scholars who have addressed the

⁵ The publication of these books in English reflects awareness on the part of Czech researchers of the priorities of readers in the West. Jan Heřman, *The Jewish Cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia* (Prague, Czechoslovakia: CJRC, 1979); idem. *Židovské hřbitovy v Čechách a na Moravě* [The Jewish cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia]; Jiří Fiedler, *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia* (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Sefer, 1991); Petr Ehl, Arno Pařík, and Jiří Fiedler, *Old Bohemian and Moravian Jewish Cemeteries* (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Paseka, 1991); and Blanka Rozkošná and Pavel Jakubec, *Židovské památky Čech: Historie a památky židovského osídlení Čech / Jewish Monuments in Bohemia: History and Monuments of the Jewish Settlement in Bohemia* (Brno, Czech Republic: ERA Group, 2004) [in Czech and English].

⁶ Samuel Gruber and Phyllis Myers, *Survey of the Historic Jewish Monuments in the Czech Republic: A Report to the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad* (New York, NY: Jewish Heritage Council and World Monuments Fund, 1994).

cemetery issue recently have either focused entirely on the malfeasance of certain Jewish leaders during the 1980s,⁷ or have used the destruction of Jewish heritage sites as evidence of state antisemitism,⁸ while under-emphasizing the participation of the Czech-Jewish leadership in the destruction.⁹

A close study of the history and political economy of the Czech Jewish cemeteries serves below as a vehicle for an exploration of Jewish-state relations during communist rule. This includes an investigation into the scope and efficacy of Western, often Jewish, interventions on their behalf, and, thereby, sets Jewish-state relations in a much broader context. Finally, as the sale and destruction of the cemeteries touched Czech-Jewish individuals (and others) so deeply, particularly when it came at the hands of Jewish leaders, it also offers a window into the development of intra-communal strife, as conditioned by state policies. Indeed, the fissures created by these practices had significant repercussions on Jewish politics and memory in the Czech lands, both before and after 1989, and, I will suggest, upon historiography as well.

* * *

In the last chapter, I argued that the postwar Czech Jewish communities and the central state found mutual interest in the sale of empty synagogue buildings, no longer needed for ritual purposes. The income generated from such transactions offset the amount of money that the

⁷ Jaroslav Spurný, “A nikdo se neptal ani pozůstalých: Židovské hřbitovy v Čechách před rokem 1990” [And no one even asked the bereaved: Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands before 1990], *Věstník*, no. 6, vol. 60 (June 2008): 6-9

⁸ Blanka Soukupová “Poměr státu a veřejnosti k osudu synagog, židovských hřbitovů židovský budov v Českých zemích po šoa (léta 1945-1956) [The state and public and the destiny of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and Jewish buildings in the Czech lands (Soa years 1945-1956) (trans. in original)], *Slovenský národopis*, no. 2 (2012): 133-150.

⁹ Idem., “Stát jako jeden z determinantů identity židovského náboženského společenství v období ‘normalizace’ (1969-1989)” [The state as one of the determiners of the identity of the Jewish religious community during the period of “normalization” (1969-1989)], in *Premeny židovskej identity po Holokauste* [The transformation of Jewish identity after the Holocaust], ed. Peter Salner (Bratislava, Slovakia: Zing Press, 2011), 42-45.

offices responsible for ecclesiastical affairs had to request of the state on behalf of the Jewish communities, and those offices, in turn, provided the communities with expanded budgets to meet their various needs. The maintenance of cemeteries ranked highly among them. Indeed, the communities often traded unused synagogue buildings for guarantees from other institutions, usually churches, that they would care for the Jewish cemeteries.

Although the administration of the Jewish cemeteries fell subject to the same system of property relations as did the former synagogue buildings, the cemeteries presented a different case entirely. Neither the central state nor the Jewish communities derived any benefit from the destruction of Jewish cemeteries. Yet only the Jewish communities had a vested interest in their preservation. At the same time, the relatively small size of the Jewish communities, their concentration in a few urban centers, and their lack of both financial and personnel resources, transformed the problem of the Jewish cemeteries into a Czechoslovak issue, most deeply felt at the local level.

During the first decades of communist rule, and particularly after 1956, the approach of the central administration to the problem posed by the Jewish cemeteries was characterized by a combination of willful neglect, on the one hand, and a respect for Jewish communal property rights and religious law on the other. When called upon by the Jewish leadership, the offices responsible for ecclesiastical affairs protected Jewish cemeteries from the encroachment of local and regional bodies. They also supported the communities in their attempts to find partners to maintain their burial grounds. Those same offices, however, refused to allocate sufficient resources for the preservation of those cemeteries no longer in active use by the communities (i.e. Jewish heritage sites). Decaying cemeteries, ravaged by persistent theft and vandalism, offered few incentives for state functionaries to spend their limited financial and political capital.

Had the officials responsible considered Jewish cemeteries to be sites of Czech national culture, they might have fared better. But in the immediate postwar years Jewish was not Czech.

For roughly fifteen years after 1956, the Jewish communities struggled to care for their cemeteries. They sold and rented vacant synagogues to pay for their upkeep, repair, and the associated salaries. The communities also sought and found sympathetic partners at all levels of the state administration, among citizens and churches, and in organizations like the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters. Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs alike shared a common culture of using cemeteries to commemorate the Second World War as the key event in the foundational myths of their rebuilt homeland and communities. During the 1960s, this coalesced with the public's embrace of the Holocaust as a discursive symbol with to call for and mark political progress. The Jewish communities thus found many allies in their attempts to preserve their cemeteries, where they gathered regularly to mourn their loved ones, often on highly politicized terms. Yet the communities found antagonists as well. And, no matter how many allies came forth, the burden of the cemeteries always remained too great. By the mid-1960s, the Jewish leadership had resolved to allow them "to decay with dignity."

The system for administrating the cemeteries changed drastically, if incrementally after 1970. A number of factors contributed to the change, including but not limited to a renewed anti-Zionist campaign, the death of the country's last rabbi until 1984, and the installation by the state of more "compliant" leaders at the helm of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands (CJRC) and the Jewish Religious Community in Prague.¹⁰ During this period, local and regional officials found willing partners at the ministerial level in their efforts to pressure the

¹⁰ Alana Heitlinger introduced the word "compliant." *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 36.

Jewish communities into relinquishing their cemeteries for reuse, often without remuneration.¹¹

The increasing temporal distance from the Holocaust, moreover, slowly removed any stigma that may have once attached to such practices. Similarly, the intensity of the concern among some state officials for how the destruction of Jewish cemeteries might damage Czechoslovakia's international image waned after the Soviet-led invasion of 1969 and the very public return to communist orthodox that followed.

This pressure led Jewish leaders, only some of whom reluctantly, to collaborate in the demolition of Jewish cemeteries, including many of significant historical value. By the mid-1980s, the leaders of the CJRC and the Prague community took proactive measures to centralize and expedite a system for the sale of cemeteries and gravestones across the region. Some had well conceived reasons for doing so, which contemporary authors have overlooked. They sought simply to monetize on behalf of their communities and for the sake of preserving some of their remaining cemeteries an ongoing process of destruction, which they anticipated would near completion after the expected imminent end to Jewish communal life in the Czech lands. Others Jewish leaders acted out of fear or resignation. A handful of powerful individuals, however, turned to profiteering.

The adoption of this new and controversial system did not alleviate the pressure faced by the Jewish leadership in Prague. To the contrary, it convinced many local and central authorities that the intensification of pressure upon the communities bore results. At the same time, the decision of the top Jewish leadership in Prague to facilitate and draw income from the

¹¹ It stands to reason that the political purges of 1969 and 1970 helped bring to power individuals who were less sympathetic to the Jewish communities and their hopes to preserve their cemeteries in perpetuity. On the purges see, Jiří Maňák, "Čistky v Komunistické straně Československa, 1969-1970" [Cleansings in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 1969-1970], *Sešity ustavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR*, vol. 28 (1997).

destruction of Jewish heritage sites divided the community. It pit the CJRC leadership against their counterparts in Prague in a battle for resources and control. The top leadership of both institutions together faced harsh criticism and endured grief-stricken pleas from members and non-members alike, who were opposed to the “liquidation” of their cemeteries. Most of those petitioners, but certainly not all, failed to understand the full contours of the political economy of Jewish communal property relations in their own country. Some who did, nonetheless, insisted upon dissent.

In the end, no one knows for certain how many Jewish cemeteries were destroyed during the period of communist rule. This reflects, in part, the difficulty in determining which cemeteries should fall into this category. Should cemeteries devastated by the Nazis, but ultimately “liquidated” by communist administrators count against the latter regime? It is harder still to determine how many were destroyed by the communist state. Should this number include cases in which private citizens or local administrators destroyed cemeteries in contravention of state policy? Might the state be held accountable for these as well, in light of its willful negligence and the effect of its antisemitic propaganda upon popular culture? What about the cemeteries sold by the Jewish communities, under pressure from both local and central authorities? Not a few fall into this category. Twenty-three of the forty-seven Jewish cemetery “liquidations” that took place after 1948 occurred during the 1980s.¹² The Jewish community leaders in Prague likely took a proactive role in many of those cases, and I expect that additional research would add more cemeteries to that tally.

Generally accepted figures, nonetheless, are available as guideposts for the following discussion. Scholars have shown that between 430 and 478 Jewish cemeteries existed in the Czech

¹² List compiled by Jiří Fiedler of the Jewish Museum in Prague. Archive of the author.

lands on the eve of the Second World War. During that conflict, the Nazis and others destroyed about seventy of them. The figures for cemetery destructions after the war range from forty-five to fifty-two. Yet the scholars offer these relatively similar figures, disagree as to the number of cemeteries that persisted through communist rule. One claims 271 and the other counts 334.¹³

Establishing a Policy for Jewish Cemeteries, 1955-1957

On 5 May 1955, the SOEA informed the CJRC that the Ministry of Health had ordered the nationalization of all confessional cemeteries, including Jewish ones, both active and inactive, by the end of 1956. The ownership of the cemeteries and the responsibility for maintaining them was to be transferred to the local national committee system. The CJRC and their Slovak counterpart emphatically refused to comply. In a letter to the SOEA, the CJRC leadership explained,

... the SOEA circular [regarding the nationalization of confessional cemeteries] evoked stupor and dismay in all of our Jewish religious communities. The members of the presidium, the representatives of all of the communities, reported at the meeting of the presidium the feelings of our coreligionists, who fear that they will forfeit their graves and the cemeteries of their forebears and coreligionists, and that they will be prevented from fulfilling the religious obligations regarding burial and grave maintenance. In the end, the members of the presidium made a declaration to the effect that for the Jewish religious community relinquishing the cemeteries would mean [the cemeteries'] end and therefore it is a matter that is not even possible to discuss [emphasis added].¹⁴

In conclusion to its twelve-page letter, the CJRC argued that “in this case, this concerns the question of the existence or the non-existence of the Jewish religious community as a whole.”¹⁵

It is understandable, in light of the disregard shown in many postwar locations for Jewish

¹³ Arno Pařík, “Gardens of Life,” in *Old Bohemian and Moravian Jewish Cemeteries*, 20-21; and Rozkošná and Jakubec, *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia*, 65-68.

¹⁴ Letter from Chief Rabbi Gustav Sicher and CJRC President Emil Neumann to the SOEA (15 June 1955), 1. As per this letter, the identification number of the SOEA’s informational circular was 4396/55-II/4-Č/Sk.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

cemeteries (and for Jewish property in general), that the Jewish leadership would have feared for the future of their cemeteries, if they were to pass into the hands of local authorities, particularly in areas with few or no Jewish residents. Not only did the leadership worry for their physical preservation, but they also raised a concern that the national committees would prevent Jews from fulfilling their religious obligations with regard to future burials. After all, the primary concern of the Ministry of Health was hygiene and not the guarantee religious freedom.

On the other hand, the CJRC's petition to the SOEA reflected its members' faith in its relationship with the latter office and in the system of property administration that they had developed together since 1950. The CJRC's arguments proceeded along three lines. First, the CJRC explained the near impossibility of dismantling cemeteries under Jewish law. "It is important to emphasize," they wrote,

That the Jewish cult and ritual does not recognize any decomposition period [*tlecí doba*] or leasing of the grave through decomposition. A grave in a Jewish cemetery is the indisputable, eternal resting-place of the dead. It is the property of the dead. Everything that the deceased possesses in his final resting place is his eternal property. It cannot be withdrawn or alienated. Therefore the graves and frequently even their markers remain eternally preserved. Therefore there are so many cemeteries in the Czech lands, where Jews have lived for at least 1,000 years, of which many are historically valuable monuments.¹⁶

The CJRC justifiably expected the SOEA to defend the right of Jewish citizens to bury according to their traditions. On the grounds of religious freedom, however, the CJRC also convinced the SOEA to prevent the nationalization of even those cemeteries where no future burials would occur and to guard against the alienation of Jewish gravestones. The petition noted seven-hundred years of precedence in the Czech lands for such policies and reminded the SOEA that only the Nazis had dared disrupt it.¹⁷ In closing, the CJRC (implicitly) provided the SOEA with a

¹⁶ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4-6.

set of moral and legal arguments to use in its support. The letter extolled the Jewish cemeteries as repositories of Czech material and cultural history. It then concluded with a convincing argument that the Ministry of Health lacked the legal authority to nationalize Jewish communal property.¹⁸

That the ministries capitulated to the CJRC's demands also reflects the burden that caring for Jewish cemeteries had placed upon the shoulders of both the Jewish communities and state officials. It had, for example, even delayed the consolidation of the communities. As one SOEA official reported in 1950,

The condition of the cemeteries and synagogues is extremely dismal. The care for and maintenance of those properties in a decorous state is the prime responsibility of the religious communities and it is therefore impossible to reduce the number of communities; we do not want to get into a situation wherein the [local national committees...] have to take care of the properties themselves (it would be rather expensive). The Jewish community has recently been guarding against the direct theft of gravestones and sepulchers, and often by stoneworkers themselves.¹⁹

Indeed, in the first postwar decade, the CJRC, its subordinate communities, and the Jewish Museum (after 1950, the State Jewish Museum) conducted repeated surveys of the roughly 400 Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands, despite lacking sufficient financial and human resources. In 1957, the museum estimated that only one-sixth of them remained in good condition and recommended caring for them; that four-sixths had been devastated, but could be restored; and

¹⁸ Ibid., 6-12. Along with its own petition, the CJRC forwarded to the SOEA a memo from the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia and a letter from its Chief Rabbi Eliaš Katz, both dated 10 June 1955. Katz and his community more thoroughly explicated Jewish law. Their arguments seem not to have made much of an impression on the Czech functionaries. Despite a commitment to preserving religious freedom within socialistic bounds, the latter cared little for the details of Jewish law. As the CJRC well knew, what the SOEA required was compelling legal grounds for defending the rights of the Jewish communities. For more on these politics, see Jacob Ari Labendz, "Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist: Managing 'Jewish Power and Danger' in 1960s Communist Czechoslovakia," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014): 91-92.

¹⁹ Dr. Šimšík, "Židovská náboženská společnost" [The Jewish religious community], (15 December 1950), 1. NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder "1950."

that the remaining sixth was “all but destroyed.”²⁰

Thus, the reluctance, until the mid-1950s, to seek a universal solution for addressing the problem of Jewish cemeteries reflected, at once, the wariness of SOEA officials about the potential costs of that endeavor and Jewish fears of misappropriation and mismanagement, should the cemeteries slip from their control. The mutual trust that had developed between SOEA and CJRC officials, particularly in the field of property relations, convinced both bodies that the cemetery problem could be resolved on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, just as SOEA officials had frequently come to the defense of Jewish communal property rights with regard to former synagogues buildings, so too did they protect Jewish cemeteries from illegal encroachment.²¹ The process of exempting Jewish cemeteries from nationalization, nonetheless, led all of the parties involved to realize that the erstwhile strategy of addressing cemeteries on a case-by-case basis would not lead to a resolution of the general problem.

On 24 April 1957, the State Monuments Administration and the State Jewish Museum convened a meeting with representatives of the CJRC and the Ecclesiastical Department of the Ministry of Education and Culture (the successor to the SOEA) to determine what to do about

²⁰ Report from the State Monument Administration to Mr. Knobloch at the Ecclesiastical Department of the Ministry of education and Culture, “Věc: svolání porady o ochraně židovských památek” [Re: calling a meeting regarding the protection of Jewish monuments] (16 April 1957), 3-4. NAČR, MŠK box 56. For examples of such endeavors see JM-PP inventory no. 75, carton 66.

²¹ In 1955, for example, the County National Committee in Karvina attempted to confiscate the Jewish cemetery in the town of Orlová as “German,” i.e., enemy, property. The town’s interwar Jewish community did, in fact, have a German linguistic and cultural orientation. Yet the cemetery, as the committee seems to have known, already belonged to the postwar Jewish Religious Community in Ostrava. The SOEA intervened to stop the confiscation immediately upon being appraised of the situation by the CJRC. The former even castigated the committee for its failure to adhere to proper policies. Collection of documents labeled, “Orlová, židovský hřbitov, konfiskace” [Orlová, Jewish cemetery, confiscation] (1955). NAČR, SÚC box 119, folder “1955.”

the Jewish cemeteries.²² While all of the parties agreed that the cemeteries deserved to be cared for and protected, they uniformly attempted to avoid assuming the financial responsibility for doing so. The State Monument Administration began the discussion by noting that the Ministry of Education and Culture had inherited the legal responsibility for meeting the financial needs of the Jewish communities from the SOEA. This opened the door for Dr. Schwarz of the CJRC to complain that the ecclesiastical offices had been providing funds only for so-called “living” cemeteries, those at which the communities still conducted burials. When the ministry’s Dr. Bolina objected that his office only “takes care of ritual needs, and not monuments,” both Schwarz and Hana Volavková, the director of the State Jewish Museum, insisted that “all of the Jewish cemeteries should be considered of ritual interest.” Dr. Bolina flatly refused to consider that possibility. “The state ritual administration does not have enough money,” he explained, “to subsidize the maintenance of all of the Jewish properties.”²³

Sensing the tension in the room, Dr. Pavel, the president of the State Monuments Administration, shifted the discussion from debates about responsibilities to the search for practical solutions. His subordinate, Dr. Šebek, raised the possibility of requesting special funds from the government and, more realistically, of bringing the most historically and artistically significant cemeteries under the protection of his office. Pavel added that, “In association with all of the initiatives it is important to emphasize the popular architecture of the Jewish monuments.”²⁴ Inasmuch, he acknowledged that the national state had little interest in preserving the cemeteries as memorials to its lost Jewish communities and their culture. As the meeting

²² In 1956, the SOEA was incorporated into the Ministry of Education and Culture as the Ecclesiastical Department. It would remain there through the duration of communist rule, despite changes to the structure, purview, and name of that ministry.

²³ “Zápis o poradě o ochraně židovských památek” [Minutes from the meeting regarding the protection of Jewish monuments] (24 April 1957), 1-2. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

²⁴ Ibid., 2.

concluded, the representatives of Ecclesiastical Department and the State Monuments Administration proposed a number of partial solutions for addressing the needs of various types of cemeteries individually. The instituted none of them, despite Volovková's pleas for fast action, "because the cemeteries are becoming desolate, the gravestones are being stolen, and the cost of their repairs increases disproportionately from year to year."²⁵ If the two government agencies did, in fact, keep their promise to ask the national committees to care for the Jewish cemeteries in their territorial purview, the effect was minimal.

The Ecclesiastical Department had other options for resolving the cemetery question. In advance of the meeting, the State Jewish Museum proposed that the state transfer the ownership of the country's Jewish heritage sites from the communities to the museum. It cited as precedent the nationalization the museum itself in 1950.²⁶ The museum hoped to incorporate the Jewish heritage sites into their research and exhibition projects. Its priorities, as reflected in the proposal and also in comments by the director, differed from those of the Ecclesiastical Department and the State Monuments Administration. Only the State Jewish Museum argued sincerely for the need to protect and care for Jewish sites as significant and constituent elements of Czechoslovak national heritage. It urged the central authorities to remind the national committees that "the Jewish monuments are not a foreign, unnecessary element, but rather a part of our general cultural treasure trove (*celkového kulturního pokladu*)."²⁷ The museum's proposal further

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ The State Jewish Museum presented this as an alternative to a plan, which it also submitted, which would have cost the state 50,000 crowns per region on an annual basis. This was likely something of a "bait and switch," designed to ensure that the state award the museum with control over the properties. Report from the State Monument Administration to Mr. Knobloch at the Ecclesiastical Department of the Ministry of education and Culture, "Věc: svolání porady o ochraně židovských památek" [Calling a meeting regarding the protection of Jewish monuments], 3-4.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

insisted upon the unique significance of the Jewish cemeteries in Czechoslovakia, in light of the widespread destruction of Jewish heritage sites which had occurred in Poland and Germany during the Second World War.²⁸

The Ecclesiastical Department rejected the museum's proposal from an "ecclesiastical-political perspective."²⁹ In general, the former jealously guarded its purview from the encroachment of the State Jewish Museum. The SOEA's directors likely worried that ceding control over the region's Jewish heritage sites to the museum might mitigate their ability control all aspects of Jewish affairs in the country. Economic considerations played a role as well. For the Ecclesiastical Department, accepting the museum's plan would have meant forfeiting the income that it had anticipated generating from the sale of synagogue buildings. The department's fear that a few hundred Jewish cemeteries would fall into ruin paled in comparison with its concern for its own bottom line. Though sympathetic to the communities when it served their purposes, the directors of the Ecclesiastical Department rarely voiced the opinion that the loss of Jewish sites would impoverish Czechoslovakia's cultural heritage. Thus, in direct contrast with the Jewish communities, the Ecclesiastical Department valued synagogues more than cemeteries, even if both valued the former.

The Ecclesiastical Department therefore decided to maintain the status quo, with the exception that it recognized the responsibility of the State Monuments Administration to protect Jewish sites of significant historical value. Although the director of the non-Catholic department of the Ecclesiastical Department, Jaroslav Knobloch, suggested that the two offices meet again to discuss the matter further, I have found no evidence to suggest that they did. This left the question of the Jewish cemeteries in the hands of the CJRC, its subordinate communities, and the

²⁸ Ibid., 2.

²⁹ Ibid., cover sheet. Jaroslav Knobloch, note dated 26 April 1957.

national committee system.

For roughly the next fifteen years, the Jewish communities sought partnerships with the local national committees and their regional superiors to ensure the preservation of as many cemeteries as possible. Rabbi Sicher's ruling that the cemeteries and even the gravestones therein belonged inalienably to the dead, prevented the communities and their party-state minders from selling them for profit, as would become common practice after 1971.³⁰

There were, of course, exceptions. As early as 1951, the CJRC allowed a national enterprise to purchase a cemetery in the Northern Bohemian city of Děčín, which was "indispensably necessary for the further development of heavy industry." The CJRC insisted, however, with SOEA support, that the purchaser cover the costs of exhuming all of the bodily remains in accordance with Jewish law, as well as their relocation to a new cemetery in Děčín, along with the stones that survived the Second World War.³¹ The state and other sectors of the national economy would continue to force the sale (or abdication) of Jewish cemeteries "in the national interest" for the duration of communist rule. In 1968, for example, the state flooded the Jewish cemetery in Dolní Kralovice, when it converted the entire village into a reservoir. The terms of each case differed profoundly and no record exists regarding how many cemeteries were destroyed in this manner.

³⁰ In 1964, the work-collective, Kámen (trans., "stone"), attempted to purchase gravestones from "devastated cemeteries" from the Plzeň community. "We warned the comrades," reported the community leaders, "that it is not allowed and [we] referred them to the CJRC in Prague and to the Chief Rabbinate." Minutes of the board meeting of the Plzeň community from 15 November 1964. ŽM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

³¹ Letter from the CJRC to the SOEA, "Věc: pozemek hřbitova v Děčíně-Podmoklech, Váš dopis z 4.9.t.r." [Re: the cemetery plot in Děčín-Podmoklech, your letter from 4 September of this year]; and associated documents. NAČR, SOEA box 119, folder "1951." The stones (and perhaps also the bodies) from the "old" cemetery, established in 1890-1891, were moved to a new cemetery, opened in 1952. Within eighteen years, even the latter had disappeared. Rozkošná and Jakubec, *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia*, 113.

The Jewish Communities and their Cemeteries, 1956-1970

A lack of financial and personnel resources hampered the CJRC's repeated efforts to document, not to mention preserve, the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands. As its general secretary, Ota Heitlinger, explained at its congress of 24 April 1963,

The cemeteries cause us mainly problems. We have 295 of them and, if we take into account that we have about 8,000 members, [the care for] one cemetery falls to nearly every twenty [members].³²

Indeed, the challenge posed by the cemeteries was one of the chief matters of deliberation at the congress. Although the Jewish leadership noted some exceptions, they reported a general lack of cooperation from local national committees.³³

An additional strategy, discussed at the 24 April meeting, was to turn to the State Monuments Administration for assistance in caring for cemeteries established before 1850.³⁴ This approach seemed promising at first because no fewer than 53.39% (and likely many more) of all Czech-Jewish cemeteries met this criterion.³⁵ Lack of interest in the preservation of Jewish monuments, particularly at the regional level, however, undermined this strategy as well. In light of these failures, the CJRC adopted a more passive approach regarding the bulk of its inactive

³² Report on the 1963 CJRC congress in the minutes of the board meeting of the Plzeň community from 15 December 1963. JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

³³ Collection of documents, "Rada židovských náboženských obcí, Sjezd 1963" [CJRC, congress 1963]. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

³⁴ The CJRC insisted that the leaders of its subordinate communities establish lists of those cemeteries in their purview that qualified for such protection. Minutes of the board meeting of the Plzeň community from 30 April 1957. JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

³⁵ Data collected by the State Jewish Museum between 1965 and 1967 suggest that 217, or 63.27%, of the 343 Czech-Jewish cemeteries that they surveyed had been established before 1850. "Návrh na úpravu židovských hřbitovů v českých krajích" [Proposal for repairing the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands] (n.d., likely 1975). ŽNO bundled files (*vaz. desky*) 36. Gruber and Myers report that at least 222, or 53.39%, of the 415 Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands had been established before 1850. Missing data in their report suggests that the number could be as high as 242 cemeteries, which would be equivalent to 58.31%. Gruber and Mayers, *Survey of the Historic Jewish Monuments*, 91-125; data compiled by the author.

cemeteries. At 1963 congress, CJRC board member (and future president) František Fuchs characterized the new strategy as allowing the cemeteries to “decay with dignity” [*důstojně chátrat*].³⁶

The challenges identified by Jewish community leaders in 1963 persisted into the first years of the 1970s. The Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands continued to suffer from vandalism, theft, and neglect. Many fell pray to a spate of copy-cat cemetery desecrations, modeled upon the widespread defacement of Jewish cemeteries with swastikas in the USA and Western Europe in 1959 and 1960.³⁷

At the same time, however, anecdotal evidence from the archives of the Plzeň community suggests that, over time, some regional and local authorities came to adopt a more cooperative approach with regard the Jewish cemeteries. I discussed the financial motivations for this change in the last chapter. Others factors contributed as well. Beginning in the mid-1950s, communist reformers and, later, even the liberalizing state of the 1960s deployed the Holocaust as a symbol with which to call for and mark political progress. The association of Jewish cemeteries with that genocide likely contributed as well to the shifting sentiments regarding their cultural value. So too may have been the contemporaneous decline of the perceived risks that some officials may have associated with taking a sympathetic stance on Jewish-related matters.

The opening of Czechoslovakia to Western tourists in the early 1960s provided additional

³⁶ František Ehrmann, “Zápis ze sjezdu delegátů židovské náboženské společnosti v krajích českých a moravských konaného dne 24 listopadu 1963” [Minutes of the congress of delegates of the Jewish Religious Community in the Regions of Bohemia and Moravia taking place on 24 November 1963] (n.d.), 6, in collection of documents, “Rada židovských náboženských obcí, Sjezd 1963” [CJRC, congress 1963]. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

³⁷ The meaning the swastikas, while by no means uniform in Czechoslovakia, differed considerably from their uses in the American context. For police reports regarding the Czechoslovak case, see ABS H-192. On the phenomenon in the USA see David Caplovitz and Candace Rogers, *Swastika 1960: The Epidemic of Anti-Semitic Vandalism in America* (New York, USA: The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1961).

impetus for party-state officials to seek an improvement in the condition of the country's abandoned Jewish cemeteries. Their general disrepair disturbed Western-Jewish visitors, particularly those with relatives buried in the Czech lands. More generally, it suggested that communist Czechoslovakia had not overcome the antisemitism that had marked its political culture during the late 1940s and 1950s. By the mid-1960s, state administrators were already used to receiving gifts from private individuals in the West for the maintenance of specific graves. Indeed, Jewish community leaders often solicited such assistance when domestic solutions seemed illusive.³⁸

Beginning in 1962, Western Jewish organizations and even individuals surprised state administrators and Jewish community leaders alike with significant offers of hard currency for the maintenance of entire cemeteries and, eventually, even groups of them.³⁹ Both the Jewish leadership and their party-state minders shared a concern that they would not be able to repair and maintain the cemeteries to the standards expected by their Western sponsors, which would have been an even greater embarrassment to the state and to the communities than the *status quo*. This led them to reject the generous offers, despite their common desire for hard currency.⁴⁰

³⁸ The case of stříbro stands out as an example. "Pamětníprotokol z prohlídky židovského hřbitova v Stříbře dne 2. 8. 1962" [Minutes from the tour of the Jewish cemetery in Stříbro on 2 August 1962] (n.d.). JM-PP inventory no. 75, carton 66.

³⁹ In 1962, for example, an American named Neubauer offered to cover the expense for repairing the Jewish cemetery in Tachov. NAČR, MŠK box 58, folder "Tachov."

⁴⁰ In June of the previous year, the Union of European Rabbis offered funds for the maintenance and repair of Czechoslovakia's cemeteries on a national scale. At first, the Ministry of Education and Culture was inclined to accept. In November 1962, the ministry approached the Communist Party with a request "that in individual cases, after an investigation into the interests of the state, permission be granted [to hold] meetings regarding financial donations from abroad. According to preliminary information," the ministry continued, "the Ministry of Finance would welcome similar operations, because [Czechoslovakia] would thereby acquire income in hard currency." No immediate action was taken. "Vyjádření k přijmutí daru od zahraničních židovských příslušníků" [Opinion on accepting gifts from foreign Jewish nationals] (13 November 1962). NAČR, MŠK box 57.

Jewish community leaders nonetheless attempted to take advantage of the heightened concern among party-state officials for how the condition of the region's Jewish heritage sites reflected upon the country. In 1964, Chief Rabbi Richard Feder wrote a letter to the New-York-based, German-Jewish newspaper, *Aufbau*, in which he laid the responsibility for the devastation squarely on the shoulders of the Nazis. Yet he also hinted that their continued disrepair reflected poorly upon the contemporary terms of Jewish-state relations in communist Czechoslovakia. He remarked,

Thank God, we are not starving [despite a lack of reparations from West Germany], because the state takes care also of us.... I will use this occasion to draw the attention of our erstwhile compatriots to the graves of their fathers and relatives, which are in rather neglected states. We would happily put them in order, but we do not have the requisite means.⁴¹

Through 1966, the World Center of European Rabbis made repeated offers to fund a massive project for the benefit of Czechoslovakia's Jewish cemeteries. In that year, both Jewish leaders and state administrators agreed that that the offer presented too many liabilities. František Fuchs rejected it definitively on behalf of the CJRC on 1 June 1966. Collection of documents labeled "RŽNO - nabídka rabinů z USA na finanční příspěvek k údržbě žid. hřbitovů" [CJRC - offer of rabbis from the USA of a financial contribution for the maintenance of the Jewish cemeteries]. NAČR, MŠK box 57.

As early as 1961, the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia began receiving offers from Leopold Grünhut of New York City, an interwar member of the Bratislava Jewish community, to finance a memorial in that city to its most famous rabbi and leader, the Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moses Schreiber, 1762 - 1839). In 1964, his offer came through the *Va'ad Le-Shmiras Kever Chasam Sofer Ugeoni Bratislava* [The Council for Protecting the Grave of the Chatam Sofer and the Scholars of Bratislava]. The leaders of the Bratislava Jewish community attempted to persuade state administrators to accept the donation by drawing their attention to another, potentially even more embarrassing solution to the problem of what to do about the Chatam Sofer's grave (and those of other rabbis), which then, as now, lay under a newly-constructed bridge. Some Americans, the Jewish leaders warned, hoped to exhume the remains and transfer them to Israel. I have not yet found confirmation in the archives as to whether or not the Ministry of Education and Culture gave permission to accept the funds. It seems that they did not. "Vyjadření k přijetí daru od zahraničních židovských příslušníků" [Opinion on accepting gifts from foreign Jewish nationals] (13 November 1962); and the letter from the Central Union of the Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia to the Ministry of Finance (7 August 1964), in collection of document labeled, "Mausoleum a památník v Bratislava" [Mausoleum and memorial in Bratislava]. NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁴¹ Richard Feder, "Dopis z Prahy" [A letter from Prague] (1964), 2. NAČR, SÚC box 211.

Concern for the perceptions of Jewish tourists increased after 1966, when party-state officials and Jewish leaders began negotiating the possibility of holding a major international celebration of 1,000 years of Jewish settlement in the Czech lands and the 700th anniversary of the Old-New Synagogue in Prague. At the CJRC congress of 1967, rising president František Fuchs reminded the delegates of their responsibility to maintain the cemeteries in their areas of administration. He asked them “mainly to interest the national committees in their care.”⁴² Upon returning home from the congress, a delegate from Plzeň paraphrased Fuch’s comments, “We are living in a year of tourism and it is upon us to present ourselves as well as possible to foreigners.”⁴³

Even under the Western gaze, the interests of the Jewish leadership and the Ecclesiastical Department aligned only sufficiently enough to secure the relative protection of the country’s most famous Jewish cemeteries and a few others in the areas frequented by tourist. Examples include the cemeteries in the Bohemian spa-town of Mariánské Lázně and the one-time Moravian-Jewish capital of Mikulov. Thus, despite minor improvements in the conditions of the Jewish cemeteries during the 1960s, the *status quo* remained generally unchanged throughout that decade. The advent of Western tourism, the slow liberalization of Czechoslovakia, the generally positive shift in popular attitudes towards Jews, and even the flourishing of Jewish cultural life in Prague did not generate sufficient will or resources to address the matter of the cemeteries on a national scale. Even the State Jewish Museum, no longer under Volavková’s direction, lowered its expectations. When its researcher, Jan Heřman, embarked on a project to

⁴² “Mimořádný sjezd delegátů Židovských náboženských obcí v krajích českých” [The extraordinary congress of the delegates of the Jewish religious communities in the Czech lands], *Věstník*, 3/29 (March 1967): 3. See also the collection of documents associated with the 1967 congress in “Rada židovských náboženských obcí, Sjezd 1967” [CJRC, congress 1967]. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁴³ “Rada židovských náboženských obcí v Praze, konala v neděli dne 29. ledna 1967 ‘Sjezd delegátů’” [CJRC in Prague, occurring on Sunday, 29 January 1967 “congress of delegates”] (n.d.). JM-PP inventory no. 11, carton 3.

catalogue all of the Bohemian- and Moravian-Jewish cemeteries, in 1965, he argued that the “single resort with a basis in reality” was to select for preservation only “the most valuable of them, based upon expert [i.e., his own] classification.”⁴⁴

In closing to this section, it should be noted that the Jewish communities prioritized the needs of living Jews, and of Holocaust survivors in particular, over the preservation of Jewish heritage sites. In 1967, for example, the authorities in Cheb began constructing a three-story garage on the site of the city’s former Jewish cemetery, where only three stones had survived the Second World War. They had neglected, however, to secure advanced permission from the Jewish community in Plzeň. When the latter approached Ota Heitlinger, the general secretary of the CJRC, for advice on how to proceed, he reacted vehemently in a letter which read,

This amounts to a gratuitous act of the local organs, which is an outrageous encroachment upon the ownership rights of the [community] and, more so, violated our basic religious principles. It is unthinkable that we would subsequently approve of such an unlawful intervention into our religious traditions and ordinances by signing a purchasing agreement. Particularly in the case of the district of the [County National Committee] in Cheb, this concerns organs which were never characterized by a friendly relationship towards our community, for example with regard to questions concerning the Krym retirement home. There is therefore no reason why we should now manifest such an exceptional desire to straighten out a matter, which the public organs in Cheb brought into this situation with the unilateral creation of facts on the ground.⁴⁵

Despite the fact that the regional authorities backed Heitlinger’s position, the Plzeň community took another approach (with his permission). They conceded to approve the project retroactively, on the condition that the city pay for and install a memorial plaque on the former cemetery

⁴⁴ Heřman, “Dokumentace židovských hřbitovů v Čechách” [The documentation of the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands], 212.

⁴⁵ Letter from Ota Heitlinger to the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (12 May 1968), in collection of documents labeled, “Korespondence - převod pozemků býv. žid. hřbitovu v Chebu a pozemku kde stávala synagoga ke čskl. stát. a zřízení památníku (1950) 1968-1969” [Correspondence - transfer of the grounds of the former Jewish cemetery in Cheb and the grounds where the synagogue stood to the Czechoslovak state and the erection of a memorial (1950) 1968-1969]. JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6.

grounds. They further urged the regional authorities,

We hope that our benevolence contributes to better mutual relations with the [administration] offices in Cheb; we have in mind the future of our retirement home in Mariánské Lázně, the acceptance of our coreligionists into that home, the erection of a memorial in its area, and the like.⁴⁶

Jewish leaders from Plzeň and Prague joined state officials at a state-funded plaque installation ceremony on 12 October 1969.⁴⁷ Local administrators acted less graciously, however, in determining the future of the retirement home residents.⁴⁸

Abnormal Normalization: New Pressures and Responses, 1970-1983

At the turn of the 1970s, the longstanding system for the administration of the Czech Jewish cemeteries changed radically. Local and central administrators colluded to place increasing pressure upon the Jewish communities to demolish their abandoned cemeteries and to sell their more valuable stones for profit. (This reflected a return to the practice of weakening religious

⁴⁶ Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (9 July 1968). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6.

⁴⁷ Jitka Chmelíková, *Osudy chebských Židů: Chebští Židé od 2. poloviny 19. století do současnosti* [The fates of the Cheb Jews: the Jews of Cheb from the second-half of the nineteenth century until the present] (Cheb, Czech Republic: The Cheb Museum, 2000), 125-26; and Rozkošna and Jakubec, *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia*, 166.

⁴⁸ The city of Mariánské Lázně took ownership of the *Krym* Jewish retirement home and demolished it in 1967 without offering the community a substitute or compensation. It did so, despite the fact that the building had been given to the community by the state, decades earlier, in exchange for the *Hagibor* youth home in Prague. In the late-1960s, the community hoped that the state would provide them with a replacement facility, hence the cemetery concession. Instead, the state transferred the *Krym*'s residents to a non-sectarian retirement home in Prameny, where it established a Jewish prayer room. The closing of the *Krym* also meant that Jewish tourists to Mariánské Lázně, of which there were many, had to go without a place of worship. Richard Švanderlík, *Historie Židů v Mariánské Lázních* [The history of the Jews in Mariánské Lázně] (Mariánské Lázně, Czech Republic: Art Gallery Nataly and the City Museum of Mariánské Lázně, 2005), 47-49. See also a letter to the Ms. Nemcová, Department of Retirement Pensions (*odbor důchodkového zabezpečení*), Western-Bohemian National Committee, "Liquidace DD. 'Krym' v Mariánské Lázně" [The liquidation of the *Krym* retirement home in Mariánské Lázně] (17 November 1969). JM-PP inventory no. 18, carton 5.

institutions by withholding adequate funding.⁴⁹) These officials had been emboldened by the renewal of anti-Zionist campaigns, following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The abandonment of liberalization, moreover, temporarily negated any imperative that the some authorities might have felt to protect Jewish sites for the sake of international appearances.

In 1969, personnel changes associated with the “normalization” of Czechoslovak politics robbed the communities of their erstwhile protectors at the (renamed) Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs. When Rabbi Richard Feder died the following November, no one remained to enforce the religious proscription against selling gravestones and demolishing cemeteries.⁵⁰

In June 1972, the CJRC established a commission to address the problem of the cemeteries and it requested that its subordinate communities do the same. The CJRC aimed to compile a list of cemeteries established before 1850, which could be brought under the protection of the state’s conservation authorities. It also sought to collect information about the needs of individual communities and cemeteries in order to address the matter on a national scale.⁵¹ In April of the following year, the CJRC’s cemetery commission suggested that the communities also establish “cemetery accounts,” to separate the cemetery issue from other budgetary concerns. For the first time, in April 1973, just three years after Rabbi Feder passed away, Czech-Jewish leaders officially acknowledged that they would have to abolish (*zrušit*)

⁴⁹ See discussion in Chapter Seven.

⁵⁰ As late as 24 June 1970, Rabbi Feder cited Jewish religious law to forbid an individual from removing his mother’s gravestone from the Jewish cemetery in Písek. Letter from Feder to the Plzeň community (24 June 1970). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6.

⁵¹ Letters from the CJRC to the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (21 March 1972 and 8 June 1972). JM-PP inventory no. 16, carton 4, folder “1971-1972.”

some cemeteries.⁵² Yet they took no official steps in that direction.

The (for-profit) destruction and sale of Jewish cemeteries by the communities only began after a forced transition in the Jewish leadership and the further failure of other options. In 1974, the heads of the CJRC and the Prague community retired from their positions, in the face of direct and mounting state pressure. The retirees included both the president and the general secretary of the CJRC, František Fried and Ota Heitlinger, and also the president of the Prague community, Pavel Kolman. Following a directive by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Karel Šnýdr, who had risen to oversee the Jewish communities, arranged for the installation of more compliant and politically reliable functionaries in their place. At a CJRC congress held on 2 March 1975, Bedřich Bass assumed the position of CJRC chair, and Bohumil Heller and František Kraus became its vice-chairs.⁵³ During the meeting, the Jewish delegates and Šnýdr concurred that the cemeteries posed a major problem for the Jewish communities. Šnýdr later reported,

The cited problem is complicated not only by a [sic: the] high number of cemeteries (700 in [Czechoslovakia], out of these, 343 in [the Czech Socialist Republic]), the administration of which the [CJRC] cannot guarantee because in most of the places there are no members of the Jewish Religious Communities any more, but also by complex religious regulations and customs, which emphasize an [sic: the] enduring inviolability of the burial place of every individual.⁵⁴

Šnýdr suggested investigating the possibility of transferring ownership the cemeteries to the

⁵² J. Ratter, “Zápis ze schůze hřbitovní komise českých krajů konaná dne 26.4.1973” [Minutes from the meeting of the cemetery commission of the Czech lands taking place on 26 April 1973]. JM-PP inventory no. 71, carton 66.

⁵³ Soukupová, “Stát jako jeden z determinantů identity” [The state as one of the determiners of the identity], 42-45; and Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 35-36.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Culture - Secretariat for Religious Affairs, “Report on the Course of the Regular Congress of Delegates of the Jewish Religious Communities in the CSR, held on March 2nd 1975 in Prague, with a proposal of religious political measures,” trans., Marie Crhová, in Marie Crhová, “Jews under the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia,” *Jewish Studies at the CEU*, vol. 3 (2002-2003): 288.

national committees, but he also looked forward to “a prospective respectful liquidation of the devastated and insignificant cemeteries.”⁵⁵

Just six months later, the new CJRC leadership nearly succeeded in convincing the Ministry of Culture to bring the extensive network of Jewish cemeteries under the ownership of the national committees. This would have absolved the communities of the responsibility for maintaining them and removed the communities from the uncomfortable position of depending upon the less-than-forthcoming generosity of the state to do so.⁵⁶ It was, ironically, Karel Šnýder who intervened with his superiors to scuttle the plan. He argued that the CJRC would never give its permission to demolish abandoned and unused cemeteries and that it would further reject any plan that did not deal with the cemeteries on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁷ The Ministry of Culture tried, once again, to bring the Jewish cemeteries under the care of the national committees in 1978. This time, however, the Ministry of the Interior rejected the plan. Its representative explained that state lacked sufficient resources to care for the cemeteries and burials for which it was already responsible. He also clarified that the transfer of ownership would mean destruction for most of the cemeteries, as only a few non-active cemeteries could be brought under the protection of the regional conservation authorities.⁵⁸

Unfortunately for the CJRC, which attempted to appeal the Ministry of the Interior’s rejection, the conservation authorities—with important exceptions—did not fulfill their legal

⁵⁵ Ibid., 290.

⁵⁶ Collection of documents labeled, “Převedení židovských hřbitovů do správy MNV” [Transferring the Jewish cemeteries to the administration of the local national committees] (1974). NAČR, SPVC box 234.

⁵⁷ Letter from Dr. E. Vlk to Jelínek, the director of the Ecclesiastical Secretariat (17 October 1975). NAČR, SPVC box 234.

⁵⁸ Letter from Ing. Bohuslav Závada to the Ecclesiastical Secretariat, “Věc: správa židovských pohřebišť” [The administration of the Jewish cemeteries] (10 April 1979). NAČR, MŠK box 234.

responsibility to care for even the oldest of Jewish cemeteries.⁵⁹ In 1974, the Plzeň community had to remind the conservation authorities in České Budějovice of their responsibility to care for the Jewish cemeteries in their region.⁶⁰ In 1979, the CJRC complained to the Ecclesiastical Department that when regional administrators desired the demolition a protected cemetery, they simply removed it from the list of protected sites.⁶¹ Indeed, twelve of the seventeen cemeteries, which were administered by the Prague community and which were demolished during the years preceding 1983 should have qualified for state protection simply by virtue of their age.⁶² At the time, the Prague community administered no fewer than 176 cemeteries.⁶³

Facing mounting and, it seems, coordinated pressure from local and central authorities, as well as persistent vandalism, the Czech Jewish communities began selling their cemeteries on a case-by-case basis in the late 1970s. They did so in response local initiatives, and, primarily, when they could not find the resources necessary to care for them. Often times, local administrations refused to offer compensation for the cemeteries, particularly when they seized them in “the public interest.” This gave further impetus for the communities to sell the gravestones for profit. The Plzeň community, for example, did not receive any compensation in 1978 when local authorities forced it to acquiesce to the destruction of its cemetery in Plzeň-

⁵⁹ Letter from CJRC to František Jelínek (n.d., after 14 June 1979).

⁶⁰ Letter from the Plzeň community to Krajské středisko státní památkové péče a ochrany přírody (11 May 1974). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 7, folder “1973-1974.”

⁶¹ Letter from CJRC to František Jelínek (n.d., after 14 June 1979). JM-PP inventory no. 78, carton 66.

⁶² Letter from Rudolf Gibian to the Ecclesiastical Secretariat (8 August 1983). ŽNO binder (*Šanon*) 4. As per below, most of these cemeteries were demolished with the expressed permission—and sometimes at the initiative of—the Jewish community in Prague. It is unclear what the CJRC leadership knew.

⁶³ Pojer, “Zápis o provedení kontroly o stavu hřbitovů spravovaných ŽNO Praha a způsobu agendy” [Minutes of executing an audit of the condition of the cemeteries administered by the Jewish Religious Community in Prague and the form of its agenda] (18 April 1988). ŽNO package (*balík*) 11b.

Lochtonín.⁶⁴ The community did, however, sell its gravestones to a construction company for over 120,000 crowns, which it promised to use to erect memorials in Plzeň-Lochtonín and in other cemeteries in Plzeň, Mariánské Lázně, and Tachov.⁶⁵ An early draft of a CJRC proposal for systemizing the management and sale of the Jewish cemeteries concluded that “The idea of ‘the dignified disappearance of the Jewish cemeteries’ has become absolutely unjustifiable.”⁶⁶

Centralized Liquidation: The CJRC Cemetery Commission, 1978-1989

The CJRC leadership was, indeed, eager to assert control over the administration of the Jewish cemeteries on a national scale. In particular, they sought to oversee the sale of Jewish cemeteries and to manage the income it generated. In 1978, the CJRC established a centralized “cemetery account” with the approval –and likely at the insistence–of the Ecclesiastical Secretariat.⁶⁷ The CJRC leadership also institutionalized procedures for selling and dismantling those cemeteries that could not be saved by other means. The individual communities were required to obtain permission from the CJRC. An announcement was to be made—although it often was not—in the CJRC newsletter, *Věstník*, informing readers of the pending demolition and offering them the opportunity to have the bodies of their relatives exhumed and their gravestones removed at their

⁶⁴ The authorities considered the devastated cemetery an eyesore and an impediment to the development of housing and hospital projects. Proposal for a letter from the Plzeň community to Josef Kabat (n.d.). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 8, folder “1977-1978.”

⁶⁵ Letter from the Plzeň community to the Department of Ecclesiastical Culture of the Regional National Committee (3 April 1978). JM-PP inventory no. 18, carton 5. They received permission to execute the sale fifteen days later. Letter from the Western-Bohemian Regional National committee to the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň, “Věc: Hřbitov Plzeň-Lochtonín” [Re: Cemetery Plzeň-Lochtonín] (17 April 1978). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 8, folder “1977-1978.”

⁶⁶ “Návrh na úpravu židovských hřbitovů v českých krajích” [Proposal for the modification of the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands] (n.d., likely from 1976-1978). ŽNO bundled files 36.

⁶⁷ “Návrh stanov ‘Ústředního hřbitovního fondu při RŽNO v ČSR...’” [Proposal for the bylaws of the ‘central cemetery account of the CJRC in (Czech Socialist Republic)], (n.d., likely 1983). JM-PP inventory no. 72, carton 66.

own expense. The remaining stones (i.e., those not damaged over the course of the decades and those not sold) were to be laid face-down and buried under eighty (or sixty) centimeters of earth. The raised plot of land was to be transformed, whenever possible, into a park, in which a memorial plaque was to be installed.⁶⁸

The CJRC leadership, nonetheless, only slowly embraced the new and radical concept of willfully participating in and profiting from the destruction of Jewish cemeteries. The CJRC insisted that the associated procedures were to be carried out in “the most optimal method, according to the Jewish religious laws for encroaching upon a Jewish cemetery.”⁶⁹ Yet, in doing so, the lay leadership of the CJRC willfully neglected the recent ruling of their own college of clerics, composed of prayer leaders and religiously educated men serving in lieu of rabbis, upholding the prohibition against selling Jewish gravestones.⁷⁰ Even if the CJRC leadership of the mid-to-late 1970s did not anticipate the extensive for-profit sale of Jewish gravestones and cemeteries which would characterize the 1980s, they did foresee and plan for selling off collections of valuable stones to cover the expenses associated with maintaining other cemeteries.⁷¹

Surely, one of the main reasons for the reluctance of CJRC officials to explore more radical options was the vocal dissent they encountered from community members. As early as 1974, a member of the Mariánské Lázně congregation objected, on behalf of his friends, to the

⁶⁸ “Návrh na úpravu židovských hřbitovů v českých krajích” [Proposal for the modification of the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands]; and “Postup při zrušení židovského hřbitova” [The methodology for dismantling a Jewish cemetery] (1984). JM-PP inventory no. 78, carton 66.

⁶⁹ “Postup při zrušení židovského hřbitova” [The methodology for dismantling a Jewish cemetery].

⁷⁰ Letter from the Kolegium duchovních (college of clerics) (1976). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 7, folder “1976.”

⁷¹ “Návrh na úpravu židovských hřbitovů v českých krajích” [Proposal for the modification of the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands].

sale of building on the grounds of city's Jewish cemetery. He wrote,

We are of the opinion that [with the sale] the community will indeed help someone to have a long weekend [i.e., vacation], but surely [with the sale] it will not resolve anything in the interest of the community.⁷²

Then, in 1976, representatives of the CJRC's constituent communities publicly opposed the sale and demolition of Jewish cemeteries by the CJRC. That December, the latter sent a memo to the leaders of all of the Czech communities, which read,

In light of the objections lodged from various places within our religious community in the matter of the eventual sale of abandoned gravestones from dismantled cemeteries, the CJRC presidium has decided that the executive board will meet again to deal with this matter and will vote again on the next step.⁷³

Thus, the plans to establish a centralized system came to a halt.

The archival record, though sparse, clearly demonstrates that the CJRC continued to face protests in the years that followed, even from non-members.⁷⁴ Jewish citizens (certainly) complained as well. The absence of their voices from the documentary record reflects, I think, the political context of 1970s. Indeed, dissent from within the communities likely drove the leaders of the CJRC and its subordinate communities, particularly Prague, to conceal from the general membership their ongoing role in the destruction of Jewish cemeteries and the sale of

⁷² Letter from Josef Rothbarth to Jiří Held at the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (n.d., received 3 December 1973). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 7. The Jewish communities often used the funds that it acquired from sources other than the state to cover the costs associated with improving the living standards of its leadership and enabling the elderly to seek medical spa treatments.

⁷³ Letter from the CJRC to the Plzeň community (17 December 1976). JM-PP inventory no. 16, carton 4, folder "1973-1976."

⁷⁴ In 1978, for example, Josef Kabat objected to the sale of the Jewish cemetery in Plzeň-Lochtonín in a letter to the chief news organ of the Communist Party of the Czech lands, *Pravda* (n.d., 1978). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 8, folder "1977-1978." One year later, a concerned citizen with a deep interest in sites of Jewish heritage appealed to the State Jewish Museum to stop the destruction of Jewish cemeteries. "I think, however," he wrote, "that even these old cemeteries are part of our cultural heritage and that something should be done about them." Letter from Ladilav Kučera to the State Jewish Museum, (10 May 1979). JM-PP inventory no. 17, carton 5, folder "1977-1979."

individual gravestones.⁷⁵ A handwritten note can be found on a copy of the cemetery proposal from the late-1970s, alongside text referring to the original commission established in 1973. It reads, “does not function.”⁷⁶

The Re-Establishment of the Cemetery Commission

It took until 1983 for Bohumil Heller to reassert the prerogative of the CJRC to oversee the management and destruction of the Czech-Jewish cemeteries. That February, after a “lively discussion,” the CJRC presidium voted unanimously to (re-)establish a central cemetery commission and an associated centralized account to facilitate the dismantling of Jewish cemeteries, the sale of their land and valuable stones, and the allocation of the income thereby accrued to the maintenance of “active” cemeteries. Immediately after the vote, the CJRC presidium charged the constituent communities with submitting proposals for dismantling “those cemeteries, which are in their property, but are not used... and are in a desolate state.”⁷⁷ The

⁷⁵ Some Jewish citizens likely supported the plan. Max Kalina wrote a letter of concern to *Věstník* about the state of the Jewish cemetery in Domažlice, where he had buried his sister. He predicted the disappearance of that and similar “country cemeteries” within ten or twenty years, with the passing of his generation. In Kalina’s subsequent correspondence with the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň, which administered Domažlice, he advocated for the cemetery to be dismantled on the terms set forth by the CJRC. Indeed, the extent to which Kalina echoed the voices of the CJRC leadership leads me to suspect that they had a hand in coordinating his interaction with their subordinates in Plzeň. Letter from Kalina to *Věstník* (19 July 1972); and letter from Kalina to the Plzeň community (26 September 1972). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6, folder, “1972.”

⁷⁶ “Návrh na úpravu židovských hřbitovů v českých krajích” [Proposal for the modification of the Jewish cemeteries in the Czech lands], 2.

⁷⁷ Artur Radvanský, “Zápis ze slavnostního zasedání presidia RŽNO a reprezentace pražské ŽNO, rozšířeného o některé funkcionáře a zaměstnance ŽNO a RŽNO, konaného dne 24.2.1983” [Minutes from the celebratory meeting of the presidium of the CJRC the representation of the [Prague community], augmented by a few functionaries and employees of the [community] and the CJRC, taking place on 24 February 1983]. NAČR, SPVC box 231. An internal memo from the Ministry of Culture suggests that the CJRC established its cemetery commission in 1984, rather than 1983. This is likely an error, but may also reflect the slow pace of institutional work

primary motivation for this latest CJRC-sponsored survey was, for the first time, destruction rather than preservation. Indeed, although Heller portrayed the new commission as the fulfillment of plans laid in 1977, the character of its mission had changed radically and reflected a new, more pessimistic outlook on the future. Only active and the most historically significant cemeteries were to survive.

Heller invited the president of each community to sit on the commission, which he chaired, along with a representative from the college of clerics and Arthur Radvanský, the general secretary of the CJRC. Though sparse, the archival record suggests that the cemetery commission succeeded to some degree in taking control over cemetery “liquidations” across the Bohemia and Moravia and in ensuring that they proceeded at a considerable pace. By February 1985, after just two years of operation, the CJRC’s cemetery account had swelled to nearly one-million crowns. It added another quarter-million in the thirteen months that followed.⁷⁸ The CJRC jealously guarded its new income and also sought additional revenue streams. In May 1986, the commission ruled that it would not allocate money to individual communities for the maintenance of their cemeteries. Not only did this help to retain money in the commission’s account, but it also ensured that more cemetery “liquidations” would follow.⁷⁹

Tensions between the Communities and the State Administration

The centralization of cemetery destructions and sales increased tensions both between the

at the CJRC. Memo by Jung (6 May 1985), in folder labeled, “Bývalé židovské hřbitovy-návrh na opatření” [Former Jewish cemeteries - proposal for measures]. NAČR, SPVC box 234.

⁷⁸ “Zasedání hřbitovní komise z 27.2.1985” [Meeting of the cemetery commission from 27 February 1985]. JM-PP inventory no. 71, carton 66; and Artur Radvanský, “Zápis ze schůze hřbitovné komise konané 14.5.1986” [Minutes from the meeting of the cemetery commission taking place on 14 May 1986]. NAČR, SPVC box 234.

⁷⁹ Radvanský, “Zápis ze schůze hřbitovné komise konané 14.5.1986” [Minutes from the meeting of the cemetery commission taking place on 14 May 1986].

communities and the authorities and within the communities themselves. Once the national committees learned that the CJRC had established a cemetery fund, some stopped allocating money to individual communities for cemetery repair.⁸⁰ It behooved the local authorities seek funds from the CJRC, rather than to spend their own limited resources. At the same time, the national committees continued to pressure the Jewish communities to repair the cemeteries under their purview.

In some cases, the state conservation authorities added to this pressure. In September 1985, for example, the regional conservation authorities in Plzeň reminded the Jewish community there that it stood in violation of the law by not tending to the historically significant cemeteries in Sušice, Švihov, Blovice, and Kolinec.⁸¹ Earlier that year, the Jewish community had, in fact, requested to remove a number of its cemeteries from the list of protected sites, including the one in Blovice. Without state support, which was not forthcoming, it lacked the funds to make the necessary repairs and hoped to turn the cemeteries over to the state, perhaps for a profit. The Ministry of Culture refused to acquiesce to the community's request, however, in light of objections levied by the State Jewish Museum.⁸² In contrast to the communities, it cost the museum nothing to demand the preservation of particular Jewish heritage sites.

The museum's involvement, however, did not always work in the favor of the cemeteries. Until the 1970s, the historical preservation laws generally functioned to protect entire cemeteries. With the advent of community-driven cemetery demolitions, however, the museum's experts

⁸⁰ "Zápis ze schůze hřbitovní komise konané dne 23.7.1985" [Minutes from the meeting of the cemetery commission occurring on 23 July 1985].

⁸¹ Letter from Krajské středisko státní péče a ochrany přírody v Plzni [The Regional Center of State Care and Defense of Nature in Plzeň] to the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň (17 September 1985). JM-PP inventory no. 73, carton 66.

⁸² "Záznam" [Memo] (16 April 1985) in folder labeled, "Bývalé židovské hřbitovy-návrh na opatření" [Former Jewish cemeteries - proposal for measures].

took on a new role. They participated in the process of selecting the gravestones to be preserved upon the destruction of cemeteries and the sale of their materially valuable gravestones for re-use. This represented a subtle policy shift, in times of extreme pressure, whereby conservational protection no longer adhered to entire cemeteries, but rather to individual stones. The State Jewish Museum, nonetheless, still stood out as the primary defender of Jewish heritage sites during the 1980s.

Jewish community leaders thus found themselves in an impossible situation. Local and regional authorities, with ministerial support, demanded action. Yet neither the central authorities nor local functionaries allocated sufficient funds to the communities for them to comply. Preventing the communities from removing their cemeteries from the list of protected sites only perpetuated this dilemma. It drove some community leaders to seek clandestine and semi-legal means for resolving cemetery related problems. And this caused tremendous tensions within the communities.

Competition and Theft Divide the CJRC and the Prague Community

The greatest of intra-communal tensions emerged between the CJRC and the Prague community. Indeed, to the exclusion of the other communities, the CJRC presidium only invited its representation from Prague to participate in the 1983 meeting at which it established the cemetery commission. I would tentatively attribute the delay in the establishment of the centralized system to resistance from Prague, in addition to the other factors discussed above. Yet resistance and financial competition from Prague also provided the impetus for the CJRC to strive for greater control over affairs at the national level. Budgetary reports suggests that the two bodies eventually reached a compromise. The CJRC made special (and undisclosed)

arrangements for the Prague community to retain a good percentage of the money that it accrued from cemetery sales, even after a national system had been put into place.⁸³

The Prague leadership had reason to resist the formation of a centralized system for managing cemetery affairs. After taking the place of the Plzeň community, in 1976, as the community responsible for administering the Jewish properties in the Southern Bohemian Region, the Prague community had come to oversee roughly 160 cemeteries, which corresponded to nearly one-half of the Jewish cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia.⁸⁴ The relative size (1,000 members), wealth, and institutional capacity of the Prague community, particularly in comparison with its counterparts across the region, enabled its leadership to care for many of the cemeteries under its watch.⁸⁵ As late as 1986, despite its own flagging capacity due to an aging membership, the Prague community still arranged for perpetual supervision at one-fifth of its cemeteries.⁸⁶ In 1988, the community paid honoraria to caretakers at twenty-three of them.⁸⁷ The

⁸³ Letter from Prague community president Rudolf Gibian to the CJRC (12 May 1987). ŽNO binder 2. In 1985, the Prague community turned over only 55,000 of the 97,000 crowns that it had acquired through the sale of gravestones. The following year, it transferred only 40,000 of the 75,577 that it had earned. Prague officially retained some of the funds in order to repair the roof on the Old-New Synagogue, as demanded by the state authorities. Yet the Prague community also requested and received an additional 120,000 crowns from the CJRC cemetery commission for that purpose in 1985. I have found no records to suggest how Prague allocated the rest of the funds that it was allowed to retain. “Zápis ze schůze Reprezentace Židovské náboženské obce v Praze, konané dne 22. května 1985 v Praze 1, Maislova u. č. 18” [Minutes from the meeting of the representation of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague occurring on 22 May 1985 in Prague 1, Maislova Street 18]. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

⁸⁴ On the transfer of administrative responsibilities, see the collection of documents in the folder labeled “Synagogání sbory v jihočeském kraji” [The Synagogue Congregations in the Southern Bohemian Region] (10 January 1977). NAČR, SPVC box 234. In 1985 there were roughly fifty cemeteries in the Southern Bohemian Region. See “Zápis ze schůze hřbitovní komise konané dne 23.7.1985” [Minutes from the meeting of the cemetery commission occurring on 23 July 1985].

⁸⁵ For the number of members in the Prague community, see the list in the folder labeled “Seznam členů” [List of members]. ŽNO package 11b.

⁸⁶ “Zápis ze schůze reprezentace Židovské náboženské obce v Praze konané dne 11. června 1986 v Praze 1, Maislova ul. 18” [Minutes from the meeting of the representation of the Jewish

overall state of Prague's cemeteries was nonetheless deplorable. Upon his retirement in 1987, community president Rudolf Gibian reported that only 10% of the cemeteries under Prague's administration were in "an acceptable state."⁸⁸ The community's proximity to the central authorities and its location in a touristic destination introduced additional tension into the vexing problems posed by the cemeteries. The Prague Jewish leadership worried that the establishment of a national system for managing cemetery affairs would disproportionately favor smaller communities, which they expected would draw more funds from the centralized cemetery account than they contributed. Indeed, the Prague leadership balked repeatedly at the annual, per-community withdrawal limit of 250,000 crowns imposed by the CJRC.⁸⁹

I would suggest that another reason why some Prague leaders resisted the establishment of a centralized system for managing cemeteries affairs was that they feared that it would expose their unscrupulous handling of the cemeteries that they administered. In 2008, Jaroslav Spurný exposed a number of such cases in the monthly newsletter of the Federation of the Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic.⁹⁰ Therein, he only told part of the story of the Jewish cemetery in Křinenc, which dates from 1724.

In the mid-1970s, the Jewish community in Prague recorded that the Křinec cemetery was in good condition. It nonetheless made some repairs to it in 1977 and entered into an agreement with the local national committee to undertake additional repairs in 1979 and 1980.

Religious Community in Prague occurring on 11 June 1986 in Prague 1, Maislova Street 18]. ŽNO binder 6.

⁸⁷ Pojer, "Zápis o provedení kontroly o stavu hřbitovů spravovaných ŽNO Praha a způsobu agendy" [Minutes of executing an audit of the condition of the cemeteries administered by the Jewish Religious Community in Prague and the form of its agenda].

⁸⁸ Rudolf Gibian, "Předávací protokol" [Transfer report]. ŽNO binder 6.

⁸⁹ For example, see "Zápis ze schůze vedení Židovské náboženské obce v Praze, konané dne 23.4.1987" [Minutes from the meeting of the Prague Jewish Religious Community occurring on 23 April 1987]. ŽNO binder 2.

⁹⁰ Spurný, "A nikdo se neptal ani pozůstalých" [And no one even asked the bereaved], 6-9.

One year later, however, the national committee complained to the community that unknown foreigners had taken pictures of the cemetery, which was “in a state of disrepair.” The committee worried that the photographs might appear in Western propaganda. Rather than repairing the cemetery as he had initially promised, Rudolf Gibian, the president of the Prague community, offered it to the local national committee for purchase. When they declined, he sold its most valuable stones to the Štuko collective, which regularly partnered with the Jewish communities in dismantling cemeteries. Gibian failed to seek permission from the conservation authorities and from the community’s ritual committee. He even neglected to announce the demolition in *Věstník*. Two years later, in 1983, Gibian reported that someone had stolen the best stones from the cemetery and thereby convinced the community to sell the grounds to a private individual for just over 10,000 crowns. The community only discovered his subterfuge in 1987, when the purchaser attempted to sell the property back to the community.⁹¹

Spurný also reports that in 1982, Gibian initiated the “liquidation” of the cemetery in Mnichovo Hradiště and the sale of its most valuable stones, once again, without the permission and without an announcement in *Věstník*.⁹² In early February 1989, an individual visited the offices of the Prague community and demanded that they return to him the 5,036.65 crowns that he had paid Gibian for the stones, which he claimed never to have received. Of course, Gibian denied any wrongdoing and questioned why the man had shown up seven years after the purported sale.⁹³ This, however, would not be the last time that Gibian would switch buyers

⁹¹ Ibid., 8; and letter from Jan Placák to the Jewish Religious Community in Prague (30 November 1987) and Wolfová, “Zpráva o hřbitovu Křinec” [Report on the cemetery in Křinec] (1 March 1988). ŽNO package 11b.

⁹² Spurný, “A nikdo se neptal ani pozůstalých” [And no one even asked the bereaved], 8-9.

⁹³ Letter from Jiří Slánský to Rudolf Gibian and Zdeněk Taussig (21 February 1989); and response from Gibian (28 February 1989). ŽNO binder 7.

under suspicious circumstances.⁹⁴

Gibian, indeed, seems to have profited significantly from the cemetery problem—and not only from domestic sources. In late 1983, he sent letters to five individuals in West Germany, Canada, and the USA. He requested that they contribute financially towards the maintenance of the cemetery in Strakonice, where some of their close relatives had been buried. He further requested that they send their

check directly to his address [i.e., in his name], since a check addressed to the Jewish religious community would be honored at unfavorable exchange rate.⁹⁵

This may have been the case, but in the context of Gibian's other dealings, it raises serious suspicions. This is particularly true in light of the fact that Ministry of Culture had vested the CJRC alone with the prerogative to engage in international relations. Gibian represented only the Prague community.⁹⁶

This window into Gibian's conduct may help explain why he resisted the CJRC's repeated demand that the Prague community form a lay cemetery commission of its own, as had been required of every community. Complying would have made it difficult for Gibian (and for whomever may have been working with him) to conceal his misdeeds. Gibian insisted, therefore, that only paid community professionals (under his direction) handle cemetery related affairs for Prague. Pressure mounted against Gibian in late-1986, after Bohumil Heller ascended to the position of CJRC chair. That same year, Rabbi Daniel Mayer, who had been serving the community since 1984, sided openly with Heller in pressuring Prague to form a commission, as

⁹⁴ See the case of Běleč in Spurný, "A nikdo se neptal ani pozůstalých" [And no one even asked the bereaved], 7.

⁹⁵ Letters from Rudolf Gibian to Jiří and Karel Ehrmann (27 October 1983); to Irena Masurová (2 November 1983); to Renée J. Newmann (2 November 1983); and to R. J. Menkart (8 November 1983). ŽNO binder 4.

⁹⁶ CJRC, "Oběžník všem ŽNO" [A circular for all of the Jewish Religious Communities] (16 December 1977). JM-PP Inventory no.18, carton 5.

did other members of the Prague board.⁹⁷

Gibian attempted to defend himself as the opposition mounted. As of November 1986, he resigned from the vice presidency of the CJRC, explaining that “he lacked the created conditions for carrying out his function.”⁹⁸ On 12 May 1987, Gibian once again refused Heller’s demands, which the latter had reissued one month hence.⁹⁹ In June 1987, nonetheless, the Prague leadership ordered Gibian to initiate meetings to move forward with the establishment of a lay cemetery commission for their community. They took additional steps in that direction at a meeting the following month.¹⁰⁰ Still, Gibian would not be deterred. In August 1987, he suggested to Heller that the CJRC once again attempt to transfer the ownership of their inactive cemeteries to the national-committee system.¹⁰¹ He also tried to marginalize Rabbi Mayer, who had by then proven himself to be an able defender of cemeteries. Gibian suggested to Heller that he raise the statuses of Cantors Feuerlicht and Neufeld to “rabbi” and, thereby, transform the college of clerics into a college of rabbis. Gibian further envisioned vesting Feuerlicht with authority over Prague and placing the Mayer in charge of the communities in Ústí nad Labem

⁹⁷ František Kraus, “Zápis ze schůze představenstvo RŽNO koané 17.12.1986 v zas. síni ŽNO” [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC occurring on 17 December 1986 in the meeting hall of the Jewish Religious Community (in Prague)]. ŽNO bundled files 28.

⁹⁸ Zdeněk Taussig, “Zápis ze schůze reprezentace Židovské náboženské obce v Praze konané dne 19. listopadu 1986 v Praze 1, Maislova ul. 18” [Minutes of the meeting of the representation of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague occurring on 19 November 1986 in Prague 1, Maislova Street 18], 1. ŽNO package 11b.

⁹⁹ Letter from Heller to the presidents of the Bohemian and Moravian Jewish communities (8 April 1987); and Gibian’s response (12 May 1987). ŽNO binder 2

¹⁰⁰ Zdeněk Taussig, “Zápis ze schůze vedení Židovské náboženské obce v Praze, konané dne 24.6.1987” [Minutes of the meeting of the leadership of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague occurring on 24 June 1987]. ŽNO binder 2.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Gibian to Heller, “Věc: Předvedení konfesních pohřebišť do správy MNV” [The transfer of confessional burial grounds to the administration of the local national committees]. ŽNO binder 2.

and Plzeň.¹⁰²

In the end, Gibian lost. The Prague leadership accepted his resignation from the position of president on 11 November 1987.¹⁰³ Just four months later, the Křinec affair came to light. Then, in October 1988, the Prague leadership officially established its own cemetery commission and account.¹⁰⁴ Gibian, meanwhile, entered into semi-retirement as the caretaker of the active Jewish cemetery in the Strašnice neighborhood of Prague.

Managing Rising Dissent with the Communities

The unilateral centralization of cemetery affairs by the CJRC, the rise in cemetery “liquidations” in the 1970s and 1980s, and rumors of Gibian’s unscrupulous dealings incited dissent within quarters of the Jewish community and beyond. In 1986, for example, representatives of the synagogue congregations in the Southern Bohemian Region requested, unsuccessfully, that the CJRC return their region to the administration of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň.¹⁰⁵ To be fair, it seems that Prague had grown infamous under Gibian’s presidency. The motivating factors behind this request may have extended well beyond the sphere of Jewish property relations.

Individual community members also expressed opposition to the demolition and sale of

¹⁰² Letter from Gibian to Heller (24 August 1987). ŽNO package 11b. Gibian had already worked with both of those cantors on cemetery matters. To be clear, I have found no indication whatsoever that either Feuerlicht or Neufeld participated in Gibian’s schemes.

¹⁰³ Zdeněk Taussig, “Zápis ze schůze reprezentace Židovské náboženské obce v Praze konané dne 11. listopadu 1987 v Praze 1, Maislova ul. 18” [Minutes from the meeting of the representation of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague occurring on 11 November 1987 in Prague, Maislova Street 18]. ŽNO binder 6.

¹⁰⁴ Artur Radvanský, “Hřbitovný komise” [Cemetery commission] (5 October 1988). ŽNO binder 3.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Gibian to the CJRC (14 January 1986); and response from Heller, “Věc: převedení jihočeského kraje pod správu ŽNO Plzeň” [Re: transferring the Southern Bohemian Region under the administration of the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň]. ŽNO binder 2.

Jewish properties, particularly those associated with cemeteries. Indeed, while the CJRC slowly embraced the idea of collaborating in the dismantling of cemeteries, the members of its subordinate communities expressed considerable outrage about it. Not all dissidents expressed themselves vituperatively. In 1987, a man who had buried his parents, grandparents, and sister in the new cemetery in Kolín, responded to an announcement in *Věstník* regarding its imminent destruction. In a letter to Rabbi Mayer, he wrote,

I am, myself, nearing the eightieth year of my life and I believe that the noted decision will touch all [Holocaust survivors] very painfully. I beg you, therefore, that on the occasion of a relevant meeting, you use all of your influence to avoid the liquidation of the cemetery.¹⁰⁶

The rabbi received a number of similar letters.¹⁰⁷

Bohumil Heller took such sentiments into account when he spoke with the presidents of the CJRC's subsidiary communities. On 27 February 1985, he explained,

that the liquidation of cemeteries will only be carried out a case of public interest or in a case of devastation. The community to which [the cemetery] belongs will discuss every liquidation with the local, city, or county national committees.¹⁰⁸

Heller also assured those in attendance that the CJRC's priority would be to ensure that the demolished cemetery grounds would “undergo a reverent conversion into a park.”¹⁰⁹

Five months later, Heller once again addressed the presidents' trepidation. He explained,

It would be absurd to want to maintain all of the cemeteries at all costs; for that, neither the Jewish communities nor the CJRC has sufficient financial resources. It is necessary to start out from the condition and significance of a [given] cemetery. At the same time, of course, [it is also necessary] to weigh even the possibility of the theft of gravestones. The point is for every religious community to try to maintain its properties and to liquidate cemeteries only in extreme cases; and to donate the funds accrued [thereby] to the

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Robert Orlický to Rabbi Daniel Mayer (2 April 1986). ŽNO package 11b. Orlický misdated his letter. Based upon the content, he had to have written it in 1987.

¹⁰⁷ See collection of letters in ŽNO package 11b.

¹⁰⁸ Artur Radvanský, “Zasedání hřbitovní komise z 27.2.1985” [Meeting of the cemetery commission from 27 February 1985]. JM-PP inventory no. 71, carton 66.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

cemetery account. Everyone knows that construction investments are extremely costly a [that] they have a tendency to increase [emphasis added].¹¹⁰

Thus did Heller try to convince the community presidents of the necessity and fairness of the ongoing cemetery liquidations.

Mr. Grünberger, who assumed control over the CJRC's cemetery commission in July 1985, sought, at a meeting one year later, to lead the community presidents in mitigating dissent among their constituents.¹¹¹ Rather than minimize the extent of the liquidations that he knew would follow, Grünberger sought to divert the dissident's anger from the state and, by extension, from the Jewish leadership as well. He reminded them of the Nazi genocide, which had caused the cemetery issues in the first place. He then attributed the successful reemergence of the Jewish communities in the Czech lands to socialism and recalled the Jewish injunction to follow the laws of the land. Grünberger continued,

I am fully convinced and my forty years of experience in different functions confirm for me that in this period and even in our work - I mean for the benefit of the Jewish religious community - we no longer have to fear presenting ourselves as Jews. This particularly concerns the fact that in procuring any of our needs from state and social organizations, we do not give up hope without trying all of the options at our disposal, simply because we are Jews and are working on something for the Jewish religious community. Also we should not excuse our failures simply [by citing] the unwillingness of offices and organizations to deal with the Jewish problem. Believe [me] that I have [heard such things] in communication with some of our coreligionists in different places in the Republic and so too in [Slovakia]. I apologize for this, my introduction, but our activities will never be successful if we do not rid ourselves of defeatism.¹¹²

Like other, but certainly not all Holocaust survivors who had come to lead the postwar Jewish communities, Grünberger feared the power of the state and its potential to manifest in

¹¹⁰ Grünberg and Černá, "Zápis ze schůze hřbitovní komise konané dne 23.7.1985" [Minutes of the meeting of the cemetery commission occurring on 23 July 1985], 1. JM-PP inventory no. 71, carton 66.

¹¹¹ On the transfer of responsibilities see, *ibid.*, 1.

