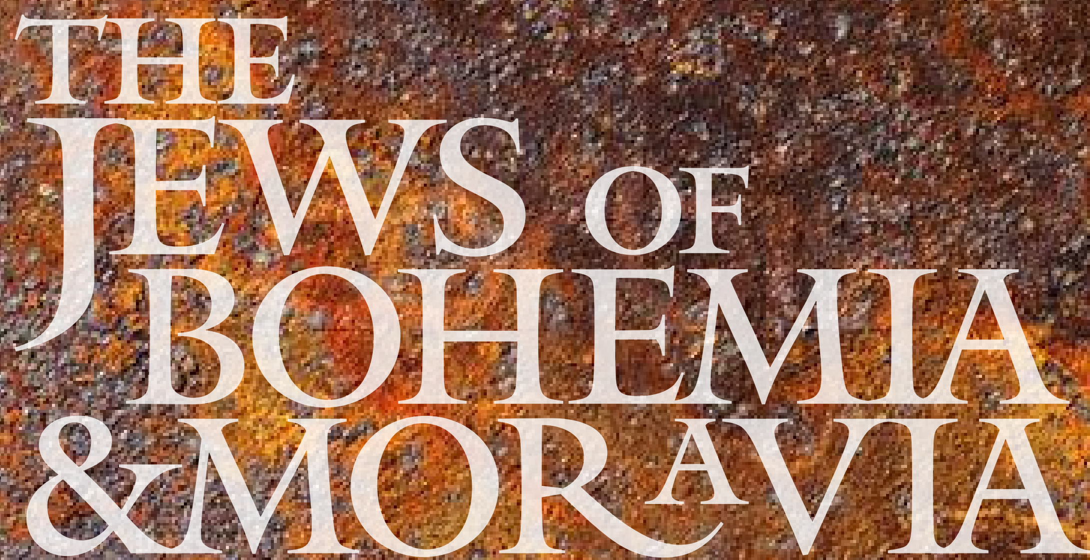

The Jews of Bohemia & Moravia

Facing the Holocaust

Livia Rothkirchen

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THE JEWS OF BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA

FACING THE HOLOCAUST

LIVIA ROTHKIRCHEN

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in loving memory of

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and all those who perished in the Holocaust.

All of the Hardships that Befell Us

The order of the world fell apart . . .
the bloody corpses of babies, men young and old,
boys and virgins, were wildly hipped together . . .
Now . . . Father of us all, it is time to proclaim
that killings must come to an end! Say it now
that not a single one will be added
to the terrible number of victims any more!
Long enough were they killed and choked to death
to the world's derision, long enough!

From the Elegy of the renowned Prague rabbi and poet
Avigdor Isaac ben Kara on the victims of the 1389 Easter Massacre

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Preface

For several decades now I have been pursuing extensive research on Nazi policy in East-Central Europe, perusing the mammoth accumulation of records, documentation, and literature: the degradation of humanity and the machinery of genocide. I came to realize that Germany's system of ruling in conquered Europe varied from country to country, as did the persecution of Jews. This meant ultimately that the toll of Jewish lives was by and large determined by the nature and extent of German control, by the Führer's postwar global aims, and in a certain measure by the attitude of the local population.

I sensed a definite need to approach this subject with a panoramic view and in a broader context, delving into earlier history such as the Czech-German conflict.

Two issues that seem diametrically opposed are examined in detail: the traditional sources of empathy and solidarity of the host nation with the Jewish community, and Czech anti-Semitism in the recent past. Ivan Klíma, the noted Czech-Jewish writer, has commented on the latter issue: "If we speak of the magnificent surge of Jewish culture that Prague witnessed more than anywhere else, we must recognize also that there has never been a long period here without some sort of anti-Semitism." I presumed that this two-pronged enquiry might serve my exploration, broadening intellectual horizons and providing new insights for the scope of this study.

One of the cardinal questions requiring elucidation is why even in this enclave, known as the most democratic country "east of the Rhine" and perceived as markedly philo-Semitic, the losses suffered by the Jewish population were numerically so high. Josef Korbel in his standard *Twentieth-Century Czechoslovakia* made this significant point concerning the victims of the "Final Solution" in the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia: "The grim reality remains that in the Czech lands, in the former Republic of T. G. Masaryk who had fought anti-Semitism throughout his long life, the results were the same as all over Hitler's Europe."