¹¹² Grünberger's speech attached to "Zápis ze schůze hřbitovní komise konané 14.5.1986" [Minutes of the meeting of the cemetery commission occurring on 14 May 1986], 1. JM-PP inventory no. 71, carton 66.

antisemitism. If he was indeed grateful for the late-communist *status quo*, he and his ilk were even more interested in ensuring that it did not worsen. This depended upon the maintenance of friendly relations with the state and upon the willingness of the communities to make the best out of any given situation.

The Fall of a Former President and the Prevailing Politics of the Jewish Leadership

Despite Grünberger's protests, "defeatism" was actually fundamental to the politics of the CJRC and Prague community leadership during the late 1980s. It, above all else, explains their collaboration in the destruction of the cemeteries, the independent initiatives they took to that end, their occasional callousness in responding to those who objected, and even Gibian's unscrupulous profiteering. While community members and others, both at home and abroad, protested on moral and sentimental grounds, the Czech Jewish leadership of the 1970s and 1980s had to make difficult political and economic choices, within a highly restricted field of action. Daily, they confronted a legacy of genocide and the persistent ambivalence about Jews at all levels of state and party administration.

This reflected most clearly in the 1985 protest of Mr. Roná, a member of the Prague community's representation to the CJRC. On the occasion of new elections, he spoke at length to criticize the activities and orientation of his community. Roná's two main lines of criticism, regarding the leadership's avarice (in accepting unnecessary charity from Western Jewry) and its disregard for the Jewish religion, coincided in his discussion of the cemeteries.¹¹³ He

¹¹³ Roná took particular aim at Gibian, who allegedly received 900 *tuzex*-crowns (dollar equivalents for use in special stores) as an honorarium for his service as the lay president of the Prague community. Roná, "Diskuzní příspěvek na schůze reprezentace Pražské ŽNO dne 22.5.1985" [Contribution to the discussion at the meeting of the representation of the Prague Jewish Religious Community occurring on 22 May 1985]. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

introduced his comments by reiterating seven demands, which he purported to have made throughout the preceding years. Roná had “stood against the sale of gravestones from our cemeteries, because our laws forbid it.”¹¹⁴

Roná then recounted a conversation with Gibian, in which the latter had rebuffed his demands. “He said to me,” Roná claimed,

that I am one of those [naïve ones] and that the community here in Prague will anyhow die out one day and everything will belong to the State Jewish Museum.

Roná then publicly reiterated his reply to Gibian,

I am in the end grateful to the State Jewish Museum that it is here, because if it depended upon the Jews who remained here, they might have even sold off [the gravestones of rabbis Landau, Rapaport, and Löw, which Roná claimed would still attract Jewish visitors from around the world, even after the disappearance of the Czech Jewish community]!¹¹⁵

Roná’s comments drew sharp criticism from many, including Grünberger, Desider Galský, the CJRC’s president, and even from the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs.¹¹⁶

Gibian’s remarks, to the extent that they may be trusted as reported, reveal an important and often neglected factor in considering the political and economic calculus of the Czech Jewish

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1. Roná also deplored the practice of cremation among community members. The practice of cremation caused fissures within Central European Jewish communities in the early twentieth century. The new Jewish cemetery in Prague has a separate, walled-off section for the burial of urns from that period. My impression is that that cremation gained in popularity among Czech Jews after the Second World War due to acculturation, rising atheism, and the additional costs associated with corporeal burial. On the cremation debates, see Adam S. Fertziger, “Ashes to Outcasts: Cremation, Jewish Law, and Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Germany,” *AJS Review*, vol. 36, no. 1 (April 2012): 71-102.

¹¹⁵ Roná may not have known of State Jewish Museum’s participation in the demolition of Jewish cemeteries and the sale of Jewish gravestones. Roná, “Diskuzní příspěvek na schůze reprezentace” [Contribution to the discussion at the meeting of the representation], 3. Blanka Soukupová cites this exchange in “Stát jako jeden z determinantů” [The state as one determining factor], 48.

¹¹⁶ Josef Junga, “Záznam ze schůze představenstva židovské náb. obce v Praze dne 22.5.1985” [Memorandum from the meeting of the presidium of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague on 22 May 1985] (23 May 1985), 2. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

leadership during the 1980s. Many of functionaries believed that they represented the last generations of Czech Jewry. They foresaw the immanent dissolution of their communities, and they administered them with that future (or lack thereof) in mind. I believe that Gibian's prediction that everything would fall to the State Jewish Museum was optimistic in his mind. He and the rest of the Jewish leadership experienced daily pressure from national committees around the country to dismantle Jewish cemeteries. If, by the 1980s, the central authorities had already ceased protecting them, it stood to reason that the cemeteries would not persist long after the disappearance of an active and organized Jewish community. This is why Zdeněk Taussig, chair of the Prague community, suggested to the CJRC cemetery commission that "Our aim should minimally be to preserve one cemetery in each county, in order to document the past: that there were Jewish settlements in the counties."¹¹⁷

Such pessimism may not excuse Gibian's actions, but it does cast a new light upon them. Like his colleagues who sat on the CJRC's cemetery commission, Gibian considered the "liquidation" of the majority of the Jewish cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia to have been immediately inevitable. He simply sought to enjoy the fruits of their destruction, the legacy of 1,000 years of Jewish settlement in the region, before everything fell to non-Jewish hands. This rang consonant, in a way, with the acceptance of financial support from foreign Jewish donors. What set Gibian (and his collaborators) apart, was that he resorted to theft in order to improve his own lot at the expense of the very community that he purported to serve.¹¹⁸ His actions may well

¹¹⁷ "Zápis ze schůze hřbitovní komise konané dne 23.7.1985" [Minutes from the meeting of the cemetery commission occurring on 23 July 1985], 1.

¹¹⁸ Jaroslav Spurný implicates František Kraus, the erstwhile secretary general of the Prague community, in the Mnichovo Hradiště case. Spurný, indeed, assumes the collaboration and collective guilt of Bohumil Heller, František Kraus, Zdeněk Taussig, and Rudolf Gibian in the instances of corruption that he reveals. When contacted for an interview by Spurný, Kraus blamed the cemetery demolitions and sales on the the national committees. As a former CJRC

have been motivated by the underlying ethos of a then common Czechoslovak aphorism, “Whoever does not steal from the state, steals from his own family.”¹¹⁹

Gibian’s excesses caught up with him in late 1988. In August, Jiří Slánský, the executive vice president of the Prague community, wrote to him about “the loss or theft, as the case may be, of gravestones” at the active Jewish cemetery in Prague, where Gibian served as caretaker. Slánský suggested implementing more security measures.¹²⁰ Sometime shortly thereafter, however, a private citizen reported the missing stones to the community. This, in turn, led the leadership to file a police report in October and to launch an internal audit.¹²¹ Once the public had taken interest, the leadership had to follow official protocol.

On 2 November 1988, Slánský responded to the audit. He found Gibian’s comments to have been “too general” and called a meeting of the CJRC and Prague leadership to discuss the matter further.¹²² Unsurprisingly, just five days later, Gibian resigned from all of his remaining functions at the Prague community and the CJRC, including from his role as cemetery

official, he also denied any knowledge of how the Prague community spent the money it had earned through the sale of gravestones. Taussig denied any involvement in the unscrupulous dealings that Spurný describes. Spurný, “A nikdo se neptal ani pozůstalých” [And no one even asked the bereaved], 8-9.

¹¹⁹ Petra Schindler-Wisten, “‘Kdo neokrádá stát, okrádá rodinu’: Rodina v komunistickém Československu” [“Whoever does not steal from the state, steals from his family:” family in communist Czechoslovakia], in *Obyčejní lidé...?! Pohled do života tzv. mlčící většiny, životopisná vyprávění příslušníků dělných profesí a inteligence* [Ordinary people...?!: A look into the lives of the so-called silent majority, the autobiographical accounts of members of the laboring professions and the intelligentsia], ed. Miroslav Vaněk, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Prague, Czech Republic: Academia, 2009), 357-397.

¹²⁰ Letter from Slánský to Gibian, “Bezpečnostní opatření pro ochranu hřbitovného majetku” [Security measures for the protection of cemetery property] (28 August 1988). ŽNO binder 3.

¹²¹ Local division of Public Safety, Jarov, “Usnesení” [Ruling], document ČVS: VB 680/PS-2-68 (22 December 1988). ŽNO binder 3.

¹²² Letter from Slánský to Miroslav Mosler, the president of the audit commission of the CJRC (2 November 1988). ŽNO package 11b.

caretaker.¹²³ When the CJRC presidium met on 17 November, Slánský discussed the aforementioned report and explained that Gibian had retired “on the condition that nothing further would be undertaken against [him].”¹²⁴

This decision did not please everyone. On 30 November, at a meeting of the Prague representation to the CJRC, Misters Roná and Meisl offered new information regarding the incident at the cemetery, which both had investigated. The former noted a opening in the cemetery’s rear wall which offered unfettered access. The latter “warned of the interesting circumstance that most of the stolen gravestones were made from [commercially valuable] Swedish granite.”¹²⁵ These findings, along with Gibian’s history of selling expensive gravestones for profit, strongly suggested criminal activity on his part. Fortunately for Gibian, the police concluded that “no traces or signs had been found that would suggest the manipulation or theft of gravestones.”¹²⁶ This blatantly contradicted evidence from the CJRC’s internal audit.¹²⁷ How the police reached this conclusion, then, and why they closed their file is open to interpretation. Neither the Jewish community nor party-state officials enjoyed (potentially international) scandals which reflected poorly upon Jewish-state relations. In Chapter Nine, I suggest that the

¹²³ Jiří Slánský, “Zápis z porady vedení, která se konala dne 9.11.1988” [Minutes of the meeting of the directorate that occurred on 9 November 1988], 2. ŽNO binder 8.

¹²⁴ František Kraus, “Zápis z jednání presidia Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR, které se konalo dne 17.11.1988 v 10.00 hodin v kanceláři předsedy Rady” [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the (CJRC) that took place on 17 November 1988 at 10.00AM in the office of the president of the Council] (18 November 1988), 2. NAČR, SPVC box 231. There was disagreement over the status of some movable property that belonged to the community, which had been and still remained in Gibian’s hands.

¹²⁵ “Zápis ze schůze reprezentace ŽNO Praha, konané dne 30.11.1988” [Minutes from the meeting of the representation of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, occurring on 30 November 1988]. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

¹²⁶ Local division of Public Safety, Jarov, “Usnesení” [Ruling], document ČVS: VB 680/PS-2-68 (22 December 1988). ŽNO binder 3.

¹²⁷ Collection of reports from August through October 1988 in NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, unsorted, církv. odbor RŽNO 1988 - činnost.

StB may have arranged the entire affair in order to unseat Gibian, whom they did not consider reliable.

Factors that Determined the Survival of Individual Cemeteries

Within the context just presented four factors determined whether or not a given cemetery survived.¹²⁸ The actions taken by individuals in various positions was the most significant of

¹²⁸ Factors that in no way helped, but might have, had communist rule not ended in 1989, included: a new law regarding the preservation of monuments passed in 1987, a protest letter issued by the leading Czech dissident group, Charter-77, and a major change in attitude at the CJRC and the Prague community in late 1988 and 1989.

On the new law see Gruber and Myers, *Survey of Historic Monuments*, 64-67. The leaders of the Prague community welcomed the legislation and called upon its members to assist in gathering information about their cemeteries. Pojer, “Zápis o provedení kontroly o stavu hřbitovů spravovaných ŽNO Praha a způsobu agendy” [Minutes of executing an audit of the condition of the cemeteries administered by the Jewish Religious Community in Prague and the form of its agenda]; and Jiří Slánský, “Informace pro členy Repräsentace ŽNO Praha” [Information for the members of the representation (of the Prague community)] (18 April 1988). ŽNO package 11b. For a copy of the protest letter see, Charter 77, “The Tragedy of the Jews in Post-War Czechoslovakia, document no. 29/1989” (5 April 1989), trans. Peter Brod, in Peter Brod “Czechoslovakia: Jewish Legacy and Jewish Present,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1990): 58-65.

In 1989, the CJRC requested and received permission from the Ministry of Culture to publish English and Czech versions of Jiří Fiedler’s manuscript, *A Small guidebook for the Jewish Monuments of the Czech Socialist Republic (Malý průvodce po židovských památkách ČSR)*. This was one of the most important indications of the changing attitudes at the CJRC. More precisely, it represented the most relevant attempt on the part of the CJRC’s top functionaries to accommodate the major shifts in popular Jewish (and non-Jewish) political culture during the late-1980s.

For years, Jiří Fiedler had taken it upon himself to document Jewish heritage sites throughout Bohemia and Moravia. He frequently submitted articles to *Věstník* based upon his travels, studies, and discoveries. On 25 November 1987, after coming into possession of Fiedler’s backpack, which revealed his hobby, StB agents accused Fiedler of Zionism and proceeded to interrogate him about his religious convictions and whether he was “of Jewish origin.” Fiedler refused to answer the questions on moral and legal grounds. Upon his release, he sent informational letters of protest to the CJRC, the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, and Rabbi Daniel Mayer. In response, the Bohumil Heller and František Kraus accused Fiedler of “attempting to stir up in [Czechoslovakia] a campaign against the Czechoslovak state organs and, through that medium, against the entire Czechoslovak political system.” In January of the following year, the presidium of the CJRC resolved to distance themselves from Fiedler’s protest

them. The definitive role played by the national committees has already been noted. When they could not be counted upon, it helped tremendously when individuals, organizations, or churches took responsibility for a cemetery. The Nýrsko chapter of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters seems to have assisted in the preservation of the town's Jewish cemetery.¹²⁹ The Jewish communities sought out such assistance and offered what they could in return. In 1974 and 1975, for example, the Plzeň community offered two different hunters' collectives the right to raise birds on the unused portions of the Jewish cemetery in Velká Hleďsebe u Mariánské Lázně, and also to use a building thereupon, on the condition that they maintained the rest of the cemetery.¹³⁰ Unfortunately, the communities lacked the power to enforce such arrangements. As one official from Plzeň explained in 1970 "At the meetings regarding purchases, everyone promises mountains and mines [e.g., "heaven and Earth"]. Then they erect little houses on our cemeteries, establish farms, and only look after their own interests."¹³¹ Or, more succinctly in

and suggested that he be prevented from publishing in *Věstník*. In personal communication with me, in 2010-2011, Fiedler recalled that Kraus shook with anger upon receiving his letter and yelled threatening remarks about him throughout the building of the Jewish community. Less than a year later, Kraus requested a subvention from the Ministry of Culture to publish Fiedler's book. Times had changed. Then communism fell. On publishing Fiedler's book and the subvention request, see the letter from František Kraus to Mr. Holub at the Ministry of Culture, "Věc: Posouzení rukopisu" [Re: The evaluation of a manuscript (13 April 1989). On Fiedler's arrest and the response of the CJRC, see letter from Fiedler to the CJRC (29 November 1987); and letter from the Kraus to Fiedler (8 December 1987). Archive of the author. On the CJRC's decision to distance itself from Fiedler, see František Kraus, "Zápis z porady presidia RŽNO, které se konalo dne 13.1.1987 v 10.00 hod. v zasedací síni ŽNO Praha" [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC, which occurred on 13 January 1987 at 10:00AM in the meeting hall of the Prague community], 3. ŽNO binder 2.

¹²⁹ "Inspekční cesta a prohlídka hřbitovů v okrese Klatovy" [Inspection trip and examination of the cemeteries in the county of Klatovy] (21 May 1973). JM-PP inventory no. 75, carton 66.

¹³⁰ Letter from the Plzeň community to Myslivecké sdružení (19 November 1974). JM-PP inventory no. 73, carton 66; and letter from the Plzeň community to Myslivecké sdružení Valy (22 January 1975). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 7, folder "1975."

¹³¹ Letter from the Plzeň community to Zdeněk Velmínský (20 October 1970). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6.

1971, “our wishes, in many cases, remain just wishes.”¹³²

Another, small group of individuals may have contributed as well, at least in terms of raising concern among community members about the destruction of their cemeteries. Jiří Fiedler, a Czechoslovak citizen with no familial or religious connections to Judaism, traveled the country (primarily on his bicycle) to document and photograph Jewish sites. He even published articles on their history in *Věstník*. Fiedler was not alone. Hana Slepíčková at the Cheb Museum and Petr Ehl at the State Jewish Museum embarked on similar projects of varying scope.¹³³ Unfortunately, there is no way to gauge the actual effect of their interventions.

The second set of factors that together determined whether a given cemetery might persist through communist rule was its condition and its location relative to an active Jewish community. Jewish communal leaders had a difficult time arguing for the need to preserve cemeteries that had sustained serious damage during the Second World War or even subsequently, at the hands of vandals, thieves, and companies. On the other hand, those cemeteries that lay close to active Jewish communities usually benefited from the attention and sympathies of their members.

The condition of a given cemetery also, in part, determined whether or not the communities would receive compensation for the land in cases of alienation. The communities could often force interested parties pay for well kept cemeteries. In the case of devastated cemeteries, however, they frequently had to cede the grounds to the state for free, in exchange for help clearing the land. This made the sale of gravestones even more urgent in the eyes of

¹³² Letter from the Plzeň community to the County National Committee in Jindřichov Hradec (11 June 1971). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 6.

¹³³ Letter from Slepíčková to the Plzeň community (n.d., post-1985). JM-PP inventory no. 74, carton 66; and letter from CJRC to all of the communities (3 July 1985). JM-PP inventory no. 72, carton 66.

Jewish officials with eyes on the bottom line. All of this further confirms that local cultures mattered significantly to the contours of Jewish-state relations during communist rule, despite the state's pretension to centralized control.

The status of a given cemetery as an object of foreign attention could also lead to its protection. The state understood that the Jewish cemetery in Mikulov was a major tourist attraction. In 1978, just as the CJRC met to establish a commission for liquidating cemeteries, a team of experts from the State Jewish Museum visited Mikulov to ensure, not only the cemetery's survival, but its proper maintenance.¹³⁴ The old Jewish cemetery in Prague benefited from such protection as well. On the other hand, the attempts by the Jewish communities to extend such consideration to other cemeteries often failed. In 1974, the Plzeň community tried to convince the Municipal National Committee in Písek to repair the Jewish cemetery there as a tourist attraction, alongside the city's castle, churches, and non-Jewish cemeteries.¹³⁵ The national committee took no action and the community subsequently dismantled the cemetery.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Vladimír Sadek and Bedřich Nosek, "Zpráva o služební cestě do Mikulova ve dnech 15.-19.5.1978" [Report for the business trip to Mikulov on the days 15 - 19 May 1978] (22 May 1978), in a folder labeled "Žádost o sdělení stanoviska k řešení problematiky židovských památek v Mikulově" [Request for the communication of an opinion regarding solving the problem of the Jewish memorials in Mikulov]. NAČR, SPVC box 234.

¹³⁵ Letter from the Plzeň community to the national committee (7 March 1974). JM-PP inventory no. 72, carton 66.

¹³⁶ Rudolf Gibian received a request in October 1987 from the County Museum in Písek to exhume the body of the poet Richard Weiner (1884-1937), because his "grave might soon disappear under the highway extension [soon to be built]." After Rabbi Mayer conducted a brief ceremony, Weiner's body was reunited with his gravestone in a nearby forest cemetery. No one expressed an interest in showing the same consideration to the other "Jewish" bodies buried in Písek. Indeed, the presence of the grave of a Czech luminary rarely if ever saved a Jewish cemetery from destruction. In 1984, the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň failed to convince the National Theater to provide funds for repairing the Jewish cemetery in Mariánské Lázně, even after they noted that it was the final resting place of the famous actress, Berta Reimenová. For the quote, see Letter from Jan Podlešák to Rudolf Gibian "Věc: exhumace a pietní uložení ostatků Richarda Weinerja v Písku" [Re: Exhumation and reverential burial of the remains of Richard Weiner in Písek] (27 October 1987). ŽNO package 11b. On the ceremony, see Daniel

The interest of foreign Jews in a particular cemetery could, in rare instances, lead to its protection. It was, after all, common practice during the 1970s and 1980s for the state to showcase its protection of Jewish heritage sights and material culture in order to combat Western accusations of antisemitism. In this, it found willing partners on the other side of the Iron Curtain—even if the state and Jewish community regularly rejected their offers of financial help. The Memorial Fund for Jewish Culture donated \$3,000 to the CJRC in 1977 towards the publication of a book in Czech on the Jewish cemeteries of Bohemia and Moravia, complete with photo-documentation.¹³⁷ Two years later, the Czechoslovak Aid Trust in London negotiated the right to print the book abroad in an English translation.¹³⁸ Yet, the foreign Jewish organizations that supported the CJRC earmarked the majority of their contributions for supporting Jewish individuals and the institutions that served them. In 1982, for example, the CJRC refused a request by the Plzeň community for additional funds to care for the cemetery in Mariánské Lázně because it had already agreed to use the money donated by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to improve the kosher cafeteria in Prague.¹³⁹

Mayer, “Zpráva o exhumaci ostatků” [Report on the exhumation of remains] (n.d.). ŽNO package 11b. Cf. Feder, *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia*, 118. On Reimenová, see the letter from the Plzeň community to the National Theater (n.d.); and the response (27 August 1984). JM-PP inventory no. 73, carton 66.

¹³⁷ Collection of documents in folder labeled “Zahraniční dar” [Foreign gift], čj.15.59577 (20 December 1977 - 4 January 1978). NAČR, SPVC box 236.

¹³⁸ Artur Radvanský, “Záznam” [Memo] (21 October 1979). NAČR, SPVC box 236.

¹³⁹ Letter from the CJRC to the Plzeň community (24 March 1982). JM-PP inventory no 17, carton 5, folder “1980-1983.”

In some instances, the persistent interest of Western Jewish individuals and organization in specific cemeteries, compounded with the lack of the financial resources required to maintain them raised the ire of the Czech Jewish leaders. When a non-Jewish, Czech woman inquired on behalf of an expatriate friend in America about the recent history of the Jews of Přestice, an official of the Prague community responded, “Our coreligionists abroad can never content themselves with the fact that the [Jewish community] was built after the occupation from scratch (*před holé zdi*) and preceded to rebuild from nothing.” Without prompting, the official went on to blame the poor condition of the Přestice cemetery on a hunters’ collective which had

Finally, the return of a rabbinic presence to Prague, in 1984, re-vested the Jewish community with one its most effective means for defending cemeteries threatened with liquidation. Despite the increasing pressure placed upon the Jewish communities during the 1970s and 1980s, the state still had to confront its constitutional obligation to respect the right of Jewish citizens to observe to their religious laws. While the college of clerics had lacked sufficient status to overrule the will of the Jewish lay leadership and state officials, the same could not be said of Rabbi Mayer.¹⁴⁰

Successfully Defending the New Jewish Cemetery in Kolín

The coalescence of these four factors (local initiative, the condition and location of the cemetery, international attention, and rabbinic intervention) empowered the Jewish community to save the new Jewish cemetery in Kolín from destruction. In November 1986, the Municipal National Committee in Kolín informed the Prague community that it wanted to erect an apartment building on the cemetery's grounds. It asked for their terms and promised to cover all of the associated costs, including moving a fairly large Holocaust memorial to another cemetery. The committee even offered to purchase the land.¹⁴¹

neglected its promise to maintain it. See letter from Kalčíková to the Jewish Religious Community in Prague (20 June 1984); and letter from Tanzerová to Božená Kalčíková, "Váš dotaz" [Your inquiry] (2 July 1984). JM-PP inventory no. 20, carton 8, folder "1981-1985."

¹⁴⁰ This eventually caused tensions between Heller and Rabbi Mayer. Despite the fact that Mayer had supported Heller in his demand that the Prague community establish a cemetery commission, Heller later turned on Mayer in the midst of another cemetery matter, which had become an international affair. See Chapter Ten for further information about the split between Heller and Mayer in the context of broader intra-communal strife.

¹⁴¹ The city of Kolín seems to have had a relatively strong sense of responsibility for maintaining its Jewish heritage sites and a good relationship with the Prague Jewish community. "Zápis sepsaný dne 11. listopadu 1986 na Městském národním výboru v Kolíně ve věci zrušení židovského hřbitova v Kolíně V. - Zalabí" [Minute written on 11 November 1986 at the

Rabbi Mayer insisted upon the supervised exhumation of all of the bodies and their reburial in the closest “living” Jewish cemetery. He also required that all of the gravestones that were not to be “taken elsewhere” be buried face down in the cemetery and that a plaque be installed thereupon indicating the land’s former status.¹⁴² Not only were (some of) Mayer’s requests in keeping with Jewish law, but they also promised to make the entire affair costly for the national committee. Mayer knew this and, I believe, hoped that it would convince its functionaries to change their minds. Surprisingly, however, they agreed to all of his terms.¹⁴³ An official announcement regarding the planned demolition of the cemetery appeared in the March 1987 issue of *Věstník*.¹⁴⁴

Next came pressure from abroad. A letter arrived from the Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue, outside of London, protesting the demolition. The synagogue felt a connection with Kolín. After receiving a “Czech Torah” from that city in 1971, one of its members began making regular trips to the city and was eventually joined there by his rabbi. Both men reported to their

Municipal National Committee in Kolín in the matter of the demolition of the Jewish cemetery in Kolín 5 - Zálabí]. ŽNO package 11b.

¹⁴² It is noteworthy that Mayer seems to have been far less troubled by the sale of Jewish gravestones. Rabbi Daniel Mayer, “Věc: Zrušení nového židovského hřbitova v Kolíně V.- Zálabí. Podmínky pro povolení zrušení hřbitova, pokud není jiného východiska” [Re: The demolition of the new Jewish cemetery in Kolín 5, Zálabí. Conditions for the permission for the demolition of the cemetery, if there is not another recourse]. ŽNO package 11b.

At a subsequent meeting of the directorate of the Prague community, Gibian admonished Mayer *in absentia* for his “incorrect approach” in dealing with the cemetery matter. Mayer had allegedly overstepped his bounds by communicating directly with the national committee. Perhaps Mayer worried that the lay and professional leaders of the Prague community would concede too much. Zdeněk Taussig, “Zápis ze schůze vedení židovské náboženské obce v Praze, konané dne 29.12.1986 [Minutes of the meeting of the directorate of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague occurring on 29 December 1986]. ŽNO package 11b.

¹⁴³ “Zápis sepsaný dne 12. února 1987 na Městském národním výboru v Kolíně ve věci rušení židovského hřbitova v Kolíně V. - Zálabí” [Minutes written on 12 February 1987 at the Municipal National Committee in Kolín in the matter of the demolition of the Jewish cemetery in Kolín 5 - Zálabí]. ŽNO package 11b.

¹⁴⁴ “Zprávy z obcí” [News from the communities], *Věstník*, no. 3, vol. 39 (March 1987): 8.

community about their experiences.¹⁴⁵ In 1982, the Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue came into the possession of the *aron kodesh* (Torah closet) that had once stood in the ceremonial hall of the Kolín cemetery.¹⁴⁶ Even if the Jewish leaders in Prague officially rebuffed the their British coreligionists, the matter had already become an international affair.¹⁴⁷

On 26 March 1987, the national committee and the Jewish community met once again. The latter asked the former to reconsider its plan. The Jewish leadership doubted whether the old Jewish cemetery in Kolín had the capacity to absorb so many new graves, along with the memorial. They further noted the cemetery's importance as a Jewish heritage site and, specifically, one in the erstwhile home of the late and beloved Rabbi Feder. Finally, the Jewish leadership raised the international issue and suggested that moving forward with the demolition might upset Jews from Kolín living around the world. The Regional Museum in Kolín and the State Jewish Museum both joined the community in emphasizing the cemetery's value. In the end, the regional museum and the County National Committee urged the Municipal National Committee to reconsider.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ "Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue: Czech & Slovak Torah Connections." <<http://npls.org.uk/Czech%20Slovak%20Scroll%20booklet.pdf>> (12 March 2014). For more on the "Czech Torahs" see Jacob Ari Labendz, "'In unserem Kreise:' Czech-Jewish Activism and Immigration in America, 1939-1994," in *Jewish History and Culture* (expected December 2014); Joseph C. Pick, "The Story of the Czech Scrolls," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia and New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America and the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 584-610; and Magda Veselská, "The Selling off of Items from the Collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague after the Second World War, with a Particular Focus on the Sale of Torah Scrolls in 1963-1964," *Judaica Bohemiae*, vol. 42 (2007): 179-232.

¹⁴⁶ Fiedler, *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia*, 96.

¹⁴⁷ Zdeněk Taussig, "Zápis ze schůze vedení Židovské náboženské obce v Praze, konané dne 25.2.1987" [Minutes from the meeting of the directorate of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, occurring on 25 February 1987], 2. ŽNO package 11b.

¹⁴⁸ "Zápis sepsaný dne 26 března 1987 na Městském národním výboru v Kolíně ve věci rušení židovského hřbitova v Kolíně V. - Zálabí" [Minutes written on 26 March 1987 at the Municipal

For two-weeks after the meeting, letters poured in to Rabbi Mayer from Jewish citizens with connections to the Kolín cemetery. The author of the first letter, dated 27 March 1987, named twelve individuals, in addition to himself, who cared for specific graves. He also noted the presence of a caretaker and the importance of the cemetery to wide circles of Jews around the world.¹⁴⁹ In part, the community leadership could protect the cemetery because private individuals had taken the initiative to preserve it. Their voices of protest, likely solicited by the rabbi, made it difficult for the leadership to do otherwise. When the Municipal National Committee requested once again to proceed with its original plan, on 8 September 1987, the community responded that it “[would not] agree under any circumstances.”¹⁵⁰ The cemetery remains intact today.

Conclusion:

The rise of dissent within the Czech Jewish communities coincided with the fall of communism. That transition, in turn, led to a radical shift in the politics and policies concerning Jewish communal properties. Specifically, the new regime passed legislation that empowered the Jewish communities (and individuals) to sue for restitution.¹⁵¹ In short time, many within the

National Committee in Kolín in the matter of the demolition of the Jewish cemetery in Kolín 5 - Zálabí]. ŽNO package 11b.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Ivan Roudnický to Rabbi Mayer (27 March 1987). ŽNO package 11b. See also letters to Rabbi Mayer from Hana Blasková (2 April 1987); Marta Marešová (8 April 1987); Robert Orlický (2 April 1986); and Zdenka Součková (7 April 1987). ŽNO package 11b.

¹⁵⁰ Zdeněk Taussig, “Zápis z porady vedeny Židovské náboženské obce v Praze konané dne 16.9.1986” [Minutes from the meeting of the directorate of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague occurring on 16 September 1987]. ŽNO binder 2.

¹⁵¹ Eduard Kubů and Jan Kuklík, “Reluctant Restitution: The Restitution of Jewish Property in the Bohemian Lands after the Second World War,” in *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, eds. Martin Dean, Constantine Goshler & Philipp Ther, Studies on War and Genocide, ed., Omer Bartov (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2007), 234-37.

communities (and beyond) came to see destruction of Jewish heritage sites as a hallmark of communist rule—and one that linked it with the more distant Nazi past. The Jewish community leadership that rose after 1989, particularly in Prague, drew strength from the consonance of its erstwhile dissent with the emerging political culture of post-communist Czechoslovakia. As the nation refashioned itself in the image of its own small dissident community (and also Wall Street bankers), so too did the Jewish communities.¹⁵²

These new leaders and their followers created a counter-culture of memory at the communities that has occluded much of the past. (Much, in any case, had been hidden from them.) Their new discourses, in part, served to distinguish the post-1989 leaders and communities from their late-communist predecessors, whom they associated with collaboration. Indeed, the Czech Jewish communities immediately expelled both Heller and Kraus from their posts at the helm of the CJRC in November 1989, the very month that communism fell. Those who have perpetuated the discourses of those transition years and have sought only to castigate the erstwhile leadership as quislings (in fields of action even beyond cemetery matters) have failed to offer sufficiently rich accounts of Jewish-state relations during late-communism and the Jewish politics that they conditioned.¹⁵³

From an international perspective, yet one which resonates equally within the Czech Republic, the destroyed cemeteries and synagogues have come to represent the embodiment of communist antisemitism—or even the persistence of antisemitism in Europe despite the multiple regime changes of the twentieth century. Antisemitism certainly played a role in the disappearance of the Jewish cemeteries during the period of communist rule. Despite the state's

¹⁵² See my discussion in the conclusion.

¹⁵³ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 38-39; and Spurný, “A nikdo se neptal ani pozůstalých” [And no one even asked the bereaved].

demand that the members of its Jewish minority consider themselves either Czech or Slovak citizen-nationals of the Jewish religion, authorities at all levels of the state administration still excluded “Jewish” heritage sites from the canon of “Czech” national culture. This exclusion in and of itself is not necessarily antisemitic, inasmuch as it can be consistent with support for Jewish nationalism. In the case of communist Czechoslovakia and the rest of the Soviet Bloc, however, which criminalized “Zionism,” it reflects a deep ambivalence about the place of Jews in the world. Antisemitism also motivated some of the vandals and excused the thieves who ravaged Jewish cemeteries.

Those authors who have pointed to the destruction of Jewish cemeteries as evidence of antisemitism (and who have, in a somewhat circular manner, attributed the phenomenon to antisemitism as well) may be justified from a moral perspective. Yet in place of an adequate explanation of the phenomenon they seek to describe, their analyses often express little more than a wish that history had unfolded otherwise. In focusing too intently on the existence of antisemitism within the party-state, moreover, they lose the ability to discern its particularities, limits, and effects.

These mutually reinforcing paradigms, the hunt for antisemitism and the efforts to portray the communist past as both other and criminal, have overwhelmingly conditioned the post-communist discussions of Jewish heritage sites at both the communal and the academic level. As a result, little effort has been made whatsoever, even among the intelligentsia, to evaluate the structures, processes, and decisions that led to the destruction of so many Jewish cemeteries. This poses a particular problem in the context of newly reinvigorated debates about the comparability of Nazism and communism, and about the continuities between the two periods in Central Europe. The destruction of Jewish cemeteries in that region certainly spanned

that divide. Yet the mechanisms and politics of destruction differed starkly between them, as did the possibilities for political action afforded to Jewish individuals and communities.

My intention here has been to see beyond antisemitism in order to explain the conditions that led to the destruction of so many Jewish cemeteries during the period of communist rule. I hope, thereby, to have brought a more constructive and guiding voice to a discussion that has for too long been besotted with emotion and recrimination. State and local authorities clearly had the most influence in determining the future of Jewish burial grounds in the Czech lands, but Jewish citizens also played decisive roles, as community leaders and citizens. So too did non-Jewish Czechs who chose to act and the Western Jewish organizations that intervened. An analysis of the various and shifting relationships between these actors reveals far more about Jewish-state relations in communist Central Europe than an enumeration of grievances.

An attachment to cemeteries drove Jewish politics in the Czech lands to a considerable degree during the period of communist rule. An early and temporarily successful gambit to protect the Jewish cemeteries from destruction eventually left them vulnerable, particularly at the local level. Indeed, during the 1970s and 1980s, political currents shifted against the Jewish communities at the very moment when they began to experience their own flagging capacities most severely. Unlike the story of the Czech synagogues from the previous chapter, this tale does not end with reference to mutual interests shared between the Jewish communities and the central state. It has concluded, rather, as a painful narrative of neglect and blackmail—the very sort that has driven much scholarship and activism since 1989.

In sum, the central state confirmed the rights of the Jewish communities to maintain control over their cemeteries, yet they failed to provide them with adequate resources to care for them. This combination of support in theory and neglect in practice reflected, in part, a serious

ambivalence about Jews, even among the very authorities with which the Jewish communities enjoyed the closest and most positive relations. Yet those offices were also bound by their charter and the priorities of the Communist Party. As Dr. Pavel, the president of the State Monuments Authority explained in 1957, “there is no legal vacuum here, rather a vacuum in the practices of the state ecclesiastical administration.”¹⁵⁴ Defending Jewish property rights in the interest of Jewish law fell to the ecclesiastical authorities. Protecting historical monuments did not. This left the Jewish communities in a difficult position, because they lacked a strong relationship with the authorities that oversaw the preservation of historic sites. The latter, moreover, had little interest in investing money into properties not owned by the state. They also held different ideas than the Jewish communities about which and what type of sites deserved their protection.¹⁵⁵ And money, in most years, was in short supply everywhere.

Structural conditions also help to account for the fact that the primary impetus for the increasing pace of cemetery destructions through the 1970s and 1980s originated at the local level. (In other words, the phenomena did not derive from directives of the Communist Party or the central state, designed to eradicate all traces of Jewish heritage from the Czech lands.) As the demonstrated in the previous chapter with reference to the Plzeň region, some local and regional administrations gladly facilitated the preservation of Jewish monuments, provided that they had access to adequate funds. At the same time, the local national committees jealously guarded their limited budgets. They were loath to spend money on the maintenance of cemeteries that should have fallen to them in 1957 or, at least, subsequently, as abandoned properties. In locations with few Jews or very small Jewish communities, national committee functionaries served the

¹⁵⁴ “Zápis o poradě o ochraně židovských památek” [Minutes from the meeting regarding the protection of Jewish monuments], 2.

¹⁵⁵ Meng, *Shattered Spaces*.

priorities of other interest groups. This included their desire for the neglected cemeteries to be maintained sufficiently well. Of course, some individuals simply sought access to cheap land.

Understanding these dynamics and how they changed over time is a fundamental first step towards analyzing the development of Jewish communal politics in communist Czechoslovakia and its legacies after 1989. The cemetery problem was just one of many that divided the Czech Jewish community during the 1980s, particularly in Prague. Many of the more “compliant” leaders of the late 1970s and 1980s had suffered during the Second World War and under Stalinism.¹⁵⁶ Their personal histories reflected in their attitudes towards party-state authority, particularly as the state seemed to turn against its Jews. Many of them, moreover, expected the imminent and unavoidable disappearance of first Jews and then Jewish cemeteries from the Czech lands. With these factors in mind, it is easier to understand their collaboration with party-state officials and local administrators in the sale of the cemeteries. On one hand, leaders like Heller and Kraus sought to avoid entering into conflict with the authorities. On the other hand, they hoped to make the Jewish community’s final years as pleasant as possible and, perhaps, to secure the preservation of a collection of representative cemeteries. It is only the absurd survival of the Czech Jewish communities for decades after the 1980s and the surprising end of communism in 1989 that has cast their decisions in such a terrible light.

At the same time, while empathy may help to explain the decision of the leaders of the

¹⁵⁶ For an account of František Kraus’s life, see Michaela Linková, *Kam se poděl Bůh* [Where was God] (Prague, Czech Republic: Olympia, 2002). I must admit to having serious doubts about the veracity of many of the stories in this book. Bohumil Heller survived Theresienstadt as a young man. Personal file on Bohumil Heller. NAČR, SPVC box 231. Rudolf Gibian survived Theresienstadt and Buchenwald. Personal file on Rudolf Gibian. NAČR, SPVC box 231. Artur Radvanský survived Theresienstadt, Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Ebensee. Artur Radvanský, *A přece jsem přežil: Vyprávění člověka, který si zachoval lásku k lidem* [I simply survived: the narrative of a man who retained a love for people], trans., Tomáš Podivinský (Germany: Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste, 2008).

CJRC and Prague community to peddle in Jewish cemeteries and gravestones, it should not overshadow the fact that there were others within the Czech-Jewish leadership who opposed them vocally and actively, like Mr. Roná and Rabbi Mayer (in some cases). They gave official voice to the views expressed by what seems to have been a good proportion of Jewish community members (and others) who opposed the participation of the communities in the destruction of their own cemeteries. Indeed, whether all of them understood it or not, they had legal and moral grounds to support their positions. The Jewish communities could have resisted the alienation of their properties by appealing to the state's commitment to honor their right to observe their religious laws. The potential efficacy of such an approach, however, was never tested. The Jewish leadership of the 1980s ignored popular opinion within their communities, particularly after the ecclesiastical authorities replaced their leaders again in 1985.¹⁵⁷ To be fair, the dissidents also reacted, at least in part, to what they knew of Gibian's unscrupulous deeds.

For years after 1989, many within the Czech Jewish communities attempted to cultivate and perpetuate the spirit of the intra-communal oppositionist movement of the 1980s. While the communities continue to sell former synagogue buildings for profit today, they now protect their remaining cemeteries from destruction. In this, they have found willing partners abroad, both institutional and private. Young heritage tourists from around the world often contribute of their time in Central Europe to maintain and repair Jewish cemeteries around the region.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 36.

¹⁵⁸ In my capacity as the resident director of the CET Jewish-Studies in Prague study-abroad program (2002-2004), I arranged such trips for students of North American universities, the vast majority of whom identified in some way as Jewish.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Differentiation in Relations: Mutuality versus Harsh Paternalism, 1953-1961

In 1957, after a long investigation by the StB, the state brought criminal charges against a group of Jewish citizens who had established a nation-wide network for the covert distribution of financial aid and other materials to elderly and impoverished Jews. The network operated out of the Israeli Ligation in Prague, with funds provided by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which Czechoslovakia had expelled in 1950. During these same months, the Ministry of Education and Culture gave permission for the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands (CJRC) and its Slovak counterpart to meet with representatives of major Western-Jewish organizations to establish a program for providing financial aid to those same citizens.

Contradictions within the party-state's position on the Jewish minority account for this irony. The party charged the StB with uncovering and defeating all manifestations of Jewish nationalism, i.e., Zionism, in Czechoslovakia. Its agents never let go of their fantasies of conspiratorial Jewish operatives working against their country and its communist order. The Ministry of Education and Culture, on the other hand, took seriously its commitment to meet the religious needs of domestic Jews, whom the postwar state had defined strictly as a religious community.

De-Stalinization provided both space and impetus for these two state organs, the StB and the Ministry of Education and Culture, to develop and put into practice divergent perspectives on Jewish-state relations. Eventually, they came into conflict, each believing that they were following the party's wishes. The reason for this tension lies in a problem that predates

communist rule: the attempt by government bureaucracies to force Jews to conform to categories designed for thinking about the Christian and post-Christian citizens of Europe's nation-states. Based in a commitment to freedom of conscience and a belief in the integrity of territorially-bound national communities, European thinkers and bureaucrats uncoupled national identity from religious affiliation (only officially and to varying degrees). The inability to separate neatly religion from ethnicity in the Jewish identification, culture, and history, rendered Jews a special case and complicated the ability of states to manage Jewish affairs. So too did the persistence of antisemitism and its political uses. The foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 and its emergence, shortly thereafter, as a battlefield of the Cold War exacerbated these tensions. Yet the party-state had built them into the bedrock of its model for Jewish-state relations by demanding that citizens of Jewish origin assimilate fully into the Czech and Slovak nations and by also committing itself to providing for the Jewish religion, devoid of national content.

This pit the StB against the Ministry of Education and Culture during the 1960s, based in how their officials diverged from one another in perspective between 1953 and 1961. Neither one of their trajectories, however, represents a more authentic articulation of party-state policies or communist ideologies. The employees of both agencies strove to manifest different aspects of the state's official policy with regard to the Jewish minority, as they interpreted it—and were told to interpret it—in light of an ever-changing political arena. This inter-ministerial (and intra-ministerial) conflict characterized Jewish-state relations between 1960 and 1975. This chapter takes into consideration the years of differentiation that preceded the conflicts of the 1960s.

Both Joseph Stalin (b. 1878) and Czechoslovak President Klement Gottwald (b. 1896) died in 1953. Their deaths precipitated major changes in the relationship between the party-state and its citizens. These manifested strongly, yet unevenly in Jewish-state relations. A moderation

of the state's war on the Roman Catholic Church and against religion in general helped foster a relationship based in mutuality between the state administration for ecclesiastical affairs and the official Jewish religious communities. Due to the particularity of the Jewish religious minority, it continued to develop even after the party-state reinstated some of its more strident anti-church policies in 1957. I identify four spheres of difference below: Jewish communal loyalty to the state and the choices of the rabbis of the Czech lands to collaborate, an expectation that the Jewish religion would disappear from Czechoslovakia due to demographic and cultural pressures and a belief that Czech-Jews held weak religious convictions, the financial benefits that the communities yielded the state, and the willingness of their leaders to act as agents of propaganda on the international stage. In the relevant sections, I review materials from earlier chapters and, of course, supplement them with new information.

Czechoslovak State Security modified its perspective on the Jewish minority as well. Its agents continued to perceive citizens of Jewish origin as a potential threat to national security based in their purported ethnic difference. Yet, during the mid-1950s, those same agents began to redirect their resources to disrupting the contacts between members of the Jewish minority and the foreign Zionists who they believed sought to lead citizens of Jewish origin into treason. After uncovering two nationwide networks, operated out of the Israeli Legation, for black-marked trade among Jews and for the distribution of charity to elderly and impoverished Jewish citizens, the StB seized upon the Israeli diplomatic corps as their main operation enemy. In a shift towards reality from the fantasies that characterized the StB's approach to the Jewish question in the early 1950s, agents adopted a harsh yet more paternalistic (and less threatening) approach to policing the Jewish communities and all citizens of Jewish origin.

The Re-Orientation of Ecclesiastical Politics, 1952-1960

The relationship between CJRC, their subordinate communities and congregations, and the state administration in charge of ecclesiastical affairs improved through the 1950s and into the 1960s. By 1953, Jewish communists and the State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs (SOEA) had brought the official Czech Jewish community in line with the bureaucracy and politics of the communist state. This sent much of the surviving interwar Jewish leadership into exile and led some erstwhile members to disaffection. Yet the community flourished, nonetheless, increasing in membership, confidence, and activity.

The stabilization of the Jewish communities within the new communistic system coincided with a reorientation of the party-state's ecclesiastical policies, which, in turn, facilitated growth at the Jewish communities. (It did so, however, idiosyncratically due to a number of factors that distinguished the Jewish case from others.) Between 1949 and 1953, the party-state waged a bureaucratic and police war against churches, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, designed to impoverish them, disrupt their international ties, weaken their hold over the population, and remove dissenting clergy. In late 1952 and into 1953, the Communist Party assessed that it had defeated the churches, and the Roman Catholic Church in particular, as serious political rivals. It continued, nonetheless, to perceive religion as an obstacle to the ideological transformation of society, especially as a new economic crisis threatened to undermine the party's credibility.¹

Acknowledging the attachments of Czechs and Slovaks to their churches, the party resolved to adopt a less antagonistic approach to managing ecclesiastical affairs and, indeed,

¹ Karel Kaplan, *Stát a církev v Československu: v letech 1948-1953* [State and church in Czechoslovakia, 1948-1953] (Brno, Czech Republic: Doplněk and the Institute for Contemporary History, 1993), 163-81.

sought to use religious institutions to reach more citizens. As of 1953, party leaders imagined themselves to be in a “contest for believers” with the churches and with the “reactionary” elements they perceived therein.² They aimed to persuade, first and foremost, church-affiliated communists, who composed 70% of the party’s membership. Only 17.70% of communists claimed no religious affiliation in 1952, whereas 64.50% belonged to the Roman Catholic Church.³

The party thus reconfirmed its commitment to the guarantee of religious freedom and the equality of all churches. It ordered the organs of the state administration to avoid discriminating against believers and from engaging in activities that could lead to that perception. Indeed, the party officially rejected the impulse of lower-level administrators to treat believers as “a unified reactionary mass.”⁴ The party-state attenuated its plans to dismantle the country’s monastic orders and reversed a decision to ban completely the performance of religious rituals in public spaces. It even released a number of prisoners of conscience, primarily Catholic clergy, whom it had only recently incarcerated. The new policy further called upon state officials to continue cultivating their relationships with politically sympathetic clergy and to deepen the latter’s loyalty through educational programming. Rather than imprisoning or attempting to influence dissenting clergy, the party-state insisted that the latter simply remove themselves from the political sphere.⁵ To be clear, the Communist Party instituted these changes to address perceived policy failures. Its ideology remained unchanged, as did the church laws passed in 1949.⁶

Following orders from the Communist Party, the SOEA began discouraging parents,

² Ibid., 171.

³ Ibid., 173.

⁴ Ibid., 171.

⁵ Ibid., 171-172.

⁶ Ibid., 170.

especially those with membership in the party, from enrolling their children into state-funded, religious-education programs. It also introduced instructional and social activities of its own, designed to weaken the hold of churches upon youths.⁷ In January 1952, for example, the SOEA arranged for movie theaters in Prague to screen films for children during Sunday church hours.⁸ Six months later, an official complained, “We have to count on the fact that mom’s are terrible and will nonetheless chase children [into church].”⁹ In 1955, the Central Committee of the Communist Party added a portfolio for an official in charge of atheistic education to its powerful Ideological Department.¹⁰

Khrushchev’s speech at the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 emboldened Czechoslovakia’s churches to seek more independence from the state. They joined other influential sectors of society in demanding a reform of the Stalinist system. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, in turn, began to perceive even the country’s non-Catholic churches as newly threatening. The party, thus, once again, rethought its approach to the management of ecclesiastical affairs. In May 1957, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a resolution, “The Foundations of Ecclesiastical Politics in the Czechoslovak Republic,” which had the “result that state control over the churches

⁷ Kaplan, *Stát a církev* [State and church], 172-174. See also collection of documents in NAČR, SÚC box 6, folder “Akce vyučování náboženství, 1949-1954” [Operation religious education, 1949-1954].

⁸ Jaroslav Vacek, “Zpráva o církevně politické situaci na okrese Praha VII, za měsíc listopad 1952” [Report on the ecclesiastical-political situation in the area of Prague 7 for the month of November 1952] (28 November 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 60.

⁹ The ecclesiastical secretary of the district national committee in Prague 11, “Církevně politická situace na obvodě Prahy 11 za měsíc říjen” [The ecclesiastical-political situation in the area of Prague 11 for the month of October] (29 October 1952). NAČR, SÚC box 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

was renewed.”¹¹

With the “Foundations of Ecclesiastical Politics,” the Communist Party leadership recommitted itself to the ideological struggle against “religious anachronisms in people’s cognition.”¹² It ordered state officials to continue dissuading parents from enrolling their children in religious-education classes and to embellish further the state’s own atheistic “enlightenment” programs. In both cases, the party warned state officials not to offend believers, fearing that it would lead them to retrenchment and reaction. The party left intact the ecclesiastical laws of 1949. It even ordered state officials to continue working with politically aligned clergy and demanding acquiescence and silence from dissenters.¹³

In the same resolution, however, the Political Bureau resurrected the party-state’s political and administrative struggle against the country’s churches and, in particular, against the “reactionary” elements that it feared grew within them. It resolved,

But the People’s Democratic State will simultaneously and henceforth operate with all decisiveness against the exploitation of the religious feelings of the people towards reactionary political ends.¹⁴

The Political Bureau thus ordered state officials to cripple the potential of churches to influence citizens. Three of the resolution’s action areas bear relevance for thinking about Jewish affairs:

¹¹ Kaplan, *Stát a církev* [State and church], 178-81. For the emergence of dissent within the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren see Peter Dinuš, “*Československá církev evangelická v agenturním rozpracování STB* [The Evangelical Church of the Czech brethren in the elaboration of the agents of the StB] (Prague, Czech Republic: Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu, 2004); and Hendrych, “Zásady církevní politiky v ČSR” [The foundations of ecclesiastical politics in the Czechoslovak Republic] (21 May 1957). NAČR-02/2 bundle 139, archival unit 182, point 7. The resolution reflects changed demands by the Political Bureau to an earlier proposal by Kahuda, “Zásady naší církevní politiky po XX. sjezdu KSSS a po celostátní konferenci KSČ” [The foundations of our ecclesiastical politics after the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and after the national conference of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] (12 October 1956). NAČR-02/2, bundle 120, archival unit 148, point 4.

¹² Hendrych, “Zásady církevní politiky [The foundations of ecclesiastical politics], 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

the intent to ruin churches financially, to monitor and intervene into church life, and to exploit the international connections of Czech and Slovak churches.

The Political Bureau sought to destroy churches slowly by depriving them of funds. It resolved that the state should reduce steadily the amount of money it allocates to meeting the material needs of churches and that it should dedicate the funds that it does provide to caring for historically significant buildings.¹⁵ The Political Bureau elaborated upon these measures in 1958 and 1959. It ordered the Ministry of Education and Culture to deplete the financial reserves of churches in order to increase their dependency upon the state. At the same time, it also required the ministry to provide only the minimum support necessary to guarantee the basic operation of those same churches. The party and the ministry both agreed that state funds should not be used to make church attendance pleasant or to “increase the interest of believers in church life.”¹⁶ By 1962, they conspired to reduce allocations for furniture, flowers, and even electricity.¹⁷

In “The Foundations of Ecclesiastical Politics” the Political Bureau resolved to reinsert the state into the daily operation of churches. It prohibited the institution of novel rituals designed to attract new members, especially youths. It banned churches from planning non-religious, cultural activities and sought an end to the performance of ritual in the public sphere.

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶ Resolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regarding František Kahuda, “Hospodářská činnost církví a náboženských společností za rok 1958” [The economic activity of churches and religious communities for the year 1958] (17 April 1959). NAČR, UV-KSČ-02/2, bundle 239, archival unit 320, point 8. See Resolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regarding Vladimír Koucký and František Kahuda, “Hospodářská činnost církví, náboženských společností a jejich zařízení” [The economic activities of churches, religious communities, and their administrations] (16 September 1958). In the above-mentioned financial report from 1958, František Kahuda, the Minister of Education, reported significant reductions in the amount of money provided to churches. His report makes no mention of the Jewish community.

¹⁷ “Intimát č. 149” (16 September 1958), 1, in collection of documents under header “Rozpracování intimátu č. 46/1962” (n.d., 1962, after 27 March). NAČR, MŠK box 1.

The resolution even required churches to request approval before announcing holiday celebrations. It ordered the state's ecclesiastical officials to ensure the cooperation of church officials by observing their meetings.¹⁸ The Political Bureau also resolved to require state approval for the appointment of clergy members on an individual basis, to decide up their placement, and to limit their numbers. It sought to "acquire [clergy] for a positive relationship with [their] administration and for the active fight for peace, especially in their contacts with believers."¹⁹ The party thus sought to inspire communist-patriotic movements within the churches.²⁰

Finally, the Political Bureau hoped to curate the international relationships of the country's churches so that they would benefit the state. On the one hand, it resolved,

In the field of international ecclesiastical organizations the goal of the Czechoslovak delegates is to actively advocate for the politics of peace, friendship, and cooperation between nations, and to head off the attacks of the international ecclesiastical reaction against the socialist states.²¹

On the other hand, it ordered the state administration to

Regulate foreign ecclesiastical political propaganda against our republic and the efforts to intervene into the internal affairs of our state, in particular as it concerns the relationship of the state to churches and believers. The aim is for the working people in capitalist countries to be truthfully informed about the condition of churches in our state and the lives of believers.²²

If the party could not isolate Czechoslovakia's churches from the outside world, it would seek to use their contacts to its benefit.

¹⁸ Hendrych, "Zásady církevní politiky [The foundations of ecclesiastical politics], 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

²⁰ Ibid., 9.

²¹ Ibid., 10.

²² Ibid., 10.

The New Ecclesiastical Politics and the Jews:

The new ecclesiastical politics of the mid-1950s structured the relationship between the state's ecclesiastical administration and the Jewish religious communities. They added complexity to, but did not undermine the system that had developed between 1948 and 1953. The Communist Party, along with state officials, developed this approach from ideologies laden with contradictions. The same offices, for example, both supported and sought to undermine religion in the country. Thus, while the policies adopted in the mid-1950s continued to shape and limit church-state affairs for decades, the contradictions inherent to them lent plasticity to the system as well.

The distinctiveness of the Jewish case introduced further tensions, both structural and ideological. Cold War adversaries divided themselves over Israel and Zionism. Yet the party-state's official framework for managing religious affairs could never fully account for the national component of Judaism. The centrality of the Holocaust to political discourses, both domestic and international, thrust the Jewish communities into the spotlight and set them on uncertain ground. It also afforded their leaders opportunities to meet with their international counterparts. Even the Jewish community's financial situation set it apart. Other churches had similarly vast holdings, but few had so many unused properties to monetize or a proportionately equivalent number of memorials to maintain. These Jewish differences intensified during the 1950s and 1960s and, inasmuch, altered the relationship between the state administration responsible for ecclesiastical affairs and the Jewish communities.

Blanka Soukupová argues that the cultural and political transitions of the late 1950s and 1960s "could not but affect so-called ecclesiastical politics." She reports that during those years the state's superintendence of the Jewish communities "could [increasingly] be equated with

some sort of administration according to a set model, but already without great ideological zealotry.” She notes as well, that the liberalization of the 1960s led to a decline in the intensity of repression. Finally, Soukupová attributes the state’s heightened beneficence towards the Jewish communities during those years—she refers to it as “condescension”²³—to its hunger for the hard currency offered by Western-Jewish organizations. She argues that “increasingly vacuous ideologies were, again and again, virtually pushed into the background, in the interest of the economy.”²⁴

Soukupová’s account bears truth, despite not placing as much emphasis as mine on mutuality in Jewish-state relations. I take issue, however, with her narrow conception of ideology. Even if the platform outlined during the 1950s remained formally in place throughout the 1960s, it necessarily acquired new meanings in the latter context. It is to reiterate the false self-perception of the Communist Party to imagine that its ideologies remained unchanged and that they neatly preceded and determined all of its actions. The transitions in the state’s relationship with the Jewish communities amounted neither to a deviation from a platonic communistic norm nor the repression of an authentic ideology for profit. It reflected, rather, the reorganization and rearticulation of old ideologies, in light of newly emergent beliefs within a complex and evolving ideological field, subject to new pressures and priorities. When officials bent the official ideological and policy structures of the 1950s to meet the needs and perspectives of the 1960s, they produced a novel and equally transient form of socialism. The nexus of ideology and political action in the late 1950s receives here the same consideration as that of the

²³ Blanka Soukupová, “Postoj Státu k židosvskému náboženskému společenství v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968: Mezi kontrolou, represemi a ‘blahosklonností’” [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community in the Czech Lands in 1956-1968: The Vicious Circle of Control, Repressions and “Condescendence (trans. in original)], *Lidé Města / Urban People*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2012), 76.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

preceding decade.

I take 1954 as an appropriate point of embarkation for this discussion. That year, the CJRC comprised nine communities and forty synagogue congregations, with roughly 10,000 members in total. It employed four full-time rabbis, and additional assistant clergy members who led prayers, ritually slaughtered animals, and supervised *kosher* cafeterias. Prague boasted two functioning synagogues. One held daily prayers and the other, like most Czech congregations, met only on the Sabbath and on festivals. The communities in Karlovy Vary and Ustí nad Labem also offered daily prayers, while those in Brno and Teplice met a few times per week. The CJRC administered three nursing homes, in Mariánské Lázně, Poděbrady, and Brno, which catered to 200 individuals.²⁵ I have already elaborated upon the Jewish communities' extensive efforts to commemorate the Holocaust and to preserve the memory of the extinguished Czech Jewish communities.

As the dominant administrative partner in Jewish-state relations, the offices that managed ecclesiastical affairs, the SOEA and its successors, set the framework in which the Jewish communities developed. They empowered the communities to engage in the aforementioned activities. Yet they also limited their freedoms and opportunities for growth by controlling their finances, choosing their leaders, monitoring them for dissent, and restricting their international contacts. The ideologies of state administrators and their shifting perspectives on the Jewish religious minority, therefore, constituted the political-cultural and discursive environment in

²⁵ Rudolf Iltis, "Záznam o rozhovoru pana vrchního rabína Dra G. Sichera s panem Sametem, korespondentem israelského listu 'Haarec' v Tel Avivu za přítomnosti úřednice ministerstva zahraničních věcí Böhmové a tajemníka RŽNO Dra Iltise. Hovor se konal v řeči německé" [Memorandum regarding the conversation between Rabbi Doctor Gustav Sicher and Mr. Samet, a correspondent of the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* in Tel Aviv, in the presence of the official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Böhm, and the secretary of the CJRC Dr. Iltis] (2 December 1954). NACR, SÚC box 211.

which Jewish leaders and community members acted and, in some cases, resisted. The strategies adopted by the Czech Jewish leadership, in turn, conditioned how state officials perceived the Jewish community and influenced their policies. So too did their general assumptions about the Jewish minority.

Unlike the Secret Police, the ecclesiastical administrators had a relatively benevolent attitude towards the minority in question. In a 1958 report, one official explained,

Most of the members of the Jewish religious community here have a positive attitude towards the people's democratic order and appreciate the rigorous anti-fascist politics of our government. Many Jews are members of the party and fulfill well their civic responsibilities.

There are, however, many Jews here who do not agree with socialism, have not reconciled themselves to the prohibition of private enterprise, and Zionist tendencies are manifest among them.²⁶

The official, however, also attributed a number of negative tendencies to Czech Jewry,

Characteristic of all of our Jews is [their] unremitting attempt to acquire benefits and concessions in view to the suffering caused by Nazi persecution, excessive sensitivity for any restriction of religious life (or the Jewish community), which they see as racial discrimination, the attempt to acquire greater positions than [those] corresponding to their societal significance under present conditions. Along these lines, they try to maintain the greatest number of religious communities as possible, lobby for the establishment of schools for training new clergy, overestimate the importance of Jewish monuments (for example, Jewish cemeteries) and demand their maintenance. They also overestimate their standing in the question of cultivating international relations. Not fulfilling [their] requests evokes a feeling of injury and incomprehension.²⁷

This tension in perception and this suspicion conditioned the articulation of a policy for managing Jewish religious affairs in the Czech lands. The report's author concluded,

Our mission, henceforth, will be to regulate the activity of the Jewish religious community such that it does not deviate from the tolerable, to orient their activity towards the proper fulfillment of civic duties, and to repress any Zionist tendencies. To limit the foreign contacts of our Jews to events that will benefit all of our society, serve the

²⁶ Ministry of Education and Culture, Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs, "Zpráva o činnosti židů v ČSR" [Report on the activity of Jews in the Czechoslovak Republic] (27 July 1958), 4. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

²⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

establishment of the peaceful cooperation between nations.

In the economic sphere, we will limit the state allowance to the essential level, such that it will gradually lead to the lowering of the number of [Jewish Religious Communities] and synagogue congregations.²⁸

These goals accorded with the country's general ecclesiastical policies. Yet state officials implemented them idiosyncratically, in light of the distinctive position of the Jewish religious minority in the Czech lands and the attention (and funds) it drew internationally.

The First Difference: Jewish Loyalty to the New Order

It should be recalled that even before the political and cultural liberalization of the 1960s, Jewish-state relations took on an exceptional character in comparison with those involving other churches. First, the state's ecclesiastical administrators considered the leaders of the CJRC and Prague-community to be reliable allies—if ones also in need of constant management. Indeed, while other churches demanded greater freedom from state control in 1956, the Prague-based Jewish leadership sought to deepen its mutually beneficial relationship with the state. In short time, the administrators came to look with similar favor on the communities in Plzeň, Brno, and Olomouc.²⁹ If this did not make the Czech Jewish communities exceptional, it did put them into a position akin to that of the Czechoslovak Church, which enjoyed dispensation from the state in exchange for its loyalty.

As Soukupová argues, the state ecclesiastical administration did not, however, rely on Jewish loyalty alone to control the communities. They guaranteed the latter's fealty by fixing elections, and thereby installing willing collaborators like Rudolf Iltis into positions of authority. They also monitored community meetings to stifle dissent and rewarded cooperation on both the

²⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁹ "Zpráva o situaci v židovské náboženské společnosti v ČSR" [Report on the activity of the Jewish religious community in the Czechoslovak Republic] (n.d., 1960), 3. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

communal and personal level. Still, officials worried about the influence of Israeli diplomats on domestic Jews and about the latter's familial and institutional contacts abroad. They believed that Jewish citizens had a proclivity to participate in the black market, not only out of antisemitic prejudice, but because the postwar order and some Israeli diplomats had, in fact, led a seemingly disproportionate number of Jews to do so. State officials sought to suppress the religiously Orthodox in particular, who they felt demanded more accommodations from the state than their liberal peers and whom they suspected of ideological dissent and criminality. During the 1950s and 1960s, the administrators responsible for ecclesiastical affairs, nonetheless, loosened their hold over the Jewish communities in accord with the country's political and cultural liberalization. They left policing to the police and deployed ingenious strategies to force policies established in the early 1950s to accommodate new priorities.

The Second Difference: Jewish Religion and the State

State ecclesiastical administrators did not perceive the Jewish religion as dangerous. As it stood little chance of attracting new adherents, it posed little threat to the advancement of atheism.

State officials also appreciated that a good proportion of Czech Jews did not hold strong religious convictions. "Some Jews," one official noted,

observe ritual prescriptions and religious practices, more or less, for reasons of prestige and in an attempt to keep ritual establishments in operation (*mikveh*, *kosher* slaughter, the ritual cafeteria, etc.). Participation in services is relatively low and only the ceremonies on the Jewish high holiday are visited abundantly.³⁰

In contrast, state ecclesiastical administrators looked with suspicion upon Orthodox Jews,

³⁰ "Zpráva o situaci v židovské náboženské společnosti v ČSR" [Report on the activity of the Jewish religious community in the Czechoslovak Republic] (n.d., 1960), 3. NAČR, MŠK box 56; quoted in Soukupová, "Postoj Státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství" [The Position of the State towards the Jewish Religious Community], 90.

especially those hailing from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, who settled in Prague and in the Western cities of Karlovy Vary and Ustí nad Labem after the Second World War. One official wrote,

In some communities, primarily in Karlovy Vary and Ustí nad Labem, there perpetually manifests an attempt to exploit the standing of the Jewish Religious Community for furthering personal interests, establishing contacts with foreigners, etc. The Jews from the eastern territories [Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia], who came here after 1945 especially excel at this. Their activities often coincide with their Orthodox faith.³¹

Rather than confronting these communities directly, a strategy appropriate for the police, the SOEA and its successors called upon the lay and clerical leadership of the Jewish communities to keep them in line. Indeed, doubt in František Fuch's ability "to restrict the activity of Orthodox Jews, who disruptively intervene into the life of the Jewish Religious Communities," among other things, led state officials reject his candidacy for the CJRC presidency in 1959. It mattered little that he was a party member and had been instrumental in the communist takeover of the CJRC in 1948.³²

This lack of concern among state ecclesiastical administrators with Judaism as a religion, except in the case of Orthodoxy, led them to extend privileges to the CJRC relative to some of the country's other churches. A tendency towards dispensation, rather than zealousness characterized their approach to managing the CJRC from 1954 to 1969.³³ Despite the Political

³¹ "Zpráva o situaci v židovské náboženské společnosti v ČSR" [Report on the activity of the Jewish religious community in the Czechoslovak Republic] (n.d., 1960), 3. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

³² Memorandum from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Department for Ecclesiastical Matters to Košnar at the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Division of Propaganda and Agitation, "Zpráva o přípravě ke sjezdu delegátů ŽNO" [Report on the preparations for the congress of the delegates of the Jewish Religious Communities], in collection of documents labeled "Sjezd 1959" [Congress 1959] (2 December 1959), 2. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

³³ Blanka Soukupová argues that the secular-communist elements that led the postwar community paid for this dispensation with public declarations of faith in the party-state system and through their collaboration. The Orthodox members of the community, particularly those from the Sub-Carpathian region, rejected this strategy and its implications for the future of Jewish religious practice in the Czech lands. Soukupová therefore attributes the stark divisions within the Czech Jewish communities, between Orthodox and relatively secular Jews, to the

Bureau's directive to reduce the influence of churches on the next generation, the SOEA continued to allow the Jewish communities to hold annual Purim carnivals for children. They even permitted the Prague community to allocate a large room for Jewish youngsters to meet and socialize with one another.³⁴ As per the next chapter, they extended even more privileges and administered with greater leniency during the 1960s. During those years, the Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Culture, even permitted the Prague community to offer historically and culturally themed lectures to its younger members. They even approved plans to hold a major, international celebration of Czech-Jewish history in Prague.

While the state administration endeavored to reduce the number of Christian clergy members, it collaborated with the CJRC to ensure that the Jewish community would not lack for rabbis. By the mid-1950s, only seven rabbis served in Czechoslovakia, four in the Czech lands and three in Slovakia. In light of the advanced ages of Rabbis Gustav Sicher (1880-1960) and Richard Feder (1875-1970), the SOEA agreed that the CJRC should hire a young graduate of the

intervention of the state into community affairs. Blanka Soukupová, "Židovská menšina v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968: Mezi lojalitou k režimu, závazky k rodinné tradici a k Judaismu" [The Jewish minority in the Czech lands in the years 1956-1968: Between loyalty to the regime and ties to their family tradition and to Judaism], in *Židovská menšina v československu v letech 1956-1968: Od destalinizace k pražskému jaru* [The Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia in the years 1956-1968: From de-Stalinization to the Prague Spring], ed. Miloš Pojar (Prague, Czech Republic: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2011).

Although the Orthodox managed to win small battles against their opponents, they could not stand against the combined strength of the official community, the non-Orthodox majority, and state officials. Many chose to emigrate in the early 1960s when the option arose.

³⁴ The SOEA did force the closure of two Jewish youth homes in 1953. The official reason for this, however, had little to do with concern over the religious indoctrination of children. The official in charge argued that religious affiliation could not play a role in the allocation of social services within a communistic society. Four years later, the successor organization to the SOEA at the Ministry of Education and Culture would, nonetheless, permit the CJRC to distribute financial and material aid to its members in need. Jacob Ari Labendz, "Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist: Managing 'Jewish Power and Danger' in 1960s Communist Czechoslovakia," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014): 93-94.

rabbinical seminary in Budapest.³⁵ This proved difficult. In 1956, Chief Rabbi Sicher rejected two candidates due to insufficient training. That same year, the Hungarian authorities refused to grant permission for a third to serve in the Czech lands on the grounds that he was not politically reliable.³⁶ After the Hungarian Uprising of October 1956, the Hungarian Jewish community resisted sending any of their rabbis to serve abroad, noting that too many of them had already emigrated.³⁷ In response, the CJRC joined with its Slovak counterpart in proposing to open a rabbinical training academy of their own, but the Ministry of Education and Culture rejected the idea.³⁸

When Rabbi Sicher died in 1960, the CJRC attempted once again to hire a rabbi from Budapest. The ministry rejected this proposal as well, noting that the Hungarian community maintained close ties with “some world Jewish unions.”³⁹ In 1962, Rabbi Emil Davidovič (1912-1986) emigrated to West Germany, reducing the number of rabbis in the Czech lands to two and thereby heightening the crisis. The Ministry of Education and Culture, therefore, agreed to permit—and to pay for—a Czech student to enroll in the Budapest seminary. The CJRC announced

³⁵ Letter from the CJRC to the SOEA “Věc: rabínský dorost” [Re: rabbinical youth] (20 December 1954) and attached documents. NAČR, SÚC box 211.

³⁶ Jaroslav Knobloch, “Získání rabína pro ČSR - situace” [Acquiring a rabbi for the Czechoslovak Republic - situation] (13 July 1956). NAČR, SÚC box 11.

³⁷ Letter from the CJRC to the Jaroslav Knobloch at the SOEA (11 January 1957). NAČR, SÚC box 211.

³⁸ Collection of documents in folder labeled “Příprava žáků židovského vyznání k výkonu duchovenských funkcí” [Preparing students of the Jewish confession for carrying out clerical functions] (2 December 1958). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

³⁹ They likely had in mind the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the World Jewish Congress. Memo by the director of the Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs for the Ministry of Education and Culture, “Věc: Obsazení funkce vrchního rabína ŽNO v Praze” [Re: filling the position of the chief rabbi of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague], in collection of documents regarding Rabbi Richard Feder (28 November 1960). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

the opportunity as early as 1963, but it took three years for them to find a candidate.⁴⁰ The postwar generation had not yet come of age and the prospect of a professional association with the Jewish community likely scared many potential students in light of the antisemitism of the 1950s. Ervín Salamon (now Thomas, b. 1948), a native of Košice, began his studies in Budapest in 1966.⁴¹

Holy Collaboration: Czech Rabbis and the State

The SOEA and its successors depended upon the cooperation of rabbis to maintain control over the Jewish communities in the Czech lands, even if they also sought to limit their influence.⁴² Indeed, following the example of Chief Rabbi Sicher, the rabbis of the Czech lands collaborated closely with state officials. Their political strategies reinforced Jewish-state mutuality in the region, even if the rabbis and state officials ultimately served competing ends. As per above, the party-state did not require rabbis to believe in or even to promote communism, and it certainly did not expect them to champion atheism. The choice of the Czech rabbis to work within, rather

⁴⁰ “Zpráva o průběhu sjezdu delegátů židovské náboženské společnosti v českých krajích dne 24.XI.1963 v Praze” [Report on the course of the congress of the delegates of the Jewish Religious Community in the Czech lands on 24 October 1963 in Prague], in collection of documents regarding congress. NAČR, MŠK box 56. In late 1964, after Rabbi Benjamin Farkaš emigrated, the CJRC inquired once again into the possibility of hiring a Hungarian rabbi. In that year, at eighty-nine years old, Rabbi Feder stood alone as the only rabbi in the Czech lands. Letter from Ota Heitlinger to Karel Šnýder, “Věc: Návrh na cestu do Budapešti” [Re: proposal for a trip to Budapest] (18 November 1964). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁴¹ Kopecká, “Informace - Věc: Ervín Salamon - pobyt v Anglii” [Information - re: Ervín Salamon - residence in England] (2 November 1972), in collection of documents regarding Rabbi Salamon. NAČR, SPVC box 233.

⁴² In 1959, one ecclesiastical officer suggested that rabbis should “not have decisive voice within the organs of the Jewish religious communities (only an advisory voice).” Memorandum from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Department for Ecclesiastical Matters to Košňar at the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Division of Propaganda and Agitation, “Zpráva o přípravě ke sjezdu delegátů ŽNO” [Report on the preparations for the congress of the delegates of the Jewish Religious Communities], in collection of documents labeled “Sjezd 1959” [Congress 1959] (2 December 1959), 2.

than against the structures of the communist state reflected the political strategy adopted by the lay leaders of the Czech Jewish communities and also some of their clerical counterparts in other churches. A lack of dissenting clergy, however, distinguished the Czech rabbinate from other ecclesiastical hierarchies and also from their fellow rabbis in Slovakia. Their strategy of collaboration, intended to secure a Jewish future in the Czech lands and to provide for the religious and educational needs of Jewish citizens, further convinced state officials that Judaism, as a religion, did not threaten the communistic order.

In the early 1950s, some SOEA officials worried about Chief Rabbi Sicher's purported liberal-democratic convictions and his "reactionary" commitment to Jewish religious law. They also noted, however, that his coreligionists held him in high esteem, presumably due to a perception that he protected the from state intervention.⁴³ Indeed, Rabbi Sicher convinced the SOEA to overturn bans on the ritual slaughter of cattle in 1953 and 1954.⁴⁴ In short time, nonetheless, the officials of the SOEA came to view Sicher as an ally. The author of his 1956 personnel appraisal (*kádrový posudek*) noted,

Among most of the believers [he] is honored and revered, and the Orthodox Jews especially presume to see him as a certain guarantee against the excessive influence of the state on the Jewish religious community in the Czechoslovak Republic. Among believers he has authority. The collaboration of Dr. Sicher with the state administration is good and from his behavior and actions it cannot be assumed that he does not have a positive attitude toward the people's democratic order in the Czechoslovak Republic.⁴⁵

⁴³ Chmělař, "Některá data o vrch. rabínovi dr. Gustavu Sicherovi" [Some data about Chief Rabbi Gustav Sicher] (26 August 1950); and idem., "Připomínka k žádosti ržno z 11.9.1951 č.j. Uv 2846" [Remarks regarding the request of the CJRC from 9/11/1951, unit number Uo 2846. NAČR, SÚC box 211.

⁴⁴ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 24-26; and Labendz, "Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist," 92-93.

⁴⁵ "Dr. Gustav Sicher: vrchní rabín židovské náboženské společnosti" [Dr. Gustav Sicher: chief rabbi of the Jewish religious community] (2 February 1956). NAČR, SÚC box 211. Not everyone agreed. A report written after Sicher's death noted that the rabbi initially resisted the new political order and "did not hide his liberal ideas and recollections of the Masaryk republic. In religious matters he began to turn to the Orthodox stream." Yet it also went on to note that he

The Minister of Education and Culture awarded Rabbi Sicher with a gift of 1,000 crowns on his eightieth and last birthday in 1960. The minister commented that he was,

convinced that the Jewish religious community will yet contribute more under [Sicher's] leadership to the struggle for the preservation of world peace and to the flowering of our socialist homeland.⁴⁶

Rabbi Sicher may have only presided over the Czech Jewish community for the first fifteen years of communist rule, but he set an example that others followed for decades.

Rabbi Feder, who served the Moravian-Jewish community from the regional capital of Brno, adopted a similar strategy to Sicher. He maintained it for ten years as Chief Rabbi, from the time of the Sicher's death in 1960 until his own demise in 1970. Yet Feder's approach differed in fundamental ways from Sicher's. As a charismatic, elderly man, Feder won the respect of the state administration and the members of his community. His state minders treated him with additional patience because he came from a working-class family and espoused a class-conscious form of Judaism. Feder had even identified with the Czech-assimilationist movement within the Jewish community before the Second World War, whereas Sicher had embraced Zionism.⁴⁷ Thus, in 1963, when Feder publicly urged the state to improve its relationship with

adopted a more collaborative posture in time. "Zpráva o situaci v židovské náboženské společnosti v ČSR" [Report on the situation in the Jewish religious community in the Czechoslovak Republic] (n.d, 1960s). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁴⁶ Copy of letter to Sicher in collection of documents labeled "Jubilea významných představitelů židovské náboženské společnosti v ČSSR [Jubilee of the distinguished representatives of the Jewish religious communities in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] (25 July 1960). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁴⁷ On Feder's life see Blanka Soukupová, "Dr. Richard Feder (26. srpna 1875 - 18. listopadu 1970), Legendární českožidovský rabín poválečné "brněnské" období," in *Židé a Morava*, vol. 17, ed. Petr Pálka (Kroměříž, Czech Republic: The Kroměříž Museum, 2011). Rudolf Iltis published a collection of Rabbi Feder's writings and speeches in 1973, curated to present the rabbi and Judaism as progressive and in line with the politics of the Communist Party. *Život a odkaz* [Life and heritage] (Prague, Czech Republic: Central Ecclesiastical Press, 1973). For

the State of Israel, an official of the Ministry of Culture and Education simply corrected him. The official explained,

The Chief Rabbi, who is eighty-eight years old did not present his remarks with malice; he said what is still alive among his coreligionists. Since he has great authority, his words have great public acceptance. Therefore, in the interests of ecclesiastical political needs, it is necessary to discuss the aforementioned problem in such a way that the Chief Rabbi does not speak similarly again at various community affairs as currently happens.⁴⁸

Feder had earlier challenged the party's hierarchy of wartime victimization at a Holocaust memorial in Terezín in 1955. He, nonetheless, preferred to avoid conflict with the state, to remain in Brno, and to focus on educating youngsters. He allowed lay leaders to assert far more control over the community than Sicher had. For his service and attitude, the state awarded Feder the Medal of Work, one of its highest honors.⁴⁹

Political scandals prevented the younger generation of Czech rabbis from following in the footsteps of Rabbis Sicher and Feder, even if their biographies suggested that they would have. Rabbi Emil Davidovič emigrated in 1962, after falling pray to intra-communal strife in Karlovy Vary four years earlier. Though hailing from territories ceded by Czechoslovakia to Soviet Ukrainian after the Second World War, Davidovič espoused a liberal form of Judaism. A faction of Orthodox, Zionist Jews from his home region arranged for his disgrace and dismissal from the

recollections of Rabbi Feder that attest to his priorities for and esteem within the Jewish communities, see Zuzana Peterová, ed., *Rabín Feder* (Prague, Czech Republic: G Plus G, 2004).

⁴⁸ "Zpráva o průběhu sjezdu delegátů židovské náboženské společnosti v českých krajích dne 24.XI.1963 v Praze," [Report on the course of the congress of delegates of the Jewish religious community in the Czech regions on 11/24/1963 in Prague] in collection of documents labeled "Rada židovských náboženských obcí, Sjezd 1963" [CJRC, congress 1963]. NAČR, MŠK box 56. Also cited in Soukupová, "Židovská menšina v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968" [The Jewish minority in the Czech lands in the years 1956-1968].

⁴⁹ Soukupová, "Postoj Státu k židosvskému náboženskému společenství" [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community], 81.

rabbinate in 1958.⁵⁰ Rabbi Bernard Farkaš emigrated in 1964, never able to overcome the stigma of having served two years in prison for participating in the aforementioned aid-distribution networks.⁵¹ Rabbi Salamon held promise, but he too eventually chose self-imposed exile.⁵²

In August 1968, while Salamon was completing his rabbinical studies in London, Soviet-led armies invaded Czechoslovakia. The imposition of political and cultural normalization thereafter meant that Salamon could not expect to receive the same latitude from state officials as Sicher and Feder had. The state's bargain had changed. Its officials intervened more forthrightly into ecclesiastical affairs and demanded more concessions from Jewish leaders. The Secret Police simultaneously enjoyed a freer hand to pursue purported Zionists. In response, Salamon prolonged his residency in England for as long as possible, visiting Czechoslovakia regularly to officiate at holiday services. When state administrators demanded that he return permanently in 1972, Salamon chose to remain abroad. His community suffered for lack of a rabbi. So ended, temporarily, the days of rabbinic-state mutuality.

In contrast to the Czech rabbis, the Chief Rabbi of Slovakia, Eliáš Katz, adopted a more antagonistic approach to managing his community's relationship with the state. The most well educated of Czechoslovakia's rabbis (according to traditional measures), Katz embraced religious orthodoxy and fought to impose it upon his community. In 1951, the police reported to ecclesiastical administrators that Katz had publicly excommunicated an employee of the Jewish community and had suggested that one would have done well to murder him for the crime of

⁵⁰ Collection of documents in a letter sent by the CJRC to the Ministry of Education and Culture (5 February 1960) in folder labeled "Rabín Emil Davidovič, 1949-1960." NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁵¹ Minister of Education and Culture, Department VI, "Věc: Návrh na obsazení funkce vrchního rabína ŽNO v Praze" [Re: proposal for filling the position of chief rabbi of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague] (14 November 1960), in collection of documents regarding Rabbi Feder. NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁵² Collection of documents labeled, "Ervín Salamon." NAČR, SPVC box 233.

informing upon a fellow Jew to the authorities, supposedly the Slovak equivalent of the SOEA.⁵³ Ten years later, during a battle for control over the Slovak communities, Katz attacked his adversaries in the pages of *Věstník*. He deployed a rabbinic embellishment of the bible (*midrash*) to associate them implicitly with Dathan and Abiram, Hebrews who according to some traditions collaborated with Pharaoh in the enslavement of their fellows, rebuked Moses for slaying a violent Egyptian taskmaster, and questioned his authority.⁵⁴ Later in the bible, they rebelled against the authority of Moses and Aaron, a crime for which they paid with their lives. Though in a meeting between Jewish leaders and state officials, Katz accused one of his opponents of having collaborated with the Nazis, his metaphor left open the possibility that he actually intended to disparage his opponents' relationship with the communist state.⁵⁵ State ecclesiastical

⁵³ This would have qualified him as a *malshin*. “Nabádání k vraždě při kázání Eliáše KATZE, rabína Židovské náboženské obce,” [Ehortation to murder during a sermon of Eliáš KATZ, rabbi of the Jewish Religious Community], attached to letter from the Ministry of National Security to Zdeněk Fierlinger (4 November 1951), in folder labeled “Zprávy MNB zasílané SÚC” [Reports of the Ministry of National Security sent to the SOEA]. NAČR, SÚC box 93.

Katz seems to have temporarily adopted a more accommodating attitude to the state in the wake of the Slánský Affair. His personnel assessment from 1956 reads, “He does not express himself politically. As the representative of Slovak Jews, however, he collaborates well with the workers of the state administration. He accepts their advice and has a good attitude towards the people’s democratic order.” See “Kádrový posudek” [Personnel assessment] (5 September 1956). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁵⁴ Eliáš Katz, “Fragmenty zo zápiskov (z denníka známeho korechitu)” [Fragments from the protocols (from the diary of a well-known *korachite*), *Věstník*, 23/7 (July 1961), 3-7. The original *midrash* can be found in the work of the medieval commentator Rashi.

⁵⁵ Letter from Rabbi Katz to the CJRC, “Vec: Památný záznam-koord. výb.” [Re: Memorandum - coordination committee] (17 March 1961). NAČR, MŠK box 56.

The name of the individual, Josef Lipa, appears on a list of the erstwhile employees of the former *Ústřední židov* (Central Jewish Community) in Bratislava. See letter to the Regional Administration of the Ministry of the Interior, Department 3, Division 3, “Zoznam osôb zamestnaných na býv. ÚŽ v Bratislave, ktorí bývajú mimo Bratislavy” [A list of people employed at the former Central Jewish Community in Bratislava] (22 May 1961), 2. ABS, H-425-365-5. See Chapter One for information on the uses of these materials.

administrators certainly thought so, as did his opponents.⁵⁶ When questioned by officials, Rabbi Farkaš insisted that Katz had invented the rabbinic legend for political purposes.⁵⁷ He thus ironically prioritized maintaining his collaborative relationship with officials, and thereby securing his community's fate, over defending a colleague who had chosen a countervailing political strategy. The Slovak equivalent of the SOEA insisted that Rabbi Katz resolve the situation, which he did by writing a letter clarifying that he had written the article with no malicious intent.⁵⁸

As the years progressed, Rabbi Katz came to believe that he could no longer practice Judaism nor raise his children as he wished in Slovakia.⁵⁹ He had steadily lost control of his community.⁶⁰ Thus, during the mid-1960s, Rabbi Katz began extorting the state by withholding the *kosher* certification for Jelínek Slivovice, plum brandy, the sale of which abroad brought tens of thousands of dollars in hard currency into the impoverished national economy on an annual basis. Katz thereby won himself an extended trip to the USA and ensured that his daughter

⁵⁶ Urban, "Věc: Posudek k článku hl. rabína Eliáše Katze 'Frangmenty zo zápiskov'" [Re: report on the article of Chief Rabbi Eliáš Katz "Fragments from the protocols"] (28 August 1961); and letter by Slovak community member, likely a member of clergy, who's signature is illegible, "Dôverne!" [Confidential] (31 July 1971); Jozef Lipa, report on Katz's article, (1961); NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁵⁷ Letter from Rabbi Farkaš to František Ehrmann (21 July 1961). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁵⁸ Ján Kmet', "Zpráva zo služobnej cesty vykonanej dňa 30.XI.1961 na MŠK - odbore pre veci cirkevné" [Report from the official trip on 11/30/1961 at the Ministry of Education and Culture - Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs] (n.d.), 1. NAČR, MŠK box 56; and letter from Rabbi Katz to the editors of *Věstník* (27 November 1961). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁵⁹ Letter from Rabbi Katz to the Regional Administration of the Ministry of the Interior, Passport Division, "K žiadost o vyst'ahovanie: Eliáš Katz hl. rabín s manželkou a maloleté deti" [Regarding the application for emigration: Eliáš Katz chief rabbi with his wife and young child] (18 May 1967). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

⁶⁰ For a brief commentary on Slovak intra-communal strife, see Blanka Soukupová, "Židovská menšina v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968" [The Jewish minority in the Czech lands in the years 1956-1968].

<<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/languages/czech/newsletter/01/zidovska.asp>> (17 July 2014).

would spend years studying English in the United Kingdom. Under the pretext of enjoying a year teaching at an Israeli university, Katz eventually secured exit visas for himself, his wife, and his son. Officials worried at first that his departure and inevitable emigration would compromise the state's ability to provide for religiously for Slovak Jewry and thereby lend credence to Western anti-communist propaganda. In the end, however, the state's ecclesiastical administrators concluded that the dwindling community no longer needed a rabbi and that it was not the responsibility of the state to provide one for the community. State officials assumed, moreover, that Rabbi Salamon would one day serve all of Czechoslovakia. They had even secured a promise from Rabbi Katz that he and his sons would continue certify the *shivvits* on annual return visits. They also feared that Katz would disparage Czechoslovakia abroad if they did not let him leave.⁶¹ Thus, a good degree of antagonism characterized the relationship between the Jewish communities and the state in Slovakia during the first decades of communist rule, due, in no small part, to Rabbi Katz.

Comparing the five rabbis who served in the Czech lands through 1970 to each other and also to Rabbi Katz helps to elucidate their roles in constructing the increasingly positive relationship between the Jewish communities and the state during the late 1950s and 1960s. Rabbis Sicher and Feder entered into voluntary relationships of mutuality with the party-state and thereby secured the well functioning of their communities. Rabbi Salamon expected to

⁶¹ See extensive collection of documents in folder labeled, "Rabín Katz Eliáš, 1956-1968." NAČR, MŠK box 58. In particular, see "Eliáš Katz, hlavný rabín Slovenska žiadosť o povolenie ročného lektorátu na Univerzite Bar Ilan v Izraeli" [Eliáš Katz, chief rabbi of Slovakia request for permission for a one year lectureship at Bar Ilan University in Israel] (n.d., 1967), in collection of stapled documents beginning with a letter from Karel Hruza to Eliáš Katz (20 July 1967). See also Soukupová, "Židovská menšina v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968" [The Jewish minority in the Czech lands in the years 1956-1968]. See also, Soukupová, "Postoj Státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství: Mezi kontrolou, represemi a "blahosklonností" [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community], 94-95.

follow in their footsteps, but understood that the invasion of 1968 had changed the nature of the state's bargain. Like Rabbi Katz, he too chose self-imposed exile to secure a better life for himself and to serve communities in locations more amenable to his goals. The experiences of Rabbis Davidovič and Farkaš serve as reminders that the success of individual actors and their political strategies depended upon factors beyond their control. Davidovič fell to intra-communal strife, a casualty of individuals who opposed the secular-communist Jewish leadership in Prague and who felt excluded from the benefits that accrued to other sectors of the community. Farkaš, in contrast, failed to negotiate the ever-shifting terrain at the intersection of ecclesiastical politics, ethnic solidarity, and foreign affairs. Finally, Rabbi Katz's relationship with the party-state throws the careers of the Czech-based rabbis into relief. Not only does it demonstrate that their strategies were the product of choice, but also suggests why state officials may have treated them with greater dispensation than their Slovak colleagues.

Jews and Money: Financial Difference at the Jewish Communities

The Jewish religious communities stood out among churches in financial matters as well. On the one hand, the state did not need to use economic levers to ensure the eventual dissolution of the communities. The small and declining size of their membership and of their younger generation in particular suggested that they would disappear of their own accord, due to natural attrition. Indeed, as time passed, synagogue congregations and even full communities dissolved themselves, sometimes after years of inactivity.⁶² On the other hand, the state benefited

⁶² Membership in the Czechoslovak Jewish communities rose from 17,000 in 1951 to a peak of 18,000 in 1963. This reflected the postwar generation's coming of age and also the decision of some individuals who had declined to join the communities in the 1950s to do so in the 1960s. Membership fell, however, to 15,000 between 1963 and 1968. This reflected new opportunities for emigration and the deaths of older members. Tomáš Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na*

financially from the persistence of the communities. In accordance with state policy, the offices in charge of ecclesiastical affairs sought to deplete the holdings of the Jewish communities and to limit the funds they allocated to them. And, for their part, the Czech Jewish community had much to deplete. During the first years of communist rule, the community supported itself, in part, with funds which remained in accounts established by the JDC and with money allocated to it by the state from the spoils recovered in Theresienstadt.⁶³ The communities also drew considerable income from the sale and rental of their properties. This further lowered the amount of money that ecclesiastical administrators had to request from the state on behalf of the communities, which, in turn, provided the material basis for Jewish-state mutuality.

The material basis of Jewish-state mutuality persisted for decades, even after the communities had disposed of their most valuable properties, sometime during the early 1960s. Shortly before this time, Czechoslovakia began to benefit financially from regular transfers of hard-currency into the state economy provided by Western-Jewish groups seeking to support their coreligionists behind the Iron curtain. In 1958, the Conference for Jewish Material Claims against Germany began transferring large sums of money in U.S. dollars to the Czechoslovak Jewish communities for distribution to elderly Jews with insufficient pensions and without family support. That year, it transferred the equivalent of 800,000 crowns (about \$40,640),⁶⁴ split

Moravě [The History of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia] (Prague, Czech Republic: Sefer, 2001), 638. Blanka Soukupová attributes only 5,162 members to the Czech communities in 1966. “Židovská menšina v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968” [The Jewish minority in the Czech lands in the years 1956-1968].

⁶³ Ministry of Education and Culture, Department VI, “Zpráva o činnosti židů v ČSR” [Report on the activities of Jews in the Czechoslovak Republic] (22 June 1958), 3. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁶⁴ The original documents do not provide dollar equivalents. I calculated the exchange rate in 1958 using <www.h360tour.com> (17 July 2014).

slightly unequally in the Slovak community's favor.⁶⁵ By the end of 1963, the Claims Conference had transferred 1,750,000 crowns and 200,000 *tuzex*-crowns (domestic dollar equivalents) to the CJRC alone. The latter and its subordinate communities dispensed monthly subsidies of between 150 and 200 crowns, along with fourteen *tuzex*-crowns, to members who had been approved by their local national committee.⁶⁶ In 1966, the CJRC identified between 450 and 550 individuals who relied upon this type of aid. The Claims Conference also provided funds directly to the CJRC and its Slovak counterpart to fund larger social welfare programs. Its annual contributions to Czechoslovakia reached about \$80,000.⁶⁷

This aid program contributed to the material bases of Jewish-state mutuality because it brought a steady flow of American dollars into Czechoslovakia's hard-currency reserves. The state retained the dollars it received and dispensed their equivalent to the Jewish communities in local currencies. In return, officials permit and even facilitated close contacts between domestic Jewish leaders and their western counterparts. Officials even overlooked the general policy that prohibited churches from offering social services. One functionary, who nonetheless supported the programs commented,

It is a negative from an ecclesiastical-political perspective that the communities will

⁶⁵ Ministry of Education and Culture, Department VI, "Informace k poradě se zástupci ZAMINI and FIMINI dne 27.5.1959 v 9.30 hod. na odb. pro věci církv." [Information for the consultation with the representatives of the Foreign Ministry and the Financial Ministry on 5/27/1959 at 9:30AM at the Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs], 1. NAČR, MŠK box 57. A document from 1965 shows slightly lower figures. Letter from Ota Heitlinger of the CJRC to the Ministry of Education and Culture (28 January 1965). NAČR, MŠK box 57.

⁶⁶ Řádný sjezd Židovské náboženské společnosti v Čechách se konal dne 24.XI.1963 v Praze" [Regular congress of the Jewish religious community in the Czech lands occurred on 11/24/1963], in collection of documents regarding the 1963 congress, 2-3. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3; and "Rada židovských náboženských obcí v Praze, Ústředný sváz žid. náb. obcí v Bratislavě - žádost o povolení finanční příspěvků ze zahraničí na sociální činnost - souhlas" [The CJRC in Prague and the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Bratislava - request for permission for financial contributions from abroad for social-service activities - permission] (25 January 1966). NAČR, MŠK box 57.

strengthen their religious influence on the supported individuals and their family members.⁶⁸

The Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs justified its decision to approve the aid program by appealing to the CJRC's own argument that Judaism mandated that its adherents care for the Jewish poor. Officials thus argued that they were constitutionally bound to allow Jews to engage in social welfare, out of a respect for their religious freedom.⁶⁹ They also noted that working with Claims Conference was the only way for the state to secure German compensation for the wartime suffering Czech and Slovak Jews.⁷⁰ The Claims Conference program exacerbated the uneven demographics at the Jewish communities. While the elderly had to maintain their membership in order to receive aid, youngsters could attend community events without formally joining. State officials did not fret about the inflation of community roles with members whom they believed would soon pass on.

To be clear, Western-Jewish aid programs posed a number of challenges for state officials. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education and Culture agreed to prohibit the Claims Conference from sending packages of goods directly to Czech and Slovak Jews, fearing that the recipients would trade them on the black market for profit. At first, they even considered prohibiting the Claims Conference from sending *tuzex*-crowns.⁷¹ The Ministry of

⁶⁸ Ministry of Education and Culture, "Informace k poradě" [Information for the consultation], 2.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Education and Culture, Department VI, "Zpráva o činnosti židů v ČSR" [Report on the activities of Jews in the Czechoslovak Republic] (22 June 1958), 3. Officials deployed similar logic to justify permitting the CJRC to manage three Jewish nursing homes through 1959. In this case, the need to provide *kosher* meals also played a considerable role. On the closure of the nursing homes see Soukupová, "Židovská menšina v českých zemích v letech 1956-1968" [The Jewish minority in the Czech lands in the years 1956-1968].

⁷⁰ Ministry of Education and Culture, "Informace k poradě" [Information for the consultation], 2. This was due to the Hallstein Doctrine, according to which the West Germany would not establish formal relations with states that recognized East Germany.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2; and letter from Pleskot at the Ministry of Finance to Dr. Flaschner at the CJRC, "Věc: Claims Conference, příspěvek pro přestárlé" [Re: Claims Conference, contribution for the

Education and Culture also worried more generally about the effect that receiving aid from abroad would have upon Czech and Slovak Jews. The same official cited immediately above concluded,

Many Jews depend on this form of support and do not attempt to work to secure their own sustenance. It is also impossible to prevent “illicit dealings” (*kšeftování*).

In the support from the West the Jews see the “greater resources” of the capitalistic world.⁷²

Despite these concerns, ministry officials approved the aid program. The state’s need for hard currency outweighed their fears about the program’s potential negative side-effects on citizens who belonged to a religious community led by trusted men.

The Ministry of Education and Culture also confronted challenges from Western-Jewish organizations less inclined to bow to its demands. Between 1958 and 1963, the *Société de Secours et D’Entraide*, a Swiss front-organization for the JDC, sent triennial and quarterly gifts of ten dollars each, in *tuzex*-crowns, directly to individual Czech and Slovak Jews. The organization relied upon international trade agreements and its neutral base of operations to evade the scrutiny and intervention of both the state and the CJRC. The *Société* even maintained its own list of European Jews for this and other purposes, a practice that it shared with the State of Israel. To the chagrin of Czechoslovak officials, neither the JDC nor the State of Israel distinguished between Jewish community members, i.e., religious Jews, and ethnic Jews who had declined to join the communities. Officials feared that support from abroad would prolong

elderly] (16 January 1958). NAČR, MŠK box 57. Other American Jewish organizations, such as B’nai B’rith succeeded in sending packages and money to individuals in Czechoslovakia, usually with the help of the JDC. They anticipated that the recipients would trade the contents on the black market and chose their gifts accordingly. Jacob Ari Labendz, “‘In unserem Kreise:’ Czech-Jewish Activism and Immigration in America, 1939-1994,” *Jewish Culture and History* (expected December 2014); and Michael Beizer, “‘I Don’t Know Whom to Thank’: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s Secret Aid to Soviet Jewry” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, n.s. 15, no. 20 (Winter 2009): 111-36.

⁷² Ministry of Education and Culture, “Informace k poradě” [Information for the consultation], 2.

and even deepen the Jewish nationalist affinities of aid recipients. The *Société*, nonetheless, succeeded in sending money directly to at least 1,369 Czech and Slovak Jews in 1963.⁷³ It also provided monthly support for the three Jewish nursing homes administered by the CJRC through 1959.⁷⁴ The *Société*'s donations totaled about \$55,000 per year.⁷⁵

For some time, state officials and CJRC leaders struggled to convince the *Société* to restrict its contributions to vetted community members. Officials worried that in addition to aiding the impoverished elderly, the *Société* also supported members of the fallen bourgeoisie and individuals who had been convicted of political crimes, along with their relatives. They also suspected that some individuals received support under multiple names or redundantly from both the Claims Conference and the *Société*. Investigations by the CJRC revealed that some of the supposed recipients on the *Société*'s lists had already died.⁷⁶ The leaders of the CJRC reiterated these concerns. Perhaps they even shared them. Yet when the CJRC attempted to restrict the *Société*'s activities, it sought primarily to stem accusations of cronyism in the distribution of foreign aid, which arose from the *Société*'s idiosyncratic method for selecting recipients and which had divided the Czech-Jewish community and especially the community in Karlovy Vary.⁷⁷ Neither the state nor the CJRC, however, had the power to compel the *Société* to

⁷³ Ministry of Education and Culture, “Zpráva o dosavadní činnosti společnosti SSE SOCIÉTÉ DE SECOURS et d'ENTRAIDE se sídlem v Ženevě, 20, Croix d'Or, na území Československa” [Report on the activities heretofore of the organization SSE Société de Secours et d'Entraide with headquarters in Geneva, 20 Croix d'Or, on the territory of Czechoslovakia] (1964). NAČR, MŠK box 57.

⁷⁴ Řádný sjezd Židovské náboženské společnosti” [Regular congress of the Jewish religious community], 3.

⁷⁵ Letter from Heitlinger to the Ministry of Education and Culture (28 January 1965), 1.

⁷⁶ Soukupová, “Postoj Státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství” [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community], 77.

⁷⁷ Collection of documents, “Věc: Stížnost členů ŽNO v K. Varech” (1959). NAČR, MŠK box 58. See also Ministry of Education and Culture, “Zpráva o dosavadní činnosti společnosti SSE” [Report on the activities heretofore of the organization SSE], 1. See also Soukupová, “Postoj

cooperate. Indeed, it was only after the Claims Conference terminated its own program in 1964, that the *Société* began to collaborate with the CJRC and the state administration. Even that took time. Although the *Société* promised to allow the Jewish community to vet its list of recipients, it continued to send money to whomever it pleased for another two years.⁷⁸ Finally, in 1966, the *Société* agreed to allow the CJRC and its Slovak counterpart to distribute all of the funds on its behalf.⁷⁹ That program persisted through 1970s into the early 1980s.⁸⁰

The Western-Jewish aid programs of the late-1950s and 1960s thus perpetuated the mutuality that had, in part, characterized Jewish-state relations in the Czech lands since the inception of communist rule. At the same time, however, they also introduced significant tensions into that same relationship, because they formalized and necessitated regular contacts between Czech Jewish leaders and their Western counterparts. The unique position of the Jewish communities and their international networks vis-à-vis other Czech groups receives attention immediately below as the final area of Jewish difference with regard to the state's management

Státu k židosvskému náboženskému společenství” [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community], 93-94.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Education and Culture, “Zpráva o dosavadní činnosti společnosti SSE” [Report on the activities heretofore of the organization SSE], 3-4.

⁷⁹ Letter from Ota Heitlinger and František Fuchs of the CJRC to Karel Šnýder at the Ministry of Education and Culture, “Věc: Příspěvek od SOCIÉTÉ DE SECOURS ET D’ETNRAIDE, GENÉVA” [Re: contribution from the Société...] (4 July 1966); and collection of documents labeled “Věc: RŽNO v Praze, ÚSŽNO v Bratislavě - finanční příspěvky ze zahraničí na sociální činnost” [Re: CJRC in Prague and CUJRC in Bratislava - financial contributions from abroad for social-service activities] (27 July 1966). NAČR, MŠK box 57.

⁸⁰ Even before it had reached an accord with the communities and with the state, the *Société* had provided significant support for the three aforementioned nursing homes - at least, until 1960. For an incomplete record of donations by the *Société* and others in the late 1960s and beyond, see the collection of requests for approval by the CJRC and the responses from the Ministry of Culture and Information in NAČR, SPVC box 236. For more information on the interventions of the Claims Conference and the *Société* into Czechoslovak-Jewish affairs, see Soukupová, “Postoj Státu k židosvskému náboženskému společenství” [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community], 92-94. Soukupová erroneously associates the Claims Conference with the *Société*. It was tied, rather, to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

of ecclesiastical affairs.

International Jewish Networks

Czechoslovakia's ministries sought to regulate the international contacts of the country's Jewish communities according to the policies set by the Political Bureau.⁸¹ Officials had good reasons to fear these re-emerging relationships. As per above, they worried that receiving aid from the West might lead some Czech and Slovak Jews to believe that their coreligionists on the other side of the Iron Curtain lived better lives than they. Exposure posed ideological problems as well.

Western-Jewish organizations often conceived of Jewishness as an ethnicity with an associated religion. This conflicted with Czechoslovakia's official definition of Judaism as a religion only. The state security services, in particular, worried that association with Western Jewry might heighten the ethno-national sentiments of Czech and Slovak Jews and, indeed, transform them into Zionists and spies. Despite the fact that most major Western-Jewish organizations supported the State of Israel and its politics, the officials at the Ministry of Culture did not focus too much on this potential threat in their assessments organized Western Jewry until 1967. Well into the 1960s, they seized, rather, upon the possibility that Western Jews would lead their Czechoslovak counterparts into lives of crime and anti-state propagandizing.⁸² Two major police investigations during the 1950s provided credible evidence in support of these suspicions. They receive close treatment below.

Although these concerns pervaded state administrations across the Soviet Bloc, the

⁸¹ Ministry of Education and Culture, "Zpráva o činnosti židů v ČSR," [Report on the activity of the Jews in the Czechoslovak Republic], 5.

⁸² "Zpráva o situaci v židovské náboženské společnosti" [Report on the activity of the Jewish religious community], 5; cited in Soukupová, "Postoj státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství" [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community].

Czechoslovak ministries more severely restricted the contacts between their domestic Jewish communities and Western-Jewish organizations than their socialist neighbors.⁸³ CJRC and Central Union leaders, of course, met with representatives of the *Société*, the Claims Conference, and the Memorial Fund for Jewish Culture to negotiate their aid programs. Yet from 1950 to 1968, the state administration sought to keep Western-Jewish leaders at arms length. The state forbade the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities from joining the World Jewish Congress and even prevented them from sending “observers” to participate in its meetings. When congress president Nahum Goldmann visited Prague in 1966, the Ministry of Culture refused his request to meet with a representative of the central government.⁸⁴ That same ministry also rebuffed the Joint Distribution Committee, when it sought to resume local operations in 1964. The Soviet Union had labeled the Joint an espionage group and Czechoslovakia’s StB agreed.⁸⁵ The Ministry of Culture, nonetheless, permitted representatives of the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities to meet with both World Jewish Congress and JDC officials on a semi-official level.

Indeed, limiting the international contacts of the Jewish communities proved challenging, especially in light of the benefits that those contacts brought the state. Not only did they fill the

⁸³ The Czechoslovak Secret Police division in charge of combating Zionism believed that it had mitigated that purported threat to a greater extent than its Hungarian counterpart because it had disrupted the international ties of the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities more extensively. They told them so. See “Izraelská problematika - informace pro maďarské přátele” [The Israeli problem - information for Hungarian comrades] (7 July 1965). ABS, A-11, INV-607. On the clandestine yet close relationship between the JDC and Hungary, see Zachary Paul Levine, “Concealed in the Open: Recipients of International Clandestine Jewish Aid in Early 1950s Hungary,” *AHEA: E-Journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association*, vol. 5 (2012). <<http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012>> (13 May 2014). On the JDC, see Tom Shachtman, *I seek my Brethren: Ralph Goldman and “The Joint”* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2001).

⁸⁴ Soukupová, “Postoj státu k židovskému náboženskému společenství” [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community], 85.

⁸⁵ “Věc: Joint - žádost RŽNO o navázání styků” [Re: Joint - request by the CJRC to establish contacts] (4 December 1964). NAČR, MŠK box 57.

nation's coffers with hard currency, but they also provided opportunities for the state to rectify the damage that the Slánský Affair had wrought upon its image in the West. As per Chapter Two, the Ministry of Education and Culture permitted Jewish leaders to participate in international Holocaust commemorations and sent collections of artifacts from Theresienstadt around the world, in order to recast itself as an anti-fascist vanguard and a defender of Jewry. If “in the matter of developing international relations [Czech and Slovak Jews] overestimate[d] their standing,” the state had given them good reason to do so—even if its officials expressed regret about it.⁸⁶

The ability of the Ministry of Education and Culture to limit the contacts between domestic Jews and Western Jewry declined after 1960, as increasing numbers of Western tourists began pouring into Czechoslovakia on an annual basis, once the state had relaxed its visa and travel restrictions.⁸⁷ Western-Jewish individual and groups, many with ties to international

⁸⁶ Zpráva o situaci v židovské náboženské společnosti” [Report on the activity of the Jewish religious community], 5.

⁸⁷ The impetus for easing travel restrictions came from the Ministry of Foreign Trade, which intervened on behalf of the state's travel agency, Čedok. The latter complained that foreign tourist faced too many obstacles when visiting Czechoslovakia. With the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the former ministry appealed to the Communist Party to remove the impediments to increasing the flow of Western tourists into the country and, by implication, profiting from them. Barák, “Opatření k uvolnění formalit pro další rozvoj mezinárodního cizineckého ruchu,” [Measures for relaxing the formalities for the further expansion of the international foreign traffic] (9 June 1956). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/2, bundle 106, archival unit 124, point 15.

In 1965, the Ideological Division of the Central Committee of the Communist Party expressed deep concern that Western tourists, who had been arriving annually in increasing numbers, were creating an a false impression among Czechoslovak citizens about the high quality of life in the West. It feared most for the younger generation and their susceptibility to bourgeois indoctrination. The party thus resolved to improve the way that the state taught about socialism, to develop television shows to “portray critically and realistically the lives of the proletariat in [the West], and to use mass-media to familiarize citizens with cases of compatriots who had returned in disappointment from Western emigration.” The Ideological Division promised that by the end of the year, Czechoslovak TV would complete an exposé of how Western espionage services systematically tormented and abused new immigrants from the

Jewish organizations, counted among them. The Ministry of Education and Culture worked closely with the CJRC to ensure that the visitors left with an impression of Czechoslovakia as a country that provided well for its Jewish religious minority and, as per Chapter Five, took pains to preserve the memory of the Nazi genocide. Indeed, the ministry worried far more about what foreign Jews might say about Czechoslovakia when they left, than they did about their potential influence upon domestic Jewry. The Ministry of Education and Culture also hoped to reap financial rewards from Jewish tourism in the form of hard-currency donations to the local communities. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade took a similar position in assessing the potential risks and benefits of increasing the flow of Western tourists into Czechoslovakia. During the early 1960s, only the state security apparatus of the Ministry of the Interior raised serious and steady concerns about the influence of foreign Jews upon the domestic communities.⁸⁸

A National Path to Intra-National Conflict

Though bound to an international communistic system, Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia developed along a unique path, just as they did across Eastern-Central Europe. The Soviet Union considered this necessary. According to the notes of the Czech delegation to an international conference on ecclesiastical affairs in Moscow, G. G. Karpov, a high-ranking Soviet official, explained,

... it is necessary to look at the particular conditions in each country, even socialist countries. It will not do, therefore, to apply all of the experiences in the Soviet Union in

Soviet Bloc. P. Auersperg, "Opatření v propagandě v souvislosti s rozvojem turistických styků s kapitalistickými zeměmi" [Propagandistic measures in association with the expansion of touristic contacts with the capitalist countries] (25 August 1965). NAČR, KSC-UV-02/4, bundle 43, archival unit 82, point 2.

⁸⁸ At this point, the StB worried about Israeli tourists in particular..

Czechoslovakia.⁸⁹

Within the context of ecclesiastical affairs in Czechoslovakia, I have identified mutuality as a salient feature of the relationship between the Jewish communities and the organs of state. It had a basis in the intersection of Jewish demographics and the particularity of Judaism as a religion, which coalesced to make Judaism seem less threatening than other faiths. The political strategy of cooperation, adopted after a successful communist coup at the CJRC, further positioned the Jewish communities as potential allies of the party-state. In the economic sphere, the communities generated a income domestically to offset the budgets of their state minders. They also drew a steady flow of foreign hard-currency into the national economy. When Czechoslovakia damaged its reputation, along with that of the entire Soviet Bloc, through the Slánský Affair, Jewish community leaders took advantage of the prominent discursive place of “Jews” and “Zionism” in Cold-War propaganda to stand in defense of their country. In exchange, the state administration for ecclesiastical affairs defended Jewish communal property from other sectors of the state and national economy, facilitated the initial contacts that reunited Czechoslovak Jewry with their Western counterparts, and helped them grow in accordance with party-state policies. They extended considerable leeway to the Jewish communities in their efforts to educate the next generation, care for their indigent elderly, and establish a communal dining hall. The state even waved import tariffs on the ritual items and kosher foodstuffs that the community imported, due to their inaccessibility at home. Party-state officials not only condoned, but also participated in Jewish commemorations of the Nazi genocide. Finally, the party publicly acknowledged Czech rabbis for their cooperation and gave them access to mass

⁸⁹ Ministry of Education and Culture, “Beseda se soudruhem G. G. Karpovem na thema : Poměr KSSS a sovětské vlády k církvím a náboženství [Discussion with comrade G. G. Karpov on the theme: the position of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet government on churches and religion] (n.d., 1956). NAČR, MŠK box 1.

media resources, including domestic radio.

My category of “mutuality” corresponds in some ways to “condescendence” in Soukupová’s “foundational triad” of Jewish-state relations: “superintendence, repression, and “condescension” (*základní triáda kontrol, represe a “blahosklonnost*).⁹⁰ Yet the term, as used in the forgoing pages, also challenges and broadens it. By introducing “mutuality,” I have acknowledged the role that Jewish leaders played in determining the their communities’ relationship with the state administration. I have also demonstrated, here and previously, that many officials held both the Jewish communities and their leaders in high esteem. Those officials considered their own acts of pro-Jewish “condescendence” to be consistent with the ideologies and policies of the party-state, and not only a means for improving Czechoslovakia’s image abroad or to generating hard-currency. These facts alone do not necessarily undermine the significance of Jewish-state cooperation. Good citizen-state relationships, once again, turn on mutual interest.

On the other hand, the fact that mutuality characterized Jewish-state relations in the Czech ecclesiastical sphere does not at all undermine the importance of Soukupová’s two remaining foundations: “control ” and “repression.” State administrators managed all aspects of Jewish communal life, replacing pre-communist independence with a mere patina of democracy. Orthodox Jews felt this most sharply. Both the Ministry of Education and Culture and the StB seeded the community with informants, whose presence stifled free expression. This only further alienated members, both actual and potential, many of whom already wrestled with the stigma attached to Judaism. Despite offering opportunities to commemorate the Holocaust, the state never fully adjusted its master-narrative of the Second World War to include the Nazi genocide

⁹⁰ Blanka Soukupová, “Postoj Státu k židosvskému náboženskému” [The Position of the State toward the Jewish Religious Community], 76.

of Jews as Jews.

What I hope to have shown here and to develop further is that the party's official ideologies comprised a good degree of contradiction which manifest in the competing priorities of various state organs and civic institutions, like the Jewish communities. Moreover, even if the party retained platforms and policies written in the early 1950s, state officials necessarily had to reinterpret them in order to intervene into in novel contexts over the course of nearly decades. Ideology, in this case, functions as a structuring, coercive, and meaning-making component of political action, rather than a precursor to it—even if it sometimes plays that role as well. I see the course of Jewish-state relations, therefore, as an ongoing interpretive struggle, open to intervention from state officials, Jewish leaders, and even citizens without formal positions. I thus argue that the positive nature of Jewish-state relations during the late 1950s and 1960s were as authentically “communist” as the repression that characterized the early 1950s and 1970s. The leaders of the communist reform movement would likely have agreed with me (or have portrayed oppression as antithetical to socialism.) G. G. Karpov, on the other hand, would likely have seen this Czechoslovak divergence as movement beyond the pale in an anti-communist direction.

Karpov, nonetheless, spoke the truth. The evolution of Czech political culture in the domestic sphere contributed to the emergence of Jewish-state mutuality in matters ecclesiastical and beyond. The relaxation of state control over the communities and the mitigation of anti-Jewish repression corresponded, first and foremost, to the belated and relatively extensive political and cultural liberalization of Czechoslovakia during the late 1950s through 1968. It also drew implicit, ideological reinforcement from the popular turn to Jewish artists and themes during those same years and also from the party-state's subsequent incorporation of the Holocaust into its own propaganda as a means to mark its political (and communistic) progress

and supersession of the (deviant) Stalinist regime. The Ministry of Education and Culture's increasingly permissive approach to managing Jewish affairs in the 1960s reflected this new, communist context, as did similar transitions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The most significant conflicts in the arena of Jewish-state relations during the 1960s, those which would shape the decade and reverberate for twenty years thereafter, set ministry against ministry. The organs of national security, housed within the Ministry of the Interior, adopted a single-minded approach to managing Jewish affairs and the Zionist threat in particular. Their officers sought primarily to protect domestic Jewry from the "unwanted influences" of Israeli diplomats and other foreign "Zionists." This paternalism chafed against the Ministry of Education and Culture's more permissive stance. It also conflicted with the priorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to maintain, if not to improve Czechoslovakia's tenuous relationship with the State of Israel and to continue benefiting from Western tourism. All of the ministries turned to the Communist Party to mediate their struggles against one another. Resolution, however, came in the form of a war in the Middle East and a Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia.

From Criminalizing Jewish Descent to Harsh Paternalism:

The agents of Czechoslovak State Security re-imagined the "Zionist" threat in the wake of the Slánský Affair and through the processes of de-Stalinization that followed. In time, they abandoned the *de facto* criminalization of Jewish descent which had characterized their earlier practices. "Zionism," however, still remained the sole framework in which agents thought about the Jewish religious minority and, as a class, citizens of Jewish descent. (Purview over other spheres of Jewish affairs fell to other ministries.) Indeed, StB agents continued to think about

Jews and Jewishness in terms established during the first years of communist rule. These ideas persisted in various articulations and combinations until the fall of communism in 1989. In the mid-1950s, the StB re-positioned itself as the defender of the Jewish minority against the corrupting influences of foreign Zionists and of Israeli diplomats in particular.

A shift from fantasy to something more closely resembling reality characterized this transition. After 1953, the party no longer sought to battle ineffable internal enemies in the public sphere. Emerging communist reformers and intellectuals began criticizing the politics and persecutions of Stalinism. Khrushchev lent his voice to theirs in 1956 and also called for a less antagonistic approach to managing relations with the West. Czechoslovakia, along with the entire Soviet Bloc, continued to view the State of Israel as a military and an ideological enemy. During the 1950s and 1960s the Soviet intelligence services compiled detailed reports about their Israeli counterpart's programs for intervening into the lives of Jews behind the Iron Curtain. They also tracked Western-Jewish organizations with similar goals.⁹¹

At the same time, however, ministerial authorities recognized that the official domestic Jewish communities had adjusted well to the new order, out of both volition and compulsion. Dissenting individuals, with notable exceptions, had either emigrated or silenced themselves in reaction to state antisemitism. Just like officials at the Ministry of Education and Culture, the officers of the StB saw this as a fragile peace worthy of protection. They also worried that foreigners would exploit Jewish particularity for espionage purposes and to undermine the socialist system from within. At a time when few Westerners traveled to Czechoslovakia, StB agents believed that the Israeli diplomatic corps posed the greatest threat, particularly because

⁹¹ The earliest and also most incomplete report that I found dates from 1961. Its author draws a direct connection between the JDC and the Israeli intelligence services. "Orgány izraelské rozvědky a kontrarozvědky" [The organs of Israeli intelligence and counterintelligence] (8 November 1961). ABS H-711, box 1.

they had the legal right to enter Jewish communal spaces as members of the Jewish religion.

Between 1953 and 1957, Czechoslovak State Security conducted two major operations that focused on Jewish citizens. While its agents brought their own prejudices to the investigation, the information that they acquired also led them to rethink the “Zionist” threat. The first operation, codenamed “Golden Goose” (1953-1955), targeted Jews who traded hard currency and scarce commodities on the black market, under the direction of Israeli diplomats. The second, Operation “Dana” (1955-1957), uncovered a nationwide network of Jews who had been distributing financial and other forms of aid to roughly 1,000 predominantly elderly and indigent Jews, also at the behest of those same Israeli diplomats.⁹²

Thomáš Habermann compares the profiles and experiences of the individuals arrested in operations “Golden Goose” and “Dana” with those of the “Jewish” victims of the Slánský Affair. The latter had identified as Czech or Slovak communists, even if they could not deny that they had Jewish roots. They stood trial for imagined political crimes, for which they received harsh, pre-determined sentences. The individuals arrested in the mid-1950s, in contrast, considered themselves Jewish and participated in Jewish communal life. The courts convicted them of criminal offenses only, which corresponded to actions that they had actually undertaken. The judges in their trials, moreover, seem to have had a freer hand to determine their verdicts and sentences. Finally, whereas the party-state had used the Slánský Affair propagandistically, the

⁹² Martin Šmok, “‘Každý žid je sionista a každý sionista je špion!’ Příběh distribuce sociálních podpor” [“Every Jew is a Zionist and every Zionist is a spy! The story of the distribution of social support], *Paměť a dějiny*, vol. 5, no. 4 (April 2011): 29-39; idem., “‘Every Jew is a Zionist, and every Zionist is a Spy!’ The Story of Jewish Social Assistance Networks in Communist Czechoslovakia,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014): 70-83; and Tomáš Habermann, “Procesy, o kterých se nemluvilo: izraelské vyslanectví a distribuce sociálních podpor v letech 1953-1957” [Trials not spoken about: the Israeli legation and the distribution of social support in the years 1953-1957], *Marginalia Historica* (forthcoming, final edition supplied by author). The operational files are available in ABS H-419.

official press made little mention of operations “Dana” and “Golden Goose.”⁹³

State Security launched Operation “Golden Goose” on 16 April 1953, based upon information that its undercover agents had acquired from Jakub Gazit, an Israeli diplomat, and one of the main organizers of black-market trade among Jews. In addition to working in his official capacity, Gazit served *Nativ* a covert program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, funded by the Joint Distribution Committee. *Nativ* agents collected information on the Jews of socialist Europe, provided them with various forms of aid, and attempted to facilitate their emigration.⁹⁴ In 1954, after the StB learned of Gazit’s involvement in *Nativ* and his participation in black-market trade, it arranged for him to be expelled from Czechoslovakia. The same fate awaited his successor, Eссор, one year later, and three more Israeli diplomats in 1957.⁹⁵ The State of Israel reassigned some of them to Vienna, where the StB continued to consider them a major security threat.

“Golden Goose” culminated, in December 1954, with the convictions of fourteen citizens for economic crimes. The prosecution proved that they had traded illegally in hard currency, and that they had sold over 8,000 watches, thousands of pairs of stockings, many valuable coins, and historical treasures, much of which they had received from the Israeli Ligation. The court exonerated the fourteen of the more serious charge of high treason. Yet, in its verdict, it still associated them with a purported bourgeois-Zionist conspiracy to undermine communist Czechoslovakia from within. Habermann attributes the relatively severe sentences that the court handed down to this perception and to the fact that the convicted had worked for and with Israeli

⁹³ Habermann, “Procesy, o kterých se nemluvílo” [Trials not spoken about].

⁹⁴ *Nativ* means “(pathway or route in Hebrew; also known as Lishkat Hakesher—the Liaison Bureau of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs [created in 1952]).” Beizer, “I Don’t Know Whom to Thank.” 115. See also Shachtman, *I Seek my Brethren*, 107-10.

⁹⁵ Habermann, “Procesy, o kterých se nemluvílo” [Trials not spoken about].

diplomats. He also stresses that the fourteen had committed actual crimes, punishable in most state. He furthermore attributes their primary motivation to greed.⁹⁶

The StB launched Operation “Dana” in September 1955. Its agents discovered that Israeli diplomats had established a network of about one hundred Jewish citizens who helped them to distribute financial aid to over 1,000 Jewish recipients across the country. The StB assessed that over 1,300,000 crowns had passed through these channels between 1953 and 1957. Tomáš Habermann suggests that the Israelis likely initiated the program as early as 1950, to replace a similar operation that had ended with the expulsion of the Joint Distribution Committee in that year. Indeed, under interrogation, the accused identified the Joint Distribution Committee as the source of the Israelis’ money. Despite the StB’s claim that the Israelis sought to aid members of the former bourgeoisie and people who had fallen pray to the political trials of the 1950s, Habermann shows the majority of recipients to have been elderly and indigent Jews, many without relatives. The network, however, also aided the Jewish victims of Stalinism and their families.⁹⁷

In the end, the StB only arrested seventeen individuals, fifteen of whom faced justice in the summer of 1957.⁹⁸ This represented only those individuals who had played the most senior roles in the aid program. The police never sought to press charges against their assistants or beneficiaries. In four separate trials, courts handed down light sentences for criminal offences, primarily for economic crimes but also for subversion. Rabbi Farkaš stood trial in Ústí nad Labem with Maxmilián Goldberger, the director of a Jewish retirement home and a CJRC

⁹⁶ Habermann, “Procesy, o kterých se nemluvílo” [Trials not spoken about].

⁹⁷ Gazit confessed to an undercover agent that he spent \$2,000 per month sending packages to Jewish political prisoners.

⁹⁸ Šmok notes that the StB arrested forty people, but that the main group of detainees numbered only seventeen. “‘Každý žid je sionista!’” [“Every Jew is a Zionist], 34.

representative. The court convicted both men of “obstructing the supervision of churches and religious communities” (*maření dozoru nad církevními a náboženskými společnostmi*). It also found Farkaš guilty of “endangering the management of the foreign exchange” (*ohoržení devizového hospodářství*). An StB appeal led judges to raise their convictions to “criminal subversion of the republic” (*restný čin podvracení republiky*) and to sentence Farkaš to fourteen years in prison.⁹⁹

Once again, the courts disappointed the StB with their rulings. Judges took pity upon the accused, who uniformly admitted their involvement in the aid program, but also insisted they had thought of it as charity work, rather than subversion. Indeed, their Israeli handlers had assured them that the state had decriminalized such activity and that it would soon approve program.¹⁰⁰ With the exception of one case, however, the prosecution succeeded in undermining this defense. The lawyers argued that the conspiratorial manner in which the defendants had carried out their activities betrayed their awareness of its criminality. Habermann suggests that the Israeli diplomats insisted upon secrecy because they feared either being shut down or being forced to work through the CJRC, which they knew collaborated closely with the state administration.¹⁰¹ I suspect that the citizens involved in the affair also relied upon secrecy to isolate the community from any possible negative repercussions of the program.¹⁰² Goldberger explained that he had

⁹⁹ Habermann, “Procesy, o kterých se nemluvílo” [Trials not spoken about]. Farkaš only served about two years of this sentence.

¹⁰⁰ Regional Administration of the Ministry of the Interior of Ústí nad Labem, “Protokol o výslechu obviněného” [Transcript of the interrogation of the accused] (6 April 1957), 3; and Idem., “Protokol o výslechu obviněného” [Transcript of the interrogation of the accused] (3 May 1957). ABS V-989.

¹⁰¹ Habermann, “Procesy, o kterých se nemluvílo” [Trials not spoken about].

¹⁰² The StB thought the Israeli Legation avoided working with the CJRC because “it welcomes, rather, personal relationships with Eastern people, because it can receive valuable information from them.” Josef Líkař, “Věc: Akce ‘DANA’ - zpráva” [Re: Operation “DANA” - report] (27 June 1956), 9. ABS H-419.

hid his involvement in order to avoid being approached by people seeking money.¹⁰³

Tomáš Habermann and Martin Šmok disagree as to whether or not a connection existed between the black-market trade among Jews and the distribution of aid to Jewish citizens. Habermann found no evidence in the case files to suggest a link. He concludes that greed alone motivated Gazit, his successors, and their accomplices to trade illegally in foreign currencies and rare goods. Such practices, he notes, proliferated among diplomats and citizens with access to foreigners.¹⁰⁴ Šmok, in contrast, argues that the aid program began with the provision of scarce goods to be traded on the black market. He further claims that this unregulated practice often achieved a better exchange rate than changing foreign currency legally.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, selling foreign currency and scarce goods at inflated prices would have helped the Israelis to stretch their resources and, thereby, to support more people. This would have been the case especially after the currency reform of 1953 and the culture of fear of financial instability which it induced.

Even without sufficient documentary evidence, I am inclined to agree with Šmok. His research aligns with Zachary Levine's work on the Joint Distribution Committee in Hungary during the same period, inasmuch as both authors consider the black-market trade to have been directly related to aid projects.¹⁰⁶ (Maxmilián Goldberger admitted during an interrogation that he suspected the aid program to have functioned in this manner.¹⁰⁷) The diplomats likely received and distributed funds in multiple forms. As the program expanded, however, it would

¹⁰³ Regional Administration of the Ministry of the Interior of Ústí nad Labem, "Protokol o výsledku obviněného" [Transcript of the interrogation of the accused] (6 April 1957), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Habermann, "Procesy, o kterých se nemluvalo" [Trials not spoken about].

¹⁰⁵ Šmok, "Každý žid je sionista!" ["Every Jew is a Zionist], 31-33.

¹⁰⁶ Levine, "Concealed in the Open." The fact that the Hungarian party-state benefited financially from this semi-legalized trade, however, made the situation in that country distinct from the Czechoslovak case.

¹⁰⁷ Regional Administration of the Ministry of the Interior of Ústí nad Labem, "Protokol o výsledku obviněného" [Transcript of the interrogation of the accused] (16 May 1957), 7.

have been impossible for the Israelis and their associates to have traded a sufficient volume of goods without party-state cooperation of the sort that the Israelis received from the Hungarians. This suggests that the program began with a combination of funding sources and moved towards a model that favored currency. With regard to Habermann's characterization of the motives behind the black-market trade, I would insist that it is consistent for those who engaged in the practice to have been, at once, aware of the relationship between their activities and the aid programs and also for them to have enjoyed benefiting personally from their involvement therein.

The agents of the StB, also lacking sufficient evidence, believed that the Israelis had engaged in illegal trade not only to fund their social support program, but also to compromise their local accomplices. The two operations convinced the StB that the Israeli intelligence services had sought, with a degree of success, to establish a Zionist "fifth column" in Czechoslovakia which would serve espionage purposes during times of peace and sabotage in the case of war. Agents pointed to the persistent contacts between Israeli diplomats and local Jews well into the 1960s. As many of the diplomats hailed from Czechoslovakia, the StB worried about their ability to penetrate the communities and to work undetected by the police. The StB further suspected that the social support programs of the *Société* and even of the Claims Conference served Israeli intelligence purposes as well. (It could not have been a coincidence that the *Société* initiated its aid program only after the police had disrupted the Israeli-run distribution network.) StB agents rightly surmised that Israeli intelligence relied upon the help of such organizations to compile lists of Jews in the Soviet Union and, by implication, the Soviet

Bloc.¹⁰⁸

This new framework for understanding the “Zionist” threat predominated at the StB until the late 1960s. When facing citizens of Jewish descent, whom they never fully trusted, StB agents adopted a policy of harsh paternalism. They continued to intervene into community affairs and to monitor the activities and relationships of prominent individuals and others whom they suspected of “Zionism.” Agents harassed citizens of Jewish descent with interrogations and threats, particularly before and after they travelled internationally. Confident, however, in its ability to control the Jewish minority, the StB sought primarily to isolate it from the Israelis and from Western-Jewish activists.

MŠK on the Israelis during the 1950s and Early 1960s:

Every year from 1958 through 1960, the Ministry of Education and Culture complained to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the diplomats of the Israeli Legation in Prague were meddling in the internal affairs of the Jewish communities. Karel Hruža, the director of the Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the former ministry, requested that an intervention.¹⁰⁹ Failing to achieve

¹⁰⁸ See StB reports compiled in ABS A34-1677 and ABS A34-1795. On the cooperation between the Joint Distribution Committee and the Nativ program in compiling lists of Jews, see Beizer, “‘I Don’t Know Whom to Thank,’” 120-21.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Education and Culture, Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs, “Zpráva o činnosti židů v ČSR” [Report about the activities of Jews in the Czechoslovak Republic] (22 July 1958). NAČR, MŠK box 56; Letter from Karel Hruža to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Věc: Zásahy israelského vyslanectví v Praze do života ŽNO v ČSR” [Re: Interventions of the Israeli Legation in Prague into the life of the CJRC] (3 November 1959); Letter from Karel Hruža to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Nové zásahy israelského vyslanectví do života v židovských náboženských obcích v ČSSR” [New intervention of the Israeli Legation into the live of the Jewish Religious Communities in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] (26 October 1960); and Letter from Karel Hruža to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (3 November 1960), in folder “Nové zásahy israelského vyslanectví do života v židovských náboženských obcích v ČSSR” [New intervention of the Israeli Legation into the life of the Jewish Religious Communities in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic]. NAČR, MŠK box 58.

satisfaction in 1960, Hrůza forwarded his complaints to the Central Committee of the Communist Party.¹¹⁰ He expressed concern over what he perceived to be an attempt by the Israeli diplomatic corps to gain influence over clergy and assistant clergy members, by giving them gifts of citrus-fruit, wine, candy, and ritual items (*lulavim*).¹¹¹ Hrůza explained,

It is the goal of the Israeli Legation to maintain its influence over Czechoslovak citizens of the Jewish religion. This type of approach incites insubordination among our Jews, not only in religious activities, but also in matters of their civic responsibilities. In recent years, a few Jewish clergy members were juridically punished for illegal activity that the Israeli Legation in Prague had incited.¹¹²

Hrůza surely had Rabbi Farkaš in mind. He accused the Israelis of leading Jews into criminality and of seeking to spread their influence throughout the community by co-opting its religious leadership. In 1960, Hrůza complained that Israeli diplomats were taking advantage of their access to religious services to deepen their ties with community functionaries.¹¹³ CJRC general secretary Rudolf Iltis confirmed those suspicions and alleged further that the Israelis had attempted to undermine discipline at the communities by showing honor to the disgraced rabbis, Davidovič and Farkaš.¹¹⁴

Hrůza expressed other concerns as well. He indicated that the Israeli Legation had violated the law by distributing religious texts without his office's permission.¹¹⁵ In 1960, he complained that the Israelis had invited far more guests than they had promised to their

¹¹⁰ Karel Hrůza to the 3rd Division of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, "Informace o nežádoucí činnosti israelského vyslanectví v Praze" [Information about the unwanted activities of the Israeli Legation in Prague] (27 October 1960). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

¹¹¹ Letter from Hrůza to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Nové zásahy israelského vyslanectví" [New intervention of the Israeli Legation] (26 October 1960). *Lulavim* are palm-fronds, bound with other plants, which religious Jews shake during the prayer services of the *Sukkoth* holiday.

¹¹² Letter from Hrůza to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Věc: Zásahy israelského vyslanectví v Praze" [Re: Interventions of the Israeli Legation in Prague] (3 November 1959), 1-2.

¹¹³ Hrůza to the Communist Party, "Informace o nežádoucí činnosti" [Information about the unwanted activities].

¹¹⁴ Memo signed by Iltis (10 June 1960).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

Independence Day celebration. At that event, according to Hrůza, they had even dared to distributed Israeli flags (or something resembling them) to children. Hrůza concluded that “from an ecclesiastical-political perspective the approach of the Israeli Legation is unwanted.”¹¹⁶ In 1964, an official of the Ministry of Education and Culture accused the Israeli diplomats of inciting Jews to emigrate. He worried primarily that the emigration of rabbis and other clergy members would make it impossible for the state to meet the religious needs of its Jewish minority and would thereby play into the hands of Western propagandists.¹¹⁷ One year later, Karel Šnýder, an official in charge of overseeing the Czech Jewish communities, expressed concern that the publications distributed by the Israeli Legation portrayed life in Israel too positively at a time when Czechoslovakia suffered from commodity shortages.¹¹⁸

The complaints of the Ministry of Education and Culture differed fundamentally from those of Czechoslovak State Security in that they barely referenced Zionism at all. In his letters from 1960, Hrůza reported that one Jewish functionary had said, “Some Jews feel closer to Voršilská Street [the address of the Israeli Legation] than Maislova [the address of the CJRC].” Yet Hrůza levied no accusations of conspiracy. He never suggested the existence of a covert Jewish network, and, indeed, never even wrote the word “Zionist.”¹¹⁹ If Hrůza worried about such matter at all—and I have found little indication to suggest that he did—he and his department

¹¹⁶ Hrůza to the Communist Party, “Informace o nežádoucí činnosti” [Information about the unwanted activities].

¹¹⁷ Copy of letter from the Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Culture to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (20 April 1964), under header labeled “Upozornění na nesprávný postup izraelského zastupitelského úřadu” [Warning about the improper approach of the Israeli diplomatic office]. NAČR, MŠK box 58.

¹¹⁸ Karel Šnýdr, memo (29 May 1965). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

¹¹⁹ In this, he continued a practice from the mid-1950s, with regard to the establishment of relationships with Western-Jewish organization for the disbursal of financial aid to local Jews. Even when ministerial officials expressed concerns about the program, they did not articulate them in terms of the Zionist threat.

left them to the appropriate authorities at the police and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Officials at the Ministry of Education and Culture had far more substantial matters with which to contend in managing the quotidian affairs of the CJRC and its subordinate communities. This reflected in the perspective of the Communist Party's Enlightenment Department as well. It's summary response to the CJRC congress of 1959, based upon Hruža's reports, did not raise the specter of "Zionism" or even the Israeli threat at all.¹²⁰

The CJRC and the Israeli Legation in Prague:

President of [the CJRC] Neumann, who was to a considerable degree informed [of the covert distribution of financial aid by Israeli diplomats] and was himself thereto connected, said today that "the employees of the Israeli Legation in Prague are pigs, that they brought the people here into misery [emphasis added]."¹²¹

It would be easy to dismiss Neumann's statement as an attempt to appease his police interrogators. To do so, however, would be to ignore evidence which suggests that the Jewish leadership in Prague had an ambivalent relationship with the Israeli diplomatic corps from the early 1950s through the beginning of the 1960s. Martin Šmok argues that

... the newly sent Israeli operatives... brought to Prague an underestimation of their opponents combined with a lack of understanding of the situation. The Israelis thus endangered tens of local people connected to the programs of social support and caused many personal tragedies.¹²²

¹²⁰ Department of Enlightenment, "Stanovisko odboru osvěty k zprávě ministerstva školství a kultury o sjezdu delegátů Židovských náboženských obcí" [The position of the Department of Enlightenment on the report of the Ministry of Education and Culture about the congress of the delegates of the Jewish Religious Communities] (1959). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-05/3, bundle 38, archival unit 309.

¹²¹ "Akce DANA: formy a metody boje izraelské rozvědky proti ČSR" [Operation DANA: the forms and methods of the fight of Israeli spies against the Czechoslovak Republic] (22 January 1960), 4 ABS A/34-1795.

¹²² Šmok, "Každý žid je sionista!" ["Every Jew is a Zionist], 31-32. Habermann agrees and takes pains to demonstrate the carelessness of Gazit in particular. See "Procesy, o kterých se nemluvilo" [Trials not spoken about].

I agree and would add my own speculation that the Israelis did not worry too much about the welfare of individual Jews behind the Iron Curtain, whom they considered lost if they could not emigrate.

The Israeli diplomats' brazenness put CJRC officials in a terrible position. Karel Hruža repeatedly noted in his appeals to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the officials and clergy members of the CJRC had complained to his office about the Israelis' attempts to penetrate the their community. For example, in 1960, Hruža wrote that the CJRC

... sees in the [activities of the Israelis] an encroachment upon their authority and an absolutely unwarranted interference into the internal affairs of the Jewish religious community and protests against that activity of the Israeli legation in Prague.¹²³

CJRC officials did not limit their activities to complaining alone. In 1959, they resolved not to accept gifts from the Israelis Legation.¹²⁴ One year later, Rabbi Feder and secretary Iltis sent a joint letter to the Israeli Legation demanding that it and its employees refrain from sending packages to the communities.¹²⁵ In 1963, the CJRC vowed

take measures to prevent unwanted visits and interference into the internal affairs of the Jewish religious communities by the staff of the Legation of the State of Israel.¹²⁶

¹²³ Letter from Hruža to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Nové zásahy israelského vyslanectví" [New intervention of the Israeli Legation] (26 October 1960), 1. For an example of citing the complaints of clergy, see Letter from Hruža to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Věc: Zásahy israelského vyslanectví" [Re: Interventions of the Israeli Legation] (3 November 1959).

¹²⁴ Untitled report on the CJRC congress of 1959 (n.d.), in folder labeled, "Rada židovské náboženské obce: Sjezd 1959" [CJRC: congress 1959]. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

¹²⁵ Letter from Rabbi Feder and Rudolf Iltis to the Ligation of the State of Israel (20 October 1960). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

¹²⁶ "Rádný sjezd Židovské náboženské společnosti v Čechách se konal dne 24.XI.1963 v Praze" [Regular congress of the Jewish religious community in the Czech lands occurred on 24 November 1963 in Prague] (4 December 1963), 5, in folder labeled, "Rada židovské náboženské obce: Sjezd 1963" [CJRC: congress 1963]. NAČR, MŠK box 56.

It may have been a sign of the political-cultural liberalization of Czechoslovakia that top CJRC functionaries felt comfortable accepting gifts of oranges from the Israeli Legation in 1965. They may also have felt more comfortable doing so, since the diplomats had sent them on the occasion of the holiday of *Purim*, when Jews are required by Jewish law to give gifts to one another. Memo by Ota Heitlinger (18 March 1965). NAČR, MŠK box 58. To that end, there is

This was nothing new. Since the early 1950s, CJRC functionaries had depended upon the SOEA to guide their interactions with the Israeli diplomatic corps.¹²⁷ Some, like Rudolf Iltis, informed on their peers for communicating too freely with the Israelis.¹²⁸

The statements and resolutions of CJRC officials regarding the Israeli Legation do not necessarily reflect their attitudes towards Zionism or even towards the State of Israel. The legation took independent actions which threatened the tenuous accord that the CJRC had struck with the state administration. Their interventions into community affairs, their “unwanted actions,” made it difficult for the CJRC to present the Jewish minority as fully nationally Czech and loyal to the communist state. (The very existence of the State of Israel and its status as a Cold-War enemy accomplished this to a degree. The diplomats only made it worse.) At the same time, the CJRC and the members of its subordinate communities depended upon Israel for money and also for ritual items and *kosher* food. CJRC officials knew, as well, that many of their constituents had emotional and family ties to the State of Israel. Some may have seen Israel and its agents as a lifeline, however disruptive of quotidian affairs, should Jewish-state relations take a turn for the worse. Having this lifeline, however, exacerbated the very problems that it promised to alleviate.

The problem in this case, I think, lies in the construction of states along ethno-national lines and in the form of nationalist politics practiced in the mid-twentieth century. The establishment of the State of Israel complicated the integration of the adherents of the Jewish

evidence to suggest that the Israelis had started, at least occasionally, to request official permission before meeting with CJRC officials. Šnýdr, memo (29 May 1965).

¹²⁷ Jaroslav Knobloch, “Úřední záznam” [Official protocol] (20 August 1952).

¹²⁸ Idem., “Úřední záznam” [Official protocol] (9 April 1954). Documents attached to this report offer yet another example of CJRC and SOEA officials negotiating how the former should interact with the members of the Israeli diplomatic corps.

religion and even citizens of Jewish origin into Czechoslovakia, the nation-state of the Czech and Slovak peoples. The Israeli government responded as nation-states do, by intervening to save their co-nationals in peril. Those interventions, however, reinforced the very notions about Jews that led some non-Jews to doubt their place in the Czech and Slovak nations. Neither one of these political formations, Israel or Czechoslovakia, however, coincided well with the complex national and religious identification of individuals who considered themselves both Jewish (in some way) and either Czech or Slovak. The Ministry of Education and Culture tended to see the Israelis as a hindrance to the well-functioning of the Jewish communities and relied upon other state organs to restrain them. The StB, on the other hand, saw the Israelis as a national security threat. They projected their doubts about the place of Jews in the national community upon the Israelis, but also came to view their Jewish compatriots with greater suspicion due to their contact with the Israelis. The leaders of the Jewish communities attempted, first and foremost, to evade falling afoul of the police. As a second priority, they tried to maintain and deepen the emerging mutuality that characterized their relationship with the state administration for ecclesiastical affairs.

Conclusion:

Divergence in the approaches of the various ministries responsible for managing different aspects of Jewish affairs introduced tension into Jewish-state relations. It also opened avenues for Jewish leaders to influence the party-state and its policies regarding their communities.

Above, I portrayed the relationship of the Ministry of Education and Culture with the CJRC and the communities as one of mutuality. I then contrasted that relationship with the paternalism that characterized the post-Slánský attitudes of StB agents towards citizens of Jewish origin, as well

as and their policies for combating Zionism. It should be clear, however, that the relationship of mutuality that persisted between the CJRC and the state administration for ecclesiastical affairs depended for its success upon the willingness of Jewish leaders to accede to state paternalism. At the same time, some Jewish leaders benefited from the paternalism of the StB. They required police consent to occupy their positions of power and influence, which brought them financial, cultural, and social advantages, not to mention the opportunity to travel beyond the borders of Czechoslovakia. Some, like Rudolf Iltis, took extreme measures to protect their relationship with the state administration. This included informing on fellow leaders whom they thought had violated the community's implicit agreement with the state. In the next chapter, I explore the exacerbation of these inter-ministerial tensions through the 1960s, their manifestation in conflict, and their culmination in a nationwide program for registering all citizens of Jewish descent—Operation Spider.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Along Came a Spider: Inter-State Conflict and State Antisemitism, 1960-1975

In 1972, Czechoslovak State Security, the Ministry of the Interior's feared secret police or "StB", launched Operation Spider, a covert, nationwide program for cataloging all citizens of Jewish descent and potential "Zionists." Scholars have characterized Spider as a return to the antisemitic policies of the early 1950s and as the culmination of a Communist-Bloc-wide, anti-Zionist campaign initiated after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.¹ Others have attributed the operation to vengeful StB agents, long frustrated with their inability to restrain the Jewish cultural renaissance of the 1960s.²

While there is much truth to these arguments, they also flatten historical time in the communist context. As per the last chapter, some scholars have wrongly characterized Czechoslovakia's 1960s liberalization as movement away from an essential communistic norm. When they and others portray the 1970s as a return to authenticity repressed, they perpetuate the same misunderstanding of the communist system and of history in general. Often reproducing the very propaganda they seek to analyze, historians have generally disregarded the competing perspectives and priorities with regard to the Jewish minority, both religiously and ethnically defined, within the various organs of the party-state. They further neglect the role that particular

¹ Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném Československu" [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], in *Židé v novodobých dějinách: Soubor přednášek na FF UK, Uspořádal Václav Veber* [Jews in contemporary history: A collection of lectures at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, organized by Václav Veber] (Prague, Czech Republic: Karolinum, 1997), 157-58; and Tomáš Kulka, "The 'New' Forms of Anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia," *Dispersion and Unity*, vol. 19/20 (1973): 62-63.

² Ivica Bumová, "ŠtB a židovská mládež (na příklade Západoslovenského kraja v rokoch 1969-1980)" [The StB and Jewish youth (through the example of the Western Slovak Region in the years 1969-1980)], in *Židovská komunita po roku 1945* [The Jewish Community after 1945], ed. Peter Salner, 67-100 (Bratislava, Slovakia: Zing Print, 2006), 71.

experiences played in conditioning the development and implementation of state policies. Most egregiously of all, however, they fail to recognize how deeply the new international and domestic contexts of the 1970s conditioned the self-conscious rearticulation of practices and ideologies from two decades earlier.³

The StB launched Operation “Spider” after competing for over a decade with other ministries to determine how the state would manage Jewish affairs and confront the purported threat posed by Zionism. A different constellation of priorities motivated each body, even as individuals across departments shared discourses on Jews and “Zionism.” During the 1960s, this pit the Ministry of the Interior against both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture. StB agents adopted a policy of harsh and protective paternalism, through which they sought to isolate all “citizens of Jewish origin” from what they perceived to have been the corrupting, Zionist-making influences of Israeli and Western-Jewish actors. StB agents

³ Other claims are less credible. Václav Benda holds that the StB initiated Operation Spider to provide lists of domestic targets to Palestinian terrorists training on Czechoslovak soil. Jana Blažková, “Skrývá se Pavouk v Moskvě?” [Is the spider hiding in Moscow?], *Týden* [The Week] 32 (August 7, 1995): 18. The StB certainly maintained contact with Palestinian agents and Arab diplomats. It is absurd, however, that they would have been interested in facilitating an anti-Jewish terrorist attack on their soil, particularly after the uproar following the suspicious death in Prague of Charles Jordan, a high-ranking official with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Blažková suggests that StB intended with Spider to identify potential victims for a second round of anti-Zionist show trials. *Ibid.*, 19. This too is unlikely. Peter Brod argues that too many high-profile Jews had fled the country by 1971 for this to have been feasible. Brod, “Židé v poválečném Československu” [Jews in Postwar Czechoslovakia], 157-8. More to the point, Czechoslovak culture rejected show trials as evils associated with Stalinism and Soviet domination. Kulka, “The ‘New’ Forms of Anti-Semitism,” 62-3. Staging one in 1968 would have been interpreted as assenting to Soviet control of internal Czechoslovak affairs – which would have been an unpalatable display, even if it accurately reflected contemporary realities. Indeed, Gustav Husák assumed the post of First Secretary of the Communist Party with a promise “to preserve at least something of the policy of 1968.” Jiří Pelikán, ed., *The Czechoslovak Political Trials 1950-1954: The Suppressed Report of the Dubček Government’s Commission of Inquiry, 1968*, with a preface and a postscript by the editor (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971), 23. This included a tacit pledge not to conduct further show trials.

worried that once “activated,” citizens of Jewish origin would form a fifth column in the Cold War. They protested the re-emergence of Jewish cultural production and (cultural production about Jews) as a hindrance to the ethnic assimilation and coming-to-atheism of the Jewish minority. This betrayed a profound contradiction in their attitudes towards those whom they identified as Jewish, regardless of their religious affiliation. StB agents pursued and persecuted them for failing to disappear, while insisting upon the near impossibility of their disappearance.

In contrast, both the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs strove to deepen Jewish-state mutuality, provided that it remained within bounds of the ideologies and laws established in the 1950s; or, at least, provided that they could articulate their new policies through them.⁴ The Minister of Education and Culture, Jiří Hájek (1913-1993, Minister of Education and culture 1965-1968, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1968), took an active role in offering the Jewish religious communities greater latitude to celebrate local Jewish culture and to raise the next generation of Jewish youths within it. He and some of his subordinates created a *de facto* distinction between political Zionism, on the one hand, and Jewish ethnic identification, encompassing religious beliefs and practices, on the other. Hájek hoped to produce Jewish ethnic space devoid of Zionism, in collaboration with communist-Jewish leaders. Yet, in his attempt to manifest Enlightenment visions of Jewish integration, he pushed the party-state’s official distinction between Jewish nationalism and the Jewish religion

⁴ Most individuals sought work in departments whose policies matched their own attitudes. Exceptions proved this rule. Karel Šnýdr of the Secretariat for Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Culture, for example, sought to undermine the mutuality developing between his office and the CJRC. This put him into conflict with the Minister of Education and Culture, Jiří Hájek, who won these contests until he took a new position in 1968. Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 113; and Jacob Ari Labendz “Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist: Managing ‘Jewish Power and Danger’ in 1960s Communist Czechoslovakia,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014): 89-94 and 97-102.

to an extreme, particularly in the Cold War context. Pressure from Israeli diplomats, Western Jews, and antisemitic state officials left little room to put such idealism into practice. Hájek could not surmount the contradictions that lay at the foundation of the party-state's relationship with the Jewish minority. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs worried little about the identificational and cultural practices of citizens of Jewish origin. Its directors could forgive any non-political, ethnic alignment which helped to improve their country's standing in the world.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia the following year offered the StB an opportunity to reassert itself. Yet those events also changed the environment in which its agents operated. Czechoslovakia joined the other countries of the Soviet Bloc, with the exception of Romania, in suspending diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967. It therefore expelled the entire Israeli diplomatic corps in June of that year. The period of political and cultural "normalization" that followed the Soviet-led invasion of 1968 disrupted the ties between Western-Jewish organizations and the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities. Having mitigated these foreign threats, after ten years of frustration, StB agents re-imagined the Zionist problem as domestic, diffuse, and still dangerous. Its agents therefore assumed more control over the internal affairs of the Jewish religious communities. They simultaneously launched Operation "Spider," with the goal of uncovering and undermining Jewish networks of the type that the StB had discovered during the 1950s in Operations Golden Goose and Dana.

Operation Spider failed, however, for a number of reasons. First, while renewed pressure from the StB may have pushed Jewish cultural production and interaction into the private, non-communal sphere, no covert networks existed for its agents to uncover in the 1970s, as they had in the 1950s. Second, despite the restoration to prominence of anti-Zionist and antisemitic rhetoric in party-state propaganda during "normalization," the influence of such ideas over

Czech and Slovak citizens had declined. This even applied to a good number StB agents. The mutuality that had characterized Jewish-state relations for much of the 1960s and the popularity of Jewish artists and themes during that decade suggested that the Jewish religious and even ethnic minority posed little threat to the Czechoslovak nation-state and its communist administration. So too did the miniscule size of the well-integrated and aging Jewish population.⁵ Finally, after 1975, many within the party-state administration found reason to reinvest Jewish-state relations with mutuality, in the service of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy agenda.

Destalinization and the Rise of a Communist-Jewish Culture

Although scholars consider destalinization to have been a belated and hesitant process in Czechoslovakia, beginning in earnest only at the turn of the 1960s,⁶ officials from various ministries joined culture leaders in rethinking the Jewish Question immediately after the deaths of Joseph Stalin and Klement Gottwald in 1953. Led by Minister Jiří Hájek, the Ministry of Education and Culture would eventually permit the CJRC and its subordinate communities to engage in Jewish cultural production, despite the fact that it technically fell outside of their purview as religious organizations. In 1966, the minister suggested that the CJRC and the Prague Community plan historically focused lectures for their younger members, with funding from the

⁵ Marie Crhová translated and published a number of documents related to Operation Spider. In her brief introductions, she argues for the significance of 1967 to its development. Crhová also anticipated my conclusion that both ideological and pragmatic factors conditioned state policy. Marie Crhová, "Israel in the Foreign and International Politics of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and Beyond," *Jewish Studies at the Central European University*, vol. 4 (2003-2005): 259-86; and idem., "Jews under the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia," *Jewish Studies at the CEU*, vol. 3 (2002-2003): 281-96.

⁶ H. Gordon Skilling, describes Czechoslovak de-Stalinization as a decade-long process beginning between 1958 and 1963. "Stalinism and Czechoslovak Political Culture," in *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, pp. 257-80 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977), 257; and idem., *Communism National and International*, 24-35 and 84-132.