Korbel's statement encapsulates several interconnected questions historians have thus far avoided formulating. I shall venture to ask the following: Was the interwar republic's approach toward the Jewish entity outright positive? To what degree did Nazi ideology influence Czechs? Did the long tradition of Jewish presence in this enclave and the Jews' unique role in economy and

culture affect Czech society's attitudes during the Nazi occupation? Did the notions of hatred toward the common enemy and of parallel destinies link Czechs and Jews? I presume that despite all the methodological problems involved and the lack of standardized contemporary surveys or polls, certain conclusions may still be drawn.

During the four decades of the Communist regime's isolationism and provincialism, Czech historiography of the twentieth century in general and the sphere of Jewish studies in particular suffered a long hiatus. Summarizing matters in "Czech Historiography at a Turning Point" in 1992, Jan Křen pointed out: "A typical example of "this nationalism of ignorance' was the history of the Jews, without whom many periods in the history of the Czech lands can hardly be imagined. In historiography too . . . virtually nothing was done in this sphere of historical studies over the past two decades."

One of the problems I encountered was the choice of material and references in light of the enormous amount of documentation made accessible in Czechoslovakia after 1989, following the collapse of Communism. I would like to think that the new documentary sources and the various seminal conferences I attended in the years 1990–2001 in Prague, Ostrava, and Terezín have opened up new vistas, augmenting the scope of my research.

The study relies heavily on World War II primary documentary sources held in Czech archives, on government publications, and on holdings in German, British, American, Swiss, and Israeli archives. In addition, I have employed reminiscences and diaries, survivors' testimonies, and private correspondence smuggled out to the free world during the war.

The core of the book, namely the chapters dealing with the period of the Holocaust and its antecedents, is based largely on a variety of archival sources and memoir literature. In the prologue, the historical setting, and the epilogue I have to a greater extent had recourse to secondary literature—the findings of other historians—presenting these with my own emphases and interpretations.

The prologue presents a survey of the centuries-old spiritual ties between Czechs and Jews, the main features of which were a common bond to the Old Testament and future-oriented beliefs in the restoration of statehood. This unique affinity culminated in modern times in Masaryk's role as an "apostle of truth" during the Hilsner affair; his impact on Prague's leading Zionists; the struggle for Czechoslovakia's independence; and the recognition of the Jews as a national minority.

An overview of the history of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia is given in chapter 1. It shows development from an autonomous, strictly isolated, and close-knit religious community into a pluralistic, liberal-minded society. The

process of Jewish assimilation, both German and subsequently Czech, yielded to the transformation of Jewry at the *fin de siècle* and the rise of the Czech-Jewish movement and of Jewish nationalism (Zionism).

In chapter 2 the part played by the Jewish minority in the Parliament of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–38) is viewed against the background of the multinational structure of the overall population, the vital role of the Jews in the economy, and their participation in all spheres of public and cultural life. With Hitler's ascent to power in Germany in 1933 came the massive impact of Nazi propaganda upon rightist groups, the escalation of anti-Semitism, and Sudeten German irredentism and its effects.

The 1938 September crisis is the focus of chapter 3. The refugee problem and the faltering of a stratum of Czech writers, journalists, and professionals meant a dilemma for the Jewish community leadership. "Aryanization" of the Czech Writer's Club, the tragic consequences of the Munich *Diktat*, and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia would follow.

Chapter 4 surveys the isolation of the Jewish entity in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; the "Nisko campaign"; and the actions of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities (JRC) during the so-called pacification period in 1939–41. Along with the reeducation, professional training, and emigration campaign came confiscation of Jewish property, Aryanization, forced labor, and the onerous and humiliating tasks imposed by the Nazi authorities upon the "Council of Jewish Elders" in the deportation campaign (1941–43).