U.S.-based Memorial Fund for Jewish Culture, provided that they did not propagate Zionism.⁷ Of course, this also served the ministry's mission of promoting atheism, inasmuch as the youngsters would not receive religious educations. It additionally reflected a perspective which embraced local Jewish history and culture as constituent elements of Czechoslovak heritage. Indeed, in 1967, the Ministry of Education and Culture gave permission for the Jewish community to hold an international celebration of 1,000 years of Jewish settlement in Prague and the 700th anniversary of the city's Old-New Synagogue. It asked only that the CJRC not to invite representatives of Western-Jewish organizations in their official capacities.⁸

This new perspective on the place of Jewish culture and history in the Czech lands reflected as well in the attention that the general public lavished upon Jewish authors and themes during the 1960s. As I argue in earlier chapters, both Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs began deploying the Holocaust as a discursive symbol with which to criticize contemporary domestic affairs safely and in the public sphere. Thus, for the first time since the advent of communist rule, the Jewish Question became useful for thinking about what it meant to be Czech in a positive and constructive way. Rising discourses stressed Jewish-Czech similarity and thereby undermined the othering effects of the heretofore prevailing uses of the category “of Jewish origin.”

Such cultural production would have been impossible without the permission of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Communist Party. The party-state soon began using

⁷ On the lecture series, see Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 105-18; and Labendz, “Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist,” 89-94.

⁸ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 27-33. The StB opposed such programs. Its agents suspected that a focus on Jewish ethnicity and culture would lead young Jews to Zionism. For example, see Major Dostál, “Problematika ‘Izrael’ – návrh na opatření k usnesení předsednictva ÚV-KSČ” [“Israel” problematic – Proposal for measures with regard to the resolutions of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party] (7 October 1965). ABS, H-711 folder 1, 140-43.

representations of the Holocaust to mark its own political progress and transcendence of Stalinism. Even earlier than that, party-state officials endeavored to improve their country's tarnished reputation in the West by allowing Czech and Slovak Jewish leaders to participate in international Holocaust commemorations and by lending artifacts from that tragedy to museums around the world. This coincided with a general improvement in popular attitudes towards Jews and Israel, encouraged by a relaxation of visa and travel restrictions between Israel and Czechoslovakia. During the mid-1960s, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even provided exit visas to hundreds of Jewish citizens who wanted to resettle in Israel. The fact that the state benefitted from these developments financially and also in terms of its foreign relations does not at all negate the positive effects that they had upon the contours of domestic Jewish-state relations and the experiences of Jews, however defined, in Czechoslovakia.

On the other hand, these new attitudes towards Jews, Jewishness, and "Zionism" operated primarily on a symbolic level for most citizens and even for some officials of the party-state. The ideas upon which they turned, moreover, drew from the very same concepts and stereotypes of Jewish otherness that motivated earlier (and still persistent) antisemitic discourses. Indeed, the adoption of a Jewish totem by a self-consciously non-Jewish society does not necessarily imply its acceptance of Jews as full and normal members thereof. Neither does it suggest that positive attitudes towards Jews will survive a shift in the political-cultural environment. They, in fact, depended for their perpetuation upon the continued alignment of popular and party-state interests with those attributed to the Jewish minority; in other words, upon continued Jewish-state and Jewish-Czech mutuality. The general population, for example, lost interest in the Holocaust when its symbolic deployment could no longer serve contemporary political ends. The Ministry of Culture and Information, which succeeded the Ministry of Education and Culture, likewise

turned away from mutuality in the 1970s and adopted a far more paternalistic and oppressive posture in the management of Jewish religious affairs. None of this, however, undermines the emergence of a type of Czech-Jewish symbiosis in the 1960s, which manifested in the policies and practices of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and even the Communist Party. This, as much as any persecution or antisemitism, should be understood as constituent of authentic Jewish-state relations during the period of communist rule.

Harsh Paternalism in Practice: Destalinization at the StB

Destalinization affected how the StB prosecuted Zionist threat as well. The roots of this change lay in Operations “Golden Goose” and “Dana,” in which agents uncovered and disrupted two nationwide networks of Jewish citizens, operating out of the Israeli Legation in Prague, one for black-market trade and the other for the distribution of aid to impoverished and elderly Jews. As per the previous chapter, StB agents believed that the Israelis had established the networks for espionage purposes, to establish a fifth-column in the case of war, and to provide support for Jewish political prisoner. For a decade thereafter, State Security agents adopted a paternalistic approach to policing “citizens of Jewish origin.” They sought, first and foremost, to undermine the supposed efforts of Israeli diplomats and Western-Jewish activists to rebuild the covert network by exerting their influencing over citizens with ties both religious and ethnic to the Jewish minority.

In 1961, therefore, the StB transferred its Zionism unit from the Administration of Military Counterintelligence to its civilian counterpart, responsible for combating foreign threats on the territory of Czechoslovakia. As part of this reassignment, the unit received a new mandate to focus on the Israeli diplomats and their domestic associates, rather than on “citizens of Jewish

origin” writ large.⁹ The StB thus terminated its card-catalogue program for registering all citizens of Jewish descent in the following year.¹⁰ Its ability to harass innocent civilians with outlandish indictments significantly deteriorated as well. Jewish community members and prominent or successful citizens of Jewish descent still faced police intimidation. Yet, on the whole, the situation for citizens of Jewish origin undeniably improved in concert with these changes.

In keeping with the new order, StB agents articulated their concerns about citizens of Jewish origin more charitably. They tacitly acknowledged that one’s being “of Jewish origin” did not automatically suggest that they stood against the Czechoslovak nation-state and its communist administration. At the same time, however, agents also portrayed such individuals as possessing heightened proclivities towards Jewish nationalism, which made them open to manipulation by Israeli and Western agents. The unnamed author of a report commissioned in 1965 as part of the deliberations regarding the youth lecture series concluded that

...the activation of youth of Jewish descent comes down to the abuse of their natural dreams to become acquainted with a tradition for with hundreds of thousands became martyrs [sic!]. Under the guise of religious awakening however, it is not difficult to figure out that the sought-after political goal is to weaken the influence of education in a socialist spirit upon these youths and to shape them in the interests of the politics of the State of Israel. This then creates the possibility for the use of these young people towards [achieving] the intelligence goals and tasks of Israeli spies on the territory of the ČSSR [the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic].¹¹

The officials of the StB thus accused domestic Jewish leaders, international Western-Jewish organizations, and Israeli diplomats of seeking to corrupt a new, naïve, and potentially dangerous

⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Špelina, “Informace k osobě JORDANA Charlese” [Information on the individual, Jordan, Charles] (3 October 1967). ABS, H-711, folder 1, 206-08.

¹⁰ Jana Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu v českých zemích, 1948-1992* [The Sources and manifestations of antisemitism in the Czech lands, 1948-1992], (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences, 1994), 42.

¹¹ Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior, “Zpráva o aktivizace mládeže židovského původu v ČSSR” [Report on the activation of youth of Jewish descent in Czechoslovakia] (18 June 1965). ABS, H-711, folder 1, 148-53.

generation of citizens of Jewish origin.

Czechoslovak State Security officers also attacked the Ministry of Education and Culture for failing to intervene against these forces. Captain Chudý expressed his unit's dissatisfaction with that ministry's approach in an embellishment to the previous report,

In consultation with the [Ministry of Education and Culture] on the question of the organization of the Jewish youth it came out that [it] was not informed about these activities in their complete breadth and in all of their connections, in particular as concerns the direct influence of international organizations on the so called problem of the Jewish youth among us.¹²

The Ministry of Culture, however, paid little heed to the StB. Indeed, the last record that I found of its functionaries complaining about the activities of Israeli diplomats dates from 1964.¹³ The ministry approved the lecture series and permitted the US-based Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture to provide all of funding for the program.

Alena Heitlinger has made much of the fact that Minister Hájek only granted this permission after František Fuchs, the vice chairman of the Prague Community, threatened that failure to do so might lead Jewish youths into the hands of less trustworthy parties. Everyone at the meeting understood that he meant the Israelis or, at least, "Zionists."¹⁴ Hájek, however, did not need to bend to this manipulation. Fuchs merely offered Hájek a means to articulate his approval of the lecture series in accordance with the party-state's anti-Zionist priorities and, thereby, to silence the vocal dissent of his less well-disposed subordinate, Karel Šnýdr. Indeed, the possibility for mutuality in Jewish-state relations depended upon the ability of both Jewish

¹² Miloslav Chudý, "Zpráva o další aktivizace mládeže židovského původu" [Report on the further activation of youth of Jewish descent] (15 November 1965), 5-6. ABS, H-711, folder 1, 154-59.

¹³ Copy of letter from the Department for Ecclesiastical Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Culture to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (20 April 1964), under header labeled "Upozornění na nesprávný postup izraelského zastupitelského úřadu" [Warning about the improper approach of the Israeli diplomatic office]. NAČR, MŠK box 58.

¹⁴ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 113.

leaders and their allies in the administration to communicate using a shared political language, one which they could not fully control, and find ways therewith to articulate new demands of the state and society.¹⁵

As official antisemitism in Czechoslovakia waned, Jewish cultural life began to flourish, particularly in the major cities. Young Jews felt more comfortable participating in community activities, presenting themselves as Jewish in certain social situations, and pursuing their interests in various aspects of Jewish culture. Young Jews even established unofficial clubs and networks in Bratislava, Prague, and Brno. Roughly 200 youngsters gathered around the Jewish community in Prague, dividing themselves into groups by age and interest. Young Czech and Slovak Jews also travel abroad, where they met with foreign coreligionists. Their activities culminated in a series of youth seminars, first in Israel, and then, after 1967, in Rumania and Yugoslavia.¹⁶

In early 1967, the post office released a series of stamps celebrating 1000 years of Jewish settlement in the Czech lands. The state withdrew them, however, when war broke out in the Middle East in June. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had raised objections to the stamps as early as 1966, fearing that they would offend the leaders of Arab states. International treaties would have bound the latter to honor the stamps, despite the fact that they carried symbols that could have been interpreted as pro-Zionist.¹⁷

The StB adapted to this new environment. Following their orders (and likely also

¹⁵ Labendz, "Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist," 89-94.

¹⁶ Brod, "Židé v poválečném Československu" [Jews in Postwar Czechoslovakia], 157-58; Bumová, "ŠtB a židovská mládež" [StB and Jewish Youths], 76-80; Alena Heitlinger, "Jewish Youth Activism and Institutional Response in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2002): 25-42; and idem., *Shadows*, 105-20. See also Collaborator "Novák," "Agentúrna správa č. 29" [Agency report no. 29] (10 October 1969). ABS, H-711 folder 4, 70-77.

¹⁷ Collection of documents in NAČR, 1261/0/44, carton 180, file 150.

attempting to justify their continued employment), its agents focused on the “unwanted activities” of the Israeli diplomats. Beginning in 1963, the StB launched a campaign against the Israeli Ligation. Its agents lobbied the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prevent the distribution of the latter’s newsletter, *The News Service of Israel (Zpravodajská služba Israele)*, which Colonel Josef Kudrna characterized as a propagandistic tool for the “revival and consolidation of Jewish bourgeois nationalism in the ČSSR.”¹⁸ Following a precedent set in the late-1950s, the StB also requested repeatedly that the Foreign Minister reproach the Israeli diplomatic corps for meddling in the internal affairs of the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities and for maintaining close contact with Jewish citizens without going through the appropriate channels. The StB’s complaints focused primarily upon the persons of *Charge d’Affairs* Yehudah Nassie and ligation second secretary Karel Yaaron. Agents compiled extensive reports on both men.¹⁹

Finally, in 1965, the StB requested that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expel Yaaron for propagating Zionism, meeting secretly with Jewish citizens, and facilitating both legal and illegal immigration to Israel. In a seven-page briefing, Colonel Košňar argued that,

In their activities, Israeli diplomats focus upon the evocation of religious sentiments among citizens of Jewish descent, the vivification and consolidation of bourgeois Jewish nationalism, Jewish unity, and the acquisition of Jewish citizens for loyalty to the State of Israel and its politics. Czechoslovak citizens of Jewish descent processed in this way constitute for the Israeli Embassy and the State of Israel a numerically strong and reliable base within Czechoslovakia, upon which the fulfillment of their other objectives is based.²⁰

Košňar and his superior, Kudrna, believed that expelling Yaaron, in coordination with a

¹⁸ Letter from Josef Kudrna to the Minister of the Interior (1 November 1963), ABS, H711, folder 1, 6.

¹⁹ Letter from Josef Kudrna to Antonín Gregor (1 December 1964). ABS, H-711, folder 1, 125-33.

²⁰ Colonel Miloslav Košňar, “Souhrnná zpráva o nežádoucí činnosti izraelského vyslanectví v ČSSR” [Summary report on the unwanted activities of the Israeli Embassy in Czechoslovakia] (March 1965). ABS, H-711, folder 1, 118-24.

propaganda campaign, would hinder the spread of domestic Zionism.²¹ They had reason to expect satisfaction, as the state had taken similar actions with regard to the diplomats whom the secret police had implicated in operations “Golden Goose” and “Dana.”

Košňar additionally expressed frustration that Yaaron had taken advantage of his own Slovak ethnicity to influence Czech and Slovak Jews. For linguistic, cultural, and espionage reasons, the State of Israel, a nation composed of many immigrants, made a standard practice of assigning diplomats to serve in their native countries. In lodging his complaint, Košňar inverted the grievance commonly expressed in StB reports that Czech and Slovak “Zionists” frequently failed to present themselves in public as Jews. (Indeed, if the Ministry of Education and Culture sought to suppress Jewish religious Orthodoxy, the agents of the StB hoped, at least, that they could rely upon its outward markers to more easily identify their “Zionist” enemies.)

During the 1950s the state-run media often reported the former, German last names of suspected citizens of Jewish origin (or of their forbears), alongside their newly taken Czech or Slovak alternatives, to suggest that those individuals did not belong fully or naturally to the Czech or Slovak nations.²² Strikingly, in their efforts to convince the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the danger posed by the Israeli diplomats, StB agents often recorded the latter’s former Czech, Slovak, or German names, alongside their newly taken Hebrew ones.²³ For the StB, these Jews

²¹ Josef Kudrna, “Návrh některých opatření k omezení činnosti izraelského vyslanectví v Praze” [Proposal for a few precautions for the disruption of the activities of the Israeli Embassy in Prague] (24 March 1965). ABS, H-711, folder 1, 136-37.

²² The StB continued this practice in its internal reports for decades. Context suggests that this had as much to do with antisemitism as it did with the imperative to provide as much information as possible on their subjects. For example, see Captain Havelka, “Návštěva TS u emigranta Imricha Manna ve Frankfurtu n. M.H.” [The visit of a secret collaborator with the emigrant Imrich Mann in Frankfurt am Main] (3 December 1973), 5. ABS, H-711, folder 7, pp. 117-21; and Major Švadlenka, “Záznam o signálu” [Memorandum regarding a signal] (3 August 1970), 3. ABS, H-711, folder 4, 113-15.

²³ Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior, “Souhrnná zpráva o činnosti IZV” [Summary report

were too Czechoslovak to be fully Jewish or Israeli. This, of course, stood in direct contrast with how its agents perceived their domestic counterparts.²⁴

Despite a new mandate to focus on the Israeli Ligation, StB agents continued to suspect all citizens of Jewish origin of potential Zionism and of not authentically belonging to the Czech or Slovak nations; indeed, many believed that they lacked the capacity to join them. The unnamed author of a briefing from 1967 noted correctly that more citizens of Jewish origin lived in Czechoslovakia than the roughly 18,000 individuals who joined the country's Jewish communities. Without a hint of irony or self-reflection, he continued, "... however, for the most various reasons they do not present themselves publicly as [Jews]." A few pages later, the author concluded that these individuals "are primarily in the first case 'Jews' and only in the second case Czechoslovak citizens."²⁵

These few sentences and the quotation marks around the word "Jew" in illustrate the frustration that StB agents felt with the ambiguity of the party-state's official position on the Jewish minority. On the one hand, the refusal to recognize "Jewish" as a category of national identification—the reason for the quotation marks—did nothing to undermine the feelings of ethnic solidarity and connectedness that some citizens of Jewish origin experienced—and which StB agents projected upon them all. The association of such sentiments with Zionism, which the party considered an enemy ideology, made criminal suspects out of all citizens of Jewish origin in the eyes of the StB. On the other hand, the government had committed itself to support and defend the domestic Jewish minority as a religious collective. Some citizens of Jewish origin did

about the activities of the Israeli Legation] (16 April 1967). ABS, H-711, folder 1, 161-69.

²⁴ In one meeting, Israeli diplomat Zev Shek claimed to have forgotten how to speak Czech. See "Záznam" [Memo] (15 April 1954). MZV, DP-T Israel, 1945-1954, box 2.

²⁵ Ibid., 1 and 4. On the culture of "passing" among Czech and Slovak Jews, see Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 13-16.

not consider themselves adherents of that religion. Others refrained from joining the Jewish communities out of fear. During the 1960s, StB agents had the unenviable task of suppressing “Jews” as an ethnic group without impinging or even appearing to impinge upon life at the Jewish communities. This grew even harder as the Ministry of Education and Culture deepened its relationship of mutuality with Jewish leaders, often through Jewish cultural programming.

Of course, the abovementioned report from 1967 also attests to the persistence among StB agents of antisemitic sentiments and stereotypes, despite their organization’s attempts to adjust to the post-Stalinist climate. Through the 1960s, the secret police lost much of its ability to engage in anti-Jewish practices and to force other organs of the state administration to do the same. Its agents, nonetheless, displayed a tremendous capacity for adaptation. Antisemitic discourses took new forms in the context of liberalization.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Communist Party versus the StB

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also had its own approach to managing Jewish-state relations, which followed from its specific priorities in the international sphere. During the 1960s, officials at that ministry rebuffed and even ignored most of the StB’s requests regarding the Israeli diplomats. In 1965, a ministerial representative reported to the StB that it had met with *chargé d’affaires* Nassie on numerous occasions, and that its interventions had always come to no avail.²⁶ When pressed, ministry officials insisted that the country’s relations with Israel were

²⁶ Response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Colonel Josef Kudrna (12 May 1965). ABS, H-711, folder 1, 135-36. See also J. Pudlák, “Záznam o návštěvě izraelského *chargé d’affaires* s. i. p. Y. Nassie a náměstka ministra zahraničních věcí s J. Pudlákem” (12 December 1965). MZV, GS-T box 28; and Major Dostál, “Problematika ‘Izrael’ – návrh na opatření k usnesení předsednictva ÚV-KSČ” [“Israel” problematic – Proposal for measures with regard to the resolutions of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party] (7 October 1965). ABS, H-711 folder 1, 140-43.

already strained enough and that any further provocation might result in the expulsion of Czechoslovak diplomats from Israel or in negative trade repercussions for their country. Czechoslovakia, in fact, owed a significant debt to the State of Israel and also benefited financially from increasing waves of Israeli and Western-Jewish tourism. During the 1960s, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had even entered into covert negotiations to improve Czechoslovak-Israeli relations.²⁷ When pressed to confront the Israelis, ministerial officials likely also considered how Western propagandists might manipulate any steps that it took against them, however justified, in order to disparage the Soviet Bloc. Perhaps they feared that it would disrupt the flow of hard currency into the national economy through Western-Jewish aid programs.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs thus prioritized maintaining a positive, if cool relationship with Israel over policing the “unwanted activities” of its diplomats. It had more pressing concerns than the latter’s potential influence over a few hundred youths and a relatively small community of aging genocide survivors, the vast majority of whom had neither the interest

²⁷ Israeli diplomats expressed a greater interest in improving these relationships than their Czechoslovak counterparts. The latter insisted that improvement was contingent upon Israel’s foreign policy. Czechoslovak diplomats, nonetheless, acknowledged a steady improvement of relations in the cultural sphere, at least, and looked forward to working more closely with the Israelis. “Materiály k nástupní audienci izraelského vyslance Shmuela BENDORA” [Materials for the inaugural audience of the Israeli Legate Shmuel BENDOR] (1957); and “Záznam o návštěvě chargé d’affaires izraelského vyslanectví dne 8. února 1956” [Memo about the visit of the *chargé d’affaires* of the Israeli Legation on 8 February 1956] (9 February 1956). MZV, DP-T Israel, 1955-1964, box 5. K. Vojáček, “Záznam o návštěvě II. tajemníka izraelského ZÚ p. Lavona u vedoucího konzulárního odboru MZV s. Vojáčka” [Memo about the meeting of the 2nd secretary of the Israeli diplomatic office, Mr. Lavon, with the director of the consular department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Comrade Vojáček] (11 February 1963); “Záznam o návštěvě chargé d’affaires Izraele p. Yehuda Nassie, u s. I. náměstka dr A. Gregor dne 30. srpna 1963” [Memo about the visit of *chargé d’affaires* of Israel, Mr. Yehuda Nassie, with Comrade 1st Minister Dr. A. Gregor on 30 August 1963] (31 August 1963); and additional documents in MZV, GS-T 1955-1964 box 20. J. Pudlák, “Záznam o návštěvě izraelského chargé d’affaires s.i. p. Y. Nassie a náměstka ministra zahraničních věcí s. J. Pudláka” [Memo about the visit of the Israeli *chargé d’affaires* of the State of Israel Mr. Y. Nassie with the deputy minister of foreign affairs, comrade J. Pudlák] (12 October 1965). MZV, GST 1965-1969 box 28..

nor the capacity to engage in espionage. The perspective of high-ranking ministerial officials diverged from those of their StB counterparts, moreover, because the individuals of Jewish origin with whom they interacted most frequently, representatives of the State of Israel, publicly embraced Jewish nationality with impunity. The entire category “of Jewish origin,” which so frustrated the StB, thus posed far fewer problems at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose officials recognized the demographic near insignificance of the domestic Jewish minority and who also assumed a more internationally focused political strategy based in *realpolitik*.

On 3 August 1965, after months of inter-ministerial negotiations, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party intervened on the StB’s behalf. It passed a seven-point resolution calling for: (1) the limiting of diplomatic relations with Israel to the level of *chargé d’affaires*; (2) the restriction of emigration to Israel to elderly and “nonproductive” citizens alone (This had been state policy since 1949.²⁸); (3) the intensification of visa restrictions and background checks on citizens traveling to Israel and on Israelis seeking entry into Czechoslovakia—though somehow without damaging the tourist industry;²⁹ (4) the monitoring of Israeli-Czechoslovak trade to ensure that it was beneficial for the latter (Was this not always a priority?!); (5) a commitment not to initiate negotiations with Israel regarding the

²⁸ Monika Hanková, “Změna postoje vládnoucích orgánů ČSR k židovské komunitě po roce 1948 na příkladu vystěhovalectví” [The change in the attitude of the governing organs of the CSR to the Jewish community after 1948: on the example of emigration], in *Židé v Čechách: sborník ze semináře konaného v říjnu 2006 v Liberci* [Jews in Bohemia: The Collection from the Seminar which Took Place in November 2006 in Liberec] ed. Vlastimila Hamáčková, Monika Hanková and Markéta Lhotová (Prague, ČR: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2007), 101.

²⁹ The Ministry of the Interior expressed concern as early as 1961 that the Israeli secret services were using tourists to conduct operations in Czechoslovakia and to spread Zionist propaganda. Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior, “Orgány izraelské rozvědky a kontrarozvědky” [The organs of Israeli intelligence and counterintelligence]. ABS, H-711, folder 1, 43-54. *Idem.*, “Agenturní prostředí v Izraeli s uvedením některých údajů o činnosti rozvědných a kontrarozvědných orgánů tohoto státu” (Agency environment in Israel with an introduction to a few facts about the activities of the espionage and counterespionage organs of that state) (5 October 1963). ABS, H-711, folder 1, 7-42.

resolution of the debt owed to it by Czechoslovakia; (6) the curtailment of cultural relations between the two countries; and (7) closer monitoring of Czechoslovak participation in Israeli conferences, etc.³⁰

The resolution emboldened StB officials who had spent many months suffering rejection at the hands of their peers at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They interpreted it as a sign that the party supported them in their war against the Israeli Legation and they developed a new plan of action. They would continue documenting the activities of the Israeli diplomats. They would interrogate and harass Czechoslovak visitors to the Israeli Legation. They would apply greater scrutiny to the travel-visa applications of citizens who had earlier requested permission to emigrate to Israel and had been denied, and they would embark on a new counterpropaganda campaign designed to portray Israel as land unfit for immigration. The Ministry of the Interior also decided to call upon the Ministry of Education and Culture to cooperate in limiting the contacts between Western-Jewish leaders and domestic Jewish youths. It would additionally seek final confirmation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that it had stopped the Israelis from distributing their newsletter in Czechoslovakia.³¹

From destalinization through the political and cultural liberalizations of the 1960s, Czechoslovakia's ministries vied with one another to advance their own priorities and perspectives with regard to the postwar "Jewish Question." Much of this competition emerged from contradictions within the party-state's policies and official ideologies that touched the Jewish minority. The Ministry of Education and Culture sought to suppress religious belief in

³⁰Letter from Jaroslav Šilhavý to Jan Záruba (25 August 1965). ABS, H-711 folder 1, 139-39.

³¹Major Dostál, "Problematika 'Izrael' - návrh na opatření k usnesení předsednictva ÚV-KSČ" ["Israel" problematic - Proposal for measures with regard to the resolutions of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party] (7 October 1965). ABS, H-711 folder 1, 140-43.

general. Yet it also established a close working relationship with the leadership of the Czech Jewish communities, one which bore increasing fruit through the 1960s. In this climate, expressions of Jewish culture and even ethnic attachment loomed less threatening in the eyes of many party-state officials. The secret police thus struggled to prosecute its war on “Zionism,” which the party still considered an enemy ideology in the service of Western imperialism. Its agents found few allies, even as they ceased hunting imagined internal enemies in the guise of “citizens of Jewish origin” and turned their attention to the very real attempts of the Israeli diplomatic corps to intervene into domestic life. The Soviet response to the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 seemed, at first, to offer advantages and vindication to the StB. These would not last long.

Violence Brings Change: The 1967 Arab-Israeli War

The escalation of violence and propaganda that preceded the Arab-Israeli War of June 1967 strengthen the hand of the StB in its campaign to expel members of the Israeli diplomatic corps from Czechoslovakia. The brewing conflict pit Cold War alliances against one another and restored “Zionism” to its place of prominence in their discourses of mutual opposition. Each side prepared for the prospect of open war in the Middle East and its potential broader ramifications, as client states of the USA and the USSR trained their M-16s and AK-47s upon each other.

By this point, Karel Yaaron had already left Czechoslovakia, according to schedule and without official incident. The StB requested the expulsion of his successor, Yitzchak Shaley, in May 1967, for allegedly following in Yaaron’s footsteps.³² This time, however, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted more favorably, in light of the new international climate. Indeed, the

³² Lieutenant Colonel Beneš, “Návrh na předběžné jednání s MZV ve věci izraelského vyslanectví” [Proposal for the ongoing meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the matter of the Israeli Embassy] (22 April 1967). ABS, H-711 folder 1, 170-74.

embassies of some Arab states had complained to the ministry about “domestic Jews, their foreign contacts, and their relationships with Israel.”³³ The StB probably encouraged the embassies to do so and it also seems likely that they also provided them with evidence to support their claims.

In this case, however, the StB did not rely upon the shifting political landscape alone to ensure the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the context of mounting anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli rhetoric, its representative drew upon tactics more characteristic of the 1950s. Lieutenant Colonel Beneš provided the ministry with proof the new diplomat, a native of Bohemia, had emigrated from Czechoslovakia without repaying a loan that he had taken from a state agency. Beneš further alleged that Yitzchak Shalev, “originally named Eugen Stern, later Evžen Štefka,” had attempted to hide this fact by submitting falsified credentials to the Czechoslovak government.³⁴ The StB thus provided the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with legal grounds to expel Shalev. Yet Beneš also manipulated Shalev’s background, his history of changing his name to accord with the dominant national culture of the country in which he resided, from German to Czech to Hebrew, to cast suspicion upon him as an individual. Beneš thus evoked the classic antisemitic stereotype of Jewish cosmopolitanism, ones which predated communist rule, but which also gained new articulation within the communist system.

Mr. Zachystal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to support the idea of expelling Shalev. He suggested further that the state should launch an accompanying media campaign to protect “that group of our honorable citizens of Jewish origin” from Israeli propaganda.³⁵ This

³³ Beneš and Dostál, “Akce Saigon - Záznam o jednání na ministerstvu zahraničních věcí” [Operation Saigon - memo about a meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] (15 May 1967). ABS, A7-415.

³⁴ Beneš, “Návrh na předběžné jednání” [Proposal for the ongoing meetings] 2-3.

³⁵ Beneš and Dostál, “Akce Saigon” [Operation Saigon].

suggests that Zachystal shared the StB's official, paternalistic perspective on Czechoslovak citizens of Jewish origin. Zachystal seems to have believed in earnest that there were good and bad Jews, and that duty bound the state to protect the former from the influence of foreign Zionists. Many secret police agents, like the author of the report from 1967 cited above, did not look as charitably upon the Jewish minority. Their responsibility to find conspiracies, even where none existed, conditioned how they viewed citizens of Jewish descent. Their jobs rewarded antisemitism. The same did not hold for employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their new willingness to explore the expulsion of a newly arrived Israeli diplomat, attests to how profoundly the political-culture of Czechoslovakia had changed with regard to Jews in only a few months.

The Arab-Israeli War of 1967 rendered debates about Shalev moot and forced a major restructuring of the StB's domestic anti-Zionist operations. In response to the conflict and to the success of the Israeli military therein, the entire Soviet Bloc, with the exception of Romania, suspended relations with Israel and expelled that country's diplomats from their territories. When Shalev and his coworkers left Czechoslovakia on 16 June 1967, the StB's anti-Zionist unit lost its main operational target.

The StB attempted to claim victory and to justify its activities over the past six years. In an internal memo, an analyst wrote that StB intelligence reports were:

... used politically during the disruption of diplomatic relations between the ČSSR and Israel; and some facts regarding the unwanted activities of the Israeli diplomats in the ČSSR were publicized in the printed news media.³⁶

The facts do not support the first claim. Czechoslovakia suspended its ties with the State of Israel on orders from the Soviet Union alone. And the Soviet Union did not base this decision at all

³⁶ Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior, "Souhrnná zpráva o činnosti IZV" [Summary report about the activities of the Israeli Legation].

upon the reports of a relatively small unit of Czechoslovak State Security that spent much of its resources tailing Jewish youths to cocktail bars and synagogues.³⁷

On the other hand, the StB used occasion of the expulsion to vindicate itself before the public and to reassert its dominance in the field of Jewish-state relations. On 15 June 1967, the Czechoslovak Communist Party's official newspaper, *Rudé Právo* (Red Right) published an article entitled "The Illegal Activity of the Israeli Diplomats in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic." It contained little more than summaries of old StB reports.³⁸ The article sent an implicit message, nonetheless, to citizens of Jewish origin and others who had been in contact with Israeli diplomats that the party-state considered their erstwhile activities to have been unlawful and subversive. The StB thus spread fear throughout the community.

The expulsion of the Israeli diplomatic corps also forced the StB to refocus its war on "Zionism" in the domestic sphere. Soviet-Bloc propaganda insisted that the ideology continued to pose a serious threat to the region, and the absence of Israeli diplomats did not mitigate the danger that StB agents saw in citizens of Jewish origin. A comparison of three reports, submitted within a period of only ten weeks, reflects the development of the StB's new perspective on the "Zionist" threat. As would be expected, a memo dated 16 April 1967 (i.e. before the expulsion), entitled "Ligation-Israel," focuses entirely upon the Israeli diplomats and their purported

³⁷ The Soviet's had collected sufficient evidence on their own about the intelligence operations of the State of Israel and organized Western Jewry. They shared their reports with their satellite states. The StB, indeed, based its own interpretation of affairs on the Soviet model. For the Soviet account, shared with the StB on 3 June 1967, see "Zpráva o provedených opatřeních k zamezení podvratně činnosti izraelské rozvědky na území SSSR" [Report on the implementation of measures for obstructing the activities of Israeli intelligence on the territory of the USSR], trans. Vávrová (3 June 1967). ABS, H-711 box 1, 197-201.

³⁸ "Nedovolená činnost izraelských diplomatů v ČSSR" (The illegal activity of the Israeli diplomats in the CSSR), *Rudé Právo*, (June 15, 1967): 2.

attempts to influence citizens of Jewish origin and to acquire them as intelligence assets.³⁹ As late as April 1967, the StB knew its enemy and had a plan to defeat it.

The StB commissioned a summary report on the Israeli diplomatic corps in the wake of their expulsion. Dated 26 June 1967, the document reiterated the content of the April memo and even shared structural similarities with it. Its unnamed author, however, added new information that reflected the agency's emerging, post-expulsion orientation. In particular, the agent emphasized the threats posed to national security by the domestic Jewish leadership and the representatives of Western-Jewish organizations. The author predicted that the latter would take over the espionage operations that the expelled Israeli diplomats had directed. Finally, the report also raised a concern regarding the activities of Czechoslovak Jews (and citizens of Jewish origin) who traveled to or lived in the West.⁴⁰

On 27 June 1967, just one day later, Captain Chudý penned a strategy proposal for an upcoming meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Culture. He suggested confronting them for their ministry's perceived laxity in monitoring the Jewish communities. In this document, the domestic Jewish leadership replaced the Israeli diplomats as the chief agents responsible for the spread of "Zionism" in Czechoslovakia. Chudý expressed deep concern about the personal and institutional links between the Czech Jewish communities and Western Jewry. In contrast, he barely mentioned the Israeli intelligence service at all. Understandably, Chudý simply described the Israeli diplomats as having once posed a threat.⁴¹

³⁹ Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior, "Souhrnná zpráva o činnosti IZV" [Summary report about the activities of the Israeli Legation]

⁴⁰ Analytical Department of the StB, "Charakteristika činnosti ZÚ Izraele" [A characterization of the activities of the Israeli Embassy], (26 June 1967). ABS, A34-2190.

⁴¹ Captain Miloslav Chudý, "Návrh k realizaci dalšího opatření podle schváleného návrhu v izraelské problematice" [Proposal for the realization of another measure according to the authorization of the proposal in the Israeli problematic] (27 June 1967). ABS, H-711 folder 1,

The following month, Karel Šnýdr, a functionary of the Ministry of Education and culture with a particularly negative attitude towards the Jewish communities, met with the presidents of the CJRC and the Prague community. He reported,

It was negotiated that it is in the interests of the [community] that it have oversight over the arrival and movements of foreign guests who come to the Prague Jewish Town Hall with the aim of [acquiring] information. Both presidents agreed with the necessity of oversight, but they objected that it is hard to achieve oversight on the premises of the cafeteria and synagogue. It was agreed that both presidents will take appropriate measures to secure oversight and that they will submit reports to us both about the arrival and movement of foreign guests and about personal meetings.⁴²

Even after the war, Jewish communal leaders felt comfortable negotiating their response to the “Zionist” threat with party-state officials. The two presidents, in fact, promised Šnýdr nothing to which their communities had not already agreed. Pavel Kollman, the president of the Prague community, instead, attempted to allay Šnýdr’s fears by noting that the rate of foreign visitation had declined in the summer of 1967, i.e., after the war, in comparison with the summer of 1966. He also tried to shift the blame for the lack of supervision at the communities onto the state’s official travel agency, which he claimed had made a common practice of sending foreign guests with advanced little notice.⁴³ The presidents succeeded in rebuffing Šnýdr because they understood that the party-state still made an official distinction between Jewish nationalism and the Jewish religion. As long as Jewish functionaries discussed community affairs on religious terms alone, they could avoid censorship by the Ministry of Education and Culture. In pointing to the state’s travel agency, moreover, Kollman reminded Šnýdr that some sectors of the state administration had an interest in perpetuating this (contradictory) distinction as well. Whether

202-205.

⁴² Karel Šnýdr, “Záznam o jednání s předsedou RŽNO ing. Fr. Fuchsem a předsedou ŽNO v Praze Pavlem Kollmanem dne 21. července 1967” [Report on the meeting with CJRC president, engineer František Fuchs, and the president of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, Pavel Kollman, on 21 July 1967] (21 July 1967), 1. NAČR, SPVC box 233.

⁴³ Ibid., 1.

the StB liked it or not, the Czech Jewish communities would continue to host Western-Jewish guests with relative impunity. It benefited the state financially and also in terms of its relations with Western countries.

Czechoslovakia's political and cultural liberalization, which proceeded despite the Middle Eastern War, presented an even more formidable challenge to the StB's efforts to refocus its domestic anti-Zionist campaign. Filmmakers released ten Holocaust-themed films between 1959 and 1969, which drew from an even broader base of similarly themed literature. The common deployment of Jewish-inflected discourses to call for and mark Czech political progress also stymied the re-emergence of anti-Zionism. During these years, sympathy for the State of Israel increased in highly visible segments of the population as well.⁴⁴ The debates at the June 1967 congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, turned on the issue of censorship, with direct reference to an intervention by the authorities to prevent the publication of editorials sympathetic to Israel by prominent authors. At that meeting, Pavel Kohout, a renowned Czech author, dared to compare the relationship between Israel and the Arab states to that which had existed between Czechoslovakia and Germany earlier in the century.⁴⁵ In this time of increasing freedoms, public and institutional sentiment turned towards Israel, and further frustrated the StB.

This liberalization and popular pro-Israel sentiment made harassing the Jewish communities difficult for the StB. Its agents achieved only minor gains in youth circles. The aforementioned *Rudé právo* article and a few arrests scared some young Jews and their parents

⁴⁴ Brod, "Židé v poválečném Československu" [Jews in Postwar Czechoslovakia], 157; Kulka, "The 'New' Forms of Anti-Semitism," 63; and Livia Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press 1996), 180.

⁴⁵ *IV. sjezd svazu československých spisovatelů /Protokol/, Praha 27.-29. června 1967* [IV congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers /Minutes/, Prague 27-29 June 1967] (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Československý spisovatel, 1967). For Kohout's speech, see pp. 39-44.

and led to a temporary decline in attendance at the Prague community.⁴⁶ During this period, the entire party-state apparatus agreed to recast the planned international celebrations of Czech-Jewish history as a local, religious affair. Officials worried that facilitating a celebration of Jewish culture, on the heels of Israel's military victory, might send the wrong message to its Arab and Soviet-Bloc allies. Emboldened by a political culture of increasing liberalization, however, Jewish leaders appealed the decision with a promise to ensure that the event would not take on a Zionist character.⁴⁷

The ascent of the liberal, Prague-Spring government in January 1968, reversed most of gains that the StB had achieved in the foregoing months. Indeed, the year witnessed something of a Jewish cultural renaissance. Party-state leaders even agreed to restore the Jewish anniversary celebrations to their international scope. In August, when Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia, the Slovak author Ladislav Mňačko found himself stranded in Israel with a group of his younger, Jewish compatriots.⁴⁸ These developments frustrated StB agents and led them to adopt even more conspiratorial tactics (and attitudes) in their fight against "Zionism" in Czechoslovakia.

Charles Jordan: A Shot Across the Bow of Western Jewry

The same political climate that prevented the StB from reigning in the leadership of the Czech Jewish communities also limited its agents' ability to work openly against the Western-Jewish organizations that operated in Czechoslovakia and its neighboring states. State Security had long

⁴⁶ Crhová, "Israel in the Foreign and International Politics," 275.

⁴⁷ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 27-33.

⁴⁸ Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Arnošt Beneš to Lieutenant Colonel Vosecký, "Věc: Zpráva z problematiky IZRAEL" [Re: Report from the problem ISRAEL] (30 September 1968). ABS, H-711 box 1, 218-20.

considered the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee an arm of the Israeli and Western intelligence communities. During the first half of the 1960s, agents compiled detailed reports about other organizations, which they also accused of espionage. They included the World Jewish Congress, the World Zionist Organization, and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. The StB relied upon the KGB for information and perspective, but also carried out its own international operations.⁴⁹ As per previous chapters, the Ministry of Education and Culture had forbidden the domestic Jewish communities from joining the World Jewish Congress and from working (openly) with Joint Distribution Committee. StB agents, however, could not prevent the Jewish citizens of Western states from traveling to Czechoslovakia and meeting with their local counterparts.⁵⁰ Not only would that have contravened international agreements, but it also would have compromised the interests of other state and economic sectors. Harassing foreigners, moreover, posed a greater risk than threatening Czechoslovak citizens. Thus, lacking options, the StB resorted to covert action.

On 20 August 1967, just two months after the expulsion of the Israeli diplomatic corps,

⁴⁹ “Orgány izraelské rozvědky a kontrarozvědky” [Organs of Israeli espionage and counterespionage] (8 November 1961). ABS, H-711 box 1, 44-54; “Agenturní prostředí v Izraeli s uvedením některých údajů o činnosti rozvědných a kontrarozvědných orgánů tohoto státu” [The agency environment in Israeli with an introduction to some data about the espionage and counterespionage activities of the organs of that state] (5 October 1963). ABS, H-711 box 1, 8-42; and “Rozvědné orgány Izraele a jejich podvratná činnost proti zemím Arabského Východu a socialistického tábora” [The espionage organs of Israel and their subversive activities against the states of the Arab East and the socialist camp] trans. Vávrová (29 July 1966). ABS A/7-267.

⁵⁰ One StB agent actually complained in 1971 that his unit could not collect data on Western-Jewish traveler to Czechoslovakia because their passports did not provide information regarding religion or ethnicity. Špelina, “Informace k osobě JORDANA Charlese” [Information on the individual, Jordan, Charles]. Of course, Czechoslovakia had removed information about religious affiliation from all personal identification documents in 1954. As the party-state did not recognize “Jewish” as a national category it could not record such information on public documents.

local police drew the body of Charles Jordan from Prague's Vltava River.⁵¹ Jordan, the executive vice president of the Joint Distribution Committee had vanished four days earlier. Czechoslovak investigators concluded that he had committed suicide. Subsequent investigations in New York and Switzerland, however, suggested strongly that someone had murdered Jordan. Scholars and journalists have now reached a consensus that agents working out of the Egyptian Embassy kidnapped, interrogated, and killed Jordan.⁵² StB agents observed the entire operation and their superiors ordered them not to intervene. The conspiracy to conceal the affair reached to the top of the Communist Party.

At the time of the Jordan incident, Czechoslovak-American relations had reached a low point. In 1966, the StB kidnapped and arrested an American citizen in Prague. That same year, the U.S. State Department expelled two Czechoslovak diplomats on espionage charges.⁵³ This climate should have dissuaded Czechoslovak officials from participating in a scheme to kidnap and (perhaps even) kill on their territory an American citizen who represented one of the most powerful Jewish organizations in the world. In an article published in 2014, I argue that the secret police intended Jordan's death to be a warning to Western-Jewish organizations not to fill the intelligence void left by the Israelis. My interviews with American- and British-Jewish activists from that period suggest that the StB's plan succeeded in scaring them and in forcing them act with more reserve. As the Prague Spring blossomed, however, Western-Jewish organizations found Czechoslovakia increasingly more open to their interventions. This led them

⁵¹ On the Jordan killing, see Labendz "Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist," 94-97.

⁵² I have intentionally avoided using the word "murder." First, it is unclear to me that Jordan's captors intended to kill him. Second, Jordan's work involved covert interventions into some of the most dangerous arenas of the Cold War. I consider the action taken against him, regrettable though it may have been, to have occurred in the murky, cloak-and-dagger world of espionage and counterespionage. Labels like "murder" which carry moral judgment do not neatly apply.

⁵³ Igor Lukes, "Changing Patterns of Power in Cold War Politics: The Mysterious Case of Vladimír Komárek," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 73-102.

to drop their investigation into the Jordan affair.⁵⁴

The StB and Citizens of Jewish Origin, June 1967-August 1968

The expulsion of the Israeli diplomatic corps also led StB agents to adjust their operations concerning citizens of Jewish origin. Still focused on the Israelis and on Western-Jewish organizations, they expected the locus of the Zionist threat to have moved abroad. StB agents worried that their counterparts in the Israeli intelligence services would intensify their attempts to acquire information from Czechoslovak citizens on visits to Israel and that they were encouraging those individuals to remain there. The author of a report dated 8 December 1967 noted that sixty-eight of his compatriots had travel to Israel since the previous January and admitted that the StB had not interrogate them at all. The author counted 130 Israeli visitors to Czechoslovakia between May and December 1967 and indicated that twenty of them had done so to visit family members. Finally, the StB identified ninety-one officials of Western “Zionist” organizations who had visited the country in 1967. They suspected that spies proliferated among them all.⁵⁵

In response, StB agents sought new collaborators and identified new suspects from among the cohorts listed above. They also continued extorting citizens who had returned to live in Czechoslovakia after having emigrated to Israel, just as they had done for years.⁵⁶ The attempts by StB agents to find willing collaborators among Czechoslovak immigrants to Israel,

⁵⁴ Tom Shachtman, *I Seek my Brethren: Ralph Goldman and “The Joint”* (New York, NY: Newmarket Press, 2001), 156-157.

⁵⁵ “Vyhodnocení práce a rozbor vyhodnocených materiálů” [An evaluation of work and an analysis of high-value materials] (8 December 1967). ABS, H-711, folder 2, 239-50.

⁵⁶ Ibid. For information on the phenomenon of “re-emigrants” and their treatment at the hands of the StB see the collection of reports in ABS, H-711 folder 3.

particularly in the aftermath of the 1967 war, seem to have failed.⁵⁷ Indeed, the drastic liberalization of 1968 stymied the StB's efforts to adjust to their new operational environment. Its agents' abilities to harass citizens of Jewish origin and to combat the "Zionist" threat reached a temporary nadir. As in other areas of interest, they resigned themselves to collecting data, even without ministerial permission.⁵⁸

Anti-Zionism and The Soviet-Led Invasion of 1968

On the night of 20 August 1968, Soviet-led armies from Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and East Germany invaded Czechoslovakia with the goal of reversing the country's political and cultural liberalization and unseating its architects in the Communist Party and state administration led by First Secretary Alexander Dubček (1921-1992). Though an unstoppable military force, the attackers met significant civil and political resistance from both ordinary citizens and party-state leaders. Newspapers and radios carried the protests of the domestic communist party and its local cells. For the first time in Czech history, the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Churches united their voices in opposition.⁵⁹ Students marched and removed street signs to confound the foreign armies. This popular dissent culminated on 19 January 1969, when a student named Jan Palach set himself on fire in front of the National Museum in Prague. Another, Jan Zajíc, followed suit in February. One month later, when Czechoslovakia beat the Soviet Union in the World Ice

⁵⁷ Dostál, "Spolupracovník 'KAMERA', t.č. Izrael" [Collaborator "camera", now Israel] and "Spolupracovník 'HUS', t.č. Izrael" [Collaborator "Hus", now Israel] (31 October 1967). ABS, H-711 folder 1, 269-70.

⁵⁸ Jaroslav Cuhra argues that the vast amount of information collected by StB agents during this period betrays their subsequent complaints about their inability to operate effectively. *Trestí represe odpůrců režimu v letech 1969-1972* [Juridical repression of the opponents of the regime in the years 1969-1972], *Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny* [Notebooks of the Institute for Contemporary History], vol. 29 (Prague, Czech Republic: The Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 1997), 15.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Hockey Championships, many thousands of fans-cum-protesters took to the streets.

The Soviet Union anticipated local resistance and attempted to use antisemitism to diffuse it. It launched a propaganda campaign in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, and even in some African states which attributed Czechoslovakia's liberalization to a counter-revolutionary conspiracy led by "Zionists" and Jewish citizens with Western ties. The propaganda even portrayed some of the Prague Spring's non-Jewish cultural and political leaders as having labored in the service of the State of Israel. The Soviet Union thus drew upon classic and pre-Marxist anxieties about Jews in order to delegitimize as foreign both the Prague Spring government and its program of liberalization. This implied that the Soviet occupiers had come, not as invaders, but as liberators of the Czech and Slovak peoples and as the saviors of their socialist order. To paraphrase Tomáš Kulka, the propaganda made double-scapegoats of Czech Jews, first for the liberation and then for the invasion.⁶⁰ Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Polish United Worker's Party, had defeated his rivals using a similar tactic in March 1968.⁶¹

This propaganda raised serious concern among Jews in the West for the safety of their coreligionists and co-ethnics in Czechoslovakia. So too did the emigration of some 6,000 Jews from that country by the end of 1969.⁶² A team of StB agents reported that Jewish leaders were encouraging younger community members to leave the country. They described the mood at the

⁶⁰ Kulka, "The 'New' Forms of Anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia," 63; and Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism], 57.

⁶¹ The Institute of Jewish Affairs in Association with the World Jewish Congress, "The Jewish Situation in Czechoslovakia after Dubcek," *Background Paper*, no. 13 (July 1969); and *The Use of Antisemitism against Czechoslovakia: Facts, Documents, Press Reports* (London, UK: The Institute of Jewish Affairs in association with the World Jewish Congress, 1968).

⁶² Brod, "Židé v poválečném Československu" [Jews in Postwar Czechoslovakia], 159; and Cuhra, *Trestí represe odpůrců režimu* [Juridical repression of the opponents of the regime], 27.

communities as one of a “psychosis for emigration.”⁶³ As Jewish organizations in the West welcomed the newcomers, some individuals began to worry about the conditions that had driven them into exile. Perhaps they had also heard that Ladislav Mňačko too had called upon all Jewish youths to leave the country.⁶⁴ As early as October 1968, the Jewish Telegraph Agency printed an article predicting that the Soviet Union would once again organize antisemitic show trials in Czechoslovakia.⁶⁵

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, members of the government, and the media repudiated antisemitism publicly as antithetical to communism and Czechoslovak culture.⁶⁶ For a brief moment, these protests laid bare the antisemitic fantasies that had pervaded, motivated, and structured Soviet-Bloc ideologies and practices regarding Jewish nationalism, the State of Israel, and citizens of Jewish origin, since the Second World War. These anti-Jewish sentiments had long undermined what could have been a principled opposition to the foundation and policies of the State of Israel. They tore at the ability of states to manifest their liberal-nationalist convictions and to integrate Jewish citizens as co-ethnics of a unique religious conviction.

I contend that some Czechoslovak citizens in positions of authority also protested to reassure the West of their liberalism and to allay any fears which might have arisen with regard

⁶³ Major Šenkeřík and Captain Říha, “Problematika ‘Izrael’ - zpráva” [Problematic “Israel” - a report] (25 October 1968). ABS, H-711 folder 5, 217-19. Alena Heitlinger reported to me that her father, CJRC executive secretary Ota Heitlinger, encouraged students to emigrate in 1968. This is confirmed in an internal StB memo from Arnošt Beneš to Lieutenant Colonel Vosecký, “Zpráva z problematiky IZRAEL” [Report from the Israel problematic] (30 September 1968). ABS, H-711 folder 1, 218-20.

⁶⁴ Major Čermák, “Spisovatel Mňačko - výzva k židům” [The author Mňačko - call to Jews] (25 October 1968). ABS, H-711, folder 5, 198.

⁶⁵ “The Soviets are Preparing in Czechoslovakia Incendiary Trials of the Type of the Trials with Slanský,” *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency* no. 20 (October 30, 1968); cited and translated in NAČR, MK-SPVC 233.

⁶⁶ The Institute of Jewish Affairs, “The Jewish Situation in Czechoslovakia after Dubcek;” and *The Use of Antisemitism against Czechoslovakia: Facts, Documents, Press Reports*.

to the future of Jews in Czechoslovakia. The Institute of Jewish Affairs and the World Jewish Congress, organizations not burdened by the task of resettling immigrants, disseminated reports on the situation. One, from 1968, indicated that with the exception of a small number of hard-line communists who had opposed the Prague Spring and other individuals who harbored anti-Jewish sentiments, Soviet propaganda had found no purchase in Czechoslovakia.⁶⁷

On 10 March 1969, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party discussed whether or not to proceed with the international celebration of 1,000 years of Jewish settlement in Prague and the 700th anniversary of the Old-New Synagogue. The Ministry of Culture and Information argued in the affirmative and suggested that it would

... dispel fears [in the West] about the fate of Jews in Czechoslovakia [after the Soviet-led invasion and the subsequent emigration of 3-4,000 Jewish citizens]. It will facilitate an understanding of the differentiated perspective of our foreign politics regarding the Middle East, which does not change the positive bearing of our state towards our Jewish fellow citizens.⁶⁸

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs lent its support to the idea as well. Both ministries stood by the conviction that anti-Zionism should have nothing to do with antisemitism. They also hoped to maintain their mutually beneficial relationships with Western-Jewish organizations and to preserve the good name of Czechoslovakia abroad, particularly in the USA. The party resolved to decide the matter at a meeting the following month.⁶⁹

The StB unit responsible for combating the Zionist threat, which the party had not invited

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ M. Galuška, “Zpráva o kulturně politických oslavách 1000. výročí usídlení Židů v Praze a 700letého trvání Staronové synagogy v Praze” [Report on the cultural-political celebrations of the one-thousandth anniversary of the settlement of Jews in Prague and the seven-hundred year of persistence of the Old-News Synagogue in Prague] (5 March 1939), 1. NAČR, AÚV-02/7, bundle 4, archival unit 13, point 10. See page 7 for estimated numbers of émigrés of Jewish origin.

⁶⁹ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 29-33; and Labendz, “Lectures, Murder, and a Phony Terrorist,” 97-102.

to comment, worried that Western Jews would take advantage of the planned celebrations to make a political statement and also to exert their influence over citizens of Jewish origin for espionage purposes. Understanding their political disadvantage, the StB devised an outlandish plan to sway the Communist Party. Agents arranged for an Arab gentleman, whom they had entrapped as a sexual criminal, to dress up like a terrorist caricature and visit the homes of a two Jewish functionaries in Prague. There, claiming to be a sympathetic, half-Jewish member of the PLO, the man warned of four upcoming attacks upon Western-Jewish visitors. He referenced Charles Jordan by name. When the frightened Jewish officials reported the incident to the police the following day, the StB had established on the record that it would be dangerous to bring Western Jews to Prague. As I have argued elsewhere,

If the StB could not convince their counterparts in other ministries and within the party about the danger posed *by* the foreign visitors, they sought with their phony terrorist threat to portray it as a security risk *for* those same ‘Zionists’ - and thereby to have [the celebrations] cancelled. Czechoslovakia could not suffer a second Charles Jordan and the agents of the StB knew it.⁷⁰

The Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party considered this factor at its next meeting, where it resolved to leave the decision to a higher-ranking party organ. The latter, however, never debated the issue. Just three days later, the CJRC postponed the celebration until 1970. Three weeks after that, the KGB pressured the StB to ensure the event’s cancelation. Chief Rabbi Richard Feder put an end to these debates by celebrating the anniversaries at a private, religious ceremony in the Old-New Synagogue. As per the previous chapter, he had made a practice of avoiding conflict with the authorities in order serve his community as freely as he could.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 99.

The Rising Politics of Normalization

Commensurate with the conclusion of the celebration affair, the political-culture in Czechoslovakia shifted with dramatic repercussions for Jewish-state relations. In the face of Soviet pressure, Alexander Dubček resigned as First Secretary of the Communist Party on 17 April 1969. Under the leadership of his successor, Gustáv Husák (1913-1991), the party initiated a series of purges designed to remove from positions of influence the remaining proponents of liberalization and other suspected individuals.⁷¹ The newly federated state's ministries, commissariats, and national committees did the same in many sectors of society.⁷² So began the period of political and cultural "normalization."

For Jews, this meant enduring the return of state antisemitism in the public sphere.⁷³ In June 1969, Major General Egid Pepich, the Slovak Minister of the Interior, accused the State of Israel and Western-Jewish organizations of subversion. He asserted, moreover, that Jewish citizens had supported Czechoslovak liberalization in the interests of the State of Israel. The minister then issued a general warning that the StB would take preventative measures to stop all citizens from collaborating with "enemy intelligence services."⁷⁴ Thus did the Slovak Ministry of

⁷¹ Jiří Maňák, "Čistky v Komunistické straně Československa, 1969-1970" [Purges of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia], *Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR* [Files of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic], vol. 28 (1997); and Vladimíra Hradecká and František Koudelka, "Kádrová politika a nomenklatura KSČ, 1969-1974" [The personnel politics and nomenclature of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 1969-1974], *Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR* [Files of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic], vol. 31 (1998).

⁷² Alena Mišáková, Hana Barvíková, and Miroslav Šmidák, *Československá akademie věd, 1969-1972: Restaurace komunistické moci ve vědě* [The Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1969-1972: The restoration of communist power in the sciences], *Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR* [Files of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic], vol. 30 (1998).

⁷³ Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism], 54-55.

⁷⁴ The Institute of Jewish Affairs, "The Jewish Situation in Czechoslovakia after Dubcek," 8-9.

the Interior introduce to official domestic political discourses the Soviet propaganda regarding the responsibility of Jewish citizens for the Prague Spring and therefore also for the Soviet invasion and occupation.

This shift precipitated the Ministry of the Interior's decision to launch Operation Spider, in which it would eventually endeavor to catalogue the personal information of all citizens of Jewish origin in Czechoslovakia. The program did not, however, develop in isolation from the more general strategies that the normalizing party-state implemented to manage its security concerns, both real and imagined. First Secretary Husák had risen to power on a promise that the party would not resort to show trials to restore order and quash dissent. Indeed, the secretary had fallen victim to such an affair during those same years.⁷⁵ This did not stop the StB from lobbying the party to bring to trial the “opponents of the regime” from 1968 and 1969. Despite lacking official approval during the Prague Spring, its agents never ceased collecting information on suspected individuals and groups. These included, most prominently, representatives of the political organizations K 231 and KAN, former Social Democrats, the lay and religious leadership of churches, and even members of certain intellectual circles. The StB began its appeal in May 1969, shortly after Husák's ascent. It met, however, with relatively little success.⁷⁶ Jaroslav Cuhra argues that the party-state employed limited juridical retribution during the early 1970s only to frighten its potential opponents into submission, rather than to achieve retribution for crimes already committed.⁷⁷

In early 1971, the Communist Party, nonetheless, resolved to establish “a central registry of the representatives, exponents, and carriers of right-wing opportunism, [and] the organizers of

⁷⁵ Cuhra, *Trestí represe odpůrců režimu* [Juridical repression of the opponents of the regime], 31.

⁷⁶ Between 1969 and 1974, Czechoslovak courts convicted roughly 3,080 individuals of crimes against the state, yet only 151 of them for high-crimes. *Ibid.*, 11-20 and 42-45.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

anti-party, anti-socialist, and anti-Soviet campaigns and actions.” It prioritized party members, prominent and influential individuals, lead agitators, and people with access to valuable information and resources.⁷⁸ By the end of 1971, party members had submitted 10,754 names for inclusion into the registry, of which the party expected to approve roughly 9,700.⁷⁹ The party drew inspiration for the registry from its own document, approved in 1970, “The Lessons from the Crisis of Development in the Party and Society after the Thirteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.”⁸⁰ That report included a statement that,

The forces that engaged in Zionism, one of the tools of international imperialism and anti-communism, had a considerable influence in the fight against socialism in [Czechoslovakia]⁸¹

⁷⁸ F. Ondřich, “Směrnice ÚV KSČ k založení a vedení jednotné centrální evidence představitelů, exponentů a nositelů pravicového oportunistu, organizátorů protistranitckých, protisocialistických a protisovětských kampaní a akcí” [Information on the fulfillment of the guidelines of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regarding the foundation and direction of a unified central registry of the representatives, exponents, and carriers of right-wing opportunism, the organizers of anti-party, anti-socialist, and anti-Soviet campaigns and actions] (18 December 1970). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4, binder 60, archival unit 107, point 1.

⁷⁹ F. Ondřich, “Informace o plnění směrnic předsednictva ÚV KSČ o založení a vedení jednotné centrální evidence představitelů, exponentů a nositelů pravicového oportunistu a organizátorů protistranitckých, protisocialistických a protisovětských kampaní a akcí” [Information on the fulfillment of the guidelines of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regarding the foundation and direction of a unified central registry of the representatives, exponents, and carriers of right-wing opportunism, and the organizers of anti-party, anti-socialist, and anti-Soviet campaigns and actions] (25 January 1972). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4, binder 17, archival unit 25, point 16.

⁸⁰ F. Ondřich, “Směrnice ÚV KSČ k založení a vedení jednotné centrální evidence” [Information on the fulfillment of the guidelines of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regarding the foundation and direction of a unified central registry], 4.

⁸¹ The Central Committee of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, “Poučení z krizového vývoje ve straně a společnosti po XIII. sjezdu KSČ” (Prague, Czechoslovakia: Nakladatelství svoboda, 1988), 19; cited in Blanka Soukupová, “Stát jako jeden z determinantů identity židovského náboženského společenství v období ‘normalizace’ (1969-1989)” [The state as one determiner of the identity of the Jewish religious community during the period of “normalization” (1969-1989), in *Premeny židovskej identity po holokauste* [Changes in Jewish identity after the Holocaust], ed. Peter Salner (Bratislava, Slovakia: Zing 2011), 37.

An StB report from 1970 made similar claims about the relationship between Zionism and the emergence of the Prague Spring. It included “Zionists” into a list of seven forces that had

The Soviet rhetoric had permeated the party at last. On the other hand, none of its resolutions regarding the registry mentioned “Zionism” at all. Despite the proliferation of anti-Zionist propaganda from 1970 through the late 1980s,⁸² “Zionism” as an operational matter, remained primarily the concern of specific StB units⁸³ and the military’s counter intelligence services.⁸⁴ The rest of the party-state administration had bigger fish to fry.

The StB and Citizens of Jewish Origin, 1968-1971

The invasion of 1968 forced the StB, once again, to change how it approached the problem of “Zionism.” Its agents perceived the greatest intelligence risk in the emigration of thousands of citizens of Jewish origin through Vienna. There, the latter received services and came into regular contact with Israeli diplomats and the representatives of Western-Jewish organizations, which had inflated their ranks to accommodate the exiles. The StB believed that Israeli and U.S.

brought about the liberalization. “Zionism” appeared last on that list, however, and received significantly less attention than the six other groups. See “Správa o činnosti nepriateľských, protisocialistických, revizionistických a pravicovo oportunistických síl” [Report on the activities of enemy, anti-socialist, revisionist, and right-wing opportunistic forces] (10 February 1970), 67-69. ABS, B2/2-161.

⁸² Soukupová, “Stát jako jeden z determinantů” [The state as one determiner], 36-47.

⁸³ StB reports reiterated the Soviet claim that “Zionists” had orchestrated the liberalization in 1971 and as late as 1983. See “Úloha sionistického hnutí v podvratní činnosti proti socialistickým státům” [The function of the Zionist movement in the subversive activities against the socialist states] (August 1971), 34-60. ABS, A30-407; and “SIONISMUS - jako jedna z forem nepřátelské činnosti proti ČSSR” [Zionism - as one of the forms of enemy activity against Czechoslovakia] (1983), 6-9. ABS, A34/1-450.

⁸⁴ In 1971, the military counter intelligence services identified 62 individuals whom it considered to be subject to Zionist influence serving in the Czechoslovak People’s Militia, the armed forces of the Communist Party. Josef Stavinoha, “Zpráva z problematiky sionismu - předložení [Report from the Zionist problematic - an introduction] (1971). ABS, A30-406. Czechoslovak Military Counter Intelligence also collected data from military records for use by the StB in Operation Spider. Major General Pavol Vrlík, “Zabezpečení celostátního projektu PAVOUK při kontrarozvědné ochraně bojeschopnosti ozbrojených sil ČSSR” [Securing the state-wide project Spider in the course of the counterintelligence safeguarding of the battle-readiness of the armed forces of (Czechoslovakia)] (27 November 1985). ABS, VKR-Pavouk.

intelligence officers would acquire information from these individuals and, most threateningly, from former collaborators who could undermine the StB's anti-Zionist operations. Agents also anticipated that their Western counterparts would turn some of the émigrés into under-cover agents and collaborators, with whom they would build a global Czechoslovak-Zionist network.⁸⁵

A comprehensive report concluded,

The representatives of this situation are internal enemy elements in close connection with the foreign enemy, which is trying to use our internal problems to achieve its goals... It can be counted upon that Israeli intelligence will exploit, for its own interests, writ-large, primarily the Czechoslovak emigration for penetrating into [Czechoslovakia], just as was the case after February 1948 and just as signals from the last period of the year 1968/1969 demonstrate. We can only confront or, rather, anticipate these intentions of the enemy if we know the intentions, which pragmatically means being, as much as possible, in close and lasting agency-operational contact with the enemy.⁸⁶

(I have no doubt that these suspicions contained more than a kernel of truth.) The StB struggled to gain control over the new environment by planting its own agents of Jewish origin in Vienna,⁸⁷ launching a disinformation campaign at home, interrogating citizens who visited Israel and Vienna, and by seeking to curb travel to Israel. They continued to monitor the activities in Czechoslovakia of individuals whom they had identified as the representatives of Western-Jewish organizations.

Turning inwards toward their own resident-citizens, StB agents first sought to identify

⁸⁵ 5th dept., 1st admin. of the StB, "Vyhodnocení operativní situace po linii izraelské rozvědky a jejich rezidentur v zahraničí" [Evaluation of the operational situation along the lines of Israeli intelligence and their residence abroad] (20 December 1968). ABS H-711, folder 4, 5-17; and "Operativní situace po linii izraelské rozvědky a jejich rezidentur v Zahraničí" (n.d., early 1969). H-711, folder 2, 200-04.

⁸⁶ "Zpráva o činnosti izraelské rozvědky proti ČSSR" [Report about the activities of Israeli intelligence against Czechoslovakia] (n.d., late 1969, early 1970), 10-11. ABS, H-711, folder 5, 263-73.

⁸⁷ The StB had agents working in Vienna from as early as 1965. Captain Gross had either turned or compromised an employee of the Jewish Agency for Israel in that city in 1965. See three reports by Gross (29 June 1965, 27 October 1965, and 28 January 1966). ABS, H-711, folder 5, 114-16, 120-21, and 127-29.

everyone who had been in contact with the former Israeli diplomats or with Charles Jordan. They worried in particular about the associates of Zev Shek, who had once served in Prague as the first secretary of the Israeli Legation, and who subsequently assumed the ambassadorship in Vienna. These efforts yielded few fruits. For example, agents hoped to prove that a man named Otto Parma, who had allegedly conspired with Shek to facilitate illegal emigration in the 1950s, had also met with Charles Jordan in Paris in 1967. Their investigation ended, however, because they could not find a record of him ever holding a passport. Parma could not have left the country.⁸⁸ StB agents failed as well in their attempts to identify every citizen of Jewish origin who had been involved in some aspect of cultural production during the 1960s.⁸⁹ Their interrogations of travelers of Jewish origin to Israel and to other capitalist states, similarly, did not yield the results for which they had hoped.⁹⁰

During these years, the StB continued to use informants, both coerced and voluntary, to penetrate the communities.⁹¹ Although agents took a particular interest in their younger members,⁹² they also worked to keep abreast of the general attitudes at the communities

⁸⁸ Švadlenka, “Záznam o signálu” [Memorandum regarding a signal].

⁸⁹ Jarsoslav Hrbáček, “Operatívna porada vedenia MV ČSSR: Rozbor stavu a návrhy ďalších úloh v boji proti sionizmu” [Operational meeting of the directorate of the Ministry of the Interior of Czechoslovakia: an evaluation of the state of and proposals for more work in the fight against Zionism] (10 September 1971), 3-7. ABS, A2/3-1136.

⁹⁰ See the many individual reports collected in ABS, H-711, folders 4-6.

⁹¹ On the culture of informing within the Jewish communities see Bumová, “ŠtB a židovská mládež” [StB and Jewish Youths], 67-68.

⁹² Švadlenka, “Zpráva o činnosti sionistických organizací na úseku mládeže” [Report on the activities of Zionist organizations in the youth sector] (25 September 1969); and (from Slovakia) Dôvina, “Nepriateľská činnosť sionistických organizácií na úseku mládeže - zpráva” [The enemy activities of Zionist organizations in the youth sector - a report] (15 September 1969). ABS, H-711, folder 5, 59-66. StB agents used informants to gather information on the participation of Czechoslovak citizens in international Jewish youth congresses. Kolínek, “Agentúrná zpráva č. 29” [Agency report no. 29] (10 October 1969). ABS, H-711, folder 4, 69-71 plus attachments. See also Bumová, “ŠtB a židovská mládež” [StB and Jewish Youths], 76-88.

regarding events in the Middle East.⁹³ These operations, however, did not rank highly among StB priorities with regard to the Zionist threat. Like the leadership of the Communist Party, StB agents did not find the Jewish minority especially threatening as a religious community, in comparison with the country's other churches.⁹⁴

Along Came a Spider⁹⁵

StB agents seeking a more comprehensive means to neutralize the domestic “Zionist” threat initiated Operation Spider in 1972. The program for collecting and cataloguing the personal information of all citizens of Jewish origin and others with whom they had contact followed a precedent set by the Communist Party for creating registries of party-state enemies. It also reflected the aforementioned operational shift at the StB. As agents abandoned their quest to bring to justice those responsible for the Prague Spring, they turned to the future and to developing new tactics for countering more covert forms of dissent and sabotage. (An StB report from 1971 suggested that “Zionists” had planted sleeper agents throughout the country.⁹⁶) Despite this relationship to broader operational trends at the StB, Spider remains a unique affair due to its rootedness in a much older tradition of European ambivalence about the place of Jews

⁹³ Collection of reports by Švadlenka (1970). H-711, folder 4, 118-19 and 131-32.

⁹⁴ The Jewish religion received scant treatment in a party report on ecclesiastical politics from 1970. An StB report from the following year does not even mention Jews at all. Brejník, “Zpráva k současné církevně politické situaci v ČSSR” [Report on the contemporary ecclesiastical-political situation in Czechoslovakia] (9 March 1971). ABS, A34-3214; and J. Fojtík, “Informační zpráva o církevně politické situaci v ČSSR” [Informational report about the ecclesiastical-political situation in Czechoslovakia] (14 April 1970). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/1, bundle 126, archival unit 203, point, 4.

⁹⁵ I am indebted to Ondřej Kohout, who presented a lecture on Operation Spider around the year 2009. It has never been published. “Akce PAVOUK: Evidence osob židovské původu Státní bezpečností v období normalizace” Operation Spider: The register of individuals of Jewish origin of the StB during the period of normalization.”

⁹⁶ Brejník, “Zpráva o židovském a sionistickém hnutí po srpnu 1968” [Report on the Jewish and Zionist movement after August 1968] (28 January 1971), 5. ABS, H-711 folder 6, 17-23.

in modern society, and in biologically conceived antisemitism. Indeed, this type of antisemitism inspired the earlier StB operations from which Spider's architects culled vast amounts of data.

In 1971, the Ministry of the Interior commissioned a reanalysis of the "Zionist" threat. Its author, Colonel Jaroslav Hrbáček, reviewed the postwar history of Zionism in Czechoslovakia, explained the post-1967 challenges that the StB had faced, and provided detailed information about its recent investigations. He concluded that a clandestine Zionist organization, with ties to the World Jewish Congress, likely might exist in Czechoslovakia. Yet Hrbáček also admitted that he lacked sufficient evidence to support this claim.⁹⁷ His report hovered between propaganda and pragmatism. The colonel began his investigation with the unassailable assumption that a "Zionist" conspiracy threatened the country and its socialist order. Politically unable to deny its existence and burdened by a lack of proof, he suggest implementing more intrusive measures for uncovering it.

Hrbáček's allegations differed from those of the preceding decades, in that they placed domestic Jewry, rather than Israeli diplomats and Westerners, at the center of the "Zionist" conspiracy. He looked with particular suspicion at citizens of Jewish origin who had been active in the cultural and political spheres during the late 1960s. As per above, the expulsion of the Israeli diplomatic corps in 1967 had shocked the StB by robbing it of an easily definable, institutional enemy.⁹⁸ As StB agents struggled to regain conceptual control over the "Zionist"

⁹⁷ Hrbáček, "Operatívna porada vedenia MV ČSSR" [Operational meeting of the directorate of the Ministry of the Interior of Czechoslovakia], 10.

⁹⁸ Marie Crhová was the first to connect Spider to the 1967 expulsion. She writes, "... June 1967 represents a turning point, since the Jewish population in Czechoslovakia once again came into sharper focus of the [StB] as a potential ally of a hostile country. Surveillance of Jewish citizens and 'pro-Israeli elements' was intensified, and antisemitism was noted." Crhová, "Israel," 260. She also points out that "some of [Spider's] files resumed earlier projects against the 'internal enemy' that [the StB] had carried out in the 1950s and 1960s." Marie Crhová, "Israel in the Foreign and International Politics," 261.

threat, they applied their outdated institution-based model to the post-1967 context. They imagined that there must have been an organized domestic counterpart to the Israeli and Western-Jewish organizations that they had been investigating. They supposed that the former had taken over the latter's operations in their absence. This assumption, without much basis in fact, posed a serious problem for the StB and an even greater one for citizens of Jewish origin. No matter how successful the StB's operations were and no matter how many Jews it arrested, its agents would never be sure that they had exposed the entire imaginary network. After all, they had always suspected all Jews of potential Zionism. The StB launched Operation Spider the following year, which trapped thousands of innocent citizens in its web.

Spider hatched in the archives. In February 1972, the StB ordered the Statistical Evidentiary Office to cull all of the personal data from the 450 boxes of documents confiscated from the Central Zionist Union, which had operated in Czechoslovakia from 1945 to 1951.⁹⁹ As the last and largest Zionist organization to have existed in the country after the Second World War, it seemed a logical place to start. The acting director of the statistical office, however, attempted to narrow the project's scope. He considered it "practically impossible in the present moment." Compiling lists of "opponents of the regime" and facilitating purges demanded tremendous resources. They seemed a higher priority than investigating political activity which took place three decades hence. The StB, nonetheless, relied upon the centrality of anti-Zionism to party-state propaganda to enforce its will upon the statistical office. A handwritten note on the bottom of Jirovský's letter ordered him to assign two clerks to the task for a period of two years.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Letter from Oldřich Pilát to the Statistical Evidentiary Office (23 February 1972). ABS, Z-1009 folder 1.

¹⁰⁰ Jan Jirovský to Oldřich Pilát, CMI, 12 December 1972, ABS, Z-1009 box 1, folder 1. See also

Though it demanded arduous labor, the StB's first attempt to identify domestic "Zionists" yield few valuable results. After more than a year of research, the statistical office produced short reports on 1,143 individuals, only 143 of whom were still alive and resident in Czechoslovakia. Most had retired due to old age.¹⁰¹ The office conducted a similar investigation into people who had served on Czechoslovak soil in the *Haganah*, the main Jewish fighting forces in Palestine before 1948. It bore even fewer fruits.¹⁰²

Failure only drove the StB to work harder. Its mission and rhetoric demanded that the "Zionist" conspiracy comprise more than a couple-hundred pensioners. Over the next four years, StB agents compiled a list of 5,592 potential "Zionists," by combing through their agency's operational files, particularly those concerning the Israeli diplomatic corps. The StB identified 122 individuals as being of particular concern and conducted thorough investigations into them. Agents also compiled twelve reports regarding the current state of the "Zionist" threat.¹⁰³ The StB also ordered the Statistical Evidentiary Office to reach even further back into history. In 1977, it investigated roughly 300 people who had worked for the "Jewish Center" in Bratislava during the Second World War, which had replaced the official Slovak Jewish communities and collaborated under coercion with the fascist state. The statistical office found that twenty-nine of

Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism], 56-57.

¹⁰¹ K Svoboda and L. Vaňková, "Ústřední svaz sionistický v ČSR (ÚSC)" [The Central Zionist Union in Czechoslovakia.] ABS, Z-1009 box 1, folder 2, 1.

¹⁰² Only thirty-two former members of the Haganah still lived in Czechoslovakia. Another 37 lived abroad but visited the country between 1964 and 1973. Lieutenant Colonel Miroslav Tomek, "Výsledky vyhodnocení" [The results of the evaluation] (July 1973), 8-12. ABS, Z-1009 box 1, folder 2, 1. ABS, Z-1009 box 2, folder 1.

¹⁰³ Major Karel Svoboda, "Zpráva o zpracování sionistické problematiky se sznamem zpracovaných akcí" [Memo: a report on the processing of the Zionist problem with the lists of processed operations] (24 September 1977). ABS, Z-1009 box 1, folder 1. For more information on the StB's activities, see ABS, "Prozatímní inventář k archivnímu fondu H-425: Židovské organizace" [Temporary inventory for the archival collection H-425: Jewish organizations] (Prague, ČR: ABS, 2008).

them still lived in Slovakia and that thirteen had legally emigrated. While the rest eluded their resources (or had grown too old), the cataloguing of the personal data was likely used to identify their descendants as being of Jewish origin.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, all of these reports contained information about the children and spouses of the implicated individuals.

The StB also relied upon its regional and county divisions to collect information on citizens of Jewish origin. Spider was an umbrella project, composed of other operations with different codenames. (They ran alongside similar operations for registering the alleged members of other groups, constructed and construed by the StB as enemies of the state.¹⁰⁵) In 1973, StB agents from the state center predicted that their registry would eventually comprise 17,205 entries.¹⁰⁶ At first, the regional divisions cooperated. The StB in Liberec provided data on 227 individuals of Jewish origin, some of whom, it reported, spread pro-Israel propaganda and maintained contacts in the West.¹⁰⁷ The StB in Ústí nad Labem recorded 931 residents of Jewish origin in the Northern Bohemian Region, in 1977, of whom ninety-two had belonged to the

¹⁰⁴ Jan Kadlec and Major Miloslav Svoboda, “Zpráva o činnosti bývalých zaměstnanců Ústředny židů v Bratislavě a seznam býv. zaměstnanců Ústředny židů s relacemi” [Report on the activities of the former employees of the Jewish Central in Bratislava and a list of the former employees of the Jewish Central with notes] (June 1977), 8. ABS, H-752.

¹⁰⁵ In 1977, when the StB in the county of Šumperk ceased contributing to Operation Spider, they also stopped keeping lists of: Enemy individuals - Other; exponents of rightwing opportunism among the former members of the Czechoslovak People’s Militia and the Administration of National Security; former members of the political association K-231; suspected youths, healthcare workers, members of the Union for Cooperation with the Army (*Svazarm*) and high-school teachers, along with four other groups left under-defined in the archival record. It is unclear to me whether the StB ceased collecting data on citizens of Jewish origin in Šumperk in 1977 or if the central office transferred that responsibility to another division. ABS, OB-1374.

¹⁰⁶ 10th administration of the StB, “Informace” [Information] (12 March 1987). ABS, X. správa SNB - 760, 16-22.

¹⁰⁷ County StB in Liberec, “Vyhodnocení operativní situace a výslednosti kontrarozvědčné činnosti na O-StB Liberec” [Evaluation of the operational situation and the results of the counterintelligence activities at the county StB in Liberec] (7 November 1975), 8. ABS, B4/5/II-11.

Central Zionist Union.¹⁰⁸ Its agents noted that

It is an interesting fact that they only express... pro-Zionist ideas in the narrowest circles of coreligionists, while in public they present themselves as very loyal to the regime.¹⁰⁹

The author of the report from Ústí alleged further that citizens of Jewish origin showed favoritism to one another and had thereby penetrated the textile and chemical industries, with the goal of subverting the economy. The StB in Plzeň shared some of these fears. In 1977, its agents counted 771 people of Jewish origin in the Western Bohemian Region.¹¹⁰

By 1983, however, the StB officers responsible for the domestic “Zionist” threat had grown disappointed with their regional and county subordinates. They complained of a lack of cooperation, improper cataloguing, and understaffing. To remedy these issues, the central unit called a nation-wide meeting and circulated new instructions. Two years later, having failed to achieve satisfaction, they issued yet another set of directives. They ordered their subordinates to focus on individuals who corresponded with addresses in Israel, people who received financial aid from Western-Jewish organizations, and citizens of Jewish origin active in “culture, mass media, healthcare, and education.” All StB agents were to send any relevant information that they acquired through non-Spider-related operations to the central office on a regular basis.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Lieutenant Josef Matuška, “Úloha sionistického hnutí v podvratní činnosti proti ČSSR na teritoriu S-StB Ústí nad Labem” [The role of the Zionist movement in the subversive work activity against Czechoslovakia in the territory of the StB administration in Ústí nad Labem] (14 September 1977), 8. ABS, B4/11-60

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁰ Major Šafrínek, “Úroveň a dosažené výsledky rozpracování v problematice sionismu rozpracování vybraných akcí, kanály do KS, tendence a projevy uvnitř báze” [The level and achieved results of the evaluation of the Zionism problematic, evaluations of selected operations, channels to capitalist states, tendencies and manifestations inside the base] (14 October 1978), 6. ABS, B3/II-99.

¹¹¹ Fourth department of the tenth administration of the StB, “Orientace k systematickému evidování osob židovského původu působících v objektech kontrarozvědně obhospodařovaných příslušnými operativními odbory II., III., IV., X., XI. a XII. správy SNB” [Orientation regarding the systematic registration of individuals of Jewish origin touched upon in the

The new instructions do not seem to have inspired better cooperation. In 1987, the directors of Operation Spider could praise only one county unit of the StB in the Czech lands (and two more in Slovakia). The Plzeň unit still worked diligently. It remains an open question, though, whether its agents did so out of ideological commitment or because they had been chosen to pilot a program for computerizing Spider.¹¹² This would have been a quite the professional perk in late-1980s Czechoslovakia. Indeed, some local StB divisions had already begun expressing doubt in Spider's mission in 1977. The county unit in Vyškov terminated its participation in that year, noting that it "concerns a [demographic] base which does not present an interesting problem from the county perspective..."¹¹³ Despite the antisemitism that pervaded the StB, some agents took a more realistic view of the Jewish minority and allocated their time accordingly.

In contrast, Spider's directors in the fourth department of the tenth administration of the StB never waned in their commitment to antisemitism and to uncovering as many citizens of Jewish origin as possible. They hoped to meet their prediction from 1973 and also to demonstrate the significance of their work. In 1985, the agents instructed their subordinates to consider as being of Jewish origin anyone with one parent

of Jewish faith, or, before 1948, [who] declared Jewish nationality, or was a member of the Zionist organization of *Hashomer Hatzair*, which worked legally in Czechoslovakia until 1948, or any other Zionist or Jewish organization.¹¹⁴

counterintelligence targets managed by the relevant operational departments of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 10th, 11th, and 12th administrations of the Administration of National Security] (1985). ABS, A34/1-451. For the quoted text, see Crhová, "Israel in the Foreign and International Politics," 281.

¹¹² 10th administration of the StB, "Informace" [Information] (12 March 1987), 3-4.

¹¹³ Adam Zdeněk, "Zpráva o ukončení rozpracování problematiky "SIONISTÉ", vedené pod helsem "TEMPL" v objektovém svazku čís. 20751" [Report about ending the work on the "Zionist" problematic, directed under the codeword "Temple" in the object file no. 20751] (1 February 1977). ASB, OB-215.

¹¹⁴ 10th Administration of the Corps of National Security, "Orientation for a Systematic Register

In 1987, those same agents considered culling personal information from the applications submitted between 1946 and 1949, by Jews and non-Jews alike, for increased pensions due to wartime suffering.¹¹⁵ The following year, however, the StB abandoned the project, noting that it would have taken three employees 500 days of labor to process the records. They nonetheless praised their colleagues in Bratislava for combing through the Jewish community's birth records, beginning in 1900, in order to identify the descendants of the individuals named therein.¹¹⁶

These heuristics and strategies for identifying citizens of Jewish origin embodied the central contradiction inherent to the party-state's relationship with its Jewish citizens. Among other criteria, the StB sought to identify ethnic Jews by virtue of their forbears' voluntary membership in a Jewish religious community. Indeed, Ondřej Kohout points out that Operation Spider worked best in locations with functioning Jewish communities, like Ústí nad Labem and Plzeň. In addition to providing local StB agents with materials for their reports, the membership of a single individual in a Jewish religious community enabled agents to mark entire families as Jewish. As one agent complained in 1987,

... a serious problem is that segment of Jewish youths and the middle generation which does not profess the Jewish religion and whose constituents are not members of the Jewish religious communities but, despite that, support ideas of Jewish exceptionalism and mutual-belonging.¹¹⁷

This tension in the perception and categorization of Europeans with ties to the Jewish minority,

of the People of Jewish Origin active in objects monitored by the counter-intelligence sections of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 10th, 11th and 12th, Administration of the Corps of National Security" (1985); translated in Crhová, "Jews," 292. See also Crhová, "Jews," 282 and 290-296. On Hashomer Hatzair, see Chapter One.

¹¹⁵ 10th administration of the StB, "Informace" [Information] (12 March 1987), 6.

¹¹⁶ 10th administration of the StB, "Informace" [Information] (1988), 5. ABS, X. správa SNB - 762, 1-8.

¹¹⁷ Josef Beneš, "Metodický pokyn ke kontrarozvědčné ochraně židovské mladé a střední generace" [Methodological instructions for the counterintelligence protection of Jewish youths and the middle generation] (11 June 1987), 3. ABS, X. správa SNB - 761, 117-20.

however conceived, antedates the ascension to power of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia. Without suggesting a continuity of program or even intent from the Nazi regime to its socialist successor, it bears noting that the former also relied upon religious registries to identify (former) citizens and residents as racially Jewish.

Despite the invocation of contemporary politics by StB agents to account for their anti-Jewish operations, their antisemitism preceded such considerations. The very real interventions of Western-Jewish organizations into Czechoslovak affairs and their likely relationships with foreign intelligence services only confirmed the suspicions that StB agents (and others) had already harbored regarding the Jewish minority. In a report about Operation Spider from 1988, one agent admitted, “At the moment, it cannot be said that the enemy activities of individuals of Jewish origin are on the rise.”¹¹⁸ Yet he continued to expound upon the dangers that he believed them to pose. For the agents of the StB center, the “Zionist” threat had become diffuse and partially unknowable. They believed their only recourse was to neutralize everyone who might have been or become involved. This amounted to the re-criminalization of Jewish descent in Czechoslovakia, after a brief period in which alternative models for Jewish-state relations flourished and faded away.

Just how Operation Spider affected those caught in its web remains an elusive question. By 1988, the StB had opened files on roughly 9,300 citizens of Jewish origin, plus another 615 individuals who received aid from foreign Jewish organizations. (The files do not indicate if the two lists duplicated names.) Those people whose files bore the marker, “caution: of Jewish origin,” could face professional and social discrimination at the hands of opportunists and antisemites. In a moment of ironic honesty, evocative of rhetoric from the 1950s, one StB agent

¹¹⁸ “Informace” [Information] (1988), 4. ABS, X. správa SNB - 762, 1-8.

complained that “Zionists” attempted to portray the state as antisemitic in order to inspire mistrust in the state on the part of citizens of Jewish origin and thereby lead them to their cause.¹¹⁹ Indeed, the StB’s manifestation of antisemitism, including its reassertion of control over the Jewish community, drove much Jewish life into the shadows. Its agents’ prediction that a domestic “Zionist” organization would emerge in Czechoslovakia after 1967 became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

An International Czechoslovak-Zionist Conspiracy?

While the StB agents of the 1970s and 1980s drew from the rhetoric and tactics of their 1950s predecessors, they also introduced a new—and more dangerous—element to their anti-Jewish fantasies. Whereas the former had anticipated that Czechoslovak “Zionists” would serve the newly founded State of Israel, the latter re-envisioned the Jewish conspiracy as a domestic one with ties to Western intelligence services. In part, this resulted from an organizational shift at the StB, which made separate divisions responsible for combating “Zionism” in the domestic and foreign spheres.¹²⁰

The latter-decade agents also re-imagined the international component of the purported

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 4-5.

¹²⁰ “Dohoda o součinnosti k problematice sionismu mezi odborem 31 I. správy FMV a 4. odborem X. správy FMV” [Agreement of collaboration with regard to the problematic of Zionism between the thirty-first department of the first administration of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the fourth department of the tenth administration of the Federal Ministry of the Interior] (22 January 1975) ABS H-711, folder 8, 147-50. While the StB pursued domestic “Zionists” through November 1989, it discontinued the related foreign counterintelligence operations in 1985. The closing document states, “The reason for the establishment of the file was the evaluation of the former framework and activities of Israeli intelligence against Czechoslovakia... At present this concerns elderly individuals who either no longer visit Czechoslovakia or who have already died.” Josef Beneš, “Návrh na uložení objektového svazku SINAJ” [Proposal for depositing the objective file Sinai] (29 March 1985). ABS, H-711, folder 9, 100-01.

“Zionist” conspiracy in light of the mass-emigration of Jewish citizens in 1968 and 1969. They believed that Czechoslovak-Jewish identity had become a distinct, global, and conspiratorial phenomenon under the aegis of a broader “Zionist” network. They supported such claims by pointing to the foundation of the Council of Jewish from Czechoslovakia in Great Britain in 1968, which renamed itself the International Council of Jews from Czechoslovakia four years later.¹²¹ Under the direction of Karel Baum, the Council lobbied on behalf of the Jews who remained in Czechoslovakia and provided a variety of services and information to those who had gone into self-imposed exile.¹²²

StB agents, however, misinterpreted the Council’s mission and its relationship with the Jewish remnant in Czechoslovakia. The Council may have been anti-communist and pro-Israel, but it had little intention of meddling inside Czechoslovakia, aside from calling attention to that state’s mistreatment of its Jewish minority and offering charity to its remaining Jews. The council, instead, attempted to reconstruct Czechoslovak Jewry as a diasporic community. Its first newsletter explained,

The message is simple: The survival of Czechoslovak Jewry and the spiritual and cultural development of a community once among the most distinguished in Central Europe no longer depends upon developments in and around Prague. To secure such survival and to hand on to future generations the heritage of our ancestors ; to assist in the preservation of Jewish cultural and religious monuments and institutions in the country of our birth ; to see to it that memorials and memorial celebrations to mark the cites and to commemorate the victims of Nazi vandalism are kept out of political horse-trading ; to assist the few of our coreligionists now left in the Czech and Slovak lands who require

¹²¹ Josef Beneš, “Vyhodnocení operativní situace na úseku kontrarozvědné činnosti boje proti sionismu a vytýčené hlavních úkolů pro 2. odbory S-StB a 2. odbor XII. S SNB Bratislava” (6 October 1987), 3. ABS, X. správa SNB - 761, 121-28; Idem., “Metodický pokyn ke kontrarozvědné ochraně” [Methodological instructions for the counterintelligence protection], 6; Brejník, “Zpráva o židovském a sionistickém hnutí” [Report on the Jewish and Zionist movement], 6-7; and Hrbáček, “Operativna porada vedenia MV ČSSR” [Operational meeting of the directorate of the Ministry of the Interior of Czechoslovakia], 7-8.

¹²² On the Czech-Jewish diaspora, see Labendz, “‘In unserem Kreise:’ Czech-Jewish Activism and Immigration in America, 1939-1994,” *Jewish History and Culture* (forthcoming).

help ; to protect them against anti-semitic invective whatever their sources and pretexts, **this is now our task** [emphasis in original].

It is the duty of those fortunate enough to survive, now living in freedom as proud citizens of Western countries or of Israel ; it is our obligation because now, in the his year of 1970, we form the majority of Jews from Czechoslovakia.¹²³

In 1972, the council expressed its position even more dramatically:

There is no reason why Czechoslovak Jewry, now overwhelmingly outside her country of origin, should fail where the Jews of Babylon, the Marranos, and, more recently, the Jews of Germany succeeded... There are many issues in the spheres of public affairs, anti-defamation and culture which can no longer be expected to constitute the daily concern of our coreligionists in Czechoslovakia. Important as this small remnant must remain as a subject of collective anxiety and care on the part of Czechoslovak Jews abroad, it is in present conditions no longer representative of Czechoslovak Jewry, both because it constitutes a mere fraction of the survivors, and because it is no longer free to act.¹²⁴

In 1978, Karl Baum even approached the World Jewish Congress with an appeal for his organization to replace the official Jewish communities of the Czech Lands and Slovakia as the representatives of Czechoslovak Jewry to the world.¹²⁵ Czechoslovak-Jewish identity may indeed have globalized. There may have even emerged a Czechoslovak-Jewish/Zionist network spanning multiple continents. These phenomena, however, largely left the Jews in Czechoslovakia behind.¹²⁶ This development, nonetheless, enabled StB agents to portray all citizens of Jewish origin as potential agents of a nationally specific, world-wide conspiracy. Of course, they never proved such connections. They did not have to.

¹²³ Council of Jews from Czechoslovakia in Great Britain, *Report on Czechoslovak Jewry*, no. 1 (1970): 5.

¹²⁴ International Council of Jews from Czechoslovakia, *Report on Czechoslovak Jewry*, no. 2 (1972/3): 5.

¹²⁵ Letter from the CJRC to the Ministry of Culture and Information (20 November 1978). NAČR, SPVC box 236, folder 3.

¹²⁶ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 125-60; Peter Salner, *Minulý rok v Jeruzaleme* [Next year in Jerusalem] (Bratislava, Slovakia: Maenčin PT, 2010); and Idem., *Budúci rok v Bratislave, alebo Stretnutie*, [Next year in Bratislava, or rather, Stretnutie] (Bratislava, Slovakia: A. Marenčin, 2007). In the summer of 2009, I interviewed members of the Czech-Jewish diaspora. Many are now available at the Jewish Museum in Prague.

The International Question about Spider

One set of questions remains to be answered. Was Operation Spider a Soviet initiative or an idiosyncratic affair of the StB? Did the KGB intervene, once again, into Czechoslovak Jewish-state relations as it had so many times before? Jana Blažková asserts that Moscow ordered all of the European communist states to compile data on their Jewish minorities, but offers no evidence to support her claim. She merely points to the fact that it was common practice for Soviet-Bloc security services to do so.¹²⁷ (Unfortunately, this is the type of order which likely would have been given orally or, if written down, destroyed in the document burning and exportation operations that followed the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia.) In contrast, I have presented Operation Spider as having emerged from the particular operational experiences and prejudices of the agents of particular StB units. It would have been only natural for them to draw upon the tactics deployed by their Warsaw-Pact colleagues. Just who gave the initial order, however, if there ever was one, may remain an irresolvable subject of debate. On the other hand, the question of Moscow's responsibility for Operation Spider may not be as important as some suggest. I invoke an argument made by Kevin McDermott with regard to the Slánský Affair, "Even if we accept that the purges were initiated and coordinated in Moscow, they often fell on fertile soil, were adapted for domestic purposes, and were not always amenable to tight party control 'from above.'"¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Blažková, "Skrývá se Pavouk v Moskvě?" [Is the spider hiding in Moscow?], 16. Once again Crhová's work points in the right direction. She offers a preliminary comparison between Jewish-State relations in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. "Israel in the Foreign and International Politics," 260.

¹²⁸ Kevin McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'? Czech Popular Opinion and the Slánský Affair," *Slavic Review*, vol. 67, no. 4 (2008): 864.

Conclusion:

Operation Spider manifested the most cynical contradictions inherent in the attitudes of StB agents regarding those citizens whom they perceived as Jews. Their demand for Jewish assimilation clashed with a disbelief in its feasibility, derived from European discourses that long antedated the advent of communist rule. Through Spider they gained articulation in communist-inflected, state policy and thereby continued to exert force over how officials thought about their compatriots of Jewish origin.

Yet the StB did not conceive Operation Spider in a vacuum. Its agents developed it in response to shifts in the domestic and international political arenas. It reflected the anxiety that some felt during liberalization, particularly in light of the increase in Jewish cultural production and the intensification of East-West Jewish ties. To that end, StB agents drew upon Soviet and Czechoslovak propaganda to justify their implementation of a program that, at its core, violated their own official principle of anti-racism. To the extent that they felt compelled to explain themselves, agents projected the responsibility for Spider upon the State of Israel and Western-Jewish organizations which sought to influence Jews behind the Iron Curtain. This remained true even as the StB shifted from a policy of paternalism to one of *de facto* re-criminalizing Jewish descent. Bombastic, to be sure, the agents' willful misinterpretations of Western-Jewish politics did not negate the truth that Westerners competed with them to shape the lives of Jews in Czechoslovakia.

Indeed, Western and Israeli activists asked too much from the perspective of the party-state and its functionaries. The former demanded, in word and deed, that state and society accept Jewish citizens as full co-nationals, but also honor their ethnic ties to a transnational Jewish people with its own nation-state in the Middle East. This may have corresponded to the interwar

nationalities politics and policies of Czechoslovakia, but the way that Europeans thought about and experienced national affiliation had changed since the Second World War. Western and Israeli activists both advocated for and facilitated the emigration of Central European Jews to the State of Israel, despite the fact that the country had aligned with the USA against the allies and trading partners of the Soviet Union across the Arab world. Emigration to Israel amounted to shifting social capital and valuable intelligence from the Soviet Bloc to the capitalist West. Even those Western and Israeli activists who had developed strategies for intervening into Jewish life in Central Europe which satisfied the demands of the Ministry of Education and Culture, raised concerns at the StB for failing to strip Jewish religious practice its ethnic components.

Both camps, East and West, relied upon different interpretations of Enlightenment values to structure their visions for the integration of Jewish citizens into the nation-states of Central Europe and, more broadly, to determine their place in modern, transnational society. Both camps also deployed the ideals of the Enlightenment propagandistically to win political contests and to disguise *realpolitik* as humanitarianism. The StB's attempts to "protect" citizens of Jewish origin from Western influence, as well as the resumption of antisemitic propaganda after 1969, only served to alienate Jewish citizens (and others) further from the party-state. Western-Jewish organizations and the State of Israel, in contrast, offered co-identification and economic benefits to the Jews of Central Europe. It may be a compelling thought experiment to wonder whether the Jews of Czechoslovakia could have thrived as a religious minority, however ethnically inflected, had Zionism and the State of Israel not occupied such a contested place in the Cold War—a place often characterized by heated violence. The opportunity never arose.

Competition to determine Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia persisted both within the state and between Cold-War camps until 1989. Just as before, certain dates and events stood

out as watershed moments. The first major transition after 1956 occurred in 1967, when war broke out in the Middle East. The next came in 1968, when Soviet-led armies invaded Czechoslovakia. The passage of the Jackson-Vanik amendment by the U.S. Congress in 1975 and the signing of the Helsinki Final Accords that same year ushered in a new period in Jewish-state relations, characterized by tensions between the party-state's domestic and international priorities. After 1975, the Ministry of Culture and Information worked with the StB to suppress domestic Jewish life. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, hoped to court American favor by demonstrating beneficence to the Czech and Slovak Jewish minorities and reverence for their culture. Jewish citizens, however defined, once again bore the brunt of these contests.

The leaders and members of the Jewish communities divided themselves into competing camps as well, each with its own strategy for negotiating and benefiting from the new political realities. New leaders, installed by state officials, called upon their communities to collaborate with the state. They sought to reestablish mutuality in Jewish-state relations, this time, however, with the lowered expectation of temporary communal survival. Small but vocal bands of dissidents emerged in reaction to these politics. Their members drew strength from the attention of Western-Jewish organizations and courage from the perception that the latter held sway over party-state policies. This small movement within the Jewish communities also belonged to a culture of rising political dissent that emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The next chapters explore this international turn and its repercussions.

CHAPTER NINE

How Precious a Legacy? The International Turn and its Legacy, 1975-1989

The Jewish religious community, from a domestic perspective, constitutes not a large group, which retains its profile and influence. In recent years, it has been an object of growing interest for international Jewish and Zionist centers, which would happily exploit it against socialism. They are concerned, on the one hand, with preserving and reviving religious activities, and on the other hand, creating an ideological, political, material, and personnel base for infiltrating the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic [ČSSR] with the goal of gaining support for the objectives of Zionism. Through the ČSSR they try to infiltrate the Soviet Union. In association with this, the interest of Western embassies, above all the USA, in the activities of the Jewish religious communities is even increasing; the number of visits and contacts of Jewish and Zionist representatives and groups from the West is rising considerably; accordingly the number of invitations on trips abroad is rising for our representatives, some of whom support such initiative.

Especially after the exhibition of the State Jewish Museum in Prague in the USA the number of organized tourist groups of Jews from the USA and other countries to the ČSSR, facilitated by Čedok [the national travel agency], has risen; during which the Czechoslovak leaders of the Jewish communities are drawn into the program. Under the cover of religious interests this activity is directed into the fields of culture, politics, and community, in accordance with the aims and program of Zionism. In recent years, the aspiration of dissidents to infiltrate the Prague Jewish community has also been registered.

In the future it will be necessary to continue the effort to constrain the damaging foreign influence on the Jewish religious community and, using the new rabbi (1984) orient their activities to the religious sphere.

- Report to the Presidium of the Communist Party of the Czech Lands, 1985¹

In a stimulating article, the historian Charles Maier cautions against adopting the twentieth century, however conceived, as a chronological framework for writing “structural narratives” of history. He proposes an alternative periodization. Maier identifies “territoriality” as the core structural feature of a period lasting roughly from 1860 until 1970. In his words, territoriality

¹ J.Fojtík and M. Lúčan, “Zpráva o plnění dlouhodobého postupu v oblasti cíkervní politiky, současná situace a další úkoly v této oblasti” [Report on the fulfillment of the long-term policy in the area of ecclesiastical politics, the contemporary situation and further tasks in that area] (3 June 1985), 23-24. NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/1, archival unit P133/85, point 16.

was “One of the most encompassing or fundamental sociopolitical trends of modern world development.”² Maier explains,

Territoriality means simply the properties, including power, provided by the control of bordered political space, which until recently at least created the framework for national and often ethnic identity. Despite our taking it as a given for so long, territoriality has not been a timeless attribute of human societies. It is a historical formation, and its political form was also historical, that is, it has a beginning and an end. But it has not followed the trajectory of the century through time, providing rather the spatially anchored structures for politics and economic that were taken for granted from about 1860 to about 1970 or 1980 but that have since begun to decompose.³

According to Maier (and he is by no means alone), the 1970s and 1980s belong more appropriately to a new historical period—or, at least, correspond to its dawn. He writes,

When and why did the territorial imperative loosen its grip? The frameworks for political and economic coordination created in the 1860s began to dissolve in the late 1960s and continued to do so in the capitalist democracies through the decade of the 1970s and then in the state socialist bloc during the 1980s - a transitional quarter-century that will, I believe, be apprehended as one of the axial crises of the modern era, as the territorial order became caught up in a process that social scientists endeavored to grasp then as “interdependence” and more recently as “globalization.”⁴

During the 1960s, Maier argues, transnational, industrial, economic, informational, and transportation networks achieved a level of robustness which undermined the former “assets of territoriality.”⁵

These structural changes disrupted systems of political organization and power that had endured for nearly a century, namely, the construct of the nation-state (including its colonial territories) and the alignment of those states into hierarchically organized and discrete blocs of mutual interest. Yet political transformation on a global scale occurred only incrementally and, I would add, stubbornly. “Nonetheless,” Maier argues, “perhaps influenced by the radical shifts in

² Charles S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 807.

³ *Ibid.*, 808.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 823.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 818.

world politics during 1989-1990, historians seem more receptive at present to models of sudden transformations.”⁶ One reads often of the “short twentieth century,” which is supposed to have lasted from 1914 to 1989. This reflects an attention to clashes of political ideology, which manifested in state violence on a massive, often global scale. Maier, indeed, admits that the twentieth century offers a productive framework in which to write “moral narratives” of history. These frequently debate the value and efficacy of state programs to implement competing ideologies of social transformation and betterment.⁷ Francis Fukuyama’s seminal work, *The End of History and the Last Man*, comes to mind.

This tension that Maier evokes, between structural and moral time, between base and superstructure, played a determining role in the development of Jewish-state relations in socialist Europe. The capitalist and communist worlds remained formally divided until the latter collapsed in 1989, despite the intensification of structural forces, which ushered in two decades of increasing interdependence. During the 1970s and 1980s, the two blocs thus struggled against one another to impose ideologically based visions for the future upon a changing and globalizing sociopolitical field. The camps addressed one another in shared but differently interpreted Enlightenment discourses. This dynamic extended even to considerations regarding the place of Jews, however conceived, in the nation-states of the Soviet Bloc, and also regarding the legitimacy and conduct of the Jewish nation-state in the world. Rarely, except in propaganda too easily ignored, did the debate focus on the status of Jews in the USA. No one of consequence to this story doubted the success of Jews and the flourishing of Jewish life in America. To the contrary, Western-Jewish leaders cultivated the fantasies of their communist counterparts about the extent of Jewish power and influence in the USA, in order to seek concessions from them.

⁶ Ibid., 810.

⁷ Ibid., 806 and 825-31.

As per earlier chapters, the interdependency of East and West and, in particular, the dependency of the East upon the West for hard currency, worked to the advantage of the Czech Jewish communities during the 1960s. Jewish cultural life flourished in Prague and beyond, the community established meaningful contacts with its counterparts in the West, individuals traveled abroad and even to Israel, a student studied for the rabbinate in Budapest, and a new cohort of Jewish youths emerged with a confidence and enthusiasm not seen since the 1930s.

This must be attributed as well to shifts in domestic political culture related to the particularities of Czechoslovak de-Stalinization. When the nascent communist reform movement seized upon the Holocaust as a metaphor with which to call for and mark political progress, it ushered in a period of sympathy for Jews and offered more opportunities to mourn the Holocaust in the public sphere. To some extent, the Soviet-led invasion of 1968 can be considered, to some extent, an attempt by the USSR to stop the emerging trends of Westward-leaning globalization and, thereby, to reinforce the systems of “territoriality” that had undergirded its control over Central Europe. Soviet propagandists seized upon the dangers of Zionism to excuse their invasion of Czechoslovakia. Indeed, no matter how close integration brought East and West, the two blocs remained fiercely divided on the topics of Israel and Zionism. This complicated any coming together that could have occurred in the field of Jewish-state relations.

After 1970, and especially after 1975, the tension between structural integration and the political opposition to it (in the East) began to articulate negatively in Jewish-state relations in the Czech lands. Newly ascendant orthodox communists sought to return Czechoslovakia to its pre-liberalization *status quo ante*. This included restoring the state’s control over the Jewish communities, limiting Jewish activity to the ecclesiastical sphere, and disrupting the ties that Czech Jewish leaders had established with Western Jewish institutions and people.

Restoring the isolation of the Czech Jewish communities proved impossible, however, with the signing of the Helsinki Accords and the passage of the U.S. Jackson-Vanik amendment in 1975. Both reflected and also facilitated the deepening of East-West interdependence. Western Jewish activists seized the opportunity to intervene again into Czechoslovak domestic affairs. For a number of years, party-state administrators tried to take advantage of the situation as well. They relied upon a newly and coercively installed CJRC leadership cohort to propagandize for them abroad and also to seek economically beneficial improvements to Czechoslovak-American relations. The brief period of relaxed tensions, known as *détente*, ended with the election U.S. President Ronald Reagan. And it incited fierce reaction on the part of Czechoslovak state administrators and their lackeys in the Jewish leadership, replaced again in 1985.

In this chapter, I move between the domestic and international spheres to argue, per Charles Maier, that international considerations came to dominate the development of Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia during the final decades of communist rule. This shift occurred across the Soviet Bloc and I therefore reference events in Hungary, Poland, and East Germany whenever appropriate. I begin with a description of a tense intermezzo in Jewish-state relations from 1969 to 1975, as the new communist leadership struggled to remake every aspect of their state and society.

A Tense Intermezzo in Jewish-State Relations, 1969-1975

In 1969, after over a decade of divergence, the various state and party organs responsible for managing different aspects of Czechoslovak Jewish affairs came into accord with one another. The Communist Party embraced the radical anti-Zionism that the Soviet Union had re-introduced to the country the previous year. Its platforms soon reflected the paranoid, antisemitic fantasies

that had long pervaded the State Security Administration (the StB or secret police). Yet despite this preponderance of anti-Zionism, reforming the Jewish communities did not rank highly among the priorities of most officials, except for those responsible for them and for policing citizens of Jewish origin. Newly empowered orthodox-communists sought to realign their country with the USSR and to reestablish the pre-liberalization *status quo ante* in all sectors of society and state. In this context, the small and relatively powerless Jewish communities did not call for immediate attention. Indeed, the purges of the party, state, and government took years to complete. Top officials, moreover, did not immediately turn against the domestic Jewish leadership.⁸

The functionaries at the Ministry of Culture's Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs (SEA), nonetheless, accused the leaders of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities (CJRC) elected in 1965, of having deceitfully opened their community to foreign Zionist infiltration, spreading Jewish nationalism, and even seeking to engage in anti-socialist propaganda.⁹ An

⁸ In 1970, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party approved a report submitted by a member of the Federal Parliament regarding the state of ecclesiastical politics. The author accused foreign Zionist organizations of attempting to influence the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities. He charged the World Jewish Congress, in particular, with working to transform the millennial celebration into an international anti-Arab protest. The only Czech citizens whom he mentioned belonged to a group of pro-Israel culture leaders, some of whom were not of Jewish origin and the rest did not have a close affiliation whatsoever with the Jewish religious communities. Fojtík concluded, "In general, it can be said that on the one hand, religious life in the Jewish communities has developed normally, but on the other hand, Jewish nationalism and pro-Zionist ideas have increased considerably among an array of citizens who no longer fond of the religion." J. Fojtík, "Informační zpráva o církevně politické situaci v ČSSR" [Informational report about the ecclesiastical-political situation in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] (14 April 1970), 27-29; see 29 for quote. NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/1, bundle 126, archival unit 203, point 4.

⁹ In 1956, the newly formed Ministry of Education and Culture subsumed the State Office of Ecclesiastical Affairs (SOEA) which had existed independently and operated on a ministerial level since 1949. The SOEA thus became the Secretariat for Religious Affairs. The Prague Spring government restructured its ministries in April 1968, yielding the Ministry of Culture. The federalization of Czechoslovakia in 1969 yielded two counterpart Ministries of Culture, one

unsigned report from the turn of the 1970s explained,

The leadership of the CJRC insisted upon the necessity of contact with foreign Jewish institutions with the explanation that in this way, the false argumentation regarding the persecution of Jews in the socialist states would be countered. The Council took an array of actions along these lines. It was incrementally confirmed, however, that the lead functionaries allowed for the infiltration of Zionism. This manifested, in particular, in the actions of the Prague community - particularly in the education of youths.¹⁰

The report also accused the CJRC and Prague community leadership of attempting to transform the millennial celebrations, discussed in the last chapter, from a private religious ceremony into an international spectacle of anti-Soviet propaganda. It also suggested that the Jewish communities had attracted new, non-believing members with promises of financial aid and emigration assistance from abroad.¹¹ This would have violated community's mandate from the state, enshrined in its bylaws, to serve only the religious needs of Czech, Slovaks, and other ethnics of the Jewish faith.

In 1973, the Communist Party issued new guidelines for the management of ecclesiastical affairs. It ordered state administrators (once again) to restrict the activities of churches to the religious sphere alone, limit their international contacts, and to marginalize all church leaders whom they associated with the liberalization of 1968. The twenty-nine-page document included only one mentioned the Jewish community:

In relation to the Jewish religious communities, adhere to the policy that these communities henceforth will develop their activities only in the area of religious life and refuse any attempts to connect religious questions with extra-confessional problems, including the interventions of foreign Zionist into the activities of the Jewish

for the Czech lands and the other for Slovakia. The Office of the President of the Government therefore founded its own Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs to coordinate between the Czech and the Slovaks and to manage foreign relations in the ecclesiastical sphere. Website of the Czech Ministry of Culture, <<http://www.mkcr.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=1839>> (5 June 2014).

¹⁰ Report from the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs, "Materiál k činnosti židovských náboženských obcí v českých zemích" [Material regarding the activity of the Jewish religious communities in the Czech lands] (n.d., 1969/1970). NAČR, MŠK box 58.

¹¹ Ibid.

communities in the CSR.¹²

The Communist Party thus raised concern that the Jewish community had overstepped its religious purview in association with foreign Zionists. It ordered SEA officials to ensure that the communities conformed to the conceptual categories assigned to them by the party-state, regardless of how Czech Jews thought about their own Jewishness.

This statement confirmed for SEA officials that the party supported their position and that it sought rectification. The day's political culture suggested that the solution lay in purging the community's leaders and replacing them with loyal and pliant individuals. During such purges, known as "consolidation," the authorities penalized individuals *ex post facto* for actions that they had taken with party-state approval during the period of liberalization. Additionally, in attacking the Jewish leadership, those SEA officials who had remained in their posts through 1969, like Karel Šnýdr, found a means to exculpate themselves from responsibility for the community's purported political deviations.¹³

¹² O. Švestka and M. Lúčan, "Návrh dlouhodobého postupu při řešení vztahů KSČ a socialistického státu vůči církvím, věřícím a náboženské ideologii" [Proposal for the long-term policy in resolving the relationship of the [Communist Party] and the socialist state with churches, believers, and religious ideology] (5 January 1973), III/a 7. NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/1, bundle 66, archival unit 64, point 5.

¹³ The Ministers of Culture who served between 1965 and 1969, Jiří Hájek and Miroslav Galuška, had already fallen from grace between 1968 and 1970. Their purported crimes of political deviation exceeded the bounds of Jewish-state relations. In 1968, nonetheless, the USSR attempted to cast aspersion upon Hájek by accusing him of having collaborated with the Nazis and of having changed his last name from Karpeles to Hájek. With the latter charge, the Soviets insinuated that Hájek had come from a Jewish family, which made his alleged treachery even worse. According to Soviet logic, it also explained his purported "Zionism." Hájek rejected the charges, but stood by his principles. He responded, "Some of these attacks had a distinctly racist character and were without foundation. It is not true that I am of Jewish origin. But I must add that I would not be ashamed of it if I were, because I think a man should be judged on the basis of what he does and how he behaves, and because I think that, in this country, racism was disowned long ago." The official news organ of the Soviet Union, *Izvestia*, retracted its "error." Maurice Friedberg, "Anti-Semitism as a Policy Tool in the Soviet Bloc," in *Soviet Communism*

SEA officials compelled the presidents of the CJRC and the Prague community, František Fuchs and Pavel Kolman, to resign. They also arranged for the dismissal of CJRC general secretary Ota Heitlinger. Officials at the ecclesiastical secretariat and the Communist Party took particular aim at Fuchs, who had taken the lead role in establishing the youth lecture series and in acquiring ministerial permission to hold the millennial celebrations on a grand, international scale. Fuchs officially resigned because his son had emigrated illegally in 1968 and because he had insufficiently reformed the community after 1969. Behind closed doors, however, he faced stronger accusations:

[Fuchs] aspired to extend the [CJRC's] activities beyond the framework permitted for religious communities. The goal was to bring into his ranks additional citizens of Jewish dissent, whereas engineer František Fuchs publically proclaimed himself to be the spokesperson for all citizens of Jewish descent in the Czech Socialist Republic. This group of functionaries, which have all spent some time in Israel, achieved partial results even in seeking out youths from Jewish families, whom they subsequently influenced with pro-Zionist ideas. CJRC President, engineer František Fuchs also engaged personally, as the lead functionary, in achieving close contacts with the World Jewish Congress, other international organizations of Zionist orientation, and renewing relations with their representatives, through whose intervention come, among other things, significant gifts of hard-currency and "support" for [community] members.¹⁴

The authorities additionally accused Fuchs of having failed to propagandize for the party-state, particularly in the arenas of ecclesiastical politics and Middle Eastern affairs.¹⁵

The SEA received permission from the government to arrange for Bedřich Bass to

and the Socialist Vision, ed. Julius Jacobson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, distributed by Dutton, 1972), 47-49.

¹⁴ V. Bejda and M. Klusák, "Zpráva o přípravách řádného sjezdu Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR a návrhy na opatření" [Report on the preparations for the regular congress of the CJRC and proposals for actions] (20 February 1975), 1. NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4, bundle 91, archival unit 145, point 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

replace Fuchs as the CJRC president in fixed elections on 2 March 1975.¹⁶ An SEA official reported that Bass, a decorated veteran of the Second World War,

can be counted upon in the future, particularly in eliminating the influence of emigrant Jewish groups [e.g., the ICJC] operating abroad and in casting off the remainder of the Zionist influences insinuated into the activities of the Jewish religious community by the past leaders of the CJRC.¹⁷

The SEA additionally arranged for Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to be elected vice presidents of the CJRC. The two would come to lead the institution in the mid-1980s. As a precaution against the resurgence of cultural activity at the CJRC, the SEA also insisted upon changes in the organization's bylaws, designed to limit the Prague community's influence. It also removed the directive to educated Jewish youths.¹⁸

SEA officials celebrated their successful intervention, but remained concerned for the fragile nature of their progress. They worried about persistent Jewish nationalism at home, especially in Prague, and about further interventions from abroad. SEA officials thus reported to the Minister of Culture that Bass's election

ended the period of political differentiation in this religious community, which began with the initiation of war aggression by the State of Israel in 1967 and during the crisis years, 1968-1969.¹⁹

They also wrote to the Communist Party that the CJRC congress had confirmed the

¹⁶ "JUDr. Bedřich Bass, předseda RŽNO - pozvání k složení slibu věrnosti ČSSR" [Bedřich Bass, J.D., CJRC President - invitation to take the pledge of loyalty to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] (26 February 1975). NAČR, MŠK box 233.

¹⁷ Illegible name, "Informace pro soudruha ministra" [Information for comrade minister] (16 June 1975), 1, in folder labeled "JUDr. Bedřich Bass, předseda RŽNO - pozvání k složení slibu věrnosti ČSSR" [Bedřich Bass, J.D., CJRC President - invitation to take the pledge of loyalty to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic]. NAČR, MŠK box 233.

¹⁸ "Informační zpráva o průběhu řádného sjezdu delegátů židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR konaném dne 2. března 1973 v Praze, s návrhem církevně politických opatření" [Informational report on the proceedings of the regular congress of the delegates of the CJRC on 2 March 1973 in Prague, with proposals for ecclesiastical-political measures] (April 1975), 3-5. NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4, bundle 98, archival unit 155, point 1.

¹⁹ Illegible name, "Informace pro soudruha ministra," 1.

correctness of the evaluation of the general developments at the Jewish religious community, based in the long-term conception of ecclesiastical politics, approved by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in January 1973.²⁰

At the same time, however, SEA officials acknowledged to the party leadership that the CJRC congress had laid only the “mere foundation for further, difficult work with the leaders, clergy, and believers of the CJRC, on the parts of the workers of the state administration.”²¹ They looked to Bedřich Bass his associates for collaboration.

Despite the goal of restricting the activities of the Jewish communities to the ecclesiastical sphere alone, state administrators called upon the new Jewish leadership to wage political battles, both foreign and domestic. Indeed, the SEA had little interest in expanding Jewish religious activity. Its officials took seriously their commitment to reducing the influence of religion in society. They also shared with the agents of the StB a suspicion that any manifestation of Judaism could be exploited by Zionist activists.

Bass, his associates, and successors worked with both the SEA and the STB to show that the CJRC had overcome the 1960s.²² They ceased requesting dispensation to develop and

²⁰ Ibid., 6.

²¹ Ibid., 2. Indeed, along with its report on the congress, the SEA submitted to the Communist Party a list of eight goals that it had set before itself in connection with the management of the CJRC. The secretariat would seek to limit the community’s activities to the religious sphere and to prevent the exploitation of their activities for Zionist ends; identify loyal leaders and support them; stop the community from overemphasizing the role of Jews in the struggle for national liberation during the Second World War (and by extension, the significance of the Holocaust); see to it that community members read the CJRC’s proclamation in honor of the thirtieth anniversary of the Soviet liberation of Czechoslovakia; ensure that *Věsník*, the Jewish monthly, conformed to party-state politics; discuss the possible takeover of the Jewish cemeteries by the local national committees; and institute more thorough financial controls over the communities and the social support that members received from foreign Jewish organizations. Ibid., 6-7.

²² Desider Galský, who replaced Bass in November 1980, directed most of his energies to foreign relations and left the internal affairs of the communities to his subordinates and the leaders of the Prague community. Bedřich Róna, a member of the Prague representation to the CJRC, who would later criticize the lack of religious activity and affiliation with the

maintain their communities. In exchange for promises of security and also personal benefits, they participated in the demolition of Jewish cemeteries and, for over a decade, refrained from educating Jewish youths.²³ Thus did the overwhelmingly secular Jewish leadership help reduce the influence of Judaism upon Czech Jews (at least within the confines of the communities). They also strove to minimize dissent and initiative on the parts of community members and lower-level functionaries. By the mid-1980s, the CJRC leadership had come to regulate their subordinate communities so severely, that they often exceeded the demands and expectations of state administrators.

Bass's first initiative as CJRC president reflected the organization's new political orientation. With SEA approval, he and Rudolf Iltis planned a celebration of the CJRC's thirtieth anniversary. They intended for the jubilee to demonstrate "the positive attitude of the Jewish

communities, said that Galský, "albeit did enough in the international field, but for the religious community did not do anything. In synagogue, for example, he was not seen..." M. Merglová, "Záznam z besedy, která se konala na ŽNO Praha 1, Maislova 18, dne 4. května 1989 v 17 hod" [Minutes from the discussion that took place at the Jewish religious community in Prague 1, 18 Maislova Street, on 4 May 1984, at 5:00PM] (May 1985), 3. NAČR, ÚPV-F, "Církevní odbor, RŽNO 1989" [The ecclesiastical department, CJRC] carton 9, unsorted.

²³ The Prague community discontinued its youth lecture series in 1974. For sometime thereafter, CJRC representative, Artur Radvanský, arrange for Jewish youths to receive informal Jewish education at special camping and sporting events. In order to disguise these activities from the authorities—or, perhaps to give them a pretext to ignore them—Radvanský publicized and registered them as retreats for the children of the members of the Revolutionary Trade-workers' Union (*Revoluční odborové hnutí* or *ROH*). Radvanský took over the position of CJRC central secretary upon the death of Rudolf Iltis in 1978. The sociologist Alena Heitlinger reminded me that the decline in youth activities during the late-1970s and early-1980s also reflected the fact that the community lacked many younger members at the time, due to demographic idiosyncrasies related to the genocide of European Jewry during the 1940s. Artur Radvanský, *A Přece jsem přežil: Vyprávění člověka, který si zachoval lásku k lidem* [I survived notwithstanding: the story of a person who retained a love for people] (Dresden, Germany: Goldenbogen, 2008); Alena Heitlinger, "Jewish Youth Activism and Institutional Response in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2002): 38; and interviews with Miša Vidláková (23 September 2011) and Alena Heitlinger (2010).

religious community to the socialist order of [Czechoslovakia].”²⁴ The discussions leading up to the event, however, betrayed a number of anxieties shared by both state administrators and Jewish functionaries. Karel Hrůza, the director of the SEA at the Office of the President, felt compelled to explain to the Communist Party that

According to the opinion of the [secretariat] the proceedings of the proposed event cannot have a negative effect even in the direction of increasing the religious activity of clergy and believers. To wit, the Jewish religious community in the Czech lands currently comprises 4,000 believers, whose average age reaches sixty years; the average weekly participation at prayers in the Czech lands fluctuates around 650 participants. As set forth in the proposal for the invitations to the CJRC’s jubilee, the circle of participants will remain limited to the presidium, all five current clergy members, the delegates of individual events, and foreign guests [emphasis added].²⁵

The CJRC and the SEA thus limited participation to eighty-four individuals in order to ensure that it conveyed the intended political message. As per above, the functionaries of both bodies believed their new peace to be tenuous at best.²⁶

The event served primarily as a semi-public spectacle about which to report at home and abroad. Bedřich Bass and František Jelínek offered remarks on behalf of the CJRC and the SEA respectively. They discussed the perceived failures of the 1960s and explicated the political line to which they expected the communities to adhere. Bass stressed that Jewish identification was to be a matter of religious conviction, rather than nationality. He pledged his the CJRC’s loyalty to Czechoslovakia and to the politics of the Soviet Bloc. This included the latter’s position on

²⁴ Karel Hrůza, “Návrh politicko-organizačního zabezpečení oslav 30. výročí vzniku Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR” [Proposal for the political-organizational safeguarding of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the creation of the CJRC] (29 September 1975), 1. NAČR, SPVC box 233.

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ Commenting on the March congress, two SEA officials reported, “These changes, even though they were not unequivocally positively received, did not incite more serious problems at the community.” The Western-Jewish press, less fearful of the party-state, expressed more strident criticism. V. Bejda and M. Klusák, “Zpráva o přípravách řádného sjezdu” [Report about the preparations for the regular meeting], 2.

Israel. Bass admitted that historical, liturgical, and familial connections bound the members of his community in sympathy to that state. Yet he asserted that the only way to bring peace to Israel and its neighbors was for the international community to work with the Soviet Union towards the fulfillment of UN resolution 242, which demanded that Israel return to its pre-1967 borders.²⁷ This was the first time that a Czech Jewish leader had spoken openly about Israel since the 1967 war.²⁸

A Rankean Turn: Jewish-State Relations in the International Arena

The CJRC's jubilee celebration of November 1975 inaugurated the final chapter of Jewish-state relations in the Czech lands, which corresponded to broader transitions in arena of international affairs. During the 1970s, Cold War adversaries attempted to draw closer to one another and abandon the confrontational approach to managing their differences that had predominated since shortly after the Second World War. This emerging culture of *détente* manifested in the Helsinki Accords, signed by thirty-three European states, the USA, and Canada in August 1975. The participating nations affirming their non-binding commitment to ten principles designed to

²⁷ "Projev Dr. Basse" [Dr. Bass's address] (late 1975), 6-8, in collection of documents under the header "Informativní zpráva o připravovaných oslavách 30. výročí trvání Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR s návrhem na opatření" [Informational report on the preparations for the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the CJRC with a proposal for proceeding]. NAČR, SPVC box 233. For Jelínek's speech see collection of documents in a set of files labeled "Hodnocení průběhu oslav 30. výročí Rady židovských náboženských obcí" [Evaluation of the proceedings of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the CJRC] (17 November 1975). NAČR, SPVC box 233.

²⁸ "Informace o průběhu oslav 30. výročí vzniku Rady židovských náboženských obcí v českých zemích a Ústředního svazu židovských náboženských obcí na Slovensku, konaných dne 2. listopadu 1975 v Praze" [Information about the proceedings of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the CJRC and the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia, which took place on 2 November 1975 in Prague] (late 1975), in a set of files labeled "Hodnocení průběhu oslav 30. výročí Rady židovských náboženských obcí" [Evaluation of the proceedings of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the CJRC] (17 November 1975). NAČR, SPVC box 233.

improve East-West relations. These included respect for the territorial sovereignty of states, a promise of non-intervention into their internal affairs, and the rejection of military force as a solution to their conflicts. The signatories also called for increased inter-state cooperation and the recognition of human rights, freedoms, and equality for all.

The passage of the Helsinki Accords, though intended to increase peaceful cooperation, introduced new tensions into Jewish-state relations across the Soviet Bloc, and especially in Czechoslovakia. In his speech on the occasion of the CJRC's anniversary, František Jelínek promised that Czechoslovakia would

... implement the spirit and letter of the [Helsinki Accords], defend them against the open and covert partisans of the Cold War, and stand up to the attempts to exploit them for attacks against our interests and the security of socialist society.²⁹

Without formally rejecting the accords, Jelínek made it clear that Czechoslovakia would seek to fulfill its commitments on its own terms. Indeed, Jelínek correctly anticipated that Western-Jewish organizations, backed by the U.S. government, would use the accords as a pretext for intervening into the affairs of the Jewish communities in socialist Europe and for advocating on behalf of "Soviet Jewry." The Socialist states, on the other hand, argued that the Helsinki Accords offered them protection from precisely this type of intervention into their domestic affairs.³⁰

During the 1960s, a student-led, grassroots movement emerged within the American Jewish community in reaction to Soviet antisemitism. Its adherents called for the USSR to enable Jewish citizens to live openly as Jews and to honor the requests of those who wanted to emigrate

²⁹ Jelínek's speech, 2.

³⁰ Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2013), 24-28; and Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

to Israel. The mainstream Jewish establishment adopted this cause towards the end of the decade and established the National Conference on Soviet Jewry in 1971.³¹ Pressure from the Jewish community led powerful cohorts within the U.S. government and Congress to champion the cause of Soviet Jews as well. They included provisions on their behalf into the United States Trade Reform Act of 1971 and into the SALT nuclear missile treaty of the same year.³² On 3 January 1975, the Congress passed the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which made the extension of most-favored-nation trade-status to the communist states conditional upon their human-rights records and their willingness to allow citizens to emigrate. The fact that the law did not mention Jews did not prevent the international community from understanding its true focus and intention.

In fighting for Soviet Jewry, American politicians drew upon a political tactic with roots in the first decades of the Cold War. They joined non-governmental activists in deploying accusations of antisemitism to gain advantage over their political opponents. The culture of *détente*, however, marked by tense, structural renegotiations of East-West affairs, transformed what had once been a matter of propaganda alone into a weapon for pressuring the Soviet Union and its allies to make substantive concessions to Western policy priorities. In order to court US favor, the USSR permitted 94,784 Jews to emigrate to Israel between 1971 and 1974. Despite a relative decline in the rate of exit between 1975 and 1977, another 61,534 emigrated to Israel

³¹ On the American movement to “free” Soviet Jewry, see Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We’ll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (New York and Boston, USA: Mariner Books and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010); and Shaul Kelner, “Ritualized Protest and Redemptive Politics: Cultural Consequences of the American Mobilization to Free Soviet Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, n.s. vol. 14, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2008): 1-37.

³² Tom Shachtman, *I Seek my Brethren: Ralph Goldman and “The Joint,” Rescue, Relief, and Reconstruction - The Work of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee*, with forwards by David S. Wyman and Teddy Kollek and an introduction by Mikhail Gorbachev (New York, NY: Newmarket Press, 2001), 117.

through 1980. The election of Ronald Reagan to the Presidency in that year ended the period of *détente* and with it Soviet acquiescence to demands for Jewish emigration.³³

Western-Jewish organizations, some of which worked to resettle Soviet Jews, also took advantage of *détente* and the Helsinki Accords to seek closer contacts with Jewish communities and individuals behind the Iron Curtain. They hoped to stem the state-induced trends towards assimilation in those countries and also to establish a foothold from which to penetrate the Soviet Union's borders. The two most active and influential organizations were the World Jewish Congress (WJC) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, known in the region as "the Joint."

These attempts at intervention put Czechoslovak officials in a difficult position. Their country had committed itself to facilitating East-West contacts and to providing for the needs of its minorities. They also hoped to establish better trade relations with the USA. In 1980, the U.S. government still held \$400,000,000 in Czechoslovak gold, which it had seized during the Second World War. The USA refused to return the treasure until Czechoslovakia resolved the property claims against it by citizens of Western states, which had arisen in connection with the nationalization of commerce and industry in the immediate postwar years.³⁴ From this perspective, it would have behooved the party-state to acquiesce to Western demands regarding Jewish citizens and communities.

At the same time, however, Czechoslovak officials also sought to protect the "progress" that they had achieved at the domestic Jewish communities. Party-state propaganda had seized upon "Zionist" penetration to explain the country's liberalization. By 1975, officials at both the

³³ Statistics from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics are compiled and available online at <<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Immigration/FSU.html>> (9 June 2014).

³⁴ Shachtman, *I Seek my Brethren*, 155.

SEA and the StB had adopted this narrative as a primary framework for managing Jewish-state relations. In that year, moreover, Czechoslovakia joined seventy-one other states in voting successfully to pass UN Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism. Thus, just as state representatives from East and West promised to bring their nations together, divisiveness over Zionism and Israel tore them apart. This tension persisted throughout the period of *détente* and featured prominently in its most acrimonious debates and propaganda wars.

Czech officials, therefore, adopted a cautious approach to reestablishing contacts with Western-Jewish organizations, and they called upon the new Jewish leadership to limit its effects in the domestic sphere. They also depended upon the Jewish functionaries to propagandize abroad, in order to counter Western accusations of antisemitism and to prevent Westerner powers from controlling the interpretation and implementation of the Helsinki Accords. Perhaps fearing another round of purges, Czech-Jewish officials took a more antagonistic tone in dealing with Western-Jewish organizations than many—but not all—of their counterparts in the neighboring socialist states.

Thus, at the CJRC's thirtieth anniversary celebrations Bedřich Bass added his voice to Jelínek's. He suggested that the international community could help to resolve the Arab-Israeli crisis by applying the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Accords to that conflict as well. This meant including the USSR into all negotiations and acceding to its demand that Israel honor UN resolution 242. It also implied that Israel was guilty of human-rights violations. In other words, Bass turned the West's tactics against the West in an attempt to gain control over the politics of *détente*. The CJRC included a statement to this effect in a widely circulated proclamation. In a summary report on the jubilee celebrations, one SEA official noted,

It is possible to anticipate that the positive content of the resolution will be reacted to negatively in Western print-media, however the resolution can also become support for

similar proclamations by the Jewish religious communities in the GDR, Hungary, and similar [countries].³⁵

Once again, the SEA correctly anticipated how Western-Jewish organizations, interested in reshaping Jewish-state relations behind the Iron Curtain, would receive the message that the party-state sent through Bedřich Bass. The Cold War had become, more than ever before, a struggle to determine the fate of Europe's Jewish minority. Yet Cold Warriors on either side of the East-West divide also exploited the Jewish communities gain control over the political-cultural discourses of *détente* and to attack each other more forthrightly in the period of increased antagonism that followed.

Contacts Reestablished: The World Jewish Congress

In 1976, with the blessing of the party-state and in the spirit of the Helsinki Accords, the CJRC established formal relations with the WJC for the first time since the Second World War.³⁶ The

³⁵ “Informace o průběhu oslav” [Information about the proceedings of the celebration], 5.

³⁶ The CJRC refused the WJC's offer of membership in the immediate postwar years. The advent of communist rule in 1948 then prevented the organizations from working together until 1956, after which point all contacts occurred on an informal basis. Beginning in 1964, the WJC extended repeated invitations to the CJRC and its Slovak counterpart to participate in its meetings as official “observers.” As late as December 1966, however, they declined, preferring to maintain a “free” relationship with the congress. The fact that SEA officials finally met with Nahum Goldmann, the head of the WJC, in 1966, lends credence to the latter's claim, in 1967, that the CJRC had agreed to participate as an “observer” in forthcoming WJC meetings. This arrangement apart in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. In 1968, the same party-state officials who had met with Goldmann earlier, refused to receive him. The CJRC and the WJC had only limited contacts between 1969 and 1976. On the relationship between the WJC and the Czech-Jewish communities in the immediate postwar years, see Jacob Ari Labendz, “‘*In unserer Kreise*’: Czech-Jewish Activism and Immigration in America, 1939-1994,” *Jewish Culture and History* (expected, December 2014). For information regarding the attempts by the WJC to establish a formal relationship with the CJRC and its Slovak counterpart after 1964 and the responses of the party-state, see the letter from CJRC president František Ehrmann to Karel Šnýdr, “Věc: Odpověď na pozvání W.J.C. k účasti na zasedání v Jeruzalemě” [Re: response to the invitation of the WJC to participate in the meeting in Jerusalem] (12 June 1964); František Ehrmann, “Rozhovor s dr. Nachum Goldmannem” [Discussion with Dr. Nahum Goldmann] (26

relationship began in a spirit of international confrontation. The WJC co-sponsored the Second World Conference on Soviet Jewry in Brussels on 17-19 February 1976. 1,200 delegates representing 32 countries approved a declaration in which they

call[ed] upon the Soviet Union:

- To respect its own Constitution and laws, to fulfill its obligations as set forth in international declarations and agreements in the field of human rights and fundamental freedom, and to implement the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.³⁷

The conference demanded the right for Soviet Jews

to be reunited with their brethren in the Land of Israel, the historic Jewish homeland... [and to] profess and practice their religion and to enjoy and develop their cultural heritage and language.

By portraying the Jewish People as a family, the conference sought to extend the right to family reunification, enshrined in the Helsinki Accords, to all Soviet Jews, regardless of whether they actually had close relatives in Israel. The conference also condemned UN Resolution 3379.

The conference thus contributed to making the issue of Soviet Jewry central to debates about the implementation of the Helsinki Accords. It incited strong reactions from around the world even before it commenced. The U.S. House of Representative passed a resolution in

May 1964); and František Fuchs, “Zpráva o jednání s představiteli Světového židovského kongresu v Paříži” [Report on the meeting with the representatives of the World Jewish Congress in Paris] (11 December 1966). NAČR box 58. For Goldmann’s claim of renewed relations see the WJC press release, “Goldman Urges Stronger Contacts between Western Jewry and East European communities,” *News from World Jewish Congress* (27 April 1967), 2. American Jewish Archives, World Jewish Congress collection, A29, folder 5. On the change of political-climate after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, see Karel Hrůza, “Záznam o rozhovoru s předsedou Rady židovských náboženských obcí Ing. Fr. Fuchs” [Memorandum regarding a discussion with the president of the CJRC, engineer František Fuchs] (29 January 1968). NAČR, MŠK box 58.
³⁷ “Declaration of the Second World Conference of the Jewish Communities on Soviet Jewry” (19 February 1976), in *The American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 77 (1977): 154-55. On the conference, see David Geller, “Second World Conference on Soviet Jewry,” *The American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 77 (1977): 153; and “Brussels II Ends with Call on USSR to Implement Helsinki Declaration, Recognize Rights of Jews to be...” *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (20 February 1976). <<http://www.jta.org/1976/02/20/archive/brussels-ii-ends-with-call-on-ussr-to-implement-helsinki-declaration-recognize-rights-of-jews-to-be>> (9 June 2014).

support of Soviet Jewry on 12 February 1976.³⁸ The USSR, on the other hand, joined Arab states in protesting to the Belgian government. It portrayed the conference as an attempt to violate the Helsinki principle of non-intervention.³⁹ It also sent a delegation to Brussels “to lobby the press and various observers that Brussels II was nothing more than a Zionist Plot to discredit the Soviet Union.”⁴⁰

From this point onwards, CJRC representatives joined their counterparts from other socialist states in using WJC meetings and the conferences of other international Jewish associations as opportunities to attack the politics of Zionism and to decry Israeli and Western-Jewish initiatives on behalf of Soviet Jewry. The CJRC evoked a negative response from Western-Jewish organizations with a letter of protest to the Congress on Soviet Jewry.⁴¹ The following December, for first time, its representatives participated as “observers” in a meeting of the European Section of the World Jewish Congress. They joined fellow “observers” from Hungary and Poland in challenging the positions on Israel and Soviet Jewry taken by the congress leadership.⁴² In November 1978, CJRC president Bedřich Bass addressed the European

³⁸ “House Adopts Soviet Jewry Resolution” *The Jewish Telegraphic Association* (13 February 1976). <<http://www.jta.org/1976/02/13/archive/house-adopts-soviet-jewry-resolution>> (9 June 2014).

³⁹ “Arabs, Russians Attack Second World Conference on Soviet Jewry,” *The Jewish Telegraphic Association* (4 February 1976): <<http://www.jta.org/1976/02/04/archive/arabs-russians-attack-second-world-conference-on-soviet-jewry>> (9 June 2014).

⁴⁰ “Brussels II Ends with Call on USSR to Implement Helsinki Declaration.”

⁴¹ Shortly after the CJRC published their letter, they experienced difficulties filling their Passover order of *kosher* wine from Hungary. SEA officials suspected that Society for Mutual Aid, a known front organization for the Joint Distribution Committee, sought to punish the CJRC for its political intervention. The also presumed that it wanted to force the organization to turn to an Israeli wine provider. Even if these claims cannot be substantiated, they reflect the tense climate in which the CJRC began to reestablish connections with Western-Jewish organizations. Collection of documents sent from the CJRC to the Fidler at the Ministry of Culture (2 April 1976). NAČR, SPVC box 233.

⁴² “Notatka o udziale v madryckich obradach Europejskiej Sekcji Światowego Kongresu Żydowskiego” [Memo on the participation in the Madrid meetings of the European Section of

Council of Jewish Community Services. He criticized the ongoing peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel for failing to include Palestinian representation. Bass provocatively compared the exclusion of Palestinians to the exclusion of Czechoslovak representation from the Munich Accords of 1938. He also insisted that without Soviet participation Middle East peace could not be achieved.⁴³

These political interventions of the new CJRC leadership reflected a sea change in the type of “ideological labor” that Czechoslovak officials demanded they perform on behalf the party-state. In previous years, Czech-Jewish leaders attempted to prove to the West that the Soviet Bloc did not persecute its Jewish minority. When they attacked, they generally limited their provocations to criticism of West Germany for maintaining former Nazis in high positions. After 1975, however, CJRC leaders exploited their relationship with the World Jewish Congress and other organizations to lend Jewish support to the more aggressive propaganda initiatives of the Soviet Bloc.

The CJRC leadership paid this price in order to benefit financially and in other ways from partnership with Western-Jewish donor organizations. It also offered Czech-Jewish leaders some protection against the type of *ex post facto* recrimination that befell František Fuchs, Pavel Kolman, and Ota Heitlinger. It remains an open question whether Bedřich Bass, his associates, and successors actually believed in their own propaganda. Its *pro-forma* and repetitive nature suggest that this may not have been the case. So too does the palpable fear of the authorities that manifested in the minutes of the CJRC’s meetings. On the other hand, I have found no direct

the WJC] (December 1976). Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw, Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza collection, LXXVI-545. My thanks to Rachel L. Rothstein.

⁴³ Bedřich Bass, “Zpráva z 35. zasedání Evropské rady pro služby židovských obcím /dale ER/ ve dnech 4.-6.11.1978 ve Vídni” [Report from the 35th meeting of the European Council of Jewish Community Services (henceforth, ER) on 4-6 November 1978 in Vienna] (21 November 1978). NAČR, SPVC box 236.

evidence to suggest that the CJRC leadership did not stand behind their comments. The remained remarkably consistent.

The CJRC's propaganda initiatives shocked Western-Jewish circles. The latter had grown accustomed to Fuchs and Heitlinger, who shared their commitment to Jewish cultural continuity in socialist Europe. Nahum Goldmann, the head of the WJC, may have perceived that Fuchs took a "rather cool view" on Israel, but in his capacity as CJRC president, Fuch never publicly criticized that country.⁴⁴ The new CJRC leadership, thus, incited charges of illegitimacy from Western-Jewish leaders. For example, as already noted, Karel Baum petitioned the WJC to allow his organization, the International Council of Jews from Czechoslovakia, to represent Czech and Slovak Jewry to the congress.⁴⁵ Such sentiments among Western-Jewish leaders only intensified after another purge at the CJRC in 1985, which brought even more antagonistic leaders to power.

Contacts Reestablished: The Joint Distribution Committee

Representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee traveled to Prague in February 1981, at the invitation of Karel Hruža, the director of the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Office of the President. Shortly thereafter, the "Joint" reestablished a direct-donor relationship with the CJRC, something which it had not enjoyed since 1949. At no point, however, had the organization ever ceased providing aid to the Jews of Czechoslovakia. In particular, after 1964, the "Joint" sent tens of thousands of dollars on an annual basis to the Czech Jewish communities through the Society for Mutual Aid. In 1981, the Society ceded all of its Czechoslovakia operations to the "Joint," including its program for delivering scarce medicines

⁴⁴ "Goldman Urges Stronger Contacts," 3.

⁴⁵ Bass, "Zpráva z 35. zasedání Evropské rady" [Report from the 35th meeting of the European Council], 4-5.

to the communities.⁴⁶

Why then did the Joint Distribution Committee, the CJRC leadership, and state administrators like Karel Hruža seek the resumption of direct relations with the JDC? For the JDC, the answer was simple. As Tom Shachtman explains,

What the JDC could bring to these Jewish communities, in addition to the welfare support they were already providing through the SSE, was attention and linkage with the rest of the Jewish world. Through the JDC, the Eastern European Jewish Communities could be assured that they were not alone or forgotten by their brethren. And through the JDC's attention, it was hoped, those communities would be comforted, and the few that had a large enough critical mass of population might be energized.⁴⁷

The "Joint" also hoped that by establishing itself legally in the Soviet satellites and by operating with deference to their laws, that it would eventually have the opportunity to begin working the Soviet Union, whose Jewish population numbered in the millions.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Between 1945 and 1950, the Joint Distribution Committee operated extensive programs for the rehabilitation of the Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia. In early 1950, in concert with the Soviet Bloc's anti-Zionist turn of the previous year, Czechoslovakia expelled the "Joint." For a number of years thereafter, it provided aid to Jewish citizens through the Israeli Ligation in Prague. In 1957, the StB dismantled the Israeli-run, aid-distribution network. The Joint Distribution Committee then began sending money and packages to Jews through a Swiss front organization, the *Société de Secours et d'Entr'Aide* (the Society for Mutual Aid). The "Joint" also administered the Claims Conference program, which provided funds to the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities for Holocaust survivors. In 1964, the society agreed to work through the CJRC and its Slovak counterpart. That same year, the Ministry of Education and Culture rejected the Joint Distribution Committee's request to resume its operations in Czechoslovakia on an official and open basis. Not even the 1967 murder in Prague of Charles Jordan, the executive vice-chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, disrupted the indirect flow of aid from that organization to the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities and their members. For a fuller discussion, see Chapters One and Eight. See also Artur Radvanský, "Zápis ze schůze představenstva RŽNO konané dne 17.5.1981" [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC on 17 May 1981]. NAČR, SPVC box 231. See also Bass, "Zpráva z 35. zasedání Evropské rady" [Report from the 35th meeting of the European Council], 5. On the relationship between the Claims Conference and the Joint Distribution Committee see, Ralph I. Goldman, "The Involvement and Policies of American Jewry in Revitalizing European Jewry, 1945-1995," in *Jewish Centers & Peripheries: Europe between America and Israel Fifty Years after World War II*, ed., S. Ilan Troen, 67-84 (New Brunswick, NJ and London, U.K.: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 72.

⁴⁷ Shachtman, *I Seek My Brethren*, 152.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 152-73.

The state administration could not have benefited directly from reestablishing the relationship between the CJRC and the JDC. The latter already provided sufficient funds to the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities. The party-state, moreover, sought a decline in Jewish religious activity and to isolate domestic Jewry from Western influence. The impetus behind Hruža's initiative arose, instead, from the common overestimation of the political influence of the American-Jewish community. On one hand, this belief reflected longstanding, antisemitic fantasies of Jewish world conspiracies. On the other, however, it also made sense in the context of the overwhelming support that American politicians gave to the Soviet-Jewry movement. How else could communist officials interpret the extent to which their U.S. counterparts went to advocate for a relatively small minority? Party-state officials, at a loss for how to improve their country's relationship with the USA, hoped to court American politicians through their Jewish constituents.

One official at the U.S. Department of State suggested that Czechoslovakia hoped for its overture with the JDC to lead the USA to award it most-favored-nation status. Yet the USA had made it clear that it would not consider Czechoslovakia's application for the status improvement until that country had resolved the aforementioned foreign property claims. Indeed, at the very moment when the JDC received Hruža's invitation, the U.S. Congress was considering selling Czechoslovakia's gold and using the interest to cover the claims of U.S. citizens. Tom Shachter's suggests that the Czechoslovak government leaked word of its covert negotiations with the JDC to *Newsweek*, which featured them in a short article on 2 February 1981. The paper overtly referenced the Czechoslovak government's hope to achieve most-favored-nation status. The fact that a copy of that article can now be found in the archives of the SEA suggests this to have

been the case.⁴⁹

New leaders took the CJRC's helm before the JDC negotiations. Artur Radvanský replaced Rudolf Ilitis as its general secretary after the latter died in 1978. Desider Galský assumed the presidency upon Bass's death in 1979. The two, along with Bohumil Heller, initiated discussions about the "Joint" with Dr. Kadelburg, the vice-president of the European Section of the WJC, at the 1978 meeting of the European Council of Jewish Communal Services. When the three appealed to Hrůza, they noted that the JDC had already resumed operations in Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Galský claimed that his intervention had helped officials to "overcome an old an aversion [to the JDC]."⁵⁰

Unlike state officials, Jewish leaders had much to gain from working with the JDC. First, they anticipated an increase in funding. In 1981, Galský asked the "Joint" to raise its contribution by forty percent. He also proposed new allocations for improving the *kosher* kitchen and preserving Jewish cemeteries. He noted, "the [JDC's] tendency is to increase support." The JDC, indeed, raised its contribution by twenty-five percent in the first year and promised to renegotiate it thereafter. In response, the CJRC established a social commission for distributing aid to individuals. Its functionaries and employees also prepared to benefit personally from the JDC's largess in increased remuneration.⁵¹

The CJRC leadership likely also hoped for their new partnership to provide them with

⁴⁹ "A Czech Overture to U.S. Jews," *Newsweek* (2 February 1981), 4. Available in NAČR, SPVC box 236.

⁵⁰ Artur Radvanský, "Zápis ze schůze představenstva RŽNO konané dne 17.5.1981" [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC on 17 May 1981], 5. NAČR, SPVC box 231. See also Bass, "Zpráva z 35. zasedání Evropské rady" [Report from the 35th meeting of the European Council], 4. In truth, the JDC began its negotiations with Poland only after it reached an agreement with Prague. The JDC had worked continually with Romania for years. Shachtman, *I Seek My Brethren*, 69-76, 80-90, and 160-67.

⁵¹ Radvanský, "Zápis ze schůze představenstva" [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium], 5.

additional security in dealing with the party-state. They understood that their superiors believed the “Joint” to wield tremendous influence in the USA. With their representatives traveling to Czechoslovakia on a regular basis (once every two months), the Jewish leadership could feel reassured that party-state functionaries would act with moderation and discretion. In short time, they would discover this to have been a mistake. Indeed, the resumption of direct contacts between the JDC and the CJRC, however beneficial all parties believed it would be, quickly introduced new tensions into Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia and between the Czechoslovak state and the organized Western Jewry. It yielded none of the anticipated advantages to the party-state.

Contacts Reestablished: The Precious Legacy Exhibit

The Precious Legacy exhibit brought the history and culture of Bohemian and Moravian Jewry to ten North American cities, between 1983 and 1985. Drawn from the collections of the State Jewish Museum in Prague, it included rare documents, ritual items, objects representing daily life, and drawings and poems created by children prisoners of the Theresienstadt concentration camp during the Second World War. The exhibit opened on 8 November at the Smithsonian Institute and drew record-breaking crowds.⁵² By May 1985, over 700,000 people had bought tickets to see the traveling exhibit. Its final attendance numbers were projected to exceed one

⁵² The exhibition traveled to Canada in 1986. Kličková, “Záznam z porady k výstavě SŽM Praha do Kanady, 1985-86” [Memo from the meeting regarding the exhibition of the State Jewish Museum in Prague to Canada, 1985-86] (6 February 1985); and J. Junga, “Záznam zasedání k plánované výstavě Státního žid. muzea v Kanadě” [Memo from the meeting on planning the exhibition from the State Jewish Museum in Canada] (4 January 1985). NAČR, UPV cartons 5-6a, unprocessed, církv. odbor, RŽNO org. 1985.

million. (The organizers believed that only fifty percent of the attendees had been Jewish.)⁵³ The exhibition received extensive coverage in the national and local press.

Mark E. Talisman conceived of the project in 1968, on one of his many visits to Czechoslovakia as the administrative assistant to U.S. Congressman Charles Vanik. (Talisman, in fact, wrote the amendment that would later bear Vanik's name.) In 1975, Talisman founded and assumed the directorship of the Washington office of the Council of Jewish Federations. In that capacity he cultivated excitement for the exhibition within the organized American Jewish community. He founded Project Judaica, the organization that would bring it to fruition.⁵⁴

American Jews had already developed an interest in Czech-Jewish history. In 1968, the Jewish Publication Society of America sold more copies of *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, vol. 1, than any other book with the exception of the Bible.⁵⁵

State administrators approached the project with trepidation. Preparations began with a trip to Prague in 1979, taken by Mark Talisman and two historians, Michael Meyer and Hillel Kieval. It took three years for Talisman to reach a preliminary agreement with the Czechoslovak government, with which the Smithsonian Institute signed a contract in mid-1983.⁵⁶ Although the

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Informace o průběhu putovní výstavy v USA ze sbírek Státního židovského muzea v Praze a její zhodnocení" [Information about the progression of the traveling exhibit in the USA from the collections of the State Jewish Museum in Prague and its evaluation] (27 May 1985). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4 bundle 144/85, point info 2.

⁵⁴ Unless otherwise noted, the information in this section can be attributed to an interview that I conducted with Mr. Talisman on 15 August 2010 in Washington, DC. See also Mark E. Talisman, "Acknowledgments," in *The Precious Legacy: Judaic Treasures from the Czechoslovak State Collections*, ed. David Altshuler (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1983), 9-13.

⁵⁵ On *The Jews of Czechoslovakia* and the interest of American Jews in Czech-Jewish history, see Labendz, "In unserem Kreise" [In our circles].

⁵⁶ Mark Talisman reports that a preliminary agreement was reached in April 1982, in "Acknowledgments," 9. Documents from the Czech archive, however, suggest that the agreement was reached in 1981. "Uspořádání putovní výstavy v USA ze sbírek státního židovského muzea v Praze" [Organizing the traveling exhibition in the USA from the collections

two sides surmounted considerable financial and bureaucratic challenges to realize the project, party-state officials remained concerned that Westerners might seek to exploit the exhibit propagandistically and that it could incite protests from Arab states. Czechoslovakia, therefore, limited the scope and volume of the historical documents that Project Judaica could photocopy and also restricted them to the archives of the State Jewish Museum.⁵⁷ They also insisted that museum representatives accompany the exhibition to the USA at the expense of its American patrons.⁵⁸

State administrators and party functionaries set aside their concerns about the exhibit for the very same reason that their colleagues had approved the return of the JDC. Yet, whereas the latter would remain a discrete affair, the exhibit had the potential to raise popular sympathy for Czechoslovakia. One official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, therefore, noted that,

... the project is essentially the only meaningful operation in our relationship with the USA with which we can document Czechoslovakia's continued interest in developing relations and its eagerness to use even "small steps" for a holistic improvement of relations [emphasis added.]⁵⁹

He further suggested that facilitating the exhibit would "create a better atmosphere for meeting

of the State Jewish Museum in Prague] (8 April 1983). NAČR, KSC-ÚV-02/4, bundle 78/83, point 15.

⁵⁷ This effectively terminated Project Judaica's second endeavor, which was to collect as much documentation as possible regarding the Holocaust in the Czech lands for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. At the time of the meetings Mark Talisman served as the vice-chairman of that organization, which later established the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. The Czechoslovak government feared that Westerners might exploit and manipulate Holocaust-related materials to propagandize against their country and the entire Soviet Bloc. The government even rejected a request from West Germany film company to take a few shots of the CJRC rolodex of Holocaust survivors. Report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (30 March 1983) in collection of documents labeled, "Uspořádání putovní výstavy v USA ze sbírek státního židovského muzea v Praze" [Organizing the traveling exhibition in the USA from the collections of the State Jewish Museum in Prague]. NAČR, KSC-ÚV-02/4, bundle 78/83, point 15; and Collection of documents, "ARD Praha - natáčení reportáže v RŽNO" [ARD Prague - Filming a reportage at the Jewish religious community]. NAČR, SPVC box 234.

⁵⁸ "Uspořádání putovní výstavy v USA" [Organizing the traveling exhibition in the USA].

⁵⁹ Ibid.

about questions of property relations and the return of Czechoslovakia's gold currency from the USA [as well as other matters]."⁶⁰ This reflected both the poor state of Czechoslovak-American relations and the overestimation on the part of Czechoslovak officials of the political influence that Jews wielded in the USA. To that end, the official expected that the exhibit would help to counter the perception in the West that the states of the Soviet Bloc restricted religious freedoms and persecuted their Jewish minorities. He also worried that the USA would propagandistically exploit a refusal of cooperation.

The Precious Legacy exhibit additionally appealed to state administrators as a means to court American Jewry because, in theory, it would not lead to the further penetration of the domestic Jewish communities by outsiders. In this way, it resembled the initiatives from earlier decades in which the State Jewish Museum sent collections of Holocaust-related materials around the world. It also reflected the ambivalence about Jews that pervaded the party-state. A 1985 Ministry of Foreign Affairs report referenced the myth that Nazi Germany had acceded to the request of Jewish historians to transform the Jewish Museum in Prague, established in 1906, into a "Museum to the Extinct Races."⁶¹ Its author failed to see the irony behind the reference. While endeavoring to weaken, isolate, and assimilate the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities, the party-state had agreed to collaborate in an exhibit celebrating their past. Had the party-state achieved its dual goals of transforming Jewish identification into a matter of religious affiliation alone and undermining completely the hold of religion upon society, its facilitation of the Precious Legacy exhibit would have amounted to completing the museum project falsely

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Informace o průběhů putovní výstavy" [Information about the progression of the traveling exhibit], 5.

attributed to the Nazi Protectorate.⁶²

Once again, party-state officials and their Western-Jewish partners intended for their efforts to serve opposing ends. In addition to sharing his excitement for the treasures that he had encountered at the State Jewish Museum, Talisman also sought to use the Precious Legacy exhibit in order to provide a legitimate means for involving more Czech Jews in Jewish life and for providing salaries to those whom he believed had lost their jobs due to antisemitism. Talisman additionally hoped to offer active Jews (and non-Jews active in Jewish affairs) “a lifeline in the most terrible situations.” As he explained, “that kind of outside connection was absolutely vital.” Indeed, Talisman and his associates intended the Precious Legacy exhibit to empower the Czech Jewish community, both organized and informal, to resist the overwhelming pressure that the party-state continued to exert upon it. Neither the state administration nor Talisman could control the outcome of the Precious Legacy. In the end, much like the return of the JDC, it only added tension to domestic Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia.

The Storm that Followed: New Tensions in Jewish-State Relations after *Détente*

The reestablishment of formal ties between the Jewish communities of socialist Europe and organized West Jewry occupied a place of prominence, perhaps disproportionate, in the political contests of 1970s *détente*. Yet the CJRC’s assumption of “observer” status in the World Jewish Congress, the formal reentry of the Joint Distribution Committee into Czechoslovakia, and the Precious Legacy exhibit each articulated during the 1980s, a period of escalating antagonism. In that context, the internal contradictions of this East-West cooperation overshadowed for party-

⁶² On the mythical status of the claim that Nazi Germany had intended to establish a “Museum to the Extinct Races,” see Dirk Rupnow, *Täter, Gedächtnis, Opfer: Das “Jüdische Zentralmuseum” in Prag, 1942-1945* [Perpetrator, memory, victim: the “Central Jewish Museum” in Prague, 1942-1945] (Vienna, Austria: Picus Verlag, 2000).

state officials the benefits that it had once promised and failed to deliver. State administrators thus sought new measures to prevent Western-Jewish organizations and individuals from disrupting their hard-won control over the CJRC and its subordinate communities. Unable to enforce their will upon their Western-Jewish opponents, they turned to the well-trod recourse of purging the Jewish leadership. Galský fell from grace amidst a flurry of accusations and political chicanery, much to the outrage of his Western supporters. (Rudolf Gibian, the president of the Prague community, lost his position as well.) Bohumil Heller and František Kraus took the helm of the CJRC and adopted a more aggressive posture in their contacts with the West, both publicly and behind closed doors. Wracked with fear and bought off with treasure, they nearly drove the Czech-Jewish community into extinction. Only the end of communism provided an opportunity for others to step in.

The Storm that Followed: The Precious Legacy

Though a fantastic success for Project Judaica, the Smithsonian Institute, and Talisman, the Precious Legacy exhibit yielded precious little to the party-state. It received no financial compensation, except for a percentage of the profits associated with the sale of some materials.⁶³ And, just as Talisman had made clear in advance of the exhibit, it did not move Czechoslovakia any closer to attaining most-favored-nation status.⁶⁴ To that end, an official report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained,

As far as the effect of the exhibit in improving Czechoslovak-American relations is concerned, the contemporary situation does not indicate that it will lead to a revitalization

⁶³ See the proposal for the contract in “Uspořádání putovní výstavy” [Organizing the traveling exhibition]; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Informace o průběhu putovní výstavy” [Information about the progression of the traveling exhibit], 4.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mark Talisman.

or improvement of the general atmosphere of bilateral relations.⁶⁵

The ministry sought to mitigate the impression of its failure by noting less impressive achievements, such as the resumption of negotiations with the USA in the cultural and scientific fields. It also pointed to the partial success of exhibit's "anti-fascist" message. The report concluded,

... lending the exhibit brought predominantly positive effects to the Czechoslovak side. Hundreds of thousands of Americans, for the first time, acquired positive information about the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic [and] about its efforts to protect historical relics. The exhibit also strongly refuted the myths about the supposed antisemitism in [Czechoslovakia and] demonstrated the religious freedom [there].⁶⁶

The ministry additionally noted a bump in revenue to Czechoslovakia due to a thirty-percent increase in tourism through the New-York branch of its national travel agency, between 1983 and 1984 alone. Some of those who visited, it presumed, occupied important positions in culture and business.⁶⁷

This profitable increase in tourism, however, created new challenges for the officials responsible for securing the isolation of the Czech Jewish communities. As noted in the same report,

... the exhibit led to the activation of the Jewish community in the USA and to a strengthening of the co-identification of world Jewry. In consequence to the exhibit the contacts between the Jewish community in the USA and the Jewish religious community in [Czechoslovakia] have intensified, which, among other things, even reflected in an increase in the frequency of visits of Jewish representative from the USA to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.⁶⁸

Officials at the Ministry of Culture's Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs understood that they

⁶⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Informace o průběhu putovní výstavy" [Information about the progression of the traveling exhibit], 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

were relatively powerless to stop this trend, particularly because it benefited the economy.⁶⁹ SEA officials and their colleagues at the StB, therefore turned their attention instead to Desider Galský, who had attended each of the ten exhibit openings in North America, and who had cultivated strong friendships—perhaps even a cult of personality—among prominent members of the American Jewish community.

Galský's own actions and attitude, encouraged by Talisman and other supporters, exacerbated the negative light in which state administrators saw him. During his time in the USA, Galský grew too confident in the protection offered by patronage. In December 1984, for example, Galský traveled as a private citizen to attend the Precious Legacy opening in New Orleans.⁷⁰ Czechoslovak Ambassador Stanislav Suja informed the local conveners three times that his country would not be sending an official representative. At Talisman's request, however, Galský ignored the implied order not to speak. He subsequently explained (as paraphrased by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs),

Even though he was aware of the fact that he was in the USA as a private individual, he considered it preferable to step forth and speak, because the other option would have sparked a suspicion that the Czechoslovak offices had blocked his appearance.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs even claimed that their Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Romanian counterparts envied Czechoslovakia's success in this regard and had contacted Talisman about coordinating similar projects with them. Report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Cultural Relations, to the Office [SIC: Secretariat] of Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Office of the President of the Government, "Věc: Záznam z přijetí dr. D. Galského na FMZV OKS" [Re: Memo from the welcoming of Dr. D. Galský at the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Cultural Relations] (17 January 1985), 3. NAČR, ÚPV carton 5, 6a, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO org. 1985.

⁷⁰ Despite the fact that Galský had received an invitation from Talisman, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected his work-visa application. The Ministry of Culture's SEA did not object to issuing him a tourist visa, even though they knew he planned to attend the opening. Its functionaries likely hoped to absolve themselves from responsibility for his actions, while also appeasing Galský's American-Jewish patrons.

⁷¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Věc: Záznam z přijetí dr. D. Galského" [Re: Memo from the welcoming of Dr. D. Galský], 4.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs took no action against Galský. It even permitted him to attend the final Precious Legacy opening in Hartford, Connecticut in June 1985.⁷²

The StB, on the other hand, resented and feared Galský's unique status within the Czech Jewish community, as well as his relationships with Western-Jewish leaders, foreign diplomats, and even with other offices of the party-state. In reporting on his removal from positions of power at the CJRC and the Prague community, the StB's tenth division accused Galský of creating an "illegal [pro-Zionist] parallel structure" at those organizations. "Among other things," the StB noted,

Galský alleges that he has a good relationship with the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose directors appraise him as "the most successful diplomat of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic." He similarly highlights his relationships with the workers of the Office of the President of the Government [of Czechoslovakia]... close to [Prime Minister] Štrougal. In this way, Galský is attempting to create among all of his partner - not only at the CJRC - an feeling of him being an untouchable individual.⁷³

This perception contributed to Galský's political demise, which the StB orchestrated in collaboration with the SEA and his competitors at the CJRC. The state administration hoped that removing Galský from power would disrupt the inroads that Western Jewry had made into the Czech Jewish community through his person. This conflict culminated not with regard to Precious Legacy, however, but in negotiations with the JDC.

The Storm that Followed: The Joint Distribution Committee

The tenth administration of the StB, responsible for eliminating "internal enemies," never supported the reestablishment of direct contacts between the "Joint" and the CJRC. Its agents

⁷² "Zpráva o pobytu ve Spojených státech amerických ve dnech 2.-10. června 85" [Report on the stay in the USA on 2 - 10 June 1985] (n.d.). NAČR, ÚPV carton 5, 6a, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO org. 1985.

⁷³ 10th Administration of the SNB, "Informace" [Information] (stamped 17 December 1986), 2. ABS, X. správa SNB - 759.

still considered the “Joint” to be an arm of Western intelligence. Indeed, despite the JDC’s self-portrayal as apolitical (i.e., non-Zionist), StB agents continued to suspect the organization of covert Zionism. In this way, their perception of the “Joint” mirrored their most basic fears of all citizens of Jewish origin. A tenth-administration report from 1983 explained,

The ideological political orientation of the “Joint” is determined by the fact that it is a tool in the hands of large American capital interests and Zionist circles. Formally, the organization presents itself as non-Zionist, but in reality, however, from the beginning of its existence it has closely cooperated with the Zionist movement. In the past the “Joint” operated in the USSR, where its enemy character was established and its activities here prohibited.⁷⁴ (5)

Since 1981, the report continued, the JDC had sent representatives to Prague on a regular basis. The StB believed, not incorrectly, that the “Joint” hoped to use its aid programs as a cover for revitalizing the Czechoslovak Jewish communities and leading their members to see themselves as ethnically Jewish. It further accused the JDC of working to

create the conditions for the economic independence [of the Czech and Slovak communities] from state subsidies, influence their activities in a pro-Zionist fashion, and secure their dependence upon foreign Zionist organizations.⁷⁵

The StB also worried that the JDC sought to cultivate Jewish-dissident movements. The 1983 report concluded,

Under their patronage are organized groups of young persons of Jewish origin, of avowedly anti-socialist persuasion and demeanor, including signatories of [Charter 77, the dissident manifesto of 1977 which launched an anti-party-state movement in Czechoslovakia].⁷⁶

Thus, immediately after the “Joint” returned to Czechoslovakia, the StB sought its ouster.

To undermine the JDC, however, the StB required support from the offices that managed

⁷⁴ 10th administration of the StB, “Informace o současném působení zahraničních sionistických organizací proti ČSSR” [Information about the contemporary operations of foreign Zionists organizations against the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] (delivered, 17 November 1983), 5

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

ecclesiastical affairs. Until 1985, they enjoyed significant influence in those quarters, but still not enough to dissuade them from pursuing the benefits that partnership with the West seemed to offer. Upon receiving the aforementioned report from the StB in 1983, the SEA (both at the Ministry of Culture and at the Office of the President) responded with requests for more detailed information. Their functionaries did not trust the general, paranoid accusations of the StB and, most likely, wanted to avoid creating a conflict with the West in the months before the premier of the Precious Legacy exhibit.⁷⁷

In 1985, after Precious Legacy's tour of the USA had concluded, the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the President's Office took its first steps towards mitigating the renewed influence of Western-Jewish organizations upon the CJRC. It focused on the JDC. That organization exceeded the secretariat's expectations in terms of the amount of money that it would transfer to Czechoslovakia. The CJRC received roughly \$90,000 on an annual basis from the JDC, which also sent \$40,000 per year to its Slovak counterpart. The fact that the "Joint" insisted upon providing aid to Holocaust survivors, regardless of whether or not they belonged to a Jewish community upset state administrators, even though it had been part of the original agreement from 1981.⁷⁸ The practice amounted to an acknowledgement of the ethnic component of Jewish identification, and, inasmuch, contravened party-state ideology. The secretariat thus ruled that

The receipt of financial aid should be either restricted or completely canceled. It supports the Zionist ideology and it is not permitted to the other churches. The finances should be

⁷⁷ Vladimír Janků, "Některé konkrétní poznámky k informaci o sionismu" [Some concrete notes on the information about Zionism] (20 December 1983); and Mikulová, "For s. Janků" [For Comrade Janků] (1983). NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, církv. odbor RŽNO složka Svět. žid. kongres, 1983-1984.

⁷⁸ "Záznam" [Memo] (n.d., 1985), 1. NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO org. 1985; for the original negotiations, see Radvanský, "Zápis ze schůze představenstva RŽNO" [Minutes from the meeting of the CJRC Presidium], 10.

accepted for repairing Jewish cemeteries, reconstructing Jewish memorials, etc. Why should the believers of the Jewish Religious Community be rewarded?⁷⁹

SEA officials found themselves in a difficult position. On the one hand, they wanted to maintain their relationship with the JDC and to continue receiving its funds. They also hoped to avoid inciting negative propaganda in the West. On the other hand, they hoped to prevent the distribution of those funds to Jewish individuals, which the “Joint” had made a priority.

SEA officials, thus, sought to resolve the matter internally. Their strategy turned on removing Galský from power and replacing him with a more pliant individual who lacked Western support. In addition to the charges discussed above, the SEA also accused Galský of trying to make *kosher* food more accessible to foreigners, maintaining a JDC-sponsored slush fund of \$10,000, and receiving a monthly bonus 400 *tuzex*-crowns.⁸⁰ It arranged for Galský to resign from the CJRC presidency and secured permission from the Communist Party and the government to have Bohumil Heller, a vice-president of the CJRC since the last purge, take his place at elections to be held on 1 December 1985.⁸¹

The removal of Galský from the CJRC presidency incited protests from the JDC and also from foreign diplomats in Prague. (Galský had been a regular guest of the U.S. Embassy, particularly under ambassador Jack F. Matlock, 1981-1983.⁸²) Diane Rosenbaum, the JDC representative to Czechoslovakia, threatened to withhold funds from the new leadership, whom she and her superiors did not trust. This forced the SEA and the CJRC to negotiate an

⁷⁹ “Záznam” [Memo] (n.d., 1985), 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸¹ Milan Klusák, “Předchozí státní souhlas k volbě předsedy Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR” [Prior state permission for the election of the president of the CJRC] (1985). NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO org. 1985; and V. Bejda, “Udělení předchozího státního souhlasu k volbě předsedy Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR” [Conferring prior state permission for the election of the president of the CJRC] (7 November 1985). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/4, carton 153/85, point 18.

⁸² Interview with Mark Talisman.

accommodation. In keeping with the laws concerning the financing of religious institutions, the CJRC would no longer seek to meet the social-welfare needs of its members. That responsibility fell to the state. In order to appease the JDC (and also to avoid upsetting community members), however, the SEA conceded to allow Galský to receive “Joint” funds as a private citizen and to distribute them to individuals, in accordance with the JDC’s wishes. The latter organization agreed to send funds allocated for personnel, infrastructural, and ritual needs directly to the CJRC’s foreign-currency account.⁸³

In an ironic twist, not lost on the StB, the new arrangement vested Galský with even greater power. He now enjoyed an unmediated relationship with the “Joint” and control over tens of thousands of dollars. The agents of the StB’s tenth division accused him of trying to amass as much capital as possible from Zionist organizations and using it

to influence the activities of individual believers and elected organs of the Jewish Religious Community, up to the point of directly undermining the position of the contemporary leader of the CJRC.⁸⁴

The StB, therefore, arranged for Heller to remove Galský from his remaining professional and elected positions at the CJRC and the Prague community. Upon learning of Galský’s ouster from the presidency, the Prague community appointed him to their representation to the CJRC. In response and at the StB’s orders, Heller accused his Galský of violating state law, in his capacity as a community functionary, by dispensing social-welfare aid to community members. Galský’s

⁸³ 10th Administration of the SNB, “Informace” [Information], 1-3; František Kraus, “Zápis ze zasedání presidia, konané dne 16.10.1986” [Minutes from the meeting of the presidents council (*presidia*) on 16 October 1986], 2. NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, církv. odbor RŽNO, 1986; and Míková, “Zápis z jednání Sekretariátu pro věci církevní MK ČSR a představiteli JOINTu, které se uskutečnilo dne 24. září 1986 na MK ČSR” [Minutes from the meeting for the SEA at the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Socialist Republic and representatives of the “Joint,” which took place on 24 September 1986] (1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO 1987, zahr. návštěvy.

⁸⁴ 10th Administration of the SNB, “Informace” [Information], 4.

work with the JDC and his political influence within the CJRC thus ended at a meeting of CJRC presidium on 17 December 1986—one year after he left the presidency.⁸⁵ The “Joint” sent him an honorarium of \$1,200 for his troubles.⁸⁶

The relationship between the CJRC and the JDC only worsened after this point. Bohumil Heller and his associates effectively stopped distributing financial support to needy members of the community, including many Holocaust survivors. The “Joint,” nonetheless, continued to contribute tens of thousands of dollars annually to the CJRC. Though JDC representatives protested against Heller’s failure to follow their directives and would eventually characterize the JDC’s relationship with the CJRC as the worst in Europe, they did not want to forego the inroads that they had made into Czechoslovakia. Heller complained in kind that the CJRC’s boldness had damaged the trust that had only recently redeveloped between the CJRC and the state administration.⁸⁷ In order to rebuild that relationship and in revenge, the state blocked the JDC’s entry-visa applications from late-1987 through mid-1988.⁸⁸ The JDC, in turn, lowered its

⁸⁵ Ibid., 3-5; and František Kraus, “Zápis ze schůze představenstva RŽNO konané 17.12.1986 v zas. síni ŽNO” [Minutes from the meeting of the CJRC presidium on 17 December 1986 in the meeting hall of the Jewish community] (1986). NAČR, SPVC box 231.

⁸⁶ Letter from Diane Rosenbaum to Desider Galský (24 March 1986), in folder labeled “Desider Galský.” NAČR, SPVC box 233.

⁸⁷ František Kraus, “Zápis z porady, konané dne 3.11.1987 na Radě židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR mezi zástupci Jointu a RŽNO.” [Meeting from the discussion on 3 November 1987 at the CJRC between representatives from the JDC and the CJRC] (1987), 2. NAČR, ÚPV-F carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, Evr. Světový žid. kongres.

The JDC insisted in vain that the CJRC distribute the vast majority of their funds to Holocaust survivors. František Kraus, “Zápis z porady předsedy RŽNO Bohumila Hellera a sekretáře RŽNO Františka Krause se zástupkyní Jointu pí. D. Rosenbaumovou dne 10.II.1987 v 10 hodin.” [Minutes from the meeting of CJRC president Bohumil Heller and CJRC secretary František Kraus with the representative of the “Joint,” Ms. D. Rosenbaum, on 10 February 1987 at 10:00am] (1987). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO 1987; letter from Ralph Goldman to Bohumil Heller (5 May 1987). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO 1987, zahr. návštěvy; and “Zápis v poradě, konané dne 10.6.1987” [Report from the meeting on 10 June 1987] (1987). NAČR, SPVC box 236.

⁸⁸ Z. Kest, “Záznam o rozhovoru” [Memorandum about a meeting] (5 November 1987). NAČR,

allocation to Czechoslovakia in 1989, citing the legitimate excuse that it had to meet additional expenses in association with an increase in emigration of Jews from USSR.⁸⁹

At the 17 December meeting, Heller closed the CJRC's social-welfare department, in compliance with the law prohibiting churches from engaging in charity work. He assured those assembled that the organization would continue to use JDC funds to make infrastructural improvements and to remunerate its functionaries and employees. Heller also promised that the president's council (*prezidium*) would evaluate applications for financial aid on a case-by-case basis and dispense funds for "necessary charity needs."⁹⁰ On 13 April 1987, he and CJRC secretary František Kafka informed the government that they had reduced the number of aid recipients from four-hundred to thirty-nine. They promised further reductions.⁹¹ Later that month, the two explained to the SEA that they had reallocated the funds that the JDC had provided for the *kosher* cafeteria to pay functionary and employee salaries.⁹² When Heller spoke to the JDC, he blamed that decision on a budget shortfall due to shifting exchange rates.⁹³ Based

ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, církv odbor, RŽNO Evr. Světový žid. kongres 1987; and František Kraus, "Zápis o telefonickém rozhovoru s p. Michaelem Schneiderem, vicepresidentem Jointu v USA dne 7.4.88 v 16 hodin" [Minutes of a telephone conversation with Mr. Michael Schneider, vice-president of the "Joint" in the USA on 7 April 1988] (1988). NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, církv. odbor RŽNO koresp.

⁸⁹ M. Merglová, "Zápis ze zasedání presidia RŽNO konaného dne 4. května 1989" [Minutes from the meeting of the president's council of the CJRC on 4 May 1989] (1989), 8. NAČR, SPVC box 231. For emigration statistics see <<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsources/Immigration/FSU.html>> (17 July 2014).

⁹⁰ Kraus, "Zápis ze schůze představenstva RŽNO konané 17.12.1986" [Minutes from the meeting of the CJRC presidium on 17 December 1986], 2.

⁹¹ Letter from Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to the Presidium of the Federal Government of Czechoslovakia, "Věc: snížení tvrdosti k podporám v TK boněch" [Re: reducing the heavy-handedness of support in *tuzex*-crowns] (13 April 1987). NAČR, ÚPV-F carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, Evr. Světový žid. kongres.

⁹² Letter from Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to Dr. Nimeřická (11 May 1987). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO 1987 - činnost.

⁹³ Kraus, "Zápis z porady, konané dne 3.11.1987" [Meeting from the discussion on 3 November 1987], 2.

upon the venal conduct of the Prague Jewish leadership in connection with the for-profit sale of Jewish cemeteries and gravestones during this very period, however, it would not be outrageous to attribute the reallocation of JDC funds, at least in part, to greed.

In permitting members of the Jewish leadership to benefit personally from contact with the JDC, the SEA and the StB used the JDC's money to buy themselves control over the CJRC and its subordinate communities. It also helped them to develop a network of high-ranking informers therein. When officials determined that they no longer considered a particular Jewish official useful, they could easily dispose of him or her. For example, in the midst of orchestrating the mid-1980s coup at the CJRC, the tenth administration of the StB concluded that "The current president of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, Rudolf Gibián, appears too weak for the scrupulous implementation of state ecclesiastical politics."⁹⁴ One and a half years later, Gibian lost his position at the community, when a number of reports surfaced, implicating him in the theft of Jewish gravestones at the active cemetery in Prague.⁹⁵ I do not doubt his guilt. Yet this does not preclude me from also suspecting that StB agents arranged for his downfall to affect a leadership change. Aware of Gibian's unscrupulous practices, the StB may have sent various agents to approach him with offers to purchase gravestones. They may even have brought the affair to the attention of members of the Jewish community.

The increase in the distribution of financial aid to Jewish community members and citizens of Jewish origin also drove the StB to seek an intensification of its program for registering citizens of Jewish origin, Operation Spider. In addition to establishing a sub-program

⁹⁴ 10th administration of the SNB, "Současná operativní situace v problematice sionismu a vytýčení hlavních úkolů do dalšího období" [The current operational situation with regard to the Zionism problematic a demarcation of the main tasks for the coming period] (stamped 13 January 1987), 4. ABS, X. správa SNB, 760.

⁹⁵ See Chapter Six. See also a collection of reports from August through October 1988 in NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, unsorted, církv. odbor RŽNO 1988 - činnost.

for tracking all aid recipients called Spider-Support (*pavouk-podpora*), the StB also launched Operation Joint, in which its agents attempted to undermine and compromise the entire system of legal aid distribution. StB agents looked with particular suspicion on the allocation of JDC funds to members of the younger generation, a number of whom received compensation and discounted meals at the *kosher* cafeteria in exchange for helping to meet the necessary quorum of ten adult males for conducting Orthodox religious services. The StB had accurate information which suggested that many of the active youths (a category which included individuals in their thirties) moved in dissident circles. Its agents, thus, set the task before themselves to

focus on uncovering groups of Jewish youths who meet outside of the Jewish Religious Community and create the conditions for [instituting] operations of influence to limit their activities.⁹⁶

The StB dedicated a separate program for disrupting those activities and associations, which it named Operation Generation.⁹⁷

StB agents believed themselves to be at a cultural and financial disadvantage to Western-Jewish organizations in struggle for the identification and loyalties of citizens of Jewish origin. They complained, without irony, that the JDC sought to compile lists of Soviet-Bloc Jews.⁹⁸ Whereas, however, StB agents considered their own operations to be defensive, they accused their competitors of attempting to intervene into the domestic affairs of Czechoslovakia and to undermine socialism. Hyperbolic though these claims may have been, they reflected the truth that Western-Jewish organizations endeavored to use all of means at their disposal to maintain

⁹⁶ 10th administration of the SNB, “Metodický pokyn k zajištění úkolů v problematice sionismu” [Methodical instructions for securing the objectives in the Zionism problematic] (stamped 4 June 1986), 7.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 5-7; and O. Koutkek, “Akce PAVOUK: Evidence osob židovského původu Státní bezpečností v období normalizace” [Operation Spider: the catalogue of persons of Jewish origin of the StB during the period of normalization] (n.d.). Unpublished, archive of the author.

⁹⁸ 10th administration of the SNB, “Metodický pokyn k zajištění úkolů” [Methodical instructions for securing the objectives], 3.

ties of influence with the Jews of socialist Europe. They worked to mitigate assimilation, to foster feelings of international ethnic solidarity, to stop the state persecution of Jews, and offer the option of emigration.

StB agents never welcomed the East-West ties that developed during *détente*. Unlike their counterparts at the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose priorities included improving relations with the USA, the StB perceived only risks in facilitating the re-penetration of the domestic Jewish communities by foreigners. The Precious-Legacy and JDC experiments failed to yield any substantial benefits to the state and, indeed, exacerbated the challenges that administrators faced in managing the Jewish communities. After 1985, the SEA, the StB, the Communist Party, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs united to reverse this trend. They enlisted the help of compromised CJRC leaders to do so. Whereas, however, administrators marginalized the “Joint” and stopped circulating the exhibit, they encouraged the CJRC to intensify its participation at World Jewish Congress events. Not only did those meetings offer a platform for propagandizing and score-settling, but they also represented the only arena wherein CJRC representatives could disrupt, challenge, and influence Western-Jewish and Israeli politics.

The Storm that Followed: The World/European Jewish Congress

The entire party-state administration shared the StB’s conspiratorial view of the World Jewish Congress. The aforementioned StB report from 1983 levied similar charges of covert Zionism on the WJC, as it did the JDC:

[The World Jewish Congress] officially distances itself from the World Zionist Organization inasmuch as its activities are directed only towards the deepening of Jewish co-identification and the revitalization of Jewish traditions. In actuality, it is a propagator

of Zionist ideas, just as they are formulated by the World Zionist organization.⁹⁹

During the 1980s, StB agents interpreted all of the activities of organized Western and Israeli Jewry as efforts to fulfill the resolutions of the thirtieth World Zionist Congress of 1982. An StB report from 1986 correctly portrayed that meeting as having “enjoined international Zionist organizations to activate all of the available resources of the Zionist and Jewish movements in the world.”¹⁰⁰ The report’s authors interpreted this as a call to arms against the Soviet Bloc, because it considered Zionism and its proponents, however willfully misunderstood, to be among socialism’s main ideological and political enemies. It therefore mattered little that the resolutions of 1982 barely referenced the countries of the Soviet Bloc directly, with the exception of three concerning Soviet Jews.¹⁰¹

In opposition to the official ideology of the party-state, which considered Judaism to be a legitimate religion, StB agents believe that Jewish nationalism and Zionism lay at the core of modern Jewish identification. (This impression derived, at least in part, from the political activities and publications of organized Western Jewry at the time.) The StB’s 1986 report explains just how its agents believed that organized Western Jewry, and the WJC in particular, sought exploit Zionism in order to undermine Czechoslovakia:

... the activity of individual Zionist [i.e., Jewish] organizations is coordinated and follows the same goal - to created in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic a base of persons who would create pressure from below upon the Czechoslovak state with the intention of changing the position of [Czechoslovakia] on Zionism and the aggressive politics of Israel. This goal is in diametrical opposition to the assimilation of Czechoslovak Jews, the comprehensiveness of which ensures the benefits and humanism

⁹⁹ 10th admin. of the StB, “Informace o současném” [Information about the contemporary operations], 10.

¹⁰⁰ 10th admin. of the SNB, “Metodický pokyn k zajištění úkolů” [Methodical instructions for securing the objectives], 1.

¹⁰¹ “Resolutions of the 30th Zionist Congress with a Summary of the Proceedings and the Composition of the Congress (Jerusalem, Israel: The World Zionist Organization, 1983), 34-35. <<http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=19063>> (13 June 2014).

of the socialist societal order and markedly weakens the potential base of proponents of the ideology of Zionism in [in Czechoslovakia].

In the fight against assimilation of the Jews the WJC is oriented foremost towards Jewish youths [and] their Jewish education at home and at the [Jewish community]. The basic intention of the WJC is to revitalize the exceptionalism of Jewish culture.¹⁰²

The StB raised specific concerns about the organized and independent visits of Western-Jewish youths to Czechoslovakia and their influence upon their domestic counterparts, some of whom, once again, the StB suspected of associating with dissident circles.¹⁰³ The StB circulated these and other reports widely and conducted its own operations to limit the influence of the WJC and its partners on the territory of Czechoslovakia.

The Secretariats for Ecclesiastical Affairs, however, sought to confront the WJC on its own turf, in an increasingly ugly propaganda battle that disrupted the limited collaboration that had emerged during *détente*. In 1985, Bohumil Heller, then a CJRC vice-president and the president of the Jewish community in Ústí nad Labem, explained the CJRC's role in these operations at an electoral meeting of Ústí community,

We understand our participation in [WJC] meetings not only as an opportunity to represent the Jewish religious community in [Czechoslovakia] with dignity, but also to represent our socialist order. It is neither a light nor simple task, because at these meetings we are sometimes exposed to doubled pressure, partly because in the west, especially, we meet by some representatives with a lack of understanding, sometimes with openly hostile positions to our regime, but also because our approach to some international Jewish problems differs radically from western opinions.¹⁰⁴

Heller and CJRC secretary František Kraus put this plan into action at a conference of the European Jewish Congress, in Geneva, in May 1986. The gathering offered Heller an

¹⁰² 10th admin. of the SNB, "Metodický pokyn k zajištění úkolů" [Methodical instructions for securing the objectives], 2.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁴ "Projev br. B. Heller, předsedy ŽNO v Ústí n.L. na výroční a volebné schůzi dne 12.5.1985 v Ústí n.L." [Speech of brother B. Heller, the president of the Jewish Religious Community in Ústí n. L. at the anniversary and electoral meeting on 12 May 1985 in Ústí n. L.] (1985), 3, in folder labeled "Bedřich Heller." NAČR, SPVC box 233.

opportunity to re-introduce himself as the newly elected CJRC president. In Geneva, Heller and Rabbi Mayer attended a working-group on East-West relations. When they discovered that it was to focus entirely on Soviet Jewry, they protested. Mayer suggested that they discuss, instead, how to maintain Jewish religious traditions in socialist Europe. The two left the meeting when they received little support. Heller's speech to the assembly focused on the Middle East. He criticized the State of Israel and its Western supporters and expressed support for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (then, not a mainstream position of Western Jewry). Heller also blamed Western-Jewish and Israeli politicking for compelling the USSR to limit Jewish emigration.¹⁰⁵

Despite holding his tongue, at least in comparison with later performances, Heller won few friends. Indeed, even before he spoke, a good number of Western-Jewish leaders had united in support of Galský. The affair with the JDC had raised concerns in the West regarding the relationship of the new CJRC leadership and the state administration. At first, Heller sought to gain their trust by helping the executive leadership of the EJC to visit Prague. Upon seeking SEA permission for the visit, he explained,

[With the visit] can be rebutted and cleaned up doubts expressed abroad, that our religious community, under the directorship of the new president, is not permitted official contact with foreign guests from Jewish organizations.¹⁰⁶

An executive of the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Office of the President shared

¹⁰⁵ Bohumil Heller and Rabbi Daniel Mayer, "Zpráva ze zasedání Evropského židovského kongresu v Genevě konaného ve dnech 23.-26. května 1986" [Report from the meeting of the European Jewish Congress in Geneva on 23-26 May 1986] (1986), and the attached copy of Heller's speech. NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, cír. odbor RŽNO 1986.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Heller and Kraus to Jelínek, "Věc: zahraniční návštěva" [Re: foreign visit] (21 August 1986). NAČR, SPVC box 236.

Heller's concern for the Western perception of the new CJRC leadership.¹⁰⁷ Before the meeting could occur, however, the relationship between the CJRC and the WJC soured. It would not recover until the shortly before the fall of communism.

On 3 October 1986, the rising president of the European Jewish Congress, Theo Klein, sent a letter of introduction to the congress's constituent communities, in which he outlined his vision for the organization. In the opening paragraph he expressed regret that the Jewish communities of the Soviet Union had not accepted his invitation to join the congress. Under his first priority, the defense of human rights, Klein called for the EJC to "fight for the rights of all Jews in the USSR who would like to emigrate and return to their collective homeland—Israel." Later, he called the Iron Curtain "[a] painful line."¹⁰⁸

The president's council of the CJRC "expressed disagreement with the negative treatise."¹⁰⁹ Heller also sent a copy of the letter to the StB, which devised a plan for how to react.¹¹⁰ Following orders, Heller sent Klein a letter of protest and also issued a public statement through the Czechoslovak News Agency. Heller chided Klein for attempting to intervene into the

¹⁰⁷ The secretariat's executive secretary, Vladimír Janků, did not look favorable upon turning the WJC visit into a political affair. He preferred that the WJC representatives travel as private citizens and that they limit their meetings to matters of religious affairs. The StB intervened to deny a visa to the executive director of the World Jewish Congress, Serge Zwaigenbaum, and offered only a touristic visa to congress president Lionel Kopelowitz. Vladimír Janků, "K cestě představitelů Světového židovského kongresu do ČSSR" [Regarding the trip of the representatives of the WJC to Czechoslovakia] (22 August 1986). NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1986; and 10th admin. of the StB, "Informace" [Information] (stamped 1 September 1986). ABS, X. správa SNB - 759.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Klein to Heller (3 October 1986), 1. NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1986.

¹⁰⁹ František Kraus, "Zápis ze zasedání presidia, konané dne 16.10.1986" [Minutes from the meeting of the president's council on 16 October 1986] (1986), 1. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

¹¹⁰ The StB report claims that it received a copy of the letter from an agent. Having looked through years of similar documents, I am fairly confident that the reference was to Heller. 10th admin. of the StB, "Informace" [Information] (stamped 27 October 1986). ABS, X. správa SNB, 759.

USSR's domestic affairs and suggested that he should have instead made a statement in support of nuclear disarmament and against the U.S. military's "Star Wars" program. Heller explain that Klein's

declaration absolutely failed to respect the social-political difference of the Jewish religious communities in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which are unequivocally bound to the socialist state and its nation.¹¹¹

Heller closed both of his communiqués with a threat to withdraw from the congress. At the StB's insistence, he refused to attend the next meeting in Paris.

Klein responded in a letter to calm the tensions, but to no avail. He assured Heller,

My letter from 3 October should be understood in such a way as to be within the framework of the tenets accepted by the European nations in the East and the West, particularly [as] in the Helsinki Accords, the tenets of non-interference into the internal affairs of each country and the intensification of cooperation without regard to their political and economic systems.¹¹²

The president of the Greek Jewish community, Joseph Lovinger, sent a letter to Heller as well, encouraging him to resume participation in EJC meetings. He portrayed Klein's new platform as apolitical and rational—which it was, but only from a Western-capitalist-Zionist perspective.¹¹³

Indeed, Western-Jewish leaders had long sought to affect change behind the Iron Curtain by insisting that their vision for Jewish integration and Jewish-state relations derived naturally and uniquely from Enlightenment ideologies.

Heller, in turn, responded with a letter in which he explained his perspective on Israeli and Soviet-Jewish affairs. He also warned of the potential negative repercussions for Jews around the world of the WJC's lobbying. With regard to Soviet Jewry, he expressed support for

¹¹¹ "Pro ČTK" [For ČTK] (October 1986); see also letter from Heller to Klein (23 October 1986). NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1986.

¹¹² Letter from Klein to Heller (12 November 1986), in Czech translation. NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1986.

¹¹³ Letter from Joseph Lovinger to Bohumil Heller (8 December 1986). NAČR, SPVC box 236.

family reunification, but objected that,

As far as we know, the majority of Jewish citizens [of the Soviet Union] share the contemporary problems of Soviet society and do not at all consider leaving the homeland. They take themselves correctly to be Russians, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, and other Soviet state-subjects. The request of those, who nonetheless would like to emigrate from the Soviet Union, will be handled individually.¹¹⁴

Heller then cautioned that,

An organized, hysterical campaign does not yield a smooth development of these questions. Experience demonstrates that external pressure that deploys “the Jewish Question” does not bring the desired effect - on the contrary, the opposite [approach] often shows success [emphasis added].¹¹⁵

He suggested, instead, to continue developing East-West relations. Heller lamented the EJC’s vilification of the USSR and accused it of provoking non-Jews to question the purported dual-loyalties of Jewish citizens. He argued,

“It harms the Jews in Europe and America,” he wrote, and I would like to know, for example, how Americans judge the Jews after the Pollard affair [of 1985-1986, in which an American-Jewish intelligence officer plead guilty to passing classified documents to Israeli agents].¹¹⁶

Heller’s response suggested to EJC officials that confrontation would not yield success. Indeed, the StB had ordered Heller to continue his fight in order to sow dissent within the ranks of the congress and, thereby, to disrupt its political program.¹¹⁷

In a further effort to appease Heller and also to secure the progress that the EJC had made in penetrating the Soviet Bloc, Klein arranged for its next gathering to be held in Budapest, in May 1987. (The congress had not met in Eastern Europe since before the Second World War.) As the StB understood, this move reflected Klein’s new strategy of taking “small steps” to

¹¹⁴ Letter from Heller to Klein (24 April 1987), 3. NAČR, SPVC box 236.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁷ 10th admin. of the StB, “Informace” [Information] (stamped 27 October 1098).

convince the CJRC to accept full membership in the congress.¹¹⁸ During this period, the European Jewish Congress also shifted its focus from advocating for Soviet-Jewish emigration to facilitating the revitalization of Jewish culture in the USSR—in part, to prepare future émigrés for their new lives in Israel (and elsewhere).¹¹⁹

The StB encouraged Heller to use the occasion as a pretext for continuing his fight against Western-Jewish politics. The CJRC, thus, accepted the Klein's invitation, on the condition that it be considered guests of the Hungarian Jewish community.¹²⁰ Heller, once again, issued a proclamation in advance of the conference, which he also distributed there. Predictably, he called upon the congress to push for nuclear disarmament and to protest the “star-wars” program. Heller also accused it of dividing East from West by deploying a manufactured “Soviet-Jewish question” as a political weapon.¹²¹ He reiterated many of these claims in his speech before the congress, in which he once again raised the issue of dual-loyalty and Jonathan Pollard. He sought to provoke a response.¹²²

Heller returned from Budapest triumphantly. Just as the StB had hoped, his performance caused an uproar. A representative from Australia even protested his attendance, insisting that

¹¹⁸ 10th admin. of the StB, “Metodický pokyn ke kontrarozvědné ochraně židovské mladé střední generace” [Methodological directives for the counterespionage protection of Jewish youths and the middle generation] (11 June 1987), 2. ABS, X. správa SNB, 761.

¹¹⁹ František Kraus, report on the Budapest conference, 3. NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, unsorted, církJ. odbor, RŽNO 1988, Svět. žid kongres.

¹²⁰ 10th admin. of the StB, “Informace,” (n.d.), pages numbered 24-26. ABS, X. správa SNB, 760.

¹²¹ For the full text of the proclamation and edits (likely by the StB), see “Prohlášení Rady ŘNO v ČSR” [The proclamation of the CJRC] (n.d.), pages numbered 27-28. ABS, X. správa SNB, 760; and “Prohlášení Rady ŘNO v ČSR” [The proclamation of the CJRC] (n.d.); and “Doporučení k změnám v textu Prohlášení Rady ŽNO v ČSR” [Recommendations for changes to the text of the proclamation of the CJRC] (n.d.). NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, církJ. odbor RŽNO, 1986.

¹²² “Připravený projev Bohumila HELLERA, předsedy Rady ŽNO v ČSR” [The speech of Bohumil Heller, CJRC president] (n.d.), numbered pages 29-32. ABS, X. správa SNB, 760.

Galský alone should be authorized to represent the CJRC.¹²³ In response, both Heller and Kraus threatened to withdraw from the meeting and the congress. This led WJC president Edgar Bronfman to intercede on their behalf and order all negative remarks about the CJRC stricken from the meeting minutes. Heller reported that he used the opportunity to expand upon his message to anyone who would listen and to explain the Galský affair. He even claimed to have found sympathetic ears.¹²⁴

The relationship between the CJRC and the EJC worsened after Budapest. Well aware that the latter did not want to lose contact with Czech Jewry, Heller continued to use its meetings for propaganda purposes. He and Kraus persisted in lobbying the EJC to adopt resolutions in support of Soviet policies in areas not related to Jewish affairs.¹²⁵ To encourage compliance, Heller enticed the EJC leadership with the prospect of meetings with Czechoslovak officials, which he indeed sought to arrange.¹²⁶

¹²³ Kraus, report on the Budapest conference, 5. Leibler also raised the Galský matter on a visit to Prague in a meeting with a director at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Jakubík, ministry report on the meeting (4 May 1987). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, Evr. světový žid kongres 1987.

¹²⁴ Kraus, report on the Budapest conference, 5-7.

¹²⁵ Josef Beneš, “Vyhodnocení operativní situace na úseku kontrarozvědné činnosti boje proti sionismu a vytýčení hlavních úkolů pro 2. odbory S StB a 2. odbor III. S SNB Bratislava” [Evaluation of the operational situation in the area of counterintelligence activities in the fight against Zionism and the main task deriving from it for the 2nd departments of the administrations of the StB and the 2 departments of the 3rd administration of the Administration for National Security, Bratislava] (6 October 1987), 5. ABS, X. správa SNB, 761.

¹²⁶ On the attempts to arrange a meeting between EJC representatives and state officials (in chronological order), see M. Mikulková, “Informace” [Information] (14 May 1987). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, Evr. světový žid kongres 1987; Letter from František Kraus to Ms. Mikulková at the SEA of the Office of the President, “Věc: pozvání do Prahy dr. Lionela Copelowitz” [Re: Invitation to Prague of Dr. Lionel Kopelowitz] (28 January 1988). NAČR, SPVC box 236; Letter from Bohumil Heller to Vladimír Janků “Věc: Mírová aktivita RŽNO” [The “peace activities” of the CJRC] (9 March 1988); Letter from Bohumil Heller to Tomáš Trávníček (14 March 1988); Copy of letter from František Kraus to Theo Klein in Czech translation, with cover dated (28 March 1988); M. Mikulková, “Informace pro místopředsedu vlády ČSSR s. Mateje Lúčana” [Information for the Vice President of the

In short time, however, Heller pushed his opponents too far. He scheduled two international “peace actions” for May and June 1988, on either side of an EJC meeting. To the first, he invited representatives from Poland, Slovakia, and both Germanies, with the goal of establishing a political bloc.¹²⁷ Together, they released another proclamation. In it, they evoked the Holocaust in order to protest the nuclear-weapons’ policy of the USA.¹²⁸ Shortly thereafter, Klein and his associates withdrew from the second “peace action” and from scheduled meetings with Czechoslovak officials.¹²⁹ Heller protested,

... this act of yours endangers, even into the future, [Czechoslovakia’s] international relations with the leadership of the European Jewish Congress, which had begun to develop.¹³⁰

Klein responded that he had never agreed to participate in the “peace action” because

The EJC always excluded itself from participating in meetings which center on issues other than those concerned with the Jewish people. Concerning Europe, we made an exceptions for two reasons: to promote the idea of Europe in the West; to promote

Government of (Czechoslovakia), Comrade Matej Lučan] (5 April 1988); Letter from Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to Vladimír Janků “Věc: mírová aktivita RŽNO - květen a červen 1988” [Re: Peace activity of the CJRC - May and June 1988] (11 April 1988); and Letter from Heller and Kraus to Janků (3 June 1988). NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, unsorted, cír. odbor RŽNO, 1988, Mírové akce.

¹²⁷ Letter from Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to Ms. Mikulková, “Věc: Návrh plánu ‘ mírové akce ’” [Re: Proposal for a plan for the “peace initiative”] (9 February 1988); Letter from Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to Vladimír Janků (10 May 1988); and additional documents like copies of speeches, invitation lists, and invitations. NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, unsorted, cír. odbor RŽNO, 1988, Mírové akce.

¹²⁸ “Deklarace přijatá dne 17. května 1988 na prvním setkání mírové akce židovských náboženských obcí Evropy” [Declaration approved on 17 May 1988 at the first meeting of the peace action of the Jewish religious communities of Europe] (17 May 1988). NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, unsorted, cír. odbor RŽNO, 1988, Mírové akce.

¹²⁹ The StB presumed that the congress reneged because the CJRC had invited representatives of the Soviet Anti-Zionist Committee, an organization of ethnic Jews, to participate in the peace program. Although the subject of discussion between the StB and the SEA, the state administration never founded an anti-Zionist committee in Czechoslovakia. It would likely have caused a backlash within the Jewish communities, if not also in certain wider circles.

¹³⁰ Letter from Heller and Kraus to the EJC in Czech translation (n.d.). NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, unsorted, cír. odbor RŽNO, 1988, Mírové akce.

relations between Eastern and Western Europe.¹³¹

The congress, of course, intended for these relations to develop in concert with Western political priorities. Klein, therefore, rebuffed Heller. (Perhaps he also sought to turn the party-state against him.) He explained,

You are right to say that it is not for us to choose the leaders of the Jewish communities. It is along these same lines that we did not intervene into your designation as representative of the Jewish communities of Czechoslovakia [sic: the Czech lands. Slovakia had only limited international representation during these decades].

But this does not keep us from refusing to communicate and meet with those individuals whose attitudes and rhetoric were for a long time strongly opposed to what we consider Jewish solidarity.¹³²

Heller stopped attending EJC meetings after this point. (He had health problems.) CJRC secretary Kraus returned disappointed from a World Jewish Congress meeting in Mexico, in August 1988. Though he appreciated what he perceived to have been greater nuance on matters concerning Soviet-Jewish emigration, he lamented that few people reacted at all to his description of the CJRC's "peace actions" from earlier in the year.¹³³

An Imperfect Storm: Jewish-State Relations in the International Arena

In general, the 1980s witnessed a worsening of the CJRC's relationships with Western-Jewish organizations. Czechoslovak state administrators and their lackeys in the Jewish leadership bear much of the responsibility for this. They had sought this very outcome. Yet these developments also mirrored broader shifts in East-West relations, attributable, at least in part, to a hardening of U.S. policies. Neither the JDC nor the WJC had offered compromise for its own sake, but rather

¹³¹ Letter from Theo Klein to Bohumil Heller (11 July 1988), 1. NAČR, ÚPV carton 8, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO 1988 koresp.

¹³² Ibid. 1.

¹³³ František Kraus, "Cestovní zpráva" [Travel report], sent to Ms. Mikulková (17 October 1988).

to gain a foothold in socialist Europe for bringing change to its Jewish communities. That Czechoslovak officials took a more combative posture than their counterparts in the neighboring states with regard to these initiatives accords as well with their country's general political footing. I additionally ascribe it to the shock (experienced by CJRC and state functionaries alike) of the sudden restoration of Western influence within the domestic Jewish communities, during the mid-1980s, through the Precious Legacy and the reestablishment of direct relations with the "Joint."

This explains, to a degree, the aggressive approach of state administrators during the late 1980s. Yet they also misinterpreted the goals of Project Judaica (the sponsors of the Precious Legacy exhibit), the JDC, and the WJC. Those organizations took advantage of their relationships with Western centers of power and exploited the prominent place of Jewish affairs in Cold-War political culture in order to intervene on behalf of the Central and Eastern European Jewish communities. Although they opposed socialism, they never understood their purview to include toppling regimes. Just as party-state functionaries had cultivated outlandish fantasies of Jewish power and danger at home, so too did they attribute to the organized, Western Jewish community powers, abilities, and desires that it never had. Antisemitism, thus, weakened the party-state and prevented its officials from finding simpler and more mutually beneficial solutions to the so-called "Jewish Question." Indeed, Czechoslovakia, along with Bulgaria, appeared to Western Jewish activists extraordinarily obstinate in comparison with the rest of the Soviet Bloc.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ In 1985 the *American Jewish Yearbook* reported, "Unlike Soviet Jewry, most of the East European Jewish communities had escaped isolation and were developing ties with Jews around the world. However, the isolation of the Bulgarian and Czechoslovakian Jewish communities remained quite pronounced." Leah Shapiro, "Soviet Bloc Nations," *The American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 85 (1985): 251.

Negotium Gestorum: The WJC and the Czechoslovak State in 1989

The World and European Jewish Congresses had lost faith in the CJRC leadership long before December 1988. Only then, however, did they begin pursuing an independent relationship with Czechoslovakia, to the general exclusion of CJRC officials. The WJC still hoped, of course, to establish more robust contacts with Czech and Slovak Jews, to integrate them into a global Jewish community, and to provide them with cultural and political support with which resist assimilation. As Central and Eastern Europeans began, *en masse*, to challenge the legitimacy of their regimes, however, the WJC also sought to position itself as the primary international Jewish organization in the region.

Maram Stern, an EJC executive board member and the head of the WJC's office in Brussels, met with officials at the Czechoslovak Embassy in Belgium on 11 November 1988. On behalf of the WJC leadership he

presented an official offer of the WJC to help Czechoslovakia in [its] period of implementing *perestroika*... The assistance would lie, chiefly, in the economic arena and in deepening connections with the USA and West Germany.¹³⁵

Stern attempted to woo his interlocutors by reminding them that Soviet and East German officials had already held high-level and relatively productive talks with the congress.

Vladimír Janků, the director of the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Office of the President, urged caution:

In accordance with its attempts to penetrate the socialist states, the WJC combines the presentation of various "legitimate requests" of religious, cultural, etc., character on the platforms established in the Helsinki Final Accords... with enticing offers of assistance to this or that socialist country, particularly in the economic arena.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ J. Kroupa, "Světový židovský kongres" [The World Jewish Congress] (8 November 1989), 3. NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. žid. kongres.

¹³⁶ Letter from Vladimír Janků to the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Věc: Nabídka Světového židovského kongresu na spolupráci s ČSSR" [Re: the offer of the WJC to cooperate

Janků, whose primary interest lay in the field of ecclesiastical affairs, portrayed the WJC's overture as yet another phase in its new strategy of taking "small steps" to penetrate the Soviet Bloc, in order to interfere with domestic Jewish affairs. He pointed, instructively, to his own office's heretofore reticent approach to dealing with the WJC.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Communist Party, however, resolved to continue negotiating with the congress. They presided over an economy in crisis and worried about the regional spread of political instability. For them, the potential benefits offered by partnering with the WJC outweighed the risks which it presented in the ecclesiastical sphere. Czechoslovak officials met with WJC representatives in Brussels, the following December, January, and March. At those meetings, Stern attempted to take advantage of his interlocutors' well-known overestimation of the power that Jews wielded in the USA. He even noted that WJC president Edgar Bronfman had the ear of U.S. President Bush.¹³⁷ This well-worn tactic for courting Soviet Bloc officials proved increasingly efficacious as Eastern Europe spiraled into political chaos. Throughout 1989, the WJC reestablished relationships with most of Europe's socialist states.¹³⁸ This led Matěj Lúčan, the First Vice President of Czechoslovakia, to insist to Stern that "... it cannot be anticipated that we will go along the paths of reform of Hungary and Poland."¹³⁹

with Czechoslovakia] (12 December 1988), 2. NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. žid. kongres.

¹³⁷ J. Kroupa, "Světový židovský kongres" [The World Jewish Congress], 3-4.

¹³⁸ Šeřík, "Záznam pro generálního tajemníka ÚV KSČ s. M. Jakeš" [Memo for the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Comrade M. Jakeš] (1 November 1989), 1. NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. žid. kongres.

¹³⁹ M. Kunst, "Záznam z jednání prvního místopředsedy vlády ČSSR s. Matěje Lúčana se členem byra Evropského židovského kongresu (CJR) - vedoucím bruselské kanceláře CJE Maranem STERNEM, konaním v Berlíně dne 7.10.1989" [Memo from the meeting of the First Vice President of the Government of Czechoslovakia, Comrade Matěj Lúčan, with the member of the bureau of the European Jewish Congress (EJC) - the director of the Brussels office of the

As months passed, the WJC's confidence grew. In July, it requested meetings with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. Three months later, Bronfman sought an audience with the Czechoslovak President and the General Secretary of its Communist Party.¹⁴⁰ WJC representatives noted their track record of helping Soviet Bloc states to improve their image in the USA. They offered Czechoslovakia assistance in establishing "joint partnerships" and "normalizing Czechoslovak-American economic relations." (The words "most-favored-nation" do not appear in Czechoslovak reports until November.) To demonstrate the WJC's capacity to aid Czechoslovakia, Stern told Lúčan that the USA's economic relationship with Czechoslovakia... is especially influenced by politics."¹⁴¹

In October, WJC officials finally began explaining to their Czechoslovak partners what they expected in exchange for assistance. They raised some concerns about the internal affairs of the Czech Jewish communities, to be addressed below, and asked that Czech and Slovak Jewish youths be permitted to attend gatherings with their peers from other countries. The WJC also urged Czechoslovakia to reestablish diplomatic ties with Israel as a means for improving its standing with the USA. In the case that the country decided to do so, the WJC requested further that it be designated to mediate the attendant negotiations.¹⁴² Edgar Bronfman and the WJC intervened similarly into the relations between East Germany and Israel, beginning in 1985,

CJR, Maram Stern, which occurred in Berlin on 7 October 1989] (1989), 2. NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. žid. kongres.

¹⁴⁰ J. Kroupa, "Světový židovský kongres" [The World Jewish Congress], 4; Idem., "Záznam telefonického rozhovoru" [Memo of a telephone discussion] (31 October 1989). NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. žid. kongres.

¹⁴¹ Kunst, "Záznam z jednání prvního místopředsedy vlády" [Memo from the meeting of the First Vice President of the Government], 2.

¹⁴² Ibid., 1-3.

much to the consternation of other stakeholders in the American-Jewish establishment.¹⁴³

Czechoslovak officials remained at once sober and suspicious in their assessments of the ongoing negotiations with the World Jewish Congress. Diplomatic officers in the USA suggested,

The actual influence of the WJC in deciding and driving processes at highest circle of the USA is indisputable. It is not, however, the only or the deciding actor in that direction. From this perspective it is necessary to reservedly accept the promises to advocate for the political, business, and financial interests of Czechoslovakia, the relaxation of the current limits and restrictions, and the acceptance by leadership circles [emphasis added].¹⁴⁴

The officers counseled their superiors to take advantage of whatever the congress had to offer, but not to rely too heavily upon them to improve Czechoslovak-American relations. Vladimír Janků expressed this idea more forthrightly in what seems to have been a unsolicited report. He wrote,

The WJC is influential and it is necessary to have contact with them... They cannot brake through the barriers to the USA and secure most-favored status (and they know it). Today, the USA gives it as a reward for abandoning the socialist orientation.

In this regard, the WJC is not actually serious and their promises amount to nothing (*jsou dosti na vodě*). It is therefore necessary to approach them with the maximum of sobriety and pragmatism to use the economic and political opportunities that these contacts provide, but, at the same time, to eschew any illusions. Refuse, if necessary, their attempts to intervene into the domestic affairs of the Jewish Religious Community and its leadership.¹⁴⁵

Czechoslovak officials did not agree to negotiate at the highest levels with the WCJ out of

¹⁴³ Angelika Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany: Moral Obligations and Pragmatic Policy* (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁴ J. Černohlávek and B. Králik, “Věc: Pokladová zpráva ke Světovému židovskému kontresu” [Re: background report on the WJC] (25 October 1989), 5. NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. žid. kongres. Despite the saliency of their reports, the diplomatic officers also charged the WJC with promoting Zionism as “a tool of the reactionary forces in the world against us.” This type of rhetoric never disappeared until the fall of the communist regime. *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Vladimír Janků, “Některé poznatky k postavení a roli Světového židovského kongresu, resp. též Evropského kongresu” [Some remarks on the position and role of the World Jewish Congress and the European Congress, as the case may be] (3 November 1989), 1-2. NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. žid. kongres.

nařveté. They did so, rather, out of desperation.

This desperation and respect for Bronfman's standing manifested in the agreement of General Secretary Miloř Jakeř to meet with him and his associates on 13 November 1989, just fifteen days before the regime fell to popular protests. The leaders of the WJC also met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs on that same day. Bronfman reiterated his offers of assistance and made two concrete requests. He asked that the state permit the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities to join the WJC as full members. He also, once again, asked to mediate the reestablishment of diplomatic ties between Israel and Czechoslovakia. Neither the General Secretary nor the minister made any promises to Bronfman.¹⁴⁶ Earlier reports suggested that some in their offices felt that *perestroika* alone would lead to the establishment of more favorable relations with the USA.¹⁴⁷ The communist government fell on 28 November 1989, rendering both possibilities mute.

Conclusion

While the WJC did not rely the CJRC leadership to help in their negotiations with the party-state, it did not exclude them completely from process. The congress still depended upon Frantiřek Kraus to gain accesses to the Jewish community. By mid-year 1989, however, reports had surfaced in the West that an opposition movement had emerged within the community, which sought to revitalize Jewish life Prague. In conversation with First Vice President Lůčan, Maram

¹⁴⁶ I. Voleř, report on the meeting between WJC officials and the Minister of Foreign Affairs (13 November 1989); and J. Kroupa, "Záznam z přijetí prezidenta Světového řidovského kongresu p. Edgara Bronfmana generálním tajemníkem ÚV KSČ M. Jakeřem" [Memo from the reception of the president of the WJC by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, M. Jakeř] (15 November 1989). NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, círř. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. řid. kongres.

¹⁴⁷ "STANOVISKO k nabice Světového a Evropského řidovského kongresu na spolupřáci s ČSSR" [Position on the offer of the World and European Jewish Congress of cooperation with Czechoslovakia] (n.d., post 1988). NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, círř. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. řid. kongres.

Stern gave voice to a popular suspicion that the state administration had undemocratically installed Heller and Kraus at the helm of the CJRC. Lúčan denied the accusation and attempted to portray the Jewish opposition movement as marginal.¹⁴⁸ When WJC officials conveyed Bronfman's request to meet with these "dissidents," the Communist Party declined.¹⁴⁹ In mid-November, he met with them informally, nonetheless, at a Jewish community reception in his honor.¹⁵⁰

The rise of an opposition movement within the Czech Jewish community excited Western-Jewish observers (with some exceptions).¹⁵¹ A number of organizations, media outlets, and individuals expressed even deeper concerns regarding the already embattled CJRC leadership. I address some of the latter's attempts to restore their reputations in the next chapter. One initiative, however, deserves mention here.

On 4 June 1989, František Kraus accompanied three youths from the Czech Jewish community on a trip to New York City to participate in the Israel Day Parade. They rode on a float with peers from Poland and Hungary. Its banner read, "Jewish children from Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary salute the Holiday," and it bore the flags of their home

¹⁴⁸ Kunst, "Záznam z jednání prvního místopředsedy vlády" [Memo from the meeting of the First Vice President of the Government], 1-2.

¹⁴⁹ Šeřík, "Záznam pro generálního tajemníka" [Memo for the General Secretary], 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ František Kraus, "Záznam o průběhu návštěvy pana Edgara Bronfmana, předsedy Světového žkdovského kongresu, která se konala ve dnech 12.-14.11.1989 v Praze" [Memo about the proceeding of the visit of Mr. Edgar Bronfman, the president of the WJC, which took place on 12-14 November 1989 in Prague] (1989). NAČR, ÚPV, carton 9, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO 1989, Svět. žid. kongres.

¹⁵¹ Vladimír Janků, the head of the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Office of the President, reported that Rabbi Arthur Schneier, the president of the Appeal to Conscience Foundation, opposed the movement. Apparently, "at the request of the directorate of the Jewish community he met with the group of young oppositionists, sharply criticized them, and banned them from similar activities." Janků, "Některé poznatky k postavení" [Some remarks on the position], 2.

countries, the USA, and Israel.¹⁵² Ronald Lauder, a philanthropist who supported Jewish cultural life in Eastern Europe and, at the time, also a mayoral candidate, marched in front of the students.¹⁵³ At the time of the parade, the governments of Poland and Hungary had already begun working closely with Western Jewish organizations. The same cannot be said for Czechoslovakia. If the presence of Polish and Hungarian students reflected the successful coming together of East and West towards the end of the Cold War, the participation of the Czech students attested to how low relations between the CJRC and Western Jewry had fallen.

This surprising anecdote reflects the end of significant period in the history of Jewish-state relations in the Czech lands. For better and for worse, international factors always conditioned how the communist state administration understood its relationship, priorities, and obligations with regard to the Jewish minority. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, international considerations came to dominate Jewish-state relations in a number of areas. This meant that neither the Czech Jewish communities nor their party-state minders could actually control the framework in which their interactions occurred and acquired meaning. (Those officials responsible for determining international affairs had little time to spend on the small Jewish minority.) The struggle over the interpretation and implementation of the Helsinki Final Accords, the passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, the rise of the Soviet-Jewry movement in the USA, and Reagan's policies of confrontation put incredible pressure upon domestic Jewish affairs in Czechoslovakia. International players on both sides of the Iron Curtain (but particularly in the West) made pawns out of the very individuals and communities that they purported to protect. This had the effect in the Czech lands of raising the stakes of domestic Jewish

¹⁵² This is my own, approximate translation, based upon a Czech translation in the document cited below.

¹⁵³ Letter from František Kraus to Holub, "Věc: Návštěva skupiny židovské mládeže v USA" [Re: visit of the group of Jewish youths in the USA] (8 June 1989). NAČR, SPVC box 236.

identification and practice. Without defending the party-state or condemning the reasonable demands of Western Jewry, it can still be said that the support offered by the latter to the Czech Jewish communities, in part, confirmed the paranoid, antisemitic fantasies of state administrators. Western Jewish leaders understood this, but believed (justifiably) that inaction would lead to worse ends.

Czechoslovak state administrators found themselves in an equally unenviable position. Even if they had wanted to, they could not abandon the party's longstanding positions on Zionism, Jewish identification, religion, and the relationship of these three phenomena to Western "imperialism." During the liberalizing 1960s, with the possible exception of the years 1968 and 1969, administrators could only reinterpret them more positively. In the two decades that followed, they had to contend with the very real initiatives of organized Western Jewry to influence Jewish-state relations in socialist Europe, backed by the USA, while also appealing to the USA for an improvement in their bilateral relations. Economic and military advantage empowered the West to present its ideologies as apolitical, but for party-state officials they were anything but. Tensions only mounted further when the pretense of *détente* fell away after 1980.

State administrators responded to these challenges predictably by installing a series of more pliant functionaries to head the CJRC and the Prague community. The last cohort, which served from 1986 through 1989, alienated the representatives of organized Western Jewry and mitigated the effects of their interventions in the Czech lands. This came at a price. Jewish cultural and religious life deteriorated in the region from 1975 to 1989. During those years, the Czech Jewish communities struggled with demographic decline, a lack of educational opportunities for younger and new members, and against pressure from the state administration, particularly with regard to the management of Jewish cemeteries. The restoration and subsequent

disruption of Western ties, the purges of Jewish leaders, and the autocratic leadership styles of Heller and Kraus exacerbated these problems. For some years, a considerable amount of Jewish cultural production and experience occurred in the private, informal sector. In time, however, divisions formed within the ranks of the community and on its premises. Young and middle-aged Jews began to demand more of their elder leaders. Conflict exploded in the Prague community in 1989 and only ended because the regime fell that November. The story of the young Jewish activists remains important, nonetheless, because it holds a key to understanding how Czech Jews—and also historians—have told the history of Jewish-state relations in communist Czechoslovakia. It composes the tenth and final chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER TEN

Esther's Revolt: Intra-Communal Strife and New Memories, 1989-1990

Rabbi Daniel Mayer (b. 1957) hoped to run for a seat in the Czechoslovak Parliament in the first post-communist elections, to be held in 1990.¹ He had reason to anticipate success beyond his status as a well-recognized public figure. While the end of communist rule had created new space for expressions of antisemitism, particularly in Slovakia, it also ushered in a period of popular philosemitism and pro-Israel sentiment. Both trends, the “antisemitic” and the “philosemitic” inverted communist discourses on Jews. The former reasserted ideas about Czech and Slovak ethno-national difference, which the party-state and its bureaucracies had officially suppressed (in an attempt to maintain a monopoly over the political uses of antisemitism and to protect Czechoslovakia's image abroad). The latter trend, which predominated, offered non-Jews an opportunity to distance themselves from the fallen regime by aligning with its purported enemies.² It also brought them closer to the rising political elites from dissident circles. In April

¹ On Rabbi Mayer's aborted effort run for Parliament, see Petr Brod, “Židé v Poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], in *Židé v novodobých dějích: Soubor přednášek na FF UK, Uspořádal Václav Veber* [Jews in contemporary history: a collection of lectures at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, arranged by Václav Veber] (Prague, Czech Republic: Karolinium, 1997), 160. For additional information on Rabbi Mayer see the collection of documents in the folder marked, “Daniel Mayer.” NAČR, SPVC box 233.

² I see a consonance here with Czech political discourses about Jews from the roughly 1918 through 1948. Czechoslovak politicians and propagandists attempted to use their country's relatively benevolent treatment of the Jewish minority to portray it as Western and democratic. During the Second World War, Jewish and Czechoslovak actors attempted to accrue political capital by depicting themselves as the first co-victims of Nazism. Finally, from 1956 through 1968, members of the Czechoslovak communist reform movement, and later even the state itself, use Holocaust commemorations (and expressions of support for Israel) to demonstrate their political progress and renunciation of Stalinism. Jan Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks, and the Jews, 1938-48: Beyond Idealization and Condemnation* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London, UK: University of California Press, 2000), 198-216; idem.,

1989, the dissident collective, Charter 77, criticized the state's treatment of the Jewish minority. Dissident-cum-President Václav Havel prioritized reestablishing diplomatic ties with Israel upon assuming office in 1990. He traveled to that country in late April of that same year, on one of his first visits abroad.³ "Philosemitism" manifested in the cultural sphere as well. Between 1992 and 1994, one of the country's most popular musicians, Petr Muk, renamed his band "Shalom."⁴ During this period, the Jewish community in Prague registered an increase in the number of people seeking conversion.⁵ Mayer should have been able to ride this "philosemitic" wave to political success.

Despite all of these advantages, in addition to his charms and cosmopolitan exoticism, Rabbi Mayer withdrew early from the Parliamentary race. Investigations into his past revealed that he had collaborated with the State Security (the StB) during his rabbinical tenure, from 1984 through 1989. This discovery also led to his dismissal from employment within the Jewish

"Negotiating Czechoslovakia: The Challenges of Jewish Citizenship in a Multiethnic Nation-State," in *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry*, eds. Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman (Oxford, UK and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 103-19; Martin J. Wein, "*A Slavic Jerusalem: An Intimate History of Czechs and Jews* (in process). I am grateful to Elana Thurston-Milgrom for reminding me of the importance of this tradition.

³ Livia Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman (Baltimore, MD and London, UK: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 190-93. On Havel's attitude towards Jews, see James Kirchick, "Havel Was Friend of Israel and Jews: Czech Playwright-Turned-President Led Region to Right Path," *The Jewish Daily Forward* (20 December 2001). <<http://forward.com/articles/148247/havel-was-friend-of-israel-and-jews>> (23 June 2014).

⁴ "Shalom," *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí* [Czech music dictionary of people and institutions] (Brno, Czech Republic: The Center for Musical Lexography at the Institute for Musical Sciences at the Philosophical Faculty of Masaryk University). <http://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php?option=com_mdictionary&action=record_detail&id=1000486> (23 June 2014).

⁵ Personal communication with Rabbi Karol Sidon and personal observation at the Jewish community from 2000-2004. See also Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ and London, UK: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 161 and 165-68.

community, which chose to render itself rabbi-less, rather than to continue its formal association an erstwhile informer. Desider Galský, the newly (re-)elected president of the CJRC, attempted to find Mayer work instructing children.⁶ Shortly thereafter, Mayer relocated with his family to Israel, where he has lived since.

Why did Rabbi Mayer believe that he could run for Parliament, given his past? Some of his friends and allies had even attempted to dissuade him from doing so, to avoid making his earlier conduct and relationship with the state administration the subject of popular debate.⁷ I attribute Mayer's decision, at least in part, to his conviction that he had acted with integrity during his years as rabbi. Did Rabbi Mayer's relationship with the state administration differ in fundamentally from those of his predecessors, Rabbis Gustav Sicher and Richard Feder, whom the members of the Czech Jewish communities continued to venerate after 1989, just as they had before? (All three, according to law, had signed pledges of loyalty to the party-state.) Should Mayer, instead, have chosen the path of his would-be predecessor Erwin (a.k.a. Thomas) Salamon who refused to work with the post-1968 regime and, thus, left his community without a rabbi? What led the Jewish communities to reject the man who had resumed instructing their children, protected some cemeteries, and who had, as I will show, aligned with oppositionist movements within the community, in 1989, to demand improvements to Jewish life? What had changed?

I pose these questions rhetorically, of course, but also sincerely. Rabbi Mayer's professional conduct strikes me as one of distinction among Czech Jewish leaders during the last decade of communist rule. His installation marked the end of a fourteen-year period in which the Jewish community lacked a rabbi. That absence, unique within the Soviet-Bloc, contributed to

⁶ Jacob Labendz, interview with Mark Talisman (15 August 2010).

⁷ Ibid. Talisman recalled attempting to dissuade Mayer from running because of his past.

the religious and cultural decline of the Czech communities, which already suffered demographic challenges, due to the Holocaust and emigration. The last wave of emigration followed the Soviet-led invasion of 1968, and robbed the community of many of its active youths. Then, in 1975, the state installed new leaders at the helms of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands (CJRC) and the Prague community. Whereas their predecessors had worked with administrators to expand the opportunities for participating in Jewish life and had established contacts with foreign Jewish centers, the latter acceded to the demands of the “normalizing” state to limit Jewish activity and to adopt a more confrontational approach towards organized Western Jewry. Another round of purges followed in 1986, which brought Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to power. The two collaborated even more forthrightly in the designs of those administrators who sought the eventual dissolution of the Czech Jewish communities. Facing these challenges and confronted with StB agents, Rabbi Mayer not only achieved much, but he also took relatively bold stands against the CJRC leadership.

In 1989, internal conflict divided the small Jewish community in Prague. It ended prematurely with the collapse of communism in late November of that same year. In his capacity as the only rabbi in Czechoslovakia, Rabbi Mayer offered his careful support to a cohort of primarily young and middle-aged community members who opposed the inaction of Heller, Kraus, and their associates. They even called for the Prague Jewish Community and the CJRC to vest Mayer with greater powers.⁸ Many of this cohort’s most prominent members rose to official and informal positions of influence in the post-1989 community. Their subsequent, *de facto* renunciation of Rabbi Mayer reflected less a lack of gratitude than a considerable shift in the

⁸ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 38.

politics of memory at the Czech Jewish communities. It mirrored broader changes in Czech society.

The Czech-Jewish Community in the 1980s

As of December 1985, the combined membership of the Czech Jewish communities had sunk to roughly 2,200 people, of whom about 1,250 belonged to the Prague community. This represented a twelve-percent decline in only five years.⁹ During that time, the Prague community lost 117 members and gained only sixty-one. The minutes of a May 1985 community meeting concluded, “This unbearable trend will surely continue because our membership is aging according to necessity and there are still few youths.”¹⁰ These figures do not account for all citizens of Jewish origin. They may not even include the entire membership of the Czech Jewish communities. In 1984, the CJRC and its Slovak counterpart reported to state officials a combined membership of 5,500.¹¹ (The Slovak communities numbered no more than 3,000 in 1970 and, since that year,

⁹ “Církevněpolitické zabezpečení sjezdu delegátů židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR” [The ecclesiastical-political safeguards for the congress of delegates of the CJRC] (n.d., before 1 December 1985), 1. NAČR, ÚPV carton 5,6a, unsorted, církv odbor, RŽNO org 1985.

¹⁰ Zdeněk Taussig, “Zápis ze schůze Reprezentace Židovské náboženské obce v Praze, konané dne 22. května 1985 v Praze 1, Maislova ul.č.18” [Minutes from the meeting of the representation of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague on 22 May 1985 in Prague 1, 18 Maislova Street] (May 1985), 3-4. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

¹¹ These figures should be taken only as relative guides for thinking about demographic changes within the Czech Jewish communities. Government and state officials reported the following statistics to the Presidium of the Communist Party in 1985. There had been 15,514 Czechoslovak citizens of the Jewish religion in 1950, 7,600 in 1977, and 5,500 in 1984. This corresponded to 0.15%, 0.05%, and 0.03% of the population. As the Slovak Jewish communities had fewer than 3,000 members, they cannot account for the discrepancy between the 2,200 and 5,500 figures. I suggest that one of two possibilities or a combination of both led to the higher figures. The lower figures may not have included a count of the members of the Czech synagogue congregations that were subordinate to the full communities whose members were counted. Alternatively, the CJRC may have intentionally overstated the size of its membership to both the state administration and organized Western Jewry. This would have increased the amount of funding that they received from both sources and also helped to protect failing communities from being

had declined in size alongside the Czech communities.) The American Jewish Year Book reported similar numbers in 1987.¹² Three years later, it relayed anecdotal data from Prague which suggested there may have been up to 10,000 additional citizens of Jewish origin living in Czechoslovakia, who did not belong to the Jewish communities.¹³ The StB counted only 9,300 citizens of Jewish origin in 1988, but, as per the previous chapter, they experienced tremendous difficulties in trying to identify them all.

These demographic challenges led community leaders to focus much of their attention, at least at meetings, on how to attract and retain younger members. The Prague community continued to hold special holiday celebrations for children through 1989.¹⁴ The StB, in turn, complained that the community used bribery to entice children to embrace religion.¹⁵ Only once, however, on *Simchat Torah* 1986, did officials from the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs (SEA, *Sekretariat pro věci církevní*) temporarily cancel a children's holiday celebration. They did so to punish Rabbi Mayer for holding unapproved (Torah reading?) rehearsals with children

dissolved by the state. "Tabulka č. 1: Přehled o náboženské příslušnosti podle sčítání lidu provedeného Státním úřadem statistickým ke dni 1.3.1950 a údaje církví o počtu věřících k 31.12.1977 a k 30.10.1984" [Table no. 1: Overview of religious affiliation according to the census carried out by the State Office of Statistics on 1 March 1950, and the data from churches about the count of believers on 31 December 1977 and 30 October 1984], in J. Fojtík and M. Lúčan, "Zpráva o plnění dlouhodobého postupu v oblasti církevní politiky, současná situace a další úkoly v této oblasti" [Report on the fulfillment of the long-term approach in the area of ecclesiastical politics, the contemporary situation and other responsibilities in this area] (3 June 1985). NAČR, KSČ-ÚV-02/1, archival unit P133/85, point 16. On the Slovak communities, see S. Kovačevičová, "Imigračné a emigračné cesty Židov na Slovensku" [The immigration and emigration paths of the Jews in Slovakia], *Slovenské Pohľady*, vol. 107, no. 8 (1991): 77.

¹² Zvi Gitelman, "Eastern Europe," *The American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 87 (1987): 271. It is odd that this publication reported 8,500 Czechoslovak Jews later in the same volume. U.O. Schmelz and Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population, 1984," *The American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 87 (1987): 335.

¹³ Zvi Gitelman, "Eastern Europe," *The American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 90 (1990): 389.

¹⁴ Jewish Religious Community in Prague, "Programové prohlášení, r. 1988-1990" [Program announcement, 1988-1990] (Feb. 1988), 2-3. ŽNOP package 11b.

¹⁵ Beneš, "Vyhodnocení operativní situace" [Evaluation of the operational situation], 3-4.

in his home.¹⁶ He had chosen that location, however, because the National Committee in Prague had not yet approved the community's request from the previous year to offer religious-education courses. This meant that Mayer could not convene the rehearsals on the premises of the community.¹⁷ The latter only received permission to offer courses in late 1987.¹⁸ Indeed, it took years for Rabbi Mayer and Bohumil Heller to convince the SEA to grant their community an exception to the rule that such courses must be taught in school buildings. For a number of reasons this proved impossible for the Prague community.¹⁹ Despite this effort, only between ten and thirteen children attended the rabbi's classes in early 1989.²⁰

The Czech Jewish communities also provided a number of services to their adult members. Most of the larger communities held weekly prayer services on the Sabbath. The Prague community convened in two synagogues and later added additional services on Mondays

¹⁶ See collection of documents in folder labeled, "Dětské oslavy židovských svátků" [The childrens' celebrations of Jewish holidays] (1986). NAČR, SPVC box 233; and Jacob Ari Labendz, Interview with Daniel Mayer, 11 May 2011.

¹⁷ Letter from Bohumil Heller to the Ministry of Culture, "Věc: náboženská výchova dětí židovské pospolitosti" [Re: the religious education of the children of the Jewish community] (15 December 1987). NAČR, SPVC box 234; Rabbi Daniel Mayer, "Informace o jednání na SVC NVP" [Information about a meeting at the SEA of the National Committee in Prague] (27 October 1986). NAČR, SPVC box 233; and Taussig, "Zápis ze schůze Reprezentace Židovské náboženské obce v Praze, konané dne 22. května 1985" [Minutes from the meeting of the representation of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague on 22 May 1985], 1.

¹⁸ Jewish Religious Community in Prague, "Programové prohlášení, r. 1988-1990" [Program announcement, 1988-1990], 3.

¹⁹ Rabbi Mayer anticipated that parents would not want their children to be seen attending Jewish religious courses in public. The Christian churches held their religious-education classes on Saturday in school buildings. The laws associated with the Jewish Sabbath would have made it impossible for the Prague community to follow suit. It therefore would have incurred an incredible expense if it had to pay the full cost for opening a school just for itself. Rabbi Daniel Mayer, "Informace o jednání na SVC NVP" [Information about a meeting at the SEA of the National Committee in Prague], 1; and letter from CJRC to the SEA at the Ministry of Culture (n.d.), in folder labeled, "Dětské oslavy židovských svátků" [The childrens' celebrations of Jewish holidays] (1986). NAČR, SPVC box 233.

²⁰ M. Merglová, "Záznam z besedy, která se konala na ŽNO Praha 1, Maiselova 18, dne 4. května 1989" [Minutes from the discussion that occurred at the Jewish Religious Community in Prague 1, 18 Maiselova Street on 4 May 1989], 3.

and Thursdays.²¹ The CJRC ensured the continuity of this practice by paying quarterly bonuses in *tuzex*-crowns to nearly 140 men in exchange for attending prayers. Most of the community leadership, however, did not join them. The CJRC coordinated the distribution of *kosher* food, ritual items, and limited social-welfare aid throughout the Czech lands. After the mid-1980s, it also managed all of the Czech Jewish cemeteries. The Prague community maintained its *kosher* cafeteria through 1989 and also provided non-monetary aid to its elderly members. Under the supervision of Rabbi Mayer and Cantor Viktor Feuerlicht, the Prague community offered two Sabbath meals per week to five adult students and reserved forty free spaces for youths at the Passover meal.²² At the end of the 1980s, the Prague community established an educational theater troupe for young-persons.²³ Finally, the CJRC leadership devoted a tremendous amount of time and money to “peace activities,” in which they promoted the politics of the Soviet Bloc.

During the 1970s and 1980s, just as in previous decades but for different reasons, much Jewish activity occurred in the private sphere.²⁴ The StB’s harassment of Jewish citizens transformed its agents’ fantasies about Zionist conspiracies into self-fulfilling prophecies. So too did the domineering and collaborative leadership of Heller, Kraus, and others, who sought to avoid upsetting state administrators.²⁵ In response, a small cohort of young people, among them a number of converts, took it upon themselves to explore Jewish culture. Many, but not all,

²¹ Letter from Jan Rott to Rabbi Daniel Mayer (26 February 1989), 2. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

²² Ibid., 1-5; and Jewish Religious Community in Prague, “Programové prohlášení, r. 1988-1990” [Program announcement, 1988-1990], 1-6.

²³ Jacob Ari Labendz, Interview with Vida Neuwirthová (Summer 2009).

²⁴ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 37-38.

²⁵ On the atmosphere at the Jewish community in Prague see Merglová, “Záznam z besedy” [Minutes from the discussion], 4. Jan Rott wrote even more critically about the “noisy, disadvantageous, exclamations of our representatives.” Based on the testimony of others, I am sure that he had František Kraus in mind. Letter from Rott to Mayer, 2.

embraced a more content-driven approach to Judaism than the members of the youth cohorts of the 1960s, discussed previous chapters, most of whom never cultivated “thick” Jewish identities.²⁶ To be clear, however, the group of people who engaged in Jewish activities in the private sphere during the 1970s and 1980s included individuals from an array of generational cohorts. It would be most proper to think about them as belonging to overlapping social, cultural, and demographic circles. Significantly, their informal and often culturally-focused activities offered women more opportunities to engage prominently in Jewish life.

What the members of this cohort could not learn from Rabbi Mayer and Cantor Feuerlicht, they taught themselves. Some studied Hebrew at the language academy in Prague, until it ceased offering such courses in 1983, after a visit from Soviet experts. The latter found the courses offensive in the wake of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Instruction resumed on a small scale in 1989, but without an arrangement for community members to participate, as there had been in the past.²⁷ During these years, informal Jewish activity took many forms. Various groups gathered in study and song, sometimes on camping trips.²⁸ They circulated, copied, and translated Jewish religious and cultural texts, which were either difficult to find or banned in Czechoslovakia. Norman Patz, an American rabbi, sent copies of books and even a typewriter to Jan Rott, an older member of the informal Jewish circles.²⁹ He and some of his

²⁶ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 1-4. My own oral history project with members of both cohorts confirms her insights.

²⁷ Jacob Ari Labendz, interview with Bedřich Nosek (summer 2009); idem., interview with Helena Klimová, Hana Pavlátová, and Ana Sterecová (17 July 2011).; and letter from Leo Pavlát to Heller (22 March 1989), 1. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

²⁸ Jacob Ari Labendz, interview with Leo Pavlát (2 June 2009); and idem, interview with Karol Sidon (30 June 2009).

²⁹ Rabbi Norman Patz, “Rabín N. Patz K Janu Rottovi” [Rabbi N. Patz about Jan Rott], *Hatikva*, no. 6 (2000). <http://zlu.cz/stare_novin/hatikva/hatikva06.html> (18 June 2014). Rabbi Patz has spoken with me about his relationship with Rott on many occasions. In 1987, Rott asked the Jewish Community in Prague to borrow a *Torah* scroll for study purposes. His request seems to

associates, Leo Pavlát, Karol Sidon, and Jiří Daníček, produced exceptional works of Jewish *samizdat*.³⁰ One circle of friends formed a choir, in 1980, called *Mišpacha*, or “family.” It performed Jewish songs at the Festival of Spiritual Music. Even before the state recognized *Mišpacha* as an official music group in 1989, the choir had a relationship with the Prague community.³¹ On 12 November 1989, *Mišpacha* performed for Edgar Bronfman, the president of the World Jewish Congress at the Prague community.³² Times had changed.

This brief story about *Mišpacha* points to the impossibility of drawing a clear line between the formal (i.e., communal) and informal spheres of Jewish activity during the 1980s. The institutional leadership of the CJRC and the Prague community came to refer pejoratively to one loose cohort of informal Jewish activists as the “young intellectuals.” (This appellation echoed the concern of StB agents with intellectuals of Jewish origin, whom they thought presented one of the worst domestic threats in their war on Zionism.) Many of the “young intellectuals” held membership in the community and therefore drew the ire of those leaders who sought to limit the scope of its activities and appease state administrators. The “young intellectuals” attended holiday celebrations and dined in the *kosher* cafeteria. Some even counted among the few who received payment and free meals in exchange for attending services. The

have been declined. Letter from Jan Rott to the Jewish Religious Community in Prague (5 February 1987). ŽNOP package 11b.

³⁰ Labendz, interviews with Pavlát and Sidon. Copies of many *samizdat* volumes are available in the library of the Jewish Museum in Prague and in Pavlát’s private collection. Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 37-38. On Czechoslovak *samizdat*, see Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, the Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 97-109.

³¹ Labendz, interview with Klimová, Pavlátová, and Sterecová. See also letter from Andrej Ernyei to Rabbi Daniel Mayer (14 June 1988). ŽNOP package 11b.

³² František Kraus, “Záznam o průběhu návštěvy pana Edgara Bronfmana, předsedy Světového židovského kongresu, která se konala ve dnech 12-14.11.1989 v Praze” [Memo on the proceedings of the visit of Mr. Edgar Bronfman, the president of the WJC, on 12-14 November 1989 in Prague] (1989): 1. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

“young intellectuals” crossed paths with dissident circles in Prague, as their foray into *samizdat* literature suggests. Yet it would be inappropriate to refer to them as a coherent dissident movement, at least until the early months of 1989. Before that point, if they indeed voiced disapproval with the Jewish establishment, they did so in the good company of many trusted community functionaries and officials. I turn now to the fracturing of the Jewish communities from within, between 1985 and 1989.

Challenges from within the Communities after 1985

Ten years after the 1975 purge of the Jewish leadership, prominent community members began voicing opposition to the direction taken by the new leaders. This reflected in the 1985 protest of Mr. Róna, a member of the Prague community’s representation to the CJRC. On the occasion of new elections, Róna spoke at length to criticize the activities and orientation of his community. He perceived it to have abandoned its primary mission to serve and support the practice of Judaism as a religion and to secure the perpetuation of traditional Jewish religious culture in Prague and throughout the Czech lands. He further accused the CJRC leadership of rewarding community functionaries too handsomely with funds donated by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and of a lack of transparency with regard to foreign donations. Róna pointed to the relatively high standard of living in Czechoslovakia, which made such payments, in his opinion, unnecessary. He portrayed the leadership as greedier still, in light of his impression that the JDC raised most of its funds from middle-class, American Jews, with financial needs of their own. Róna took particular aim at the president of the Prague community, Rudolf Gibian who allegedly received 900 *tuzex*-crowns as an honorarium for his service as the

lay president of the Prague community.³³

Although the Prague committee voted to convene a panel to respond to Róna's remarks, they bore few fruits. Just the opposite. Church and state united against Róna. CJRC president Galský characterized Róna's charges as "half truths" and defended his own conduct in the handling of the funds provided by the JDC. The Prague community board, in kind, voted to deny Róna membership in its economic-steering committee.³⁴ Josef Junga, the secretary for ecclesiastical affairs of the National Committee in Prague, attended the meeting at which Róna spoke. In response to his comments, the secretary raised bureaucratic challenges to the lease agreement that Róna's son had signed for a studio in one of the buildings at the active Jewish cemetery in Prague.³⁵ Neither Galský nor Junga would allow even salient criticism to damage the fragile and lucrative peace that been reached between community functionaries and state administrators.

Soon after Róna's remarks, Bohumil Heller assumed the presidency of the CJRC and, with František Fuchs, reduced the amount of individual social-welfare aid that the community distributed. This incited further dissent, particularly from members who lived at a geographical remove from Prague.³⁶ The president and vice-president of the synagogue congregation in České Budějovice complained to the CJRC,

³³ Roná, "Diskuzní příspěvek na schůze reprezentace Pražské ŽNO dne 22.5.1985" [Contribution to the discussion at the meeting of the representation of the Prague Jewish Religious Community occurring on 22 May 1985]. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

³⁴ Josef Junga, "Záznam ze schůze představenstva židovská náb. obce v Praze dne 22.5.1985" [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague on 22 May 1985] (23 May 1985), 2. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

³⁵ Taussig, "Zápis ze schůze Reprezentace Židovské náboženské obce v Praze, konané dne 22. května 1985" [Minutes from the meeting of the representation of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague on 22 May 1985], 2.

³⁶ Mikulková, "Informace" [Information] (24 March 1987). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO 1987 - činnost.

We discovered from various members of our synagogue congregation that they are already not receiving the [*tuzex*-crown] support from the [Prague community] that had been promised to them on the basis of the evaluation of the social commission of the [Prague community].

We expect that this happened in association with and on the basis of the speech of Mr. B. Heller from 17 December 1986.

Because this independent action is a deep blow directed against the neediest and the weakest, we protest in the sharpest terms and ask for an explanation of how the CJRC deigned to dispose of the materials, sent to us by the “Joint,” to help coreligionists marked by suffering in concentration camps, powerless, [and] forced to pay for every exceptional service in sickness.³⁷

Rather than responding to this criticism, Heller and Kraus forwarded the letter to the Ministry of Culture and accused its authors of conspiring with the Prague community to cast aspersion upon the new leadership of the CJRC.³⁸ An official at the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs in the Office of the President suggested allowing the CJRC to disburse aid on an extraordinary basis to quell dissent.³⁹ While the tactic may have calmed the protests, the damage to Heller and Kraus’s reputations had been done. It only exacerbated the negative opinions of the CJRC leadership that had emerged, particularly in Prague, with regard to the destruction of the Jewish cemeteries.

In 1987, Heller and Kraus also lost a partner in Rabbi Mayer. The latter had begun his career in the spirit of his predecessors, Rabbis Sicher and Feder. He worked with state administrators and Jewish lay leaders to serve his community. Using rabbinical privilege, Mayer protected the Jewish cemetery in Kolín from destruction and restarted the community’s educational programs. Assuming his post in 1984 meant working with administrators whose applied a restrictive, even hostile, approach to managing the Jewish communities. It also entailed

³⁷ Letter from the Arnold Eisner and the vice-president of the synagogue congregation in České Budějovice to the CJRC (8 March 1987). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, cír. odbor, ŘZNO 1987.

³⁸ Letter from Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to the SEA at the Ministry of Culture, “Věc: protestní dopis synagogálního sboru v Čes. Budějovicích” [Re: the protest letter of the synagogue congregation in České Budějovice] (18 March 1987). NAČR, ÚPV carton 7, unsorted, cír. odbor, ŘZNO 1987.

³⁹ Mikulková, “Informace” [Information] (24 March 1987).

reporting to the StB, an unavoidable compromise which would haunt Mayer after 1989.⁴⁰

Despite this tactical decision to work within the structures of the party-state, Mayer would not bend completely to the wills of Heller and Kraus. He distanced himself from them at the 1987 European Jewish Congress meeting in Budapest, and did not participate in their provocation of the Western delegates.⁴¹ Later that year, he refused to accompany Heller and Kraus to an EJC meeting in Paris. The StB concluded that he had come under the influence of Zionists (including his wife, Hana).⁴² Heller sought to marginalize Mayer by promoting Cantor Feuerlicht to the rank of rabbi (which he lacked the capacity to do) and assigning him to oversee the Prague community. The ruse, of course, failed. As late as April 1989, Heller and Kraus lamented that they could not stop Mayer because of the protection afforded to him by his office.⁴³ As time progressed, Mayer took stronger, though strategic positions against Heller and Kraus. In particular, he offered his support to the “young intellectuals,” led by Leo Pavlát, who addressed a letter of protest to Heller. Hana Mayerová counted among the signatories.

“Esther and Mordechaj:” “The Young Intellectuals” Perform

The “young intellectuals” took to the stage on the festival of *Purim* 1981.⁴⁴ Karol Sidon, a renowned dissident author, composed the script for the annual *spiel*, the traditional play which brings the *Book of Esther* to life, often in comic form. The book’s heroine, Queen Esther, hides her Jewish identity from the Persian King, Ahasuerus, to win his love and, thereby to save her

⁴⁰ Brod, “Židé v Poválečném Československu” [Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia], 160.

⁴¹ František Kraus, report on the Budapest conference.

⁴² 10th admin. of the StB, “Informace” [Information] (n.d., 1987), 3. ABS, X. správa SNB, 760, 73.

⁴³ CJRC (either Heller, Kraus, or both), “Pokus o narušení církevní struktury Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR” [An attempt to disrupt the ecclesiastical structure of the CJRC] (27 April 1989), 2-4. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, církv. odbor, RŽNO 1989, různé.

⁴⁴ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 36-37.

people from the evil prime minister, Haman. The latter had sworn to murder the kingdom's Jews and seize their property because Esther's uncle Mordechai had refused to bow before him. The plot climaxes when Esther reveals herself to the king, who then orders Haman to be executed and legalizes Jewish self-defense. Sidon's play concluded with language more appropriate to the twentieth-century, which less than subtly implied a consonance between the ancient world and the new. Esther proclaims,

We became victims of the arrogant fop and bitter enemy, who used his influence upon you so that he could manifest out his petty personal bias. Know now that Moredechai, who already saved your life once, is my relative. And this man... (points to Haman)... the scoundrel wanted to hang him simply because he would not bend his knee before him. But this did not satisfy him, and, so that he could enrich himself with Jewish property and satisfy his wretched bloodthirsty soul, deluded you, that the Jews would not bow to you! But you are surely a just king, you surely will not allow for an innocent people to be exterminated! We live, after all, in a civilized land.⁴⁵

At a time of rising dissent, the "young intellectuals" called upon the values of civilization to renounce their need to hide their identities and to ask for justice from an antisemitic government. In turn, CJRC secretary Artur Radvanský, asked Leo Pavlát to amend the script. Pavlát refused. He lacked the author's prerogative and could not seek Sidon's consent. The StB had arrested Sidon for unrelated crimes.⁴⁶ More provocations awaited.

The night of *Purim* arrived and the community gathered in the ceremonial hall. A choir performed and then did the actors. The CJRC and Prague community leadership, however, trained their eyes on the audience. As Galský later explained to the board,

There was also, however, an unpleasant occurrence. There was present a relatively large group of people - non-Jews - who are known to us and to the state administration as people with a negative attitude towards our regime; we have been implicated, the Catholic Church distances itself from these people, the Evangelicals too. The group is seeking a platform in our midst. We must take measures so that foreign people off the street will not come to our celebrations; such things we may not allow ourselves. We

⁴⁵ Karol Sidon, "Mordechai a Esther" [Mordechai and Esther] (1980). Archive of the author.

⁴⁶ Labendz, interviews with Sidon and Pavlát.

must take heed of two fundamental things:

- 1) Jews must support the politics of “détente.”
- 2) must respect the laws of the state in which the live [and] take heed not to come into conflict with the laws of the land.⁴⁷

The maligned, though unnamed guests belonged to a close community of dissidents, who had brought their children to enjoy the play.⁴⁸ They came to support Sidon, but also, as Galský explained, to relax in what they believed to be protected space. The international community kept watch over the Czech Jewish community and the “Joint” had returned. In a private conversation, Karol Sidon explained to me that this had given him courage.⁴⁹

The *Purim* incident of 1981 confirmed for CJRC and state officials alike the ties they had assumed to exist between the “young intellectuals” and the country’s political dissidents. Together they monitored them for years, the Jewish functionaries hoping to protect their community from guilt by association and the StB hunting for enemies.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that the individuals and groups referred to as “the young intellectuals” continued in their activities, both inside and outside of the community, it would be another eight years before one of their initiatives demanded a response from the community leadership.

⁴⁷ Artur Radvanský, “Zápis ze schůze představenstva RŽNO konané dne 17.5.1981” [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC on 17 May 1981] (1981). NAČR, SPVC box 231. Radvanský wrote a similar report, likely for SEA officials. See “Žpráva o průběhu Purimové oslavy dne 21.3.81 v budově ŽNO v Praze” [Report about the proceedings of the *Purim* celebrations on 21 March 1982 in the building of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague] (1981). ŽNO, unsorted.

⁴⁸ Leo Pavlát recalls that the dissidents brought their children to the dress-rehearsal and not the play itself. Labendz, interview with Pavlát.

⁴⁹ See also, Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 37.

⁵⁰ Beneš, “Vyhodnocení operativní situace” [Evaluation of the operational situation]; and František Kraus, “Zápis ze schůze představenstva RŽNO, která se konala dne 20.12.1988” [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC which took place on 20 December 1988] (1988), 4.

The Open Letter of 1989 and the Ensuing Debates

On 19 February 1989, Leo Pavlát sent an open letter to CJRC president Bohumil Heller, which carried the signatures of an additional twenty-four community members, including Hana Mayerová, the wife of board member Jan Rott, other Prague board members, and one signatory of the dissident manifesto, “Charter 77.”⁵¹ It opened with the words,

We, the middle and younger generation of our community, turn to you because we are deeply concerned by the current state of and, in particular, prospects for, the Czech Jewish religious community. Almost forty-five years since the war, a situation has come about in which time may yet complete what the Nazi genocide began - Judaism in our country is in danger of extinction in the near future.⁵²

Pavlát lamented the alienation of his generation from Jewish traditions and knowledge, despite the fact that some had even attended Rabbi Feder’s lectures. He continued,

It is necessary to bring Judaism closer to the people, to explain and to teach. Judaism cannot be restricted to synagogue rites because it is also a cultural and historical phenomenon... Therefore we ask you to do your best to ensure that the conditions for a real understanding of Judaism, especially where young people are concerned, are created within the framework of the J[ewish] R[eligious] C[ommunity]... If, after more than a thousand years, Judaism is not to vanish from Bohemia and Moravia, young people must be convinced that it consists of more than a dance and a bottle of Israeli wine at [the Jewish festivals of] *Hanuka* and *Purim* and that it is more than the stereotypical preservation of some antiquated customs.⁵³

To remedy the situation, Pavlát suggested that the community organize “lectures, discussions, lessons, even films and musical events,” make its library more accessible, and arrange for its members be able to borrow books from the State Jewish Museum. He also insisted that the Jewish community “revive our own publishing activities. It is time that at least some

⁵¹ A copy of the letter with notations designating the relationship of the signatories to the StB and Charter 77 can be found in NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cirk. odbor. RŽNO, 1989, různé.

⁵² Letter from Leo Pavlát, et. al., to Bohumil Heller, “Open Letter to the Leadership of the Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands” (19 February 1989), trans. and annotated in Peter Brod, “Documents: Czechoslovakia: Jewish Legacy and Jewish Present,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1990): 66.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

comprehensive works of basic Judaistic [sic] literature appear in Czech.” Pavlát closed his letter by stressing the need for Hebrew language instruction and requesting that the CJRC confer greater powers upon Rabbi Mayer.⁵⁴

The letter demanded a response due to its saliency and also because of the names attached to it. A man in his late sixties, Jan Rott expressed sympathy for the content of the letter, in a letter of his own to Rabbi Mayer, which the president’s council of the CJRC debated on 29 March 1989.⁵⁵ Rott lamented the terrible atmosphere at community, which had driven its younger members away, despite offers of free food. The elderly, he added, felt uncomfortable as well, when they heard about internal divisions. He charged,

According to the reports from closed meeting which leak out (particularly through fragments published in *Věstník* and from oral reports) I am acquiring the impression that our representatives are not enough or not at all considering a some extremely important questions.⁵⁶

Rott argued that historically, while it had not been the community’s institutional responsibility to instruct members in the fundamentals of tradition and culture, it must nonetheless assume that role in the wake of the disruptions and losses of the Holocaust and the 1950s. He called for the community to implement many of the suggestions raised by Pavlát and his associates. Rott then situated his criticism within the politics of Jewish-state relations.

Of course, because we do not put our hands to work in this, a suspicion arises that everything is forbidden to us. And so even with simple religious inactivity we can inspire

⁵⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁵ František Kraus and M. Merglová, “Zápis ze schůze presidia Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR která se konala dne 29. března 1989 v 10 hod. v zasedací síni židovské radnice v Praze 1, Maiselova 18” [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC which took place on 29 March 1989 at 10am in the meeting hall of the Jewish town hall in Prague 1, 18 Maislova Street]. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé. I am unclear as to how widely this letter was circulated, but it seems to have been read by many of those involved in this conflict.

⁵⁶ Letter from Jan Rott to Rabbi Mayer (26 February 1989), 3. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

the impression that the state forbids these obvious and permitted things. Because: why would we otherwise not have them? - Another matter of fact accedes to this question: When, in today's conditions, I would like to obtain a *menorah* or a *mizrach* [artworks pointing Eastward to orient prayers], I have to obtain it outside of the rabbinate, outside the [CJRC], outside the community [and] simply associate with those who will help me. And they are elsewhere than in the official [community]. Whom does this condition help?

If our organs will not function properly it creates the logical space for the emergence of *chavurot* [private Jewish collectives]... Around the world *chavurot* emerge everywhere an active community is missing. Neither for the development of the community, nor for the state it is not the best solution.⁵⁷

Rott thus accused the CJRC and Prague community leadership of creating the conditions that had pushed Jewish life into the private, informal sphere. He suggested that they had not taken advantage of the opportunities offered to them by the state administration and had, thereby, cast undue aspersion upon the party-state. Rott insisted upon holding friendly talks “with all of [our] coreligionists, including the 25...”⁵⁸

One month later, on 28 March 1989, František Kraus forwarded a copy of Rott's letter to the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Office of the President of the government. He asserted, “... I consider its content to be the best conceived proposal for a response [to the open letter]. Tomorrow, I will make the presidium familiar with it.”⁵⁹ He did so the following day. Rabbi Mayer rose in support of Rott's perspective as well, and also defended the petition of the twenty-five. He explained,

The letter sent by Dr. Pavlát has formal errors, but I do not want it to be taken as a declaration of war against the [CJRC], or the [Prague community] or the state. The only want dialogue. All things are not in order.⁶⁰

Rabbi Mayer emerged, in short time, as the champion of Pavlát and his associates. This only

⁵⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 8

⁵⁹ Letter from František Kraus to the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Office of the President of the Government, “Věc: Zaslání návrhu” [Re: Sending a proposal] (28 March 1989).

⁶⁰ František Kraus and M. Merglová, “Zápis ze schůze presidia Rady židovských náboženských obcí [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC], 5.

worsened his relationships with Heller and Kraus. Other Jewish functionaries, including Bedřich Róna and Juraj Slánský, the executive vice-president of the Prague community, joined the call for productive dialogue. The community leadership committed itself to demonstrating civility and began planning a series of round-table discussions. They did so with the permission and support of the Ministry of Culture.

Not everyone, however, shared their enthusiasm. One Jewish functionary insisted, unsuccessfully, upon excluding converts from the meetings.⁶¹ Heller evinced a generally negative attitude towards Pavlát and his associates, but conceded that “something new is being born; there is a dream here of strengthening Judaism.” Citing illness, however, he removed himself from the talks. He would remain active behind the scenes, nonetheless, and, in that capacity, never took any steps to address the concerns of the twenty-five.⁶²

The following month, as Jewish functionaries in Prague prepared themselves to address the concerns of the “young intellectuals,” Charter 77 released its first document concerning the fates of the Czech and Slovak Jewish communities. The dissident group accused the state of committing a host of offenses against the Jewish minority, including hiding the truth about the Holocaust and failing to commemorate it adequately after 1968, nationalizing and destroying Jewish communal properties, and limiting the operations of the State Jewish Museum. It also charged the state with driving the Jewish minority to near extinction, by not recognizing “Jewish” as a national category (a decision which, in fact, antedated the communist coup of 1948), by inspiring waves of Jewish emigration, and by failing to provide for the perpetuation of Jewish culture. Charter wrote,

There is also silence on the fact that our Jewish minority has actually been liquidated

⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

⁶² Ibid., 5-6.

several times - not only *en masse* by Nazism but also by the subsequent inclusion of the Jews who survived under the category of Czech or Slovak nationality without regard to their ethnic and cultural differences [emphasis in original]...

The destruction of religious and cultural life in contemporary Czechoslovakia is illustrated, e.g., by the scandalous fact that between 1970 and 1984 the Jewish community did not have a rabbi, which is unprecedented in the one-thousand-year-old history of Jews in the Czech lands. The teaching of Hebrew... has also been devastated.⁶³

It is undocumented, though likely, that Charter 77 intended for their protest to support to Pavlát and his associates. As their document received considerable attention in the West, however, it had the opposite effect of transforming what had been an internal matter of the Jewish community, into an international affair of broader political significance.

Just a few weeks later, Heller and Kraus tried to distance themselves from the twenty-five and also to gain political advantage over them. In a report to the SEA, they accused them of “an attempt at disrupting the ecclesiastical structures of the [CJRC].”⁶⁴ Heller and Kraus additionally sought to discredit their adversaries by noting that “for the most part, the signatories are converts and some are close to Charter 77.”⁶⁵ Indeed, they portrayed the entire affair as a plot to transform the Jewish community into a bastion of anti-state, political dissent. They wrote,

When next, on 5 April, Charter 77 publicized its document no. 28/89, which was broadcast four days later on the radio station, Radio Free Europe, the approach of the

⁶³ Charter 77, “The Tragedy of the Jews in Post-War Czechoslovakia,” Document no. 29/1989 (5 April 1989), annotated and trans. in Peter Brod, “Documents: Czechoslovakia: Jewish Legacy and Jewish Present,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1990): 64.

⁶⁴ Bohumil Heller and František Kraus, “Pokus o narušení církevní struktury Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR” [Attempt at disrupting the ecclesiastical structures of the CJRC] (27 April 1989), 1. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

The CJRC defended itself and the state against the accusations of Charter 77 in a report stamped 11 April 1989. It addressed the charges and language of “Document 28/89” relatively fairly, by placing the dissident organization’s criticism into historical and ideological context. “Několik poznámek k dokumentu Charty 77/28/89 z 5.4.1989, ‘Tragédie Židů v čs. poválečné skutečnosti’” [Some notes regarding the document of Charter 77, 28/89, “The Tragedy of Jews in the Czechoslovak postwar reality]. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

⁶⁵ Letter from Bohumil Heller and František Kraus to Vladimír Janků (28 April 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

people who organized the entire affair came into broader context. This obviously amounts not only to a “castle coup,” which would have replaced one (old) CJRC leadership team with a new team (of young ambitious people), but, rather, to part of the political strategy and tactics of the social forces which represent the oppositional currents in the state and which, at the time of progressing redevelopment [i.e., *perestroika*] and deepening democratization [i.e., *glasnost*], aspire to more expansive and farther-reaching political changes in state and society. In this context, the attempt to discredit and dispose of the current leadership of the CJRC cannot be considered otherwise than as an attempt to create from the relatively small, but in the international context not without meaning, Jewish community in the [Czech Socialist Republic], a center of political opposition against the leadership of the socialist state [emphasis added].⁶⁶

Heller and Kraus also turned on Rabbi Mayer, whom they accused of paraphrasing the Charter 77 document in a speech at a Holocaust commemoration in Brno. They suggested replacing him with Cantor Feuerlicht, limiting his international travel, removing him from the Czechoslovak Peace Committee, and monitoring his contacts with foreigners⁶⁷

Although the intervention of Charter 77 complicated the preparations for the round-table talks, they proceeded nonetheless, and still with state support. The president’s council convened on the morning of 4 May 1989 to finalize their strategy in advance of the first meeting, which was to take place that very evening. Three invited guests partook in the deliberations: Róna, Slánský, and the editor of *Věstník*, Ota Ornest. At the outset of the meeting, Rabbi Mayer announced that the college of clergy (*kolegium duchovní*) “agreed with the initiative of the signatories and with the pursuance of meetings, and that, as soon as possible.”⁶⁸ Vice president Neufeld, acting in Heller’s place, attempted to calm the tension in the room. He suggested that “... it is not necessary to take Pavlát’s letter so seriously, rather as push for discussion and free

⁶⁶ Heller and Kraus, “Pokus o narušení církevní struktury” [Attempt at disrupting the ecclesiastical structures], 1-2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2-4.

⁶⁸ M. Merglová, “Zápis ze zasedání presidia RŽNO konaného dne 4. května 1989 v 10 hod. v zasedací síni RŽNO v Praze 1, Maislova 18” [Minutes from the meeting of the CJRC president’s council which took place on 4 May 1989 at 10am in the meeting hall of the CJRC in Prague 1, 18 Maislova Street] (1989), 1. NAČR, SPVC box 231.

remarks. We consider everything to be a friendly chat.”⁶⁹ He later remarked,

It is necessary to resolve the matters without fear that we have done something. Just the opposite, our work is appreciated in the person of Mr. Heller with a high state honor - and that is also a mirror onto our activities. It is necessary to speak with people and inform them, because direct contact with believers is important.⁷⁰

Bedřich Róna and the representatives of state administration supported this position.

Not everyone shared Mayer’s enthusiasm and Neufeld’s confidence. In the intervening months since the first letter, a number of meetings had taken place and additional letters had changed hands. Members of the twenty-five had begun to raise difficult questions about the management of community affairs and its finances. This troubled some Jewish functionaries even more than the criticisms that had been voiced originally. Kraus announced that the leadership had no obligation to share their expense-receipts with the general membership of the community.⁷¹ Slánský characterized his adversaries as ignorant of community affairs and worried that they would ask about the international contacts and travel of CJRC functionaries. Ota Ornest raised a concern that no one would be able to answer such questions, since the CJRC had not delegated a representative to participate in the round-table talks.⁷² Mr. Holub, the repetitive of the Ministry of Culture, attempted to calm their nerves. He assured them,

It is important to limit the points, which will be discussed at the meeting and also to ask the young believers what they were willing to do to improve the life at the community.⁷³

Tension pervaded the leadership, which hoped to focus the round-table discussions on matters of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁷¹ Ibid., 5.

⁷² Ibidl, 4-5.

⁷³ Ibid., 4. Later, Holub suggested responding, if someone were to malign CJRC leaders of having protested against the emigration of Soviet Jewry, by pointing to the difficulties that Western-Jewry faced in resettling them. Like Holub, Comrade Vytiska, of the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs of the National Committee in Prague, also suggested putting the young people to work. He wondered if they were only interested in speaking their minds. Ibid., 8.

culture and religion alone. They understood the need for change, but would neither expose their own complicity in the cultural impoverishment of the community, nor consider comprehensive means for addressing the problems that they had caused. The Jewish functionaries intended for the meetings to placate the twenty-five and to empower them to make moderate improvements within the community's present structure.

The functionaries spent much of their time debating who would represent the community and who would speak to particular concerns. That discussion further revealed the divisions in their midst. Neufeld asked Mayer, Róna, Slánský, and Ornest to lead the round-table talks. All four looked positively upon the initiative of Pavlát and his associates, even if the latter two also worried about their own reputations. Neufeld did not assign anyone to represent the CJRC, because religious and cultural matters fell to the Prague community.⁷⁴ Mayer, nonetheless, objected that someone should represent the CJRC, to whom the first letter had been (wrongly or rightly) addressed. Kraus responded,

The rabbi does not want to take the responsibility [to represent the CJRC] at the discussion, even though it appears to be a directed attempt to oust me and Mr. Heller. Charter 77, [Radio] Free Europe, Mr. Norman from the American Embassy have all jumped on board and they want to discredit our church. Mr. Pavlát bypasses individuals and work against [them]. In Brno, the rabbi used a quotation from a letter very similar to the letter of Charter [77].⁷⁵

Mayer denied the charges with Neufeld's support. Indeed, with Heller on medical leave, Kraus had lost some of his authority within the community. Mr. Holub decided against sending a representative of the state administration to the meeting. It would only have exacerbated the feeling that the religious initiative had broader political implications.⁷⁶

Despite some initial objections to the meeting's limited scope and to Heller's absence, the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 5.

first round-table talks proceeded in relatively good spirits. Pavlát and others offered practical suggestions for developing Jewish life in the Czech lands. Most concerned providing better access for members to the resources which were already available in Prague and also for expanding them. The representatives of the older generation supported these ideas. One even proposed reallocating the bonuses that members received in *tuzex*-crowns to cover associated the expenses. Slánský informed the round-table participants that the Prague community was already working to open a “religious-enlightenment center.” (The proposal for which, submitted even before the twenty-five had sent their letter, pushed the limits of what might have been considered “religious” activities and, thereby, reflected the relatively liberal approach of the Prague community in comparison with the CJRC.⁷⁷) The round-table also addressed the poor atmosphere at the community and agreed that it should be improved. The participants, however, could not decide upon actions to be taken. The meeting was of an informal and informational character only. Two more meetings, the minutes of which I have not located, followed shortly thereafter.⁷⁸

The three round-table discussions resolved nothing, precisely because they lacked the potential to do so. The petitioners had wanted to achieve substantial change, but the community leadership thought only of placating them. The president’s council met on 27 June 1989 and the CJRC presidium met the following day.⁷⁹ With the blessing of the state administration, they

⁷⁷ Letter from Juraj Slánský to the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs of the National Committee in Prague (11 January 1989), 1. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, církJ odbor, RŽNO, 1989, Různé.

⁷⁸ M. Merglová, “Záznam z besedy, která se konala na ŽNO Praha 1, Maiselova 18, dne 4. května 1989 v 17 hod.” [Minutes from the discussion which took place at the Jewish Religious Community in Prague 1, 18 Maislova Street, on 4 May 1989 at 5pm] (1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, církJ. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

⁷⁹ M. Merglová, “Zápis ze zasedání představenstva Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR, které se konalo dne 28. června 1989 v 10.00 hod. v zasedací síni ŽNO Praha” [Minutes

decided not to address the requests by Pavlát and his associates that the CJRC amend its bylaws and that the Prague community improve its kitchen and cafeteria. Moreover, rather than discussing the proposals raised at the round-table talks, with the exception of the community's publishing priorities, the leadership focused upon the danger posed by their younger coreligionists. Both Slánský and Ornest voiced concern that the twenty-five were forming a separate fraction, to the detriment of the community. Holub, for the first time in public, associated the young cohort with dissent. He advised caution, however, because he felt that its members fell into three categories:

- 1) Those who want to improve religious life;
- 2) Those who signed, but do not see and do not have information;
- 3) Those who are really oppositional, where under the proposals something hides; what [that is] must be determined, but it exists.⁸⁰

Holub further warned that similar cohorts had divided the Hungarian and Polish Jewish communities, and he insisted upon better communication as a preventative measure. Mr. Mosler, a member of the both president's council and the presidium, expressed the frustration that many felt with the twenty-five, when he proclaimed to the presidium,

From today we consider everything to be concluded, I mean by this the actions of the young coreligionists; but brother rabbi is mistaken if he wants to convince us that they were innocent. They got caught up among hostile elements, and we do not need to defend

from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC, which took place on 28 June 1989 at 10:00am in the meeting hall of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague] (1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé; and M. Merglová, "Zápis ze schůze presidia Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR, která se konala dne 27.6.1989 v 10 hod. v zasedací síni ŽNO" [Minutes from the meeting of the president's council of the CJRC, which took place on 27 June 1989 at 10am in the meeting hall of the Jewish Religious Community] (1989). NAČR, SPVC box 231.

⁸⁰ Merglová, "Zápis ze schůze presidia Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR, která se konala dne 27.6.1989" [Minutes from the meeting of the president's council of the CJRC, which took place on 27 June 1989], 2.

them.⁸¹

Heller, who had returned from his sick leave, agreed,

We absolutely consider the matter as closed; after all, it lacks such importance and seriousness. I further suggest to break away from people, like, for example, Dr. Pavlát - I suggest this even to brother rabbi.⁸²

Mayer, of course, continued to defend Pavlát and his associates. Radvanský proposed putting them to work maintaining the country's Jewish cemeteries.⁸³

Only after this last round of meetings, did Heller respond in writing to the original letter that he had received four months hence. He began his letter, addressed only to Pavlát, by twisting the latter's words to make it seem as if Pávlat had insulted the Jewish religion. He criticized Pavlát for taking too much of an academic approach to Judaism and for failing to focus on its rich traditions, despite the loss of those very traditions among much of Czech Jewry, particularly the younger generations. Heller excused the community's lack of activity by pointing to its dire financial situation, which he placed into historical perspective. He also attacked Pavlát for failing to address the needs of the older generation, which accounted for the majority of the community's membership, and the imperative to educate young children. Heller concluded by suggesting that Pavlát and his associates could help the community best by attending services and funerals—exactly what many of them had been doing all along. With the backing of the dominant voices within the CJRC and Prague community leadership, Heller sent a clear message to Pavlát and the other twenty-four signatories that the matter had been settled.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Merglová, "Zápis ze zasedání představenstva Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR, které se konalo dne 28. června 1989" [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC, which took place on 28 June 1989], 6.

⁸² Ibid., 6.

⁸³ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁴ Letter from Bohumil Heller to Leo Pavlat (June/July 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé,

Pavlát responded to Heller to express his indignation and also to reiterate his suggestions for how to improve the community. He also sought to clarify that he and his cohort had nothing to do with the country's dissident movements.⁸⁵ Tomáš and Adela Wichsovi, a married couple which had signed the original letter, also sent a letter of complaint to Heller. They criticized his response to Pavlát, his lack of communication during the preceding four months, and his failure to participate in talks. They concluded,

From your conduct during the entire affair, we come to the opinion that the future of Judaism in the Czech Socialist Republic is rather indifferent; and this we consider for a person in your function to be, at the very best, deplorable.⁸⁶

Heller responded to Pavlát, once again, with a letter that said even less than his earlier missive.⁸⁷ He and his associates had failed to take advantage of the opportunity provided to them by the initiative of the twenty-five and had thereby only further divided the Jewish community in Prague. The motives of the Jewish leadership most likely lay in a combination of fear of the authorities and a drive for self-preservation. The collapse of the communist regime, just four months after this last round of communication, rendered the stalled debate moot, and put the community in the hands of the erstwhile opposition.

The Affair of the Open Letter in the Public Sphere

At the meeting of the president's council and the CJRC presidium on 27 and 28 June 1989, Juraj Slánský sought to end the affair with the open letter by marginalizing the signatories. He reminded those assembled that they represented only two-percent of the community membership.

⁸⁵ Letter from Leo Pavlát to Bohumil Heller (14 July 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

⁸⁶ Letter from Tomáš and Adela Wichsovi to Bohumil Heller (16 July 1989), 2. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

⁸⁷ Letter from Bohumil Heller to Leo Pavlát (27 July 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

At the earlier meeting, Mosler urged even more strident measures. He argued, “If they have political demands and [if they] will make a Jewish Charter, we will have to expel them.”⁸⁸ Rabbi Mayer countered, however, by reminding those assembled that,

... it is impossible to expel anyone unless they commit a mortal sin. In the end, though, they regularly attend synagogue and if it were not for them, in the end, there would not be [communal observance of the Sabbath], for instance. We have 1,000 people, including many CJRC functionaries, who come perhaps 1x per year.⁸⁹

The movement may have been small, but it comprised the community’s active core and, by most accounts, its future. Its petition ignited a crisis within a close-knit, multi-generational group, akin to a family feud. Yet this struggle unfolded within overlapping political and cultural contexts, both domestic and foreign, which exceeded the bounds of the small community. Though it concluded prematurely with the collapse of communism in November 1989, the conflict, nonetheless, reflected the crises of categories that articulated within Jewish-state relations as the regime crumbled.

At the CJRC presidium meeting of 28 June 1989, when Jewish functionaries tried to put an end to the open-letter affair, delegate Grünberger lamented Pavlát’s decision to address his concerns regarding the community in a public fashion. He argued that such an approach endangered the community and violated the well-worn Jewish political strategy of maintaining public silence to avoid conflict with non-Jewish authorities. He explained,

If what concerned the author of the letter was only the defense of Jewish traditions, why did he not discuss his ideas with the elder coreligionists, who grew up in the Jewish tradition...

The form of submitting an open letter can be characterized as open. That form also has nothing in common with Jewish traditions.

Our religious community, from the oldest history, devoted itself to religious life

⁸⁸ Merglová, “Zápis ze schůze presidia Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR která se konala dne 27.6.1989” [Minutes from a meeting of the president’s council of the CJRC which occurred on 17 June 1989], 4.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 4.

alone. It eschewed anything that could provoke its surroundings. The author of the letter should have been able to anticipate something like this.⁹⁰

Comrade Holub of the Ministry of Culture agreed that the public airing of Jewish affairs had led to a crisis. At the same time, however, he urged against recrimination. He said,

It is necessary to think through every action and it is a real shame that the possibility of exploitation did not dawn upon the signatories, who approached the entire matter with good intentions.⁹¹

Holub spoke the truth. Pavlát and his associates did not consider it a danger that their initiatives would be exploited in the public sphere. Indeed, they used the public sphere, both foreign and domestic, to gain advantage over their adversaries.

From the genesis of the conflict in February 1989 through its *de facto* resolution nine months later, the two sides struggled against one another to control its portrayal in the media. Pavlát and his associates repeatedly requested that their letters be published in the community newsletter, *Věstník*, in order to involve the entire Jewish community in the discussions that they sought to inspire.⁹² The CJRC leadership, in contrast, hoped to contain the matter as much as possible and to control what the general membership of the community, throughout the country, knew about the crisis in Prague.⁹³ Vice President Neufeld contended “that it is undesirable to

⁹⁰ Merglová, “Zápis ze zasedání představenstva Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR, které se konalo dne 28. června 1989” [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC, which took place on 28 June 1989], 9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹² M. Merglová, “Zápis ze zasedání presidia RŽNO konaného dne 4. května 1989” [Minutes from the meeting of the CJRC president’s council which took place on 4 May 1989], 2; and Merglová, “Záznam z besedy” [Minutes from the discussion], 9.

⁹³ The outlying communities responded to the affair with a considerable deal of differentiation. The community in Ustí nad Labem, home to Bohumil Heller, took sides with their patron against the twenty-five young activists. In contrast, the community in Plzeň offered its implicit support to Pavlát and his associates. They wrote, “We are envious of Prague, that it still has so many young members who are intensely interested in Jewish history; and it is possible to endorse with agreement the remarks expressed on the first and second page of the letter.” Letter from the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň to the CJRC (25 March 1989); and letter from the Jewish

vent these unpopular matters within the broader public.” He suggested, instead, that “[i]t is necessary to write internal ‘flash-memos’ and to distribute them only within the framework of the [Jewish Religious Communities].”⁹⁴ As Róna explained at the first round-table talks, “*Věstník* has a wide circle of readers—not only coreligionists.”⁹⁵ The publication, indeed, reached non-Jewish audiences in Czechoslovakia and Jewish activists in the West. Even Rabbi Mayer suggested holding off on publishing anything about the conflict until the two sides had reached “shared conclusions.”⁹⁶ *Věstník*, in fact, never carried a single article about the divisions in the Prague community, despite the fact that the matter drew the attention of the Western media and even the local press.

The leaders of the Jewish community understood that they could not benefit from debating the conflict in the public sphere. They had aligned themselves too closely with the party-state, which, through 1989, grew increasingly unpopular with the general public and with members of the Jewish community. A discussion of their failures would have reflected poorly upon their protectors in the state administration. In the persons of Heller and Kraus, the leadership had also alienated itself from most of organized Western Jewry. Contesting Pavlát and his associates would have only revealed further the extent to which the Jewish communal leadership had made a practice of collaborating with the state administration to diminish Jewish activity in Czechoslovakia and, ultimately, to achieve the complete assimilation of the Jewish minority into the Czech, atheist majority.

Religious Community in Ustí nad Labem to the CJRC (17 August 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, církv. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

⁹⁴ M. Merglová, “Zápis ze zasedání presidia RŽNO konaného dne 4. května 1989” [Minutes from the meeting of the CJRC president’s council which took place on 4 May 1989], 3.

⁹⁵ Merglová, “Záznam z besedy” [Minutes from the discussion], 6.

⁹⁶ M. Merglová, “Zápis ze zasedání presidia RŽNO konaného dne 4. května 1989” [Minutes from the meeting of the CJRC president’s council which took place on 4 May 1989], 3.

František Kraus attempted to gain control over the public reception of the conflict in an interview with Jiří Kohout, published in the Communist Party's main news organ, *Rudé právo* (Red Right), on 6 March 1989.⁹⁷ In the short piece entitled, "The Conditions Correspond to the Needs," Kraus argued that the Jewish communities met the demands of their members with the help of the state administration. Falsely and in contradiction to the charges levied by Pavlát and his associates just weeks earlier, Kraus contended that community members had access to Hebrew-language instruction and that the community published "the most important religious literature with the permission of our state." Kraus also noted that the community provided robust opportunities to mourn the Czech victims of the Holocaust, including the "3,700 Czechoslovak citizens of the Jewish faith" whom the Nazis had murdered in the family camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in March 1944. Kohout's questions corresponded well with the criticism levied by the twenty-five.

The interview incited criticism and drew threats from among the signatories of the open letter. Pavlát wrote a letter to Heller on 22 March, in which he exposed Kraus's lies and half truths. He requested that the CJRC leadership meet to discuss his criticism of the interview and that they subsequently publish a correction in the newspaper. He explained,

The cited inaccuracies of the noted interview are of fundamental significance and, as far as I can judge, their publication damaged the good relations inside our community. The believers surely know the conditions inside the individual communities.⁹⁸

Pavlát sent copies of his letter to Juraj Slánský and Rabbi Mayer, but would not directly communicate with Kraus.

⁹⁷ Jiří Kohout, "Rozhovor o Židovských náboženských obcích v ČSR: Podmínky odpovídají potřebám" [An interview about the Jewish religious communities in the Czech Socialist Republic: The conditions correspond to the needs], *Rudé právo* (6 March 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

⁹⁸ Letter from Leo Pavlát to Bohumil Heller (22 March 1989), 3. NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

Pavel Bergmann addressed a similar letter of complaint to Kraus, in late March, in which he threatened legal action if he did not print a correction in *Věsník*.⁹⁹ Ten days later, having receiving no response, Bergmann forwarded his letter to both Heller and the editorial board of *Rudé právo* and he reiterated his threat. To Heller, he wrote,

With regard to the fact that I am not concerned with personally scandalizing Mr. Kraus, but with truthful information for our and even the foreign public, I think that you should prompt a peaceful resolution of this case [emphasis in original].¹⁰⁰

Bergmann even seems to have provided Heller with a sample retraction, already bearing Kraus's name.¹⁰¹ No such document ever appeared in *Věsník*.

Kraus only took action to correct his "inaccuracies" after Bergmann discussed them on Radio Free Europe. The station also broadcast the letter that Bergmann had originally sent. On 7 July 1989, Kraus sent a letter to the editorial board of *Rudé právo*, in which he corrected and blamed Kohout for the errors in the interview. He continued,

In conclusion, I would like to say that I consider the actions of Dr. Bergmann to be part of an organized pressure operation of certain individuals, who pursue not religious but political goals [in association with Charter 77].¹⁰²

The CJRC forwarded a report to the Secretariat of Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Office of the President in which it levied similar charges against Pavlát,

The approach taken by Dr. Pavlát - particularly when set in relation to the earlier letter of the twenty-five community members - unfortunately rouses in this form the impression

⁹⁹ Letter from Pavel Bergman to František Kraus (28 March 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Pavel Bergmann to Bohumil Heller (7 April 1989); and Letter from idem. to the editorial board of *Rudé právo* (7 April 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

¹⁰¹ "Návrh tiskové opravy pro *Věsník ŽNO v ČSSR*" [Draft of corrections for *Věsník*] (n.d.). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

¹⁰² Letter from František Kraus to the editorial board of *Rudé právo* (7 July 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

that the substance of the dissonance lays elsewhere.¹⁰³

Kraus and the CJRC, once again, attempted to control the domestic public discourses around the crisis. They soon shifted their attention, however, across the Iron Curtain.

The conflict in the Prague community drew the attention of the Western media, which reached (back) into Czechoslovakia and broke the silence of the domestic news agencies. As per above, Radio Free Europe broadcast the transcripts of the open letter, Charter 77's document 28/89, and even Bergmann's protests. Reuters picked up on these reports and carried its own story, "Prague Jews Blast Leaders," on 23 May 1989. This presented a significant risk to the CJRC leadership, which most of organized Western Jewry already mistrusted. It reflected poorly upon them abroad and so too at home. Ota Ornest suggested to the president's council of the CJRC, "We should learn from objective people—Jews; everyone tells us, resolve your matters at home; do not turn this into sensation, and do not parade this in front of foreigners."¹⁰⁴

In July and August, nonetheless, František Kraus tried to defend his reputation and that of the CJRC in letters to Shimon Cohen, the executive director of the Office of the Chief Rabbi's in London, and to the *The Jerusalem Post*.¹⁰⁵ To the latter, he wrote,

Sir, - Your Reuter report of May 23, "Prague Jews blast leaders," was inspired by the so-called group of Young Jews, which consists mainly of converted and dissident Jews, less than 3 per cent of our community in Bohemia and Moravia.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ "K dopisům Dr. L. Pavláta p B. Hellerovi, předsedovi RŽNO a doc. Ornestovi, ved. red. *Věstníku* ve věci rozhovoru, který poskytl ústř. taj. F. Kraus Rudému právu" [Regarding the letters of Dr. L. Pavlat to B. Heller, CJRC president, and Docent Ornest, the editor-in-chief of *Věstník* with regard to the matter of the interview that central secretary F. Kraus gave to *Rudé právo*] (n.d.). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

¹⁰⁴ M. Merglová, "Zápis ze zasedání presidia RŽNO konaného dne 4. května 1989" [Minutes from the meeting of the CJRC president's council which took place on 4 May 1989], 3.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from František Kraus to Shimon D. Cohen (27 July 1989), "Your letter 12th July 1989." NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

¹⁰⁶ František Kraus, "The Jews of Czechoslovakia: To the Editor of the *Jerusalem Post*," *The Jerusalem Post* (7 August 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

Later, he continued,

Our community continues to be represented by the Council of Jewish Communities as elected to fill out its term in 1990. Our sole goal remains, as always, to be loyal to [sic] Czech citizens practicing the Jewish faith.¹⁰⁷

Kraus's attempt to deflect the media criticism against him and his associates reflects the difficult situation in which they found themselves. He knew, of course, that his Western readers likely supported the Czechoslovak dissident movements and that they would not be impressed with his pronouncement of loyalty to the communist regime. Kraus's subtle ethnic politics, however, betrayed an even greater conceptual crisis in Central European Jewish-state relations which culminated as communism collapsed.

A Crisis of Categories: Converts, Dissidents, and Jewish Affiliation

In 1989, as communism collapsed across Central and Eastern Europe, the party-state could no longer endure the contradictions inherent to its system for categorizing and managing Jewish identification and practice. This system turned upon the artificial division of Jewishness into two separate spheres, corresponding to religious affiliation and national belonging. The party-state's postwar, democratic predecessor manifested this conceptual fiction in its bureaucracy, in response to the heightened culture of exclusionary ethno-nationalism that had emerged through the Second World War. The regime offered Jewish citizens the choice to remain in the country as ethnic Czechs, Slovaks, and Ukrainians of the Jewish religion or to emigrate as national Jews to Israel. As much as this policy drew upon the local, interwar tradition of offering Jewish citizens the right to claim the nation to which they belonged, it also reflected the deeper ambivalence with which many non-Jews had come to view their Jewish compatriots.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

At the turn of the 1950s, communist Czechoslovakia joined the rest of the Soviet Bloc in declaring Zionism (i.e., Jewish nationalism) an enemy ideology. It also closed its borders to Israel-bound emigration, thus removing national choice from Jewish citizens. While the party-state committed itself to supporting and protecting the Jewish religion in its institutional form (while working to undermine religion, writ large), it also began to persecute citizens of Jewish origin as potential Zionists. The difficulty in separating Jewish religious from national identification and practice plagued Jewish-state relations through 1989. As long as the party-state stood fast against the West, it could, to an extent, contain these tensions. The end of territoriality as the determining factor in international affairs, the attendant increase in the influence of Western-Jewry in Czechoslovakia, and the emergence popular challenges to the regime at home, however, undermined its ability to do so. Having sworn allegiance to the party-state and its bureaucracy, the Jewish leadership in Prague suffered from a crisis of concepts, just like their state minders.

As per above, when František Kraus sought to discredit the “young intellectuals,” he could not do otherwise than to associate them with dissent and portray himself and his associates as loyal to the party-state. As most of those whom he addressed in the West did not accept the legitimacy of communist rule—or, at least, hoped for it to end—Kraus adopted a second strategy to undermine his adversaries. He, like others before him, sought to cast aspersion upon them by over-emphasizing the number of converts to Judaism in their midst. Perhaps he thought that such information would lower their status in the eyes of the Western Jewish establishment, which he believed, not incorrectly, to privilege ethnicity over religious affiliation as the deciding factor in Jewish identification. Of course, this acknowledgment of Jewish ethnic solidarity and the shared fates of ethnic Jews resonated unspeakably with the experiences of Czechoslovak citizens of

Jewish origin, who endured decades of anti-Zionist propaganda and state persecution. Yet, in speaking the unspeakable, in calling into question the Jewishness of individuals who had undergone conversion to the Jewish religion, Kraus laid bare the untenable contradiction that had pervaded Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia for decades.

The country's highest-ranking Jewish professional had conceded finally that Judaism encompassed more than a religion alone. Intentionally or not, Kraus admitted, thereby, that there existed legitimate and fundamental modes of Jewish identification and experience that could not be determined by membership in the state-recognized Jewish religious community. He stood in good company. At the meeting of the president's council of the CJRC on 28 March 1989, Comrade Holub, the representative from the Secretariat for Ecclesiastical Affairs at the Ministry of Culture conceded,

This concerns a specific situation: it is well possible to become a Catholic or an Evangelical, but it is difficult to become a member of your community, because it even concerns philosophy. Who will solve this situation: the CJRC or the clergy?¹⁰⁸

Holub had in mind the problem of passing on Jewish traditions to the postwar generation, but his comments, nonetheless, reflect the crisis of categories incited by Pavlát and his associates in the context of communism's unfolding demise.

This tension manifested as well in the inability of Jewish leaders to discuss the ethnic aspects of Jewish identification, even when appropriate. It contributed to their difficulty to speak with precision about Holocaust, particularly after 1975. The last criticism that Pavlát levied against Kraus's interview with *Rudé právo* concerned the language that the latter had used to discuss the prisoners of the "family camp" at Auschwitz-Birkenau. He explained,

¹⁰⁸ Kraus and Merglová, "Zápis ze schůze presidia Rady židovských náboženských obcí v ČSR která se konala dne 29. března 1989" [Minutes from the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC which took place on 29 March 1989], 6.

In the noted interview, it affected me particularly unpleasantly that in connection with the murder of the so-called family camp in Auschwitz the central secretary of the CJRC used the conjunction Czechoslovak citizens “of the Jewish faith.” How is it possible to falsify historical reality so? Did the Jewish tragedy during the last world war have only the character of religious persecution? During the Second World War the Jewish population was murdered as an ethnicity. This is universally known and I do not know why the monstrosity of one of the faces of fascism was minimized and veiled so.¹⁰⁹

As the CJRC leadership could not assail the truth of Pavlát’s argument, it attacked his character instead. They accused him of adopting the racist language of their erstwhile Nazi oppressors and declared,

Jewish nationality in our conditions does not exist... The term is not even used by us today... And who is “of Jewish origin?” According to what standard and who decides upon it? Will we once again begin to count if someone has all Jewish grandparents, or if he is a halfling of some kind or another?... Does it not remind [one] to a certain extent of the antisemitic [bacteria] of the trials of the 1950s, when with regard to individual defendants they did not neglect in the accusation to note, first and foremost, that they [were] “of Jewish origin”!¹¹⁰

This protest, on one hand, reflects an ethical commitment never to allow biology (or race) to determine identity. On the other hand, however, the discomfort of Jewish officials to deploy such categories even when discussing the history of the Second World War attests to the deep anxiety that they felt when considering the complexities of identification.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Pavlát to Heller (22 March 1989), 2.

¹¹⁰ “K dopisům Dr. L. Pavláta” [Regarding the letters of Dr. L. Pavlat], 5.

¹¹¹ This had not been so problematic just twelve years earlier. In 1978, when the CJRC published a condemnation of Charter 77 in *Věstník*, it referred to the Nazis victims as “citizens of Jewish *origin* and faith [emphasis added].” Two months later, however, the CJRC published a correction. The Czechoslovak News Service had misquoted their proclamation as saying “citizens of Jewish *nationality* and faith [emphasis added].” This time, the CJRC’s correction made the statement more accurate. While many of the Nazis victims from Czechoslovakia had declared themselves to be of Jewish nationality, the Nazis had murdered them because of their biological origins. Jewish nationality, of course, is a matter of political culture. CJRC “Prohlášení Rady židovských náboženských obcí v české socialistické rebulice k t. zv. ‘Chartě 77’” [Proclamation of the CJRC with regard to the so-called “Charter-77”], *Věstník*, vol., 39, no. 1 (January 1977): 3; and the editorial board of *Věstník*, “Redakční sdělení” [Editorial announcement], *Věstník*, vol. 39, no. 3 (March 1977): 3. cf. Wilma A. Iggers, “The Flexible National Identities of Bohemian Jewry,” *East Central Europe/LEurope Du Centre-Est*, vol. 7,

Change Begets Change: The Jewish Community after November 1989

On 28 November 1989, the employees of the CJRC and the Prague community, under the aegis of Rabbi Daniel Mayer, announced that they had joined the general strike against the communist regime, which fell that very day.¹¹² Shortly thereafter, the CJRC leadership fell as well. At a meeting on 3 December 1989, the CJRC presidium voted unanimously to remove Heller, *in absentia*, from the position of president. Following the wishes of the European Jewish Congress, as expressed in a congratulatory phone call, the presidium then restored Desider Galský to its presidency. (He died, unfortunately, less than one year later in a traffic accident.)¹¹³ With one exception, the members of the presidium also voted to relinquish their own positions and call for early elections in February 1990. František Kraus similarly announced his own resignation, as of 31 December 1989. The presidium requested that he recant his position on the “letter of the twenty-five” before the World, European, and Canadian Jewish Congresses.¹¹⁴ As the bureaucracy had not yet changed, František Kraus wrote to the Ministry of Culture the following day to secure state approval for Galský’s appointment to the presidency.¹¹⁵

no. 1 (1980): 48. (Iggers notes the wrong issues and page numbers.)

¹¹² Mayer wrote a letter of protest to Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec eight days earlier, to which the leadership of the Prague community expressed its concurrence on 22 November. The CJRC and the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, untitled document (28 November 1989). ŽNO, bound records 28.

¹¹³ Twenty-five days later, the Czechoslovak people restored Alexander Dubček to power as well, as the Chairman of the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Parliament. He too died within a few years, the victim of another automobile accident.

¹¹⁴ Kraus and Merglová, “Zápis ze schůze představenstva RŽNO, která se konala 3.12.1989 v zasedací síni ŽNO Praha, Maislova ul. 18, v 9 hod.” [Minutes of the meeting of the presidium of the CJRC which took place on 3 December 1989 in the meeting hall of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, 18 Maislova Street, at 9am] (3 December 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

¹¹⁵ Letter from František Kraus to František Jelinek at the Ministry of Culture, “Věc: nový předseda Rady ŽNO v ČSR” [Re: the new president of the CJRC] (4 December 1989). NAČR, ÚPV carton 9, unsorted, cír. odbor, RŽNO, 1989, různé.

Conclusion: Of Rabbis, New Communities, and Memory¹¹⁶

As far as can be determined from the minutes of the CJRC presidium meeting of 3 December 1989, no one called for the removal or resignation of Rabbi Mayer. He had stood in opposition to those whom the presidium attacked and had even spoken on behalf of the community against the communist regime as it fell. Rabbi Mayer felt so confident in his station that he subjected himself to public, extra-communal, scrutiny in seeking political office. One year later, however, his record of conduct led him to withdraw from the race and lose his position within the community. What changed and why so quickly?

I attribute Mayer's fate to the popular reconstruction of political memory in the wake of communism's collapse. Recent research has shown political dissent to have been a marginal, though highly visible phenomenon in Czechoslovakia, likely limited to the activities of roughly 2,000 individuals. Not only did the vast majority of citizens refrain from joining these movements, but a significant proportion of citizens also regarded dissidents with ambivalence. For a time, scholars uncritically adopted the popular myth that average citizens withdrew from the political sphere during the 1970s and 1980s, in exchange for a higher standard of living and the relaxation of police controls over the private sphere.¹¹⁷ Contemporary scholars, notably Paulina Bren and Michal Pullmann, however, have demonstrated this not to have been the case. To the contrary, citizens actively participated in the public political arena by adopting the discourses of the hegemonic state, partaking in its political rituals, working within its

¹¹⁶ I am, once again, indebted to Elana Thurston Milgrom for inspiring some of the conclusions here.

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Bolton attributes this myth to Milan Šimečka and Antonín Liehm. *Words of Dissent*, 73-73. This remains a centerpiece of popular beliefs about the experiences of average people during the last two decades of communist rule. One powerful photographic essay depicting quotidian life in Czechoslovakia from 2001 only depicts politically engaged citizens at the ends of the 1960s and 1980s. Pavel Štecha (photos) and Ivan Hoffman (text), *U nás: 1968-1990, in our Country* (Lomnice nad Popelku, Czech Republic: Jaroslav Bárta, Studio JB, 2001).

infrastructure, consuming its media, following its informal codes, and obeying its laws.¹¹⁸ Banal capitulation on such a massive scale may not qualify as collaboration, if that word is to mean anything at all. Yet it functioned coercively within society, nonetheless, achieving what Jan Gross has called, in a very different context, the privatization of politics.¹¹⁹ Citizens surely feared the police informants in their midst, yet I do not reference that phenomenon here. They also worried, however, about the quotidian, social, professional, and financial repercussions of non-conformity.¹²⁰ Dissent threatened this uneasy peace.

Widespread, public opposition to the regime emerged with significance only in the very last years of communist rule, particularly in 1989. Michal Pullmann attributes this to the active participation of citizens in their country's political culture during the middle and later years of the 1980s. The party-state, he contends, lost its hegemony over the populace when average citizens began to use the state's own discourses to make demands of the state which lay outside of the state's program, ran counter to its politics, and, ultimately, undermined its legitimacy.

¹¹⁸ Michal Pullmann, *Konec experimentu: přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* [The end of the experiment: perestroika and the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia] (Prague, Czech Republic: Scriptorium, 2011); and Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2010). See also Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 221-26; and Miroslav Vaněk, ed., *Obyčejní lidé...?! Pohled do života tzv. mlčící většiny, životopisná vyprávění příslušníků dělných profesí a inteligence* [Ordinary people...?!: A look into the lives of the so-called silent majority, the autobiographical accounts of members of the laboring professions and the intelligentsia], 3 vols. (Prague, Czech Republic: Academia, 2009). The dissidents, indeed, divided themselves in terms of how they understood the relationship of the general public to the party-state and in their prescriptions for creating change. See Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, 221-68.

¹¹⁹ See my discussion in Chapter One.

¹²⁰ Many of the those who participated in my oral history project, which focused on Jewish citizens who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, explained that they did not experience an existential fear of the state during the 1970s and 1980s. The worried little about incarceration. What concerned them, primarily, was the possibility that the state would attempt to coerce their collaboration by limiting their professional and social opportunities and, even worse, those of their children. Many of my interviews are now available at the Jewish Museum in Prague. I direct you, in particular, to my interviews with Zuzana Glükseliková and Pavel Kolan.

James Krapfl argues further that demands for decency and “humanness” held a place of prominence in the popular protests of 1989, which accompanied, accelerated, and conditioned the collapse of the Czechoslovak communist regime.¹²¹ This helps to explain the popular enthusiasm for restoring Alexander Dubček—and perhaps also Desider Galský—to power. Dubček had presided over the liberalization of Czechoslovakia, in his capacity as the General Secretary of the Communist Party, and in the name of his political philosophy, “Communism with a human face.” Many of those who revolted against the party-state in 1989 initially sought to continue Dubček’s work—to reform the socialist system, rather than to overthrow it.¹²²

This orientation of the Czechoslovak, or “Velvet,” Revolution, conditioned the competing systems of collective memory within which Czechs and Slovaks could begin to think about their own experiences and conduct in earlier years. To remember oneself as having been aligned with the communist regime, or even complicit in its hegemony, would have meant, in this case, to admit to one’s own indecency and inhumanity. Yet, as Paulina Bren demonstrates, whether or not most Czechs and Slovaks behaved indecently or inhumanely, they had participated significantly in the political culture that sustained the party-state for nearly two decades. Rather than confronting this uncomfortable truth, Ladislav Holý argues, Czechs and Slovaks constructed a myth which featured two classes of historical actors: the Czech and Slovak nations on the one hand, and the communists, somehow stripped of their national identities, on

¹²¹ James Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989-1992* (Ithaca, NY and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2013). Bolton, cited above, argues that a particular cohort of dissidents insisted, first and foremost, that people act more decently with one another. The dissident essayist, Ludvík Vaculík, expressed this well in, “On Heroism,” in *A Cup of Coffee with My Interrogator: The Prague Chronicles of Ludvík Vaculík*, trans. Geore Theiner with an introduction by Václav Havel (London, UK: Readers International, 1986 and 1987), 47-51.

¹²² Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague*, with a new afterward by the author (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 78-130.

the other.¹²³ This Manichean narrative sacrificed the possibility of constructing an empathetic and complex perspective on the past in order to achieve national (and also personal) redemption on the cheap.

It left no room for men like Rabbi Mayer, who worked closely with the state administration, including the police, to create changes and opportunities within his community, which were, in fact, consonant with the goals of the revolution. He believed, perhaps naïvely, that his actions and intentions would determine how his peers would judge him. How could he have expected the emergence of a culture so lacking in historiographical empathy from a revolution that turned on the value of decency?

To that end, it must be reiterated and stressed that Rabbi Mayer fell first, not within his own religious community, but in the public political sphere, an arena rife with intensifying divisions after 1989.¹²⁴ Perhaps the community would have tolerated or even expressed gratitude for Mayer's conduct during the 1980s, had he not run for government office. Its leadership, however, could not abide maintaining him in a position of honor, once the public had identified him as a collaborator. Rabbi Mayer, nonetheless, continues to find himself welcome at the community today.

The members of that community may have, indeed, evinced more tolerance than the general public for those who had worked with the state administration, at least on a personal level. They nonetheless constructed a culture of political memory similar to that which emerged on the national scale. Echoing discourses from the Second World War, which portrayed Czechs and Jews as the first co-victims of Nazism, the members of the Czech Jewish communities, by

¹²³ Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Transformation of Society* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹²⁴ James Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face*, 111-228.

and large, adopted an image of themselves as victims of communism, alongside the good people of Czechoslovakia.¹²⁵ As I have demonstrated in the foregoing chapters, this perspective does not lack a significant element of truth. Yet it also draws attention away from the nuances inherent to the work of Jewish leaders with state administrators, i.e., from Jewish politics. This trend manifested most strongly with regard to the last decades of communist rule, and with good reason.

In consonance with a national phenomenon, yet again, many of those who had opposed the administrations of the 1980s assumed positions of power and influence in the 1990s. Karol Sidon returned to Czechoslovakia from political exile as Karol Ephraim Sidon in 1992 to become the Chief Rabbi of Prague and the Czech Republic. Leo Pavlát rose to direct the Jewish Museum two years later, after having served as a diplomat in Israel. Others associated with either political dissent or the intra-community opposition movement of 1989 also joined the boards of the Jewish communities.

James Krapfl describes tremendous struggles among the post-1989 political elite to determine the outcome of the Velvet Revolution. This, he argues, led radicals and ideologues to seek the exclusion of those with whom they disagreed from the processes which would steer their country's future.¹²⁶ I have already mentioned the only three acts of overt political exclusion which transpired within the Czech Jewish communities of which I am aware. They touched Heller, Kraus, and Mayer. Regrettably, I can offer no insights into whether or not some individuals practiced anticipatory self-exclusion within the communities. Yet this heuristic sets a high bar for the category of exclusion. Even today, the state recognizes the CJRC alone as the country's sole Jewish ecclesiastical institution, to the exclusion of a number of civic

¹²⁵ Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks, and the Jews*; and Wein, "A Slavic Jerusalem."

¹²⁶ James Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face*, 111-228.

organizations founded after 1990. Some of these groups, nonetheless, serve religious ends, particularly for individuals who either reject the formal Orthodoxy of the official community or who cannot join them because they do not meet their membership criteria, based in religious law. The members of these groups have developed their own religious cultures, as well as unique perspectives on the recent history of Jewish-state relations in the Czech lands.¹²⁷

It may be wrong to imagine these official and semi-official Jewish spheres as fully independent of one another. Some individuals belong to multiple groups, and others move informally between them. Yet, at the same time, the official community still exercises considerable control over Jewish culture and politics by virtue of its access to the state and its near monopoly over Jewish properties, infrastructure, and services. The broader public, moreover, considers the official community to be the legitimate embodiment of Jewishness in the Czech lands. Until recently, this situation has meant that a single institution has exercised significant control over the frameworks of Czech-Jewish collective memory. It has, for the most part, adopted the Manichean politics of memory which emerged within the general public—as the case of Rabbi Mayer suggests. Change has only come in recent years.

A similar trend manifested in the first attempts to write the Jewish history of the communist period, and it remains influential today. With significant exceptions, whose voices appear throughout this work, authors have adopted “antisemitism” as their primary framework of analysis when approaching this topic. (Such an approach is consonant with Western, Cold-War propaganda about the Soviet Bloc and may reflect a moment of early triumphalism, now passed.) This, in turn, mirrors a trend in the general historiography of the Czech lands. Many scholars

¹²⁷ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 161-87 and 205-15. For the sake of disclosure I must report that I worked for one such organization, Bejt Praha, from September 2000 through December 2001. I then helped to found another, *Masorti-ČR*.

thereof have sought only to reveal the “crimes of communism.”¹²⁸ Both literatures too neatly divide the rulers from the ruled. In addition, neither leaves much room for analyzing the motivations of state administrators and, therefore, also prevents authors from exploring the agency of the party-state’s purported “victims.” Within these frameworks, achieving a complex understanding of the latter’s relationships with the state and with each other is nearly impossible. These literatures offer little to those of us concerned with understanding the Jewish cultures of Europe.

Fortunately, cultures change. In my conclusion, I point to new trends in the memory politics at the Czech Jewish communities and also in historiography. They offer opportunities for re-approaching the recent past, as I have sought to do here, which have significant implications for thinking about the intersection of statecraft, ethnicity, and religion in contemporary Europe and also, of course, for writing Jewish historiography.

¹²⁸ Michal Kopeček, “From the Politics of History to Memory as Political Language: Czech Dealings with the Communist Past after 1989,” in *Forum Geschichtskulturen, Czechia, Version: 1.0* (16 December 2013). < <http://www.imre-kertesz-kolleg.uni-jena.de/index.php?id=519&l=0>> (24 June 2014); Idem., *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce: zrod a počátky marxistického revizionismu ve střední Evropě, 1953-1960* [The search for the lost meaning of revolution: the birth and beginnings of Marxist revisionism on Central Europe, 1954-1960] (Prague, Czech Republic: Argo, 2009); and idem., “Paměť národa new style,” *Lidové noviny* (18 November 2006). <http://www.aktualne.usd.cas.cz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=48&Itemid=8888974> (24 June 2014).

CONCLUSION

On 12 October 2010, Ivan Klíma (b. 1931)¹ and Valtr Komárek (1930-2013)² sat beside one another on a stage at the Jewish Town Hall in Prague to participate in a public, moderated discussion on the theme, “Czech Jews and Communism.” I sat in the audience. Both Klíma and Komárek had joined the Communist Party after the Second World War and later aligned with its reform wing. Klíma found success as an author and served as the deputy editor of *Literární noviny*, the weekly newsletter of the Czechoslovak Writers’ Union. The party expelled Klíma in 1967, however, after he protested against censorship at Fourth Congress of the Writers’ Union, where much debate turned on the issue of Czechoslovakia’s reaction to the Arab-Israeli war of that year. Klíma resumed publishing freely in 1968, when the government abandoned censorship. Komárek pursued economics. He rose within the party-state apparatus and, from 1964 to 1967, worked as an advisor to Che Guevara. Komárek returned to Czechoslovakia in 1968 to develop a new, socialist economic theory for the Prague Spring government. After the Soviet occupation of August 1968, Klíma refused to emigrate and, instead, worked menial jobs and continued writing as a dissident. He found a friend and patron in Philip Roth. Komárek’s career suffered, but he remained a member of the Communist Party. In 1978, he joined the Economic Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. Six years later, he assumed the directorship of the

¹ Charles McGrath, “Optimism Outlasted a Lifetime of Horrors,” *The New York Times* (17 November 2013). <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/18/books/ivan-klimas-my-crazy-century-spans-decades-of-czech-life.html?_r=0>; and Maya Jaggi, “Building Bridges,” *The Guardian* (30 April 2004).

<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/01/featuresreviews.guardianreview12>> (27 June 2014).

² Václav Lang, “Valtr Komárek,” *Novinky.cz* (2013). <<http://tema.novinky.cz/valtr-komarek>>; and “Valtr Komarek: One of the velvet revolutionaries,” *The Independent* (16 May 2013). <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/valtr-komarek-one-of-the-velvet-revolutionaries-8619808.html>> (27 June 2014).

academy's Institute of Prognostication, where he oversaw and educated future Prime Minister and President Václav Klaus. He played a central role, once again, in planning the post-1989 economic transition and, afterwards, served in the government.

Klíma and Komárek, both ethnic Jews, spoke about their decisions to join the party and of their choices after 1968. One audience member, who had emigrated as a young man in that year, challenged both men for not having left the Communist Party after the Slánský Affair. They pointed in response to the optimism for reform that had built from the mid-1950s through 1968. The crowd loved Klíma. He had brought fame to their community, not only with his literary works, but also with his principled and self-sacrificing stance against the post-1968 regime. He spoke in beautiful, if well rehearsed prose. Komárek, in contrast, faced criticism for having remained a communist after the invasion. I anticipated that he would. What followed, however, surprised me. Komárek accounted for his life by explaining, less than poetically, that he had wanted to continue to do interesting things, to be engaged in the world, and to provide for his family. He had collaborated out of calculated self-interest. An unexpected applause followed.

The applause marked for me a transition in the way that Czech Jews, at least some of those who associated with the community, could and did express themselves publicly with regard to their experiences during the 1970s and 1980s. It signified, I think, an openness to reflecting in a more complex and empathetic way about the relationship between the party-state administration and so-called average citizens during the 1970s and 1980s. Komárek's words and the crowd's response reflected an acknowledgment, however belated, that the post-1989 memory-mythical division of Czechoslovak society into neat classes of rulers and ruled simply does not accord with lived reality and with the historical record. Alongside a few thousand dissidents, lived millions of citizens who participated actively in the public sphere and who

conferred legitimacy upon the regime by adopting its political and cultural discourses. The leaders and members of the Jewish community may have hidden much from state administrators, even on stays in the very country cottages that feature so prominently in traditional accounts of the period, but they did not withdraw fully into the private sphere. The crowd clapped in identification.

This turn in the politics of memory bodes well for Czech political culture and has already born historiographical fruit.³ It renders almost mute the popular and scholarly trend of comparing the 1970s and 1980s to the 1950s. Such discussions accept all too easily and even rearticulate the restorative nostalgia and rhetoric of the post-1968 regime.⁴ At the same time, they fail to take into account the structural differences between the two periods, in both the domestic and international spheres—as well as the fact, per Charles Maier, that globalization’s advance undermined the distinction between the two after 1970. Imagining the later communist decades as a return to the 1950s can also give the impression that the middle years were somehow exceptional, i.e., less authentically communist, rather than simply different. This, in turn, can lead to an idealization of the communist regime, one based primarily on ideological terms and blind to all but the most obvious structural considerations. Charles Maier calls these “moral

³ For a collection of such works by Czech authors on Czech history, see *Social History*, vol. 37 (2012).

See also Matěj Spurný, “Nejsou jako my: Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945-1960)” [They are not like us: Czech society and minorities in the borderlands (1945-1960)] (Prague, Czech Republic: Anticomplex, 2011).

⁴ I borrow this phrase from Svetlana Boym. She writes, “[Restorative] nostalgics do not think of themselves as nostalgic; they believe that their project is about truth. This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in ant modern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories. Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time.” Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

narratives,” and they require themes.⁵ For nearly two decades after 1989, Czech activist-scholars sought to reveal the “crimes of communism,” rather than attempting rethink a regime they believed themselves already to understand. The Czech Historian Michal Pullman subjects this practice to considerable criticism. He writes,

If the party was always right, it became in the post-1989 historiography always wrong—driven by a pure exercise of power, fulfilling the totalitarian aspirations of the narrow party elite. If anti-communist tendencies were always wrong before, they became—by labeling them as resistance—always right today, regardless of the motivations of the agents.⁶

And later,

I must say that I find the instruction to interpret state socialism as a ‘totalitarian regime’ inappropriate and unhelpful. Not primarily because the concept of totalitarianism is outdated and discredited in my view, but more because it closes off the discussion and obstructs the analysis of facts that contradict a set of *a priori* assumptions.⁷

I agree with Pullmann’s general conclusion that “scholarly historiography during the 1990s was rather positivist and oriented towards the history of repression.”⁸

This trend manifested institutionally in 1995, when the Ministry of the Interior established the Office for the Documentation and Prosecution of Communist Crimes (*Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu*).⁹ In 2007, the ministry founded the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (*Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů*).¹⁰ As its name suggests, its purview extends from the years of Nazi-German occupation through the end of communist

⁵ Charles S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 806.

⁶ “Discussion: Writing History in the Czech and Slovak Republics: an Interview with Michal Pullmann,” *Social History*, vol. 37, no. 4 (November 2012): 396.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 398.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁹ Michal Kopeček, “From the Politics of History to Memory as Political Language: Czech Dealings with the Communist Past after 1989,” in *Forum Geschichtskulturen, Czechia, Version: 1.0* (16 December 2013), 2-5. < <http://www.imre-kertesz-kolleg.uni-jena.de/index.php?id=519&l=0> > (24 June 2014).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-11.

rule. This scope draws upon the very real similarities and continuities of political ideology and practice that Europe's fascist and Stalinist regimes shared. Yet it fails to differentiate the first decade of communist rule, to which this continuity applies, from those that followed, to which it does not.¹¹

In 2008, the Czech government led European politicians in drafting and signing the "Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism." That document also put the "crimes of communism" into conversation with those of fascism, again, without acknowledging the end of Stalinism in the 1950s. Some scholars argue that this and similar initiatives reflect an attempt by the political right to discredit their opponents on the left. They accuse its proponents of seeking to associate the left with the Gulag, much as the right has inherited Auschwitz, and of trying to construct a moral equivalency between the two, which at once condemns and exonerates both sides.¹²

This practice also re-nationalizes the atrocities of the Second World War, at the expense of Jewish voices and Holocaust memory. European nations can now speak of their losses to both communism and Nazism in one breath, without noting the important differences in the politics of the regimes and in their victims. Thus, if commemorating the Holocaust remains "the

¹¹ Two works that address these similarities well and without falling into the errors to be discussed immediately below are: Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: A. A. Knopf; distributed by Random House, 1999); and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010).

¹² Efraim Zuroff, video-recorded lecture "On the Prague Declaration" (University of Helsinki, 25 June 2012). <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8VCVFTV6hM>> (28 June 2014). Carolyn J. Dean levies similar criticism against the emerging discourses of Second-World-War memory in contemporary France, with particular reference to Stéphane Courtois, Mark Kramer, et. al., *The Black Book of Communism* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1999). See Dean, "Recent French Discourses on Stalinism, Nazism and 'Exorbitant Jewish Memory,'" *History and Memory*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 43-85. This discussion has a long history, which began with the so-called historians' debate in Germany. For a compelling account thereof see Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

contemporary European entry ticket,” these discourses of collapse facilitate what John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic call “remembering to forget.”¹³ This “moral narrative” leaves little else for the researcher of post-1956 Central and Eastern Europe to do, other than to count rare bodies (and lesser sins) and to repeat the slogan, “never again,” with her finger pointed at an entire century.

Neither the public discourses about nor the historiography on the Jews and Jewish communities of socialist Europe have escaped similar problems. The endeavor to reveal the “crimes of communism” assumes criminality as an *a priori* framework of analysis. It replaces questions with conclusions and renders deeper explanations unnecessary. With regard to discussions of Jewish-state relations, this has manifested in a popular and even scholarly recourse to “antisemitism” as an analytical framework, which pits the state against the Jews. I suggest that this trend drew additional strength from its consonance with Western-Jewish political discourses from the final decades of the Cold War, and I have attempted to show its obfuscating effects in my chapters on Holocaust memory and the political economy of Jewish communal properties.

It is, of course, productive to think about Jewish-state relations in terms of the party-state’s attempt to find a bureaucratic solution to the “Jewish Question” and also in terms of the strategies deployed by those individuals and communities, identified in some way as Jewish, to respond thereto. Yet, for a number of reasons, too fast a boundary cannot not be drawn between Jews and the state, nor should Jewish-state relations be considered in oppositional (i.e.,

¹³ John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic, “Introduction,” in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 1-24. The authors attribute the phrase “the contemporary European entry ticket,” to Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2005), 803. See also Dean, “Recent French Discourses.”

antisemitic) terms alone. First, the state managed and financed the Jewish communities just as it did the country's other churches. This meant that Jewish leaders worked with state administrators to develop, maintain, and shape Jewish life. It does not follow from the fact that the party-state determined the framework in which this cooperation occurred that its history is one of oppression and division alone. As I have shown, the relationship between Jews and the state incorporated aspects of both mutuality and antagonism. Moreover, to label all Jewish cooperation with the state a product of false consciousness or coercion is to deny the experiences of many Jewish citizens. It also makes it difficult to speak about intra-communal divisions among Jews.

Second, citizens of Jewish origin occupied official posts within the Communist Party and the state administration which sometimes had bearing on Jewish affairs. This held true before the Slánský Affair, when communists of Jewish origin occupied high positions in disproportionate numbers. It also applied during the 1960s, when the state relied upon Jewish artists and leaders to use the Holocaust as a means for marking and calling for political progress. After 1975, the CJRC leadership fought the party-state's battles in the international arena with increasing stridency. Third, only at certain moments did the state treat Jewish citizens as Jews. For example, receiving packages from Israel might mark the recipient as Jewish for postal workers, who normally did not consider the religious or ethnic particularities of their clients. What happened next, depended upon the proclivity of the particular postal worker and the orders that she may have received from the police. Most often, the intended recipient would obtain her package and she would certainly continue to benefit from the services of the Post Office. Job applicants did not normally provide information about their heritage or faith to potential employers. A German-sounding last name, however, might suggest to the hiring body that an applicant was of Jewish origin. What happened next, again, depended upon the particular people in the scenario. If the

position, however, involved state or industrial secrets, StB agents might have vetted applicants to prevent citizens of Jewish origin from obtaining such jobs. The same applied to visible positions in the cultural sphere. Those citizens of Jewish origin not associated with political dissent, however, always had the right to employment of some sort. Finally, the party-state comprised various administrations that did not always agree on the best way to manage Jewish affairs. I thus contend that too much internal variegation existed within the set of people and institutions identified by the terms “Jews” and “State” to support the writing of a history of opposition.

My deconstruction of the Jewish-state binary does not render it meaningless or useless, even for the purposes of historical analysis. It does, however, suggest that the “antisemitism” framework may be too Manichean in character to capture the nuances upon which historiography turns. Indeed, too single-minded a focus on antisemitism has led some scholars and popular voices, particularly during the 1990s, to depict the history of Jewish-state relations as a series of racist excesses committed by a united party-state against the Jewish minority, interrupted by a period of exceptionality in the 1960s.¹⁴ It prevented them from taking into account the competing priorities and perspectives within the party-state system. It also made it difficult to consider the complex and contradictory ways that international pressures conditioned Jewish-state relations in the Czech lands.

With this dissertation, I have sought to model an alternative approach to analyzing Jewish-state relations in the communist Czech lands. I have taken into account not only the aforementioned blurring of the Jewish-state divide, but also the divisions within the state

¹⁴ Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006); Jana Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu v českých zemích 1948-1992* [The sources and manifestations of antisemitism in the Czech lands 1948-1992], *Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR* [Notebooks of the Institute of Contemporary History], vol. 19 (1994).

administration regarding the management of Jewish affairs. Antisemitism features prominently in my work, particularly in light of the long history of ambivalence about Jews in the region. Indeed, I prefer to speak of ambivalence, rather than antisemitism. Modern animosity towards Jews, despite its medieval and ancient roots, almost always existed within and sometimes in self-conscious opposition to liberal discourses about the equality of all human-beings as individuals and the rights of nations. Even Stalinist antisemitism came dressed in Enlightenment garb.

Resisting antisemitism as a framework of analysis also facilitates a better integration of Jewish voices and political action into the historical narrative. They appear, not only as reactions to antisemitism, but also as interventions into a complex field of competing ideas about Jews that manifested simultaneously in the policies, practices, and priorities of various branches of the party-state administration. Jewish communities and individuals could and did oppose the state, but they often worked as its junior partner to their own advantage. Sometimes, Jewish factions aligned against one another in ways that paralleled divisions within the state and also between the state and the citizenry.

Finally, with my shift in perspective, I have sought to consider the effects of structural change over time, in both the domestic and international arenas. The party-state very often established policies that affected the Jewish minority without ever taking the latter into serious consideration. This applied to crafting legislation about ecclesiastical affairs, setting policies for tourism and travel, and also to the postwar transformation of Czechoslovakia from a nationalities state into the exclusive nation-state of the Czech and Slovak peoples. A focus on antisemitism can lead to an over-interpretation of significant events in Jewish-state relations. By remaining, nonetheless, concerned about how discourses of ambivalence articulated at particular moments and in the context of broader affairs, I have sought to bridge the gap between “structural” and

“moral” narratives. Historical actors, I contend, experienced the tension between the two in their own lives, and understood the dependence of Jewish-state relations upon the general affairs of state.

This opens the possibility for exploring the concept of “latent antisemitism” in a new light. Scholars often use this term to explain the resurfacing of antisemitism within majority populations that have experienced long periods of apparently successful Jewish integration. Within the framework of discussions centered upon antisemitism, the concept has always struck me as both magical and xenophobic. It presumes, without need for much explanation, the persistence of a discourse without its prominent articulation and despite, in many cases, its public negation. To assert that antisemitism moves only between latent and manifest forms is also to assert its inevitability. On the one hand, this contradicts the historiographical axiom that cultures change, rupture, and disappear over time. On the other hand, it often attributes a set of unsavory beliefs, currently associated with genocide, to particular peoples in an almost primordial fashion.¹⁵ A focus on ambivalence, rather than antisemitism, however, empowers the author to find and express continuities and discontinuities between seemingly opposing periods of antisemitism and philosemitism. Situating this discussion into the contexts of Jewish-state relations and other concerns not directly related to Jews, moreover, helps to avoid presenting antisemitic resurgence as an ahistorical “eternal return.” To repeat an earlier quote from Jonathan Bolton, “... one of the things that made the 1970s different from the 1950s was—the 1960s.”¹⁶ Another differentiating factor, as per Chapter Nine, was globalization.

¹⁵ Daniel Jonathan Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Knopf, distributed by Random House, 1996).

¹⁶ Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, the Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 74-81, see 81 for quote.

The Czech-Jewish Case and Its Implications

In narrow terms my argument is as follows. The years of Czechoslovak communist rule, 1948-1989, represent the final chapter of a story that spanned roughly two centuries, in which East-Central European governments sought to facilitate the integration (alternatively, the exclusion or removal) of Jewish subjects-cum-citizens through bureaucratic means. This endeavor failed because the party-state insisted upon applying to Jews firm categories created for thinking about Christian and post-Christian Europeans with presumably singular national identities. Yet Jewish practice and identification, as I have shown, resists disambiguation into neat ethnic and religious categories. Jewish citizens, moreover, like many other citizens (particularly before 1947) held attachments to multiple and overlapping national communities.

The assignment of different ministries to manage the Jewish religion, on the one hand, and Jewish national identification on the other, built this contradiction into the very fabric of the state. StB agents perceived a risk of Zionist reassertion in any manifestation of Jewishness, whether religiously defined or not. It also relied upon the association of individuals and of their forbears with Jewish religious institutions in order to identify them as potential Jewish nationalists. On the other hand, the state's support for the Jewish religion opened the door to expressions and experiences of Jewish ethnic co-identification. State administrators, often in conflict with one another, never succeeded in overcoming these tensions. The communities and individuals identified in some way as Jewish paid a price for this in most years. Yet they also benefited in others, when conditions aligned to make it advantageous for various organs of the party-state to treat them with leniency and even to extend to them unique privileges. No period, however, should be considered as having been determined by philosemitism or antisemitism alone. The dependence of Jewish-state relations on factors well beyond Jewish affairs suggests

the need for more complex explanations, of the type that I have tried to offer. Indeed, Jewish leaders and individuals found ways to influence the state throughout the duration of communist rule.

More broadly, I believe this work to have suggested that nation-states, as such, lack the capacity to manage the identification of their citizens successfully, whether as individuals or as groups. The nation-states of East-Central Europe, in particular, failed at integrating their ethnic and religious minorities—in this case, Jews—because their bureaucracies depended upon the use of sharp categories that did not and could not correspond well to the lived experiences and common knowledge of their citizens, including state administrators. I stand on the shoulders of giants when I attribute this failure to necessity.¹⁷ What then accounts for the endeavor in the first place and for the obduracy of officials in the face of persistent disappointment?

I believe that the answer lies, at least in part, in the dialectic character of the Enlightenment and of European modernity.¹⁸ In making this claim, I draw upon Marcel

¹⁷ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); and Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ In lieu of attempting to paraphrase an influential text, I will quote two passages at length which have bearing on the present discussion: “As a totality set out in language and laying claim to a truth which suppressed the older mythical faith of popular religion, the solar, patriarchal myth was itself an enlightenment, fully comparable on that level to the philosophical one. But now it paid the price. Mythology itself set in motion the endless process of enlightenment by which, with ineluctable necessity, every definite theoretical view is subjected to the ineluctable necessity, every definite theoretical view is subjected to the annihilating criticism that it is only a belief, until even the concepts of mind, truth, and, indeed, enlightenment itself have been reduced to animistic magic... Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology. Receiving all its subject matter from myths, in order to destroy them, it falls as judge under the spell of myth. It seeks to escape the trial of fate and retribution by itself exacting retribution on that trial. In myths, everything that happens must atone for the fact of having happened. It is no different in the enlightenment: no sooner has a fact been established than it is rendered insignificant... The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself... The identity of everything with everything is

Stoetzler's 2008 book, *The State, The Nation, and the Jews: Liberalism and the Antisemitism Dispute in Bismarck's Germany*. Following Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (judiciously and non-dogmatically), Stoetzler cautions against thinking about the history of European modernity as a competition between liberalism, on the one hand, and conservatism or anti-liberalism on the other. He argues, instead, that the liberal attempts to create national societies of universal rights and inclusion always turned upon the demand for popular homogenization and, therefore, also exclusion. This pertained in particular to the domestic Jewish minorities, however conceived.

Stoetzler thus characterizes his work as a “study of the forms of antisemitism that occur in liberal societies [emphasis added].”¹⁹ He takes as his object of analysis the debates about the

bought at the cost that nothing can at the same time be identical to itself. Enlightenment dissolves away the injustice of the old inequality of unmediated mastery, but at the same time perpetuates it in universal mediation, by relating every existing thing to every other. . . . Not merely are qualities dissolved in thought, but human beings are forced into real conformity. The blessing that the market does not ask about birth is paid for in the exchange society by the fact that the possibilities conferred by birth are molded to fit the production of goods that can be bought on the market. Each human being has been endowed with a self of his or her own, different from all others, so that it could all the more surely be made the same. But because that self never quite fitted the mold, enlightenment throughout the liberalistic period has always sympathized with social coercion. The unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual and in the scorn poured on the type of society which could make people into individuals.” Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) 7-9.

“Race is not, as the racial nationalists claim, an immediate, natural peculiarity. Rather, it is a regression to nature as mere violence, to the hidebound particularism which, in the existing order, constitutes precisely the universal. Race today is the self-assertion of the bourgeois individual, integrated into the barbaric collective. The harmonious society to which the liberal Jews declared their allegiance has finally been granted to them in the form of the national community. They believed that only anti-Semitism disfigured this order, which in reality cannot exist without disfiguring human beings. The persecution of the Jews, like any persecution, cannot be separated from that order. Its essence, however it may hide itself at times, is the violence which today is openly revealed.” Ibid., 138-39.

¹⁹ Marcel Stoetzler, *The State, the Nation & the Jews: Liberalism and the Antisemitism Dispute in Bismarck's Germany* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 7.

place of Jews in German society that occupied the Berlin public sphere from 1879 through 1881. In his conclusion, Stötzler presents a summary account of how conservative liberal-nationalists moved quickly from demanding that Jews assimilate to rejecting the feasibility of Jewish integration. The consonance of his presentation with the experiences of StB agents merits its quotation here at length:

The analysis of the Dispute has pointed to the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion as inherent in the “nation” form of the modern state. Whenever a state and society are constituted in the form of “the nation,” some degree of cultural homogeneity will have to be enforced, and there will inevitably be some form of (more subtle or more overt) pressure toward sociocultural assimilation. If a relevant minority appears not to be assimilating as much as it is expected to, representatives of the established national culture tend to draw one of three conclusions. First, they may think that the members of the minority are prevented from assimilating by circumstance; this is the classic position... Second, they are seen as being unwilling to assimilate... Or third, they are seen as unable to assimilate, which is the “racist” position... These three interpretations have different and potentially opposite practical implications but work toward the same political end, the consolidation of nation building. Because [Heinrich von] Treitschke [1834-1896, Prussian historian and member of the Reichstag, the main conservative voice in these debates] expects antisemitism to accelerate the assimilation of the German Jews (his first objective) and strengthen national consciousness of all Germans (his second objective), he endorses it. The tension in his argument between whether or not he believes Jewish assimilation to be possible implies the second objective can still be achieved independently from the first: if inclusion does not work, exclusion will [emphasis added].²⁰

During the early years of de-Stalinization, the StB assigned its agents the task of protecting citizens of Jewish origin from the influences of foreign Zionists, who presumably prevented them from assimilating (*usque ad finem*²¹) into the Czech and Slovak nations. Like the early liberal advocates of Jewish integration in Central Europe, the StB sought to use the coercive powers of the state to remove the conditions which they believed kept Jews from transcending their own Jewishness. The directors and agents of the StB division responsible for monitoring

²⁰ Ibid, 286.

²¹ Kateřina Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Žide?: Národní identita Židů v Čechách, 1918-1938* [Czechs, Germans, Jews? the national identity of Jews in the Czech lands, 1918-1938] (Prague and Litomyšl, Czech Republic: Paseka, 2008), 132-39.

and combating domestic Jewish nationalism grew frustrated through the 1960s at the resurgence of Jewish cultural life. In the decades that followed, they attempted to register all citizens of Jewish origin as potential “Zionists” and enemies of the state. This amounted to an admission that Jews could not belong.

The similarity of these two stories attests to the continuities of ideology and practice between the periods before and after the Second World War and, inasmuch, support my contention that the communist years must be considered the final chapter of an historical epoch that began in the late eighteenth century. So too does the persistent use by states, in particular, of antisemitism as a political tool. It should be recalled that the party-state struggled throughout the 1950s and 1960s to maintain a monopoly on these discourses and the benefits that accrued to those who mastered them. Adorno and Horkheimer reflected upon the inseparability of nationalist antisemitism from anti-Jewish hatred stemming from religious beliefs, despite the claims of its proponents to have abandoned such pre-modern sentiments.²² The indivisibility of Jewish religious and national identification and practice has been central to my narrative as well.

To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that everything remained the same through the 1940s. The Second World War, the Holocaust, the founding of the State of Israel, and the spread of communist-party rule across East-Central Europe wrought drastic changes both to the terms of Jewish integration and to Jewish-state relations. The “exclusion” to which Stoetzler points culminated in the genocide of European and North African Jews (along with many others), a tragedy that Treitschke could not have anticipated. The leaders of the postwar nation-states of East-Central Europe never considered this option. Instead, they excluded the Jewish nation conceptually by revoking their national minority rights and by attempting to achieve the national

²² Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 144-47.

assimilation of Jewish citizens by fiat. Until 1950, the Czechoslovak state facilitated the emigration of Jews who rejected this accommodation. The closing of the country's borders to such movement, however, left state administrators with little recourse other than to insist without end upon the very national assimilation of Jews that many of them believed to be impossible.

The extent to which international factors influenced Jewish-state relations and the national integration of Jews also separates the periods before and after the Second World War. They entered only rhetorically into the Antisemitism Debate (*Antisemitismusstreit*). Treitschke advised his acolytes,

If the English and the French talk with some disdain of the prejudice of the Germans against the Jews we must reply to them: "You don't know us; you live in happier circumstances which make the rise of such prejudices impossible." The number of Jews in Western Europe is so small that they cannot have any noticeable influence upon the morality of the nation. But our country is invaded year after year by multitudes of assiduous pants-selling youths from the inexhaustible cradle of Poland, whose children and grand-children are to be the future rulers of Germany's exchanges and German's presses.²³

Self-professed German antisemites may have felt obliged to respond to the criticism of Western observers, but the latter did not intervene considerably into German affairs. Treitschke attributed the failure of Jewish integration in Germany to immigration from the East, but he did not take issue with the treatment of Jews in those territories. For late-nineteenth-century German antisemites the "Jewish Question" was primarily a domestic affair. The same cannot be said with confidence of the Czech case. Bohemia and Moravia remained part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. Its policies conditioned the region's nationalities debates and therefore also discussions of Jewish integration. After independence, however, the Czech "Jewish Question"—if

²³ Heinrich von Treitschke, "A Word about our Jewry (1880)," reprinted from idem., *A Word about our Jewry*, ed. Ellis Rivkin and trans. Helen Lederer (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College-Institute of Religion, n.d.), 1-7, in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, eds Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, 2nd edition (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 393.

it remained a question at all—became a domestic concern as well.²⁴ This changed only in the mid-1930s with the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany and its willful interventions into Czech affairs.

After the Second World War, international considerations weighed more heavily on Jewish-state relations and on the integration of Jewish citizens into the Czechoslovak bi-national state. Palestinian-cum-Israeli and Western-Jewish organizations operated in the country between 1945 and 1949. While some established social-welfare programs, many others promoted Zionism and facilitated Jewish emigration. Next, the USSR introduced an anti-Zionist campaign, which shaped Jewish-state relations in Czechoslovakia for decades. The Israeli diplomatic corps and Western-Jewish organizations intervened with increasing intensity and success into Czechoslovak Jewish affairs from 1956 through 1968, and then again in the 1980s. The persistence of popular antisemitism and the state's use of antisemitism as a political tool, motivated and, in my opinion, also justified their actions. (They too inspired conflict between the state offices responsible for managing different aspects of Jewish life.) Throughout Cold War, moreover, Western and Eastern political blocs propagandistically accused each other of antisemitism. On one hand, these accusations merely functioned as one out of a number of antagonistic discourses during the Cold-War. And to some extent, both sides used Jews as pawns. On the other hand, they were also sincere. Treitschke's observation that East and West disagreed on how to manifest the Enlightenment in practice, specifically with regard to the integration of Jews into the nation-state, still held true. After the experience of the Second World

²⁴ Hillel J. Kieval, "Negotiating Czechoslovakia: The Challenges of Jewish Citizenship in a Multiethnic Nation-State," in *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry*, eds. Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman (Oxford, UK and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 103-19. See also idem., *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); and idem., *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918* (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988).

War, however, the Western camp took it upon itself to spread its vision across Europe.

The official policies in East and West, nonetheless, bore remarkable similarities. In both East and West, states granted full equality and rights to Jews as citizens. The capitalist and communist states also both vested their Jewish citizens with religious freedoms in accordance with their respective policies for managing ecclesiastical affairs. (Jewish religious institutions even fared better in communist Czechoslovakia than some Christian churches.) The blocs diverged, however, with regard to the ethno-cultural identification and political allegiances of their Jewish citizens. Western states left such matters to the civic and private spheres, which they did not regulate heavily—at least where Jews were concerned. Europe’s socialist states, in contrast, attempted to manage these phenomena from above. In most years, they rejected the rights of citizens to express dissent from their official ideologies and policies. In the Jewish case, StB agents even gathered information and harassed citizens who they thought might dissent.

This East-West competition articulated within a particular political context. Stalin initiated the Soviet Bloc’s anti-Zionist turn in the fall of 1948 in reaction to public expressions of Jewish ethnic solidarity and support for the newly founded State of Israel. While Israel attempted for some time to remain (or be perceived as) a neutral party in the emerging Cold War, the Soviet Bloc recognized its Westward orientation as early as 1949. As Israel moved further into the Western camp, communist administrators and party leaders feared that Israeli agents would exploit the sympathies of Jewish citizens for espionage purposes. Indeed, they did. This only confirmed for Soviet-Bloc officials the importance of managing the identities of Jewish citizens. Indeed, they understood it to be a matter of state security. Western and Israeli observers, on the other hand, fairly interpreted the restrictions that their Eastern counterparts placed on Jewish citizens as antisemitic. They sought to alleviate their burden and also to ensure the continuity of

Jewish life in the lands where it had once flourished. Western intelligence services also endeavored to build and maintain networks of collaborators and informants.

The East-West differentiation in Jewish affairs thus began, in some ways, as a disagreement about the role of the state in managing the beliefs and purported identities of their citizens. The particularities of the Cold War and of Middle Eastern politics, in particular, transformed this matter into a prolonged international crisis. This culminated in the 1970s and 1980s. Even as both camps attempted to find common ground during the period of *détente*, they divided themselves with increasing stridency over the issue of Soviet Jewry and, by extension, concern for the Jews of Central Europe as well. The relative economic supremacy of the West (after the American decline of the 1970s) pushed the Soviet Bloc into reaction. So too did the policies of Ronald Reagan.

Could the communist approach to integrating Jewish citizens have succeeded in isolation from foreign intervention? It may bring little benefit to ponder counter-factual questions, yet they still sometimes merit posing because they encourage a shift in perspective. This is such an instance. Imagine that the Jewish citizens of Czechoslovakia enjoyed equal rights and that they could practice their religion freely in accordance with state policies. In the absence of state antisemitism, (exacerbated during communism by international factors) they might even have inherited the mantle of the *Čecho-židé*, the Jewish assimilationists of the First Republic. Of course, this never happened and antisemitism persisted. It may also be immoral to extend to some peoples and not to others the right to organize as a national community, even if this reflected the visions articulated by cohorts within them. And it certainly appears that nation-state experience great difficulties when they seek to manage the ethnic identification of their citizens.

I raise this question only, however, to portray more clearly the role of Western powers in

conditioning Jewish-state relations within the Communist Bloc. This should give at least brief pause to the proponents of triumphalist historiographies of the sort discussed above. They have all too often seized upon an idea of what Jewish integration (or some other sociopolitical phenomenon) should have look like, instead of analyzing it on its own terms. In the worst cases, these histories amount to little more than attempts to vindicate the ideologies of nationalism (as well as other Enlightenment discourses) from reproach. Jeffrey Herf, focusing on another period, invented the concept of “Reactionary Modernism” to salvage modernity from Nazi Germany, rather than admitting that the Enlightenment contains within itself structural and ideological contradictions in need of constant attention from the political and civic spheres.²⁵ It is one thing to want history and the Enlightenment to have unfolded in a certain manner and even to work towards that goal. It is quite another—one which hampers political work and denies any useful role to historiography in the present—to take as one’s central research question why history did not unfold in a particular manner.

This trend has manifested in the treatment of the communist years as a period of exceptionality in terms of Jewish history. I recall here the titles that I mentioned in my introduction. They imply that the post-communist transition was a return to normalcy: *Gray Dawn*, *Out of the Shadows*, and *In the Shadow of the Holocaust & Communism*. In reading such works and others, I sense an implicit and retroactive demand the party-state approach Jewish integration on Western terms. Authors take it for granted that nation-states and national communities should extend to Jewish citizens the right to be full members of the local national community and also nationally Jewish. Yet this simply does not correspond to how Europeans thought about national belonging in the postwar years. Some authors, moreover, see no reason

²⁵ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

for postwar moderns to have doubted the possibility that Jews could be loyal to two states at once, to their home country and to Israel, regardless of the broader political context which pitted those very states against one another.

Of course, one finds historical precedent for an accommodation of this sort in the policies of First Republic Czechoslovakia, which extended to Jews as individuals the choice whether or not to identify as a members of the Jewish nationality. Indeed, Hillel J. Kieval characterized the goal of the Czech Zionist movement at the foundation of the state in 1918 to have been the construction of “a Czechoslovak Jewish nation whose contours coincided with the borders of the new state.”²⁶ Yet this was an uneasy bargain at best, born of expediency as much as ideology. It also reflected popular ambivalences, which reached even into the office of the President, about the ability of Jews ever to become fully Czech or Slovak.²⁷ The Communist Party did not derail Czechoslovak history, much as it directed it along a logical, if less preferable course.

A Turn to Sub-Ethnicity

Yuri Slezkyn protests against the relative lack of historiographical attention to the lives of the Russian Jews who joined the Communist Party before the Revolution. He attributes it to the fidelity of historians to a master narrative which excludes them. While the Jews of Czechoslovakia have not been absent from the historical record, the “antisemitism” framework has precluded a deep analysis of their politics, experiences, and modes of identification. I quote here at length from Slezkine,

Tevye the Milkman had five daughters... Tsaytl rejected a wealthy suitor to marry a poor tailor, who died of consumption. Hodl followed her revolutionary husband, Perchik, into Siberian exile. Shprintze was abandoned by her empty-headed groom and drowned

²⁶ Kieval, “Negotiating Czechoslovakia,” 118.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 198-216.

herself. Beilke married a crooked war contractor and fled with him to America. Chava eloped with a non-Jewish autodidact (“a second Gorsky”) and was mourned as dead, only to return, repentant, at the end of Shalom Aleichem’s book....

A great deal has been written about Chava the Zionist and Beilka the American, representing as they do the two apparently successful solutions to the European Jewish predicament. Even more has been written about the unassuming Tsaytl, who—let us suppose—stayed in rural Ukraine to be forgotten or patronized by the emigrants and their historians; beaten and robbed by Shkuro’s and Petliura’s soldiers; reformed resolutely but inconsistently by the Soviets (possibly by her own children); martyred anonymously by the Nazis; and commemorated, also anonymously, in the Holocaust literature and ritual. Which is to say, relatively little has been written about Tsaytl’s life but a great deal has been written about her death—and about its significance in the lives of Chava’s and Beilke’s children.

But what about Hodl?... She would not, however, be a part of the canonical Jewish history of the twentieth century on the theory that a Bolshevik (assuming that is what she became, along with so many others) could not be Jewish because Bolsheviks were against Jewishness (and because “Judeo-Bolshevism” was a Nazi catchword). Hodl’s grandchildren—fully secular, thoroughly Russified, and bound for the United States and Israel—are an important part of the Jewish story; Hodl herself is not.

It is obvious, however, that Hodl’s grandchildren would not have entered Jewish history had Hodl not been one of Tevye’s daughters—the one he was most proud of.²⁸

I do not mean to imply that every Czech Jew aligned with the Communist Party, although many did, including some of leaders of the Jewish religious communities. I share a goal with Slezkine, nonetheless, of seeking to restore marginal (non-Dubnowian) voices to the master narratives of Jewish history.

To that end, I will quote at from yet one more work of relevance. Hillel J. Kieval concludes his collection of essays on “the Jewish experience in the Czech lands” with a meditation on an anecdote. In 1996, the author and scholar, Eduard Goldstücker, told a group of students and professors from the University of Washington about a small social gathering which took place in Prague in June 1964.²⁹ Kieval paraphrases Goldstücker’s recollections,

²⁸ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2004), 204-04.

²⁹ Eduard Goldstücker (1913-2000) was a Czech author and a scholar of German literature. He served briefly in the Czechoslovak diplomatic corps before falling victim to the political trials of the 1950s. The party rehabilitated Goldstücker in 1955. He held academic posts thereafter and

As the four men sat reminiscing about life in Prague before the war, one of them remarked that here—in Langer’s living room—were gathered four types of Jews, each of whom represented one of the cultural options open to Czech Jewry in the twentieth century, and each option, it seemed, had led to a particular fate.³⁰

This is neither the place for me to explore those “types,” nor to review Kieval’s additions to them and his ultimate deconstruction of the entire basis of the typology. I turn instead to his words of conclusion:

What begins as a reminiscence, a successful connection of personal and historical memory—of past and present—leaves us with an overwhelming sense of discontinuity. The historical patterns of Jewish culture and society in the Czech lands (as well as in other parts of Central Europe) are shattered by successive political nightmares: Nazism, German occupation, state-sponsored genocide, Communist rule, and Soviet occupation.... None of the Czech-Jewish “types” could be found in Prague five years hence. The Zionists had been transported across continents, their movement long since declared a criminal conspiracy. The heroes of the Czech-Jewish ideal, relegated to irrelevancy and anachronism, no longer spoke. The German option, which in the interwar years was already but a shadow of its former self, was rendered absurd with the entry of the first German troops in 1939. The Jewish Communists, representing the final chapter in the history of Jewish emancipation in the Czech lands, were consumed by the revolution itself. The last sounds they heard were the echoes of nationalist and racist antisemitism. It could be argued, I think, that modern Jewish history in the Czech lands began with Joseph II [r. 1780-1790] and ended with Rudolf Slánský or perhaps with Eduard Goldstücker [who emigrated in 1968, but returned to Czechoslovakia after 1989].³¹

I agree that “successive political nightmares” brought an end, nearly absolute, to the story of modern Czech Jewry. And I see no merit in debating the exact date of its final horizon.

I have attempted here, instead, to elucidate the sociopolitical and cultural parameters which shaped and continue to shape the next chapter of the Czech Jewish experience—what

was a prominent voice in the Prague Spring of 1968. He emigrated to England after the Soviet-led invasion and repatriated to Czechoslovakia in 1990. Ritchie Robertson, “Goldstücker, Eduard,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*.

<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Goldstucker_Eduard> (11 July 2014); and Ruth Tosek and Marian Sling, “Eduard Goldstücker: Literary Scholar and Prominent Figure in the Prague Spring of 1968,” *The Guardian*, obituary section (24 October 2000).

<<http://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/oct/25/guardianobituaries1>> (11 July 2014).

³⁰ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, 218.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 228-29.

Kieval calls “a heartbeat to the future.”³² This endeavor reveals a dissonance between the respective histories of the state and of the Czech Jewish minority. While continuity through the Second World War characterizes the former, rupture defines the latter. Despite my focus on the state and its attempts to manage Jewish integration, I have also sought to gesture towards the emergence of a new Jewish politics and of a few novel cultural and societal trends Jewish society. I regret, nonetheless, that I do not feel competent at present to offer a summary analysis of the contours, conflicts, and stakes of this new Jewish experience. In place thereof, I shall attempt to sketch as best as possible how I understand the terms of the Czech-Jewish reorientation after the Second World War and its broader implications.

At some point between 1945 and 1956, the primary reference point for Jewish identification, politics, and culture in the Czech lands shifted away from the nation, or rather from the competition between nationalities that had characterized Bohemian and Moravian politics for a over century. Postwar Czechoslovakia transformed itself from a multi-ethnic state under Czech and (less so) Slovak hegemony into the nation-state of the Czech and Slovak peoples. In concert, the active members of the Jewish minority in the Czech lands (and perhaps also in Slovakia) slowly came to see themselves as belonging to a sub-ethnic community within both the Jewish and Czech nations. Of course, they did not articulate their subject position in this manner. Sub-ethnicity is a new concept and the party-state controlled the public discourses about Jewishness.

Jonathan Ray recently introduced the concept of sub-ethnicity to Jewish historiography in a thoughtful reanalysis of Sephardic Jewry’s emergence of as a semi-coherent group. He locates this watershed not in Spain, but in the expulsions from the peninsula beginning in 1492. Ray

³² Ibid., 229.

writes, "... it is the phenomenon of diaspora that is the crucial factor in shaping a new 'nation' within the Jewish world."³³ And,

... this new post-expulsion community was characterized by migration to a variety of locales, by a continued relationship to a homeland and continued promotion of its memory, and by the construction of a new group identity within the broader rubric of Judaism...³⁴

Not surprisingly, one finds some of the first, self-conscious expressions of Czech-Jewish sub-ethnic identification and community building in the context of diaspora. In 1933, Czechoslovak and Lithuanian settlers founded Kibbutz Czecho-Lita in the Galilee region of Palestine.³⁵ The following year in Palestine, Czech and Slovak immigrants established the Association of Jews from Czechoslovakia. By 1939, it boasted nearly 2,000 members, with branches in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa.³⁶ Czech-Jewish immigrants also founded a number of organizations in the United States of America, beginning in 1939 with the T. G. Masaryk Club. Others included the Czechoslovak Jewish Representative Committee (1942-1946), the Joseph Popper Lodge of B'nai B'rith (1944-1994), and the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews (1961, ongoing). Each

³³ Jonathan Ray, "New Approaches to the Jewish Diaspora: The Sephardim as a Sub-Ethnic Group," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, new series, vol. 15, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 20. See also idem., *After Expulsion: 1492 and the Making of Sephardic Jewry* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013).

³⁴ Ray, "New Approaches to the Jewish Diaspora," 21. For authors working on more contemporary communities see Rebecca Kobrin and Alanna Cooper. Kobrin uses the term "diaspora" to refer to Jews and Jewish communities from Białystok. For reasons that shall become clear, I find this term too limiting for present purposes. Cooper refers to Jewish sub-ethnicities as *edot* (Hebrew for "communities; *edah* in the singular). Her approach most closely mirrors my own. I am hesitant to use her terminology, nonetheless, because of its Jewish inflection. It may disrupt the drawing of comparisons between the Jewish case (and cases) and other similar phenomena. Alanna E. Cooper, *Bukharan Jews and the Dynamics of Global Judaism* (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 2012); and Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and its Diaspora* (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 2010).

³⁵ Avraham Eilat, "The Beginning" (n.d., in Hebrew). <<http://www.kfar-masaryk.org.il/ViewPage.asp?pagesCatID=4781&siteName=Masaryk>> (11 July 2014).

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, "Sdružení Židů pocházejících z Československa" [The Association of Jews from Czechoslovakia] (n.d.). <<http://www.czsk.net/svet/clanky/svet/zidizcr.html>> (11 July 2014).

had its own cultural and political missions and, therefore, attracted and repelled different immigrant cohorts. (To be clear, most Czech Jews in the USA did not affiliate with such groups.) Proximity to the wartime Czechoslovak government-in-exile vested the Czech-Jewish community in England with political advantages. In 1952, various organizations there united to form the Committee of Jews from Czechoslovakia under the aegis of the Conference of Material Claims against Germany. Many of these groups maintained contact with one another and thereby constructed an international Czech-Jewish network, which persisted throughout the duration of communist rule in Czechoslovakia.

The publications of the most active, organized cohort of New-York-based Jews from Bohemia and Moravia (and some from Slovakia) reflect that they “lived in a diaspora, not only of space, but also of time, separated from Masaryk’s First Czechoslovak Republic, which they recalled in halcyon tones.”³⁷ In 1943, Frederick Fried, the chairperson of the Czechoslovak Jewish Representative Committee portrayed the political and national debates that had once divided the Jews in Czechoslovakia “as the erstwhile essence of that country’s united Jewry.”³⁸ “It is that ‘unity in diversity,’” he wrote, “that rounds off the spiritual foundations of our native Judaism.”³⁹ In the context of diaspora—and among immigrants of strikingly similar backgrounds—a sub-ethnic community emerged from a population that had only years earlier divided itself along ethno-linguistic and political lines.

The ideological roots of this transformation, however, trace back to First Republic Czechoslovakia. They lay somewhere in between the ways that Dimitry Shumsky and Hillel J.

³⁷ Jacob Ari Labendz, “‘*In unserem Kreise:*’ Czech-Jewish Activism and Immigration in America, 1939-1994,” *Jewish History and Culture* (forthcoming).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Frederick Fried, “On the Crossroads of Three Worlds,” *Bulletin of the Czechoslovak Jewish Representative Committee*, special issue, Czechoslovak Jewry: Past and future (October-November 1943): 17.

Kieval write about Zionism in Czechoslovakia. Shumsky argues that the Prague-Zionists, in particular, embraced a bi-national, Czech-Jewish identity and that they furthermore saw themselves as inter-cultural mediators.⁴⁰ Kieval, who considers a broader cohort of Zionists and whom I quote above, explains that they attempted to construct themselves as “a Czechoslovak Jewish nation whose contours coincided with the borders of the new state.”⁴¹ To be fair, these national orientations represented only one (or two) of many would-be paths to integration or separation that Czech Jews promoted between 1918 and 1938. They are, moreover, only ideal types. As Kieval argues, Czech Jews lived in a world of shifting boundaries and interrelated networks that resist neat categorization. Their experiences do not correspond well to the concepts which scholars often deploy to discuss them.⁴²

This rootedness of sub-ethnic identification in the home country, rather than in diaspora, suggests that something must be added to Jonathan Ray’s innovation in order for it to apply to the twentieth century without complication. Perhaps the rise of modern nationalism and the emergence of new nation-states in Europe constructed a domestic context similar to diaspora for some Jews. Zionists most keenly felt their difference from the majority populations, from whom they also demanded varying degrees of separation, either cultural or territorial. The secular among them replaced Jewish dreams of messianic return to the Land of Israel with political programs for the redevelopment of the Jewish people. The religious imagined themselves as harbingers of the end of time. Together, they transformed divine exile into quotidian diaspora.

⁴⁰ Dimitry Shumsky, “Historiography, Nationalism and Binationalism: Czecho-German Jewry, the Prague Zionists and the Origins of the Bi-national Approach of Hugo Bergmann,” *Zion* vol. 69, no. 1 (2004): 45-80 (in Hebrew).

⁴¹ Kieval, “Negotiating Czechoslovakia,” 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*; and idem, *Languages of Community*, 217-29; cf. Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka’s Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

(In contrast, ambivalent offers of inclusion led others Jews to protest too much their belonging to the majority.) Thus, for certain cohorts of Jews in European, modern nationalism accomplished the very same feat that late-medieval and early modern expulsions had for earlier generations.⁴³

Three sets of general factors contributed to the self-conscious turn towards Czech-Jewish sub-ethnic or bi-national identification after the 1945: the foreclosure of options previously available to Jews, the Jewish experience during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, and the contradictions inherent to the party-state's policies and practices with regard to the Jewish minority. The anti-German policies of the postwar state allowed for Jews to retain their citizenship and (sometimes) recover stolen property on the condition that they separate themselves from the German nation, language, and culture. The expulsions of the German minority through 1947 rendered this demand almost mute and terrified those Jews who had belonged to German circles before the war. Many Jews in the Czech lands, moreover, had come to disdain Germans with the same ferocity as their non-Jewish compatriots. In the mid-1950s, Artur Radvanský, the executive secretary of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech lands from 1978 until 1986, changed his name from German-sounding Thüerberger to an alternative which recalled the Czech name for the town of his birth, Radvanice.⁴⁴ Many other Jews, perhaps thousands, took similar measures.

Not all of the Jews in postwar Bohemia and Moravia sought to draw closer to the Czech people. Zionism offered one alternative, but it proved to be short-lived. Most of the ardent proponents of exclusive Jewish nationalism (and perhaps also German Jews) left Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1949. This led to the further homogenization of the Jewish population in the

⁴³ I drew inspiration here from Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 1-104.

⁴⁴ Artur Radvanský, interviewe by Martina Marsalkova (October 2004), 14. <<http://www.centropa.org/biography/artur-radvansky>> (13 July 2014).

Czech lands. The anti-Zionist turn of 1949 resulted in the forced closure of all foreign and domestic Zionist organizations and rendered taboo any expressions of Jewish nationalism. Surely some Zionists remained in the Czech lands, notably transplants from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. Those who stayed active in Jewish life, however, did so in the context of the Jewish religious communities, which demanded that they accommodate the policies and ideologies of communist Czechoslovakia.

Communism also offered an alternative to Czech-Jewish, bi-national or sub-ethnic identification, just as it had before the Second World War. After 1948, it even functioned as a means for achieving fuller assimilation, in light of the popularity of the Communist Party and its insistence upon the identification of the nation with the party regime. I have in mind, of course, individuals like Rudolf Slánský, Rudolf Margolius, and Otto Šling, who fell victim to the show trials of the 1950s. I hesitate to include them into this story of Jewish identification, however, precisely because they did not claim to be Jewish and wished not to be considered so. The same cannot be said of the communists who joined the Jewish religious communities after 1945 and who directed it as of three years later.

These Jewish communists attempted to shape the communities in accordance with the demand that Jews identify as citizens of the Jewish religion. The Czech Jewish communities, indeed, saw themselves as bounded by the borders of Czechoslovakia, both internal and external. Most of the members also believed themselves to be Czechs. Much, nonetheless, suggested that their members also belonged to a separate (sub-) ethnicity. Individuals whom the Nazis had identified as Jewish during the Second World War had suffered differently during that conflict than their non-Jewish compatriots. In its aftermath, the Holocaust united survivors of all backgrounds with memories of loss and trauma. It also forced them to consider the

interdependency of their fates. The resurgence of state-antisemitism during the 1950s and the persistent rhetoric which singled out “citizens of Jewish origin,” ironically, further confirmed the saliency of Jewish ethnicity within the borders of Czechoslovakia. So too did contact with Western-Jewish and Israeli organizations and individuals. Thus, when the party-state restricted Jewish activity to the ecclesiastical sphere, it also transformed the country’s Jewish religious institutions into venues for ethnic communion, especially for non-practicing Jews. Emigration played a role as well by reducing the Jewish population by more than half. Ideological adversaries therefore had to cooperate to some degree or, at least, share institutions. The provision of aid to survivors by the communities contributed to making this a necessity for some.

Subsequent emigration also contributed to the strengthening of Czech-Jewish sub-ethnic identification. During the first half of the 1960s, hundreds of Jews left for Israel with the state’s blessing. Transplants from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia seem to have predominated among those who emigrated from the Czech lands. Their departure further homogenized their former communities. In contrast, the larger emigration wave of 1968 and 1969 scattered thousands of Czech Jews around the globe. They inflated the Czech-Jewish diaspora and introduced a younger generation to it. This helps to explain why Karl Baum believed in the 1970s that the International Council of Jews from Czechoslovakia should represent Czechoslovak Jewry to the World Jewish Congress. He did not lie when he claimed that more Czechoslovak Jews lived outside of their home country than on its territory. These many factors encouraged active Jews in the Czech lands (and beyond) to see themselves as belonging to a Jewish sub-ethnic group within the Czech nation and a Czech sub-ethnic group within a global Jewish people.

During the communist years, individuals and communities negotiated Czech-Jewish sub-ethnic identification in three main forums. As the party-state sought to achieve total control over

Jewish identification and practice, it compelled the attention of Jews and politicized their choices. This stands in contrast with the Czech nation (i.e., the self-conscious non-Jewish majority) which seems to have increasingly understood and accepted what it meant to be Czech-Jewish, even if many remained ambivalent about their Jewish co-nationals. The political uses of the Holocaust by non-Jews during the 1960s depended upon this type of knowledge.

For those who participated in Jewish life in the public sphere, the state-recognized Jewish communities represented the only sanctioned option, outside of some limited opportunities at the Israeli Legation and at other foreign Embassies. This made the communities, as institutions, the primary locus of intra-communal conflict. The fact that the state administration also sought to direct communal affairs, vested what might have been relatively local and low-stakes quarrels with political significance on the national and even international levels. The communist transformation of the communities from 1948 to 1953 and the emergence of an internal opposition movement in 1989 attest to this fact. They both left lasting political and cultural legacies for organized Czech Jewry.

The Jews of the Czech lands also negotiated their ethnic identification in the international arena—even if they did not leave home. Many had contact with Western-Jewish organizations and Israeli diplomats. The official communities, and therefore also the state, often mediated these relationships. Czech Jews, however, additionally belonged to less formal, transnational networks of friends, relatives, and travelers. When they interacted privately with foreigners, both at home and abroad, they drew the attention of the state security apparatus and, thus, did so at considerable risk to themselves and to their families. This attests to the fact that the state succeeded in supplanting “the nation” as the main partner in all negotiations of Jewish ethnicity in the Czech lands, even if much occurred in the private sphere.

To be clear, other identificational alternatives existed for Czechs of Jewish origin, religion, and culture than to see themselves as members of a Czech-Jewish sub-ethnic group. Many withdrew from all or most spheres of Jewish life and attempted to “pass” as non-Jewish, however defined, even in front of their own families.⁴⁵ Some Orthodox Jews, particularly those from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, continued to see themselves as, in the first place, simply Jewish. In a number of cities—and often in the Old-New synagogue in Prague—they composed the majority of regular synagogue attendees. (Non-religious, Czech Jews often met at holiday celebrations or for meals in the *kosher* cafeteria.) Both of these options existed for Jewish émigrés abroad. Unfortunately, I cannot embellish this section any further, except insofar as to call for more research into the full range of identificational options available to “Jews” in and from the communist Czech lands.

The bi-national character of Czechoslovakia also suggests a number of questions left unanswered here. What role did “Czechoslovak,” as political category, play in the ethnic identification of Jews in and from the Czech lands? How did Slovak Jews who resided in the Czech lands or who associated with Czechoslovak circles abroad figure into the Czech-Jewish sub-ethnicity, if at all?⁴⁶ What influence did the identificational and political orientations cultivated by Jews in Slovakia have in the Czech lands? These questions, however important, presume a sharp boundary between national communities, which does not reflect lived experiences. (This holds true despite the fact that the state administered the regions separately, especially after the federation of 1969.) Any research will have to begin by parsing the interdependency of and fluidity between the Czech and Slovak nations. This may be particularly necessary in the Jewish case, as the international Jewish community tended to think in terms of

⁴⁵ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 15, 82, 85, 93-94, and 197-98.

⁴⁶ Labendz, “*In unserem Kreise.*”

“Czechoslovak Jewry” (even if they often only had Czech Jewry in mind), and because a shared Jewish identity may have mitigated Czech and Slovak differences to some extent.

Beyond 1989: Sub-Ethnicity, Liberal Democracy, and the European Union

The legacy of the communist years still marked the discourses associated with Czech-Jewish identification and politics even after the fall of communism. In my introduction, I recalled a story told to me by Rabbi Sidon in which non-religious members of his community referred to themselves as “Czechs of the Jewish religion.” In light of the fact that the communist-era Jewish communities unofficially served ethnic purposes as well, I hesitantly suggest that the term “Czechs of the Jewish religion” may actually correspond to a claim of some kind of bi-nationality. That Sidon’s interlocutors privileged their Czech nationality supports my contention that Czech-Jewish sub-ethnicity always existed in relationship to both a transnational Jewish people and the territorial-based (but not bound) Czech nation.

Arriving at the number of Jews in the Czech lands in 1989 and later presents the same sorts of challenges as does counting the number of Jews in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War. The American Jewish Yearbook reported the Jewish population of Czechoslovakia to have been around 7,900 at the end of 1989.⁴⁷ At the same time, it estimated that the combined membership of the country’s Jewish communities hovered around 5,000.⁴⁸ As per Chapter Ten, the Prague community, which has always been the largest, boasted nearly 1,250 members in that year. The census of 1991, which depended upon individual responses, however, produced far

⁴⁷ U. O. Schmelz and Sergio DellaPergola, “World Jewish Population, 1989,” *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 91 (1991): 456.

⁴⁸ Zvi Gitelman, “Eastern Europe,” *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 91 (1991): 351.

lower tallies. Only 1,292 residents of the Czech lands reported being of the Jewish religion.⁴⁹ A mere 218 claimed membership in the Jewish nationality.⁵⁰

Today, the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic reports that its ten subordinate communities have a combined membership of about 3,000 and that an additional 2,000 people belong to other Jewish organizations. It estimates the total Jewish population of the country to be between 15-20,000, including foreigners.⁵¹ The Prague community reported 1,894 registered members in 2012, along with 164 “extraordinary” (i.e., not Jewish according to Jewish Orthodoxy) members. The average age of the regular members of the Prague community is 53.⁵² Once again, the census returned far lower numbers. Only 1,515 individuals reported being of the Jewish religion in 2001.⁵³ This discrepancy likely reflects the hesitancy of many Jews to allow themselves to appear in public documents as Jews. Others may have a too fluid an understanding of their own identities to feel comfortable marking themselves as singularly Jewish. With this in mind, I trust the higher figures. The population of the Czech Republic is roughly 10.6 million.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Czech Statistical Office, “Population by Denomination and Sex: as Measured by 1921, 1930, 1950, 1991 and 2001 Censuses” (2012). <[http://www.czso.cz/csu/2012edicniplan.nsf/t/B5001FC4D8/\\$File/4032120119.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2012edicniplan.nsf/t/B5001FC4D8/$File/4032120119.pdf)> (11 July 2014).

⁵⁰ The Government Council for National Minorities of the Czech Republic, “Informace o plnění zásad stanovených Rámcovou úmlouvou o ochraně národnostních menšin podle čl. 25 odstavce 1 této Úmlovy” [Information regarding the fulfillment of the principles established in the “Convention for the Protection of National Minorities” according to chapter 25, paragraph 1 of that convention] (n.d.). <<http://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rnm/informace-o-plneni-zasad-stanovenych-ramcovou-umluvou-1406>> (11 July 2014).

⁵¹ Federation of the Jewish Communities of the Czech Republic, “Statistika” [Statistics] (n.d.). <<http://www.fzo.cz/o-nas/statistika>> (11 July 2014).

⁵² Jewish Community in Prague, “2012 Annual Report” (2013), 2. Available for download: http://www.kehilaprag.cz/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=147&lang=cs (accessed on 10 July 2014).

⁵³ Czech Statistical Office, “Population by Denomination and Sex.”

⁵⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook: Europe: Czech Republic,” last modified 22 June 2014. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ez.html>> (11 July 2014).

With the fall of communism in 1989, the state stopped trying to manage Jewish affairs and the integration of the Jewish minority. Hence, it recognized the wishes of some residents to be recorded as nationally Jewish in the 1991 census. At the same time, the state did not invite representatives of the Jewish nationality to consult on its implementation of the Council of Europe's "Convention for the Protection of National Minorities," signed in 1995. The consultants included representatives of the Slovak, Roma, Polish, German, Hungarian, and Ukrainian minorities.⁵⁵ The exclusion of Jews likely reflected the small size of the Jewish national minority, as recorded in the census, rather than discrimination or an avowal of Jewish nationalism. Indeed, the post-transition Czechoslovak government made it a priority to restore diplomatic relations with the State of Israel immediately. President Václav Havel even accompanied 180 Czechoslovak Jews on a trip to Israel in April 1990, to attend the opening of an exhibit on Czechoslovak Jewry.⁵⁶ Czechoslovak-Israeli relations have remained remarkably strong since that point and citizens can freely express their support for Israel without anticipating any reaction from state officials or, for that matter, from much of the public sphere.

I do not doubt Václav Havel's sincerity nor the sincerity of the successive Czechoslovak and Czech governments until today. Yet I suggest, nonetheless, that the radical reversal of the policies regarding Israel and Jewish nationalism also reflects a broader rejection of anything associated with the communist regime; in this case, anti-Zionism and antisemitism. This trend frequently co-articulates with an identification of contemporary Czech political culture with its

⁵⁵ The Government Council for National Minorities, "Informace o plnění zásad" [Information regarding the fulfillment of the principles].

⁵⁶ "180 Czechoslovak Jews to Accompany Havel on Historic Visit to Israel," *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (24 April 1990). <<http://www.jta.org/1990/04/24/archive/180-czechoslovak-jews-to-accompany-havel-on-historic-visit-to-israel>> (11 July 2014); and Natalia Berger, *Where Cultures Meet: The Story of the Jews of Czechoslovakia*, with an introduction by President Václav Havel (Israel: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1990).

prewar and wartime-exile iterations. With regard to Jews, it often turns upon a wartime discourse, revived briefly in the 1960s, which united Czechs and Jews under the category of Hitler's first co-victims. A letter from Havel included into the catalogue for the aforementioned exhibit reveals something of how this worked. He wrote,

As a dissident, I lived for many years in something of a ghetto and I learned what irrational injustice can mean. I learned that it can only be resisted by maintaining that sense of personal freedom which is impervious to external oppression. The state in which we lived until the autumn of 1989, that is, since the beginning of the communist regime, was never able to formulate its attitude to the Jewish question. It was only "Charter 77" that issued a document on the issue. The state supported antisemitism after the infamous anti-Jewish trials of the fifties, and continued in that direction in the sixties, seventies and eighties. The regime tried to liquidate the Jewish problem from a position of strength, rather than trying to resolve it.⁵⁷

Slipping too easily between anti-antisemitism and support for Zionism, Havel went on to associate himself with Czechoslovakia's founding President, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and the latter's rejection of antisemitism. As I have noted, however, Masaryk never fully overcame his ambivalence about Jews and their ability to assimilate. He fought against antisemitism primarily because he considered it to be a blight upon the Czech nation. The dialectics of anti-communism function similarly here, when they lead to support for Israel and the popular rejection of antisemitism. Indeed, the phenomenon even explains the short-lived explosion of popular antisemitism in the early 1990s. Participants celebrated their democratic freedom to express racist sentiments as a post-communist prerogative.

This suggest that despite the praiseworthy improvements to the conditions of Jewish life in the Czech lands, the "Jewish Question" there remains, in some ways, unresolved. What does it mean, for instance, when public figures refer to Jews as "Jewish fellow-citizens" (*židovské spoluobčané*)? Would not the term "Jewish citizens" suffice? It seems, then, that if the majority

⁵⁷ Václav Havel, "A Message from Václav Havel," in *Where Cultures Meet: The Story of the Jews of Czechoslovakia* (Israel: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1990), 12.

has indeed accepted Jews as members of the Czech nation, it has accepted them as Jews; that is, as particular or peculiar Czechs. In other words, the predominant conceptions of Czechness have not changed to accommodate Jewish inclusion into the Czech nation. Jews remain, in some ways, a group apart.⁵⁸

Lest readers think this too post-modern a demand, I direct their attention to the influential philosopher of Czech-Jewish assimilation, Jindřich Kohn (1874-1935). After the First World War, Kohn characterized assimilation as a process of (Hegelian-inspired) synthesis, which unites and transforms the parties involved.⁵⁹ His ideas, in fact, reflected in the lives of many interwar Czech Jews, as Kateřina Čapková explains,

The end of organized Czech-Judaism in the Czech lands [in the late 1930s] is all the sadder, for here lived thousands of Jewish citizens, who although not organized into any Czech-Jewish association, experienced and contributed daily to the symbiosis of Czechs and Jews, just as Jindřich Kohn and the students of the Kapper [club] professed it. Precisely because most of the Jews in the Czech territories did not have a problem coexisting with the Czech population, they did not have the need to organize into their own associations.⁶⁰

Perhaps the same could be said of contemporary society in the Czech Republic. It may even apply to the experiences of thousands of individuals during the period of communist rule. The nation-state form, however, and the categories upon which it depends, continue to cast Jews and Czechs into semi-immutable categories. Czech-Jewish sub-ethnic identification emerged and persisted both despite and in response to these contradictions.

⁵⁸ For thoughtful analysis along these lines, see Matti Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Twentieth Century Vienna* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London, UK: University of California Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé?*, 123, 152-53, and 174; and Friedrich Thieberger, "Spiritual Resources of Czechoslovak Jewry," *Bulletin of the Czechoslovak Jewish Representative Committee*, special issue, Czechoslovak Jewry: Past and future (October-November 1943): 24-26.

⁶⁰ Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé?*, 174.

Time, however, has narrowed the geographical field in which that identity is now negotiated. The members of the diasporic Czechoslovak-Jewish associations, founded in waves from 1934 through the early 2000s, did not succeed in passing on their particular way of identifying to their children. While some of the groups still exist, they no longer function as identificational reference points for (younger) Jews in the Czech Republic.⁶¹ This means that re-territorialization has accompanied the movement of Czech-Jewish identity politics into the Czech public sphere. I address one exception to this rule below.

To be clear, the state has not faded completely from this picture. Even if the state has committed itself not to intervene into ecclesiastical matters, it still assumes the prerogative to register religious institutions, to which it provides financial support.⁶² To this day, the Czech Republic only recognizes one Jewish ecclesiastical organization: the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic. It is the successor to the Council of Jewish Religious Communities of the communist years. Thus, the federation alone has benefited from the state's

⁶¹ For example, membership in the Association of Jews from Czechoslovakia fell from 13,000 in 1992 to merely 4,000 at present. To wit, ninety percent of its members are from Slovakia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Sdružení Židů pocházejících z Československa" [The Association of Jews from Czechoslovakia]. See also Alena Heitlinger, "From 1960's Youth Activism to Post-Communist Reunions: Generational Community among Czech and Slovak Jewry," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2009): 265-88; idem., *In the Shadows*; Idem., interviewed by the author (summer 2009); Peter Salner, *Minulý rok v Jeruzaleme* [Next year in Jerusalem] (Bratislava, Slovakia: Maenčin PT, 2010); and Idem., *Budúci rok v Bratislave, alebo Stretnutie*, [Next year in Bratislava, or rather, Stretnutie] (Bratislava, Slovakia: A. Marenčin, 2007).

⁶² On Jewish affairs in the Czech lands after 1989, see Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 165-87. See also Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 206-26; Charles Hoffman, *Gray Dawn: The Jews of Eastern Europe in the Post-Communist Era* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 13-54; and Edward Serotta, *Out of the Shadows: A Photographic Portrait of Jewish Life in Central Europe since the Holocaust* (New York, NY: A Birch Lane Press Book, Published by Carol Publishing Group, 1991), 50-85.

generous restitution policies with regard to Jewish communal properties.⁶³ This has enriched the organization and, thereby, has empowered it to attend to the diverse needs of its members. I has also created problems.

The transitions in the perspective and policies of the state, nonetheless, have had a profound effect upon where the members of the Czech-Jewish minority negotiate their identities and relationship with the Czech nation. That work now occurs primarily in the private and civic spheres, often beyond the bounds of the official Jewish communities. This change has provided significant space for the articulation and further embellishment of what I have called Czech-Jewish sub-ethnicity.

As the country's only official Jewish ecclesiastical organization, the federation wields a considerable amount of control over public Jewish life. This begins with the question of who counts as Jewish and ends with the allocation of resources. In response to perceived and actual exclusion, both Czech and foreign Jews have established a number of civic organizations which, unofficially, also serve religious purposes. (Czech Jews founded even more organizations to meet their different cultural and social needs.)⁶⁴ In 2002, this tension between exclusion and inclusion manifested in what some foreign observers called the "Conversion Controversy," in which I was personally involved.⁶⁵ Masorti Olami, the international Jewish Conservative

⁶³ Eduard Kubů and Jan Kuklík Jr., "Reluctant Restitution: The Restitution of Jewish Property in the Bohemian Lands after the Second World War," trans. Charlotte Kreutzmüller, in *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, eds. Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler and Philipp Ther, Studies on War and Genocide, vol. 10 (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2007), 234-37.

⁶⁴ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 161-65.

⁶⁵ From August 2000 through December 2001, I served as a member of the Masorti Youth Corp as the religious-education director of Bejt Praha, which calls itself "The Prague Open Jewish Community." Masorti Olami established its own civic organization in Prague due to irresolvable differences with Bejt Praha, primarily of a personal nature. On Bejt Praha and Masorti, see Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 181, n. 5. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency followed the affair closely

Movement, conducted eighteen conversions in the Czech Republic and nineteen in Poland. The Jewish community in Prague, which is officially Orthodox, opposed them and would not recognize the converts as Jewish. Some of the new Jews chose to limit their activities to the Masorti community. Others obtained membership in the Děčín Jewish community, through which they gained access to many of the services enjoyed by the members of the Prague community. To be clear, I have never heard of a single instance of the Prague community refusing to allow members of the Masorti community to participate in their events and services. Indeed, the community allows Masorti and other groups to use its spaces for non-Orthodox religious services. The freedom of the Czech civic sphere thus mitigates the tensions still created by the state's management of Jewish affairs, limited as it may be.

The opportunities presented in the broader civic sphere did not prevent the members of the official Jewish community from forming camps and coming into conflict with one another in 2004. Alena Heitlinger characterizes the discord as having been the product of

long-simmering disagreements over a series of substantive issues [which] quickly escalated into an open conflict over internal democracy, governance issues, and who legitimately represents the Prague Jewish Community.⁶⁶

As I will only address one aspect thereof here, I direct interested readers to Heitlinger's narration and analysis.⁶⁷ The conflict of April 2004 demonstrates that in the context of a transnational Jewish world, the efforts of one nation-state to determine the status of Jews within its borders can have significant consequences for other Jewish sub-ethnicities. This is particularly the case

and relevant articles are available through its online archive. On the "Conversion Controversy," see Ismar Schorsch, "The Conversion Controversy" (5 October 2012). <<http://learn.jtsa.edu/content/commentary/bereishit/5763/conversion-controversy>>; and Stewart Ain, "Conversion Controversy," *The Jewish Week* (27 September 2002). <http://www.thejewishweek.com:8080/features/conversion_controversy> (10 July 2014).

⁶⁶ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 169.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 168-80. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency covered the crisis closely as well.

when the nation-state in question defines itself as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

The conflict began when, for the first time in recent history, community members formed a coalition to compete in the elections of the Prague community. After winning a narrow majority, the coalition used its strength to institute a number of radical changes. This included removing Rabbi Sidon from the position of Chief Rabbi of Prague. Tomáš Jelínek, the new community president, then installed Rabbi Manes Barash as the rabbi of the Old-New Synagogue. The latter, an American, represented the Chabad Lubavitch sect in the Czech Republic. In response to considerable opposition, Jelínek submitted the matter to arbitration by a Jewish religious court in Jerusalem. The judges ruled in favor of Barash, whose approach to Judaism more closely resembled their own. Sidon conceded to their ruling and moved his services to a prayer room in the building of the Prague community. There, he and his followers remained until the following December, when the community resolved the conflict, which at one point descended even into violence.

Why did the Czech Jewish community (or, rather, Tomáš Jelínek) turn to Israeli religious courts to resolve a community matter? The explanation has in part to do with the fact that Czech converts to Judaism depend upon the approval of the Israeli rabbinate to be recognized as religiously Jewish in that country. While the state recognizes non-Orthodox conversions completed abroad for the purposes of qualifying for citizenship, those individuals who do not undergo a rigorous Orthodox conversions remain excluded from certain spheres of civic-Jewish activity. Marriage by a rabbi and burial in a Jewish cemetery come to mind. Beyond that, some Czech converts fear informal exclusion and derision in Israel. Thus, in order to ensure the quality of Czech conversion, Israeli judges fly to Prague on regular basis to preside over religious courts, alongside Rabbi Sidon. This has opened the door to persistent Israeli interference in Czech

Jewish affairs, and has encouraged the Prague community to remain conservative in its interpretation of the Jewish religion. Indeed, for a number of years, would-be converts trod an arduous path to recognition by the Jewish community.

What an odd and revealing twist of fate?! During the period of communist rule, Israeli interventions, based upon that state's understanding of Jewishness, contributed to marking citizens of Jewish origin as different from the rest of the population, regardless of how they thought about their own identities. After 1989, it has led to the exclusion of some citizens of Jewish origin and religion (for instance the Masorti converts) from full membership in the Czech Jewish community.

In April 2014, former community president Tomáš Jelínek once again called for Sidon's removal from office. Citing the Israeli ruling which mandated the state to accept non-Orthodox conversion completed abroad for the purposes of acquiring citizenship, he called, once again, for Sidon's ouster. Jelínek also proposed that the community form its own religious court for conducting conversions or that they cooperate with communities in the surrounding countries to do so.⁶⁸ To wit, Masorti Olami implemented this strategy to conduct the conversions that launched the "controversy" of 2002.

This suggests the significance of considering the European context, particularly in light of the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union in 2004. I perceive (or perhaps only anticipate) the emergence of a Czech-European mode of identification, which shares a number of traits with Czech-Jewish sub-ethnicity. Czechs now compose a particular nation within the body

⁶⁸ Tomáš Jelínek, "Náboženské konverze v Česku nebudou i nadále v Izraeli uznávány. Sidon by měl odejít do důchodu" [Religious conversions in the Czech lands will not be recognized in Israel for a long time. Sidon should retire], *Židovský listy* [Jewish pages] (30 April 2014). <<http://zidovskelisty.blog.cz/1404/nabozenske-konverze-v-cesku-nebudou-i-nadale-v-izraeli-uznavany-sidon-by-mel-odejit-do-uchodu>> (10 July 2014).

of a European people still in the making. What does that mean for Czech-Jewish identification? Alena Heitlinger places the opposing forecasts of two scholars into conversation with one another in what she calls the “Wasserstein-Pinto ‘debate.’”⁶⁹ Bernard Wasserstein predicts the end to Jewish life in Europe based upon cultural discontinuity and the demographic decline of its individual national Jewish communities.⁷⁰ Diana Pinto suggests, in contrast, that a viable path to survival lies in the construction of a pan-European Jewish community with a culture of its own. She foresees it becoming a “third pillar” of Jewish life, alongside American and Israeli Jewry.⁷¹

Europe’s national Jewish communities now debate within and among themselves the political orientation that they should assume with regard to their national governments and the European Union. Which bodies will offer the best protection against antisemitism and provide a better context for cultural and national development? The answers that European-Jewish leaders suggest often depend upon the particular experiences of Jews in their home countries.⁷² Czech-Jewish leaders will have various proposals of their own. It remains to be seen, however, if they will draw upon the transnational legacies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the erstwhile multi-ethnic character of First Republic Czechoslovakia, or if they will embrace the Czech-populist Euro-skepticism of former Prime Minister and President Václav Klaus, which has gained some traction within the Czech electorate. Having a clearer perspective on the communist

⁶⁹ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 208-14.

⁷⁰ Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe Since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁷¹ Diana Pinto, “The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity,” *The CEU Jewish Studies Yearbook*, vol. 1 (1996-1999). <http://web.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/pdf/01_pinto.pdf> (11 July 2014).

⁷² Pierre Birnbaum, “Farewell to Europe? On French Jewish Skepticism about the New Universalism” and Y. Michal Bodemann, “The Return of the European Jewish Diaspora: New Ethno-National Constellations since 1989,” in *A Road to Nowhere?: Jewish Experiences in the Unifying Europe*, eds. Julius H. Schoeps and Olaf Glockner (Boston, MA Brill, 2001), 159-77 and 179-90.

years will be important to this process, as it is now a constituent element of the pan-European Jewish condition. I hope that my work can contribute in some small way to that end.

Finally, I will add Ruth Gruber's voice to this conversation. Gruber observed considerable interest in Jewish culture among a number of non-Jewish European cohorts, as well as the leadership of some non-Jews in the production thereof. She coined the term "virtually Jewish" to refer to their Jewish-themed festivals, music, museums, etc., which have helped to familiarize a wide range of Europeans with their continent's (nearly) lost Jewish heritage. European Jews participate in and benefit from this phenomenon too. Gruber suggests that this "virtually Jewish" culture may actually help sustain Europe's Jewish communities, provided that Jews assume some control over its direction, in order to ensure that it has "a living Jewish dimension, [without which] the virtual Jewish world may become a sterile desert—or a haunted Jewish never-never land."⁷³ What might this mean for someone who identifies, depending upon the context, as a member of the Jewish sub-ethnicity of the Czech nation, both the Jewish and Czech sub-ethnicities of the European people, and the Czech/European sub-ethnicity of the Jewish people?

⁷³ Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London, UK: University of California Press, 2002), 238. Annamaria Orla-Bukowska rejects the foundation of Gruber's thesis. She finds Gruber's concern about the authenticity of Jewish cultural production disingenuous (and ethno-centric). If all culture is commodified in the context of late capitalism, then either everything or nothing is authentic. According to Orla-Bukowska, this applies to Jewish cultural production in Europe as well. She compares Gruber's argument to determining the authenticity of a New-York (Jewish) bagel based upon who owns the bakery. Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, "Virtual Transitioning into Real: Jewishness in Central Eastern Europe," in *Framing Jewish Culture: Boundaries and Representations*, ed. Simon J. Bronner, Jewish Cultural Studies, vol. 4 (Oxford, UK and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014), 365-81.

In contrast, the conservative French philosopher Alain Finkelkraut complains about French Jews with little connection to what he considers authentic (i.e., Polish) Jewishness, who wear their heritage lightly and seek to derive some cultural benefit from doing so. Alain Finkelkraut, *The Imaginary Jew*, trans. Kevin O'Neil and David Suchoff, with an introduction by David Suchoff (Lincoln, NE and London, UK: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

Beyond Czech-Jews: Implications for Other Fields

I took as one of my primary goals in preparing this study the task of integrating Jewish history with the history of Czechoslovakia and the Cold War. Thus far, I've addressed at length the obvious importance and benefit of thinking about Jewish-state relations and Jewish culture in terms of the broader contexts in which they manifested. This pertains as well to the popular myths about history, or collective memory, and its relationship to historiography. I have attempted to portray the common focus on antisemitism as either related to or even derived from discourses about the "crimes of communism" and Western Cold-War propaganda. What, however, has Jewish historiography to offer the fields of Central European, Cold War, and communist studies?

The communist regimes of Central Europe collapsed only a quarter-century ago and it took over a decade to declassify, sort, and make available a sufficient breadth of archival materials to support studies of lasting value. Michal Pullmann, whom I quote above, points to additional cultural barriers that have complicated this process. It should not be surprising, then, that a comprehensive and updated study of the Czechoslovak state from 1948-1989 remains a desideratum. Studies of Jewish affairs cannot seek to fill this gap. Yet they can offer moments of insight, nonetheless, because Jewish-state relations brought so many of the party-state's component parts into sustained contact with one another. The centrality of the "Jewish Question" to the politics of modernization and the disproportionate attention paid to Jews, Zionism, and Israel during the Cold War further position Jewish historiography as a laboratory for considering a far broader range of topics. As the aphorism goes, "Jews are good to think with."

I have shown that competition within the party-state apparatus contributed significantly to determining the course of history and the character of the state. Such conflict exceeded the

bounds of the well-known struggle between communist reformers and Moscow-aligned hardliners. I have in mind, rather, the clashes between different parts of the state administration over the development and implementation of policies at those points where their purviews met and their priorities diverged.

This leads to a second observation. Communist ideology proved flexible enough for all of the parties involved in this type of conflict, even those from within the limited civic sphere, to present their cases as being consistent with both the party's platforms and Moscow's directives.⁷⁴ I attribute this phenomenon, in part, to the contradictions inherent to the party-state's official ideologies, particularly when external factors such as Western intervention exacerbated them. If I am correct, this implies that no interpretation of communism, no opinion, and no policy—within reason—should be considered more authentically communist than any other. This applies as well to the conflicts between the reform and orthodox wings of the party. From an anthropological perspective, moreover, it even extends to the characterization of different periods of communist rule. Just because the 1960s may have been more pleasant for many citizens than the 1950s, does not make the former any less constitutive of Czech communism than the latter. They only appear so within the dialectically related discourses of the post-1969 Communist Party and the revolutionaries of 1989.

This last conclusion returns the discussion to Michal Pullman's argument about the relationship between popular memory and contemporary historiography. I have endeavored here to help refocus and sharpen historiography's gaze and also to demonstrate that Jewish historiography has much to offer in this regard. It deserves the attention of a far wider audience.

⁷⁴ Jacob Ari Labendz, "Lectures, Murder, and a Phoney Terrorist: Managing 'Jewish Power and Danger' in 1960s Communist Czechoslovakia, *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014): 84-108.

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