The retardation policy of the Czech Protectorate government under General Alois Eliáš is described in chapter 5, as are the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws by *Reichsprotektor* Constantin von Neurath and the issue of the "privileged Jews." With the arrival of Reinhard Heydrich as the new acting Reichsprotektor (September 27, 1941) came the arrest of Premier Eliáš, the state of civil emergency, wiping out of the resistance cells, and wholesale deportation of Jews. Completing the picture are Heydrich's assassination (May 27, 1942), the Jewish culprits of the *heydrichiáda*, the servility of the second Czech collaborationist government, and the nazification and reeducation of Czech youth.

Chapter 6 views matters farther afield—the policy of the London-based Government-in-Exile; recruitment of Jewish volunteers in Palestine in the fall of 1939; and Jewish participation in the Czechoslovak units abroad. The discussion covers attitudes and responses to the plight of the Czech population in general and that of the Jews in particular as well as President Beneš's policy and his ties with the Home Resistance (1939–45).

The resistance groups engaged on the home front are profiled in chapter 7. Jewish individuals and groups participated in various acts of defiance and

resistance—intelligence, sabotage, and a clandestine press. Also delineated are the strategy of the Moscow-based Czechoslovak leadership and their influence upon the Communist resistance cells and the shaping of government policy in the postwar years.

Chapter 8 deals with the reaction of the local population to the persecution of the Jews. Among the responses were Czech writers' assistance to their Jewish friends and solidarity and compassion from gentile individuals and groups reaching out to Jews by arranging their safe passage abroad or providing them with shelter or false papers. Individuals caught by the Nazis for sheltering Jews faced a cruel fate.

The dual tasks of Ghetto Terezín are unraveled in chapter 9: decimation was the crux, but it was also designed for propaganda and alibi—to camouflage the Nazi annihilation policy. Central to its effect were the stance of the Jewish "Self-Government," the wartime collaboration of the International Committee of the Red Cross with Nazi authorities, and the "inspection visits" of the ICRC delegation in Terezín in 1944–45.

The unique manifestation of defiance and courage by inmates of the ghetto of Terezín, especially the cultural elite of writers, poets, musicians, artists, and educators, are explored in chapter 10. Care was devoted to cultural activities and the education of children and youth. Artists and musicians on the threshold of death exercised their creativity in songs, music, satirical opera, and an "open university" in the struggle to boost morale and preserve the sanity and lives of the doomed population.

The epilogue surveys the postwar years. Renewal of community began for the "saved remnant" but was affected by mass emigration to Israel and the decline of communal life under the Communist regime. The manifestations of Prague Spring, the "Normalization" period, and the 1989 November Revolution and its aftermath bring the story to the present.

Acknowledgments

When I embarked on this project the Iron Curtain still hung over Eastern Europe, and contacts with colleagues and friends in Czechoslovakia were limited and strained. There was no access at all to documentation held in the state archives and other institutions.

Consequently, it was only in the eighties that I began to focus on the fate of the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, realizing that research on Czech Jewry was lagging behind. This led to numerous visits abroad to locate archives and institutions that held documentation on prewar Europe and World War II.

I was gratified to find the documents relating to the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile in the Public Record Office in London. Eventually, it was this topic that formed the kernel of my research in the years to come. I thus continued visiting major institutions and archives: the British Museum's British Library and the Wiener Library (London), the Institut für Ost-Europa (München), the U.S. National Archives (Washington DC), the Joint Distribution Committee Archives (New York), and the Hoover Institution for War and Peace (Stanford, California).

The year of the "Velvet Revolution," 1989, marked a turning point in my academic undertakings with free access to all the important sources held in the various archives in Prague, Terezín, and elsewhere. A period of fruitful cooperation and personal contacts with colleagues in Czechoslovakia began. Conferences, meetings, and exchange of ideas, along with access to major depositories, gave a new impulse to my research.

It gives me pleasure to express my gratitude to readers, colleagues, and all those friends who have helped me over the years. My thanks are due to Prof. Yoav Gelber, former head of the project at the Yad Vashem Research Institute, who initially guided this enterprise. I am greatly indebted to Edna Ben-Dov, my first reader and editor, for her devoted work, stimulating observations, and friendly attitude. To Jana Veselá I am grateful for help in correcting the text. Special thanks are due to Jill Berinson for her assistance and patience in helping to compile the bibliography. I also want to express my thanks to the staff of the Yad Vashem archives and library for their readiness to attend to my requirements.

To those who accepted the invitation of the publishers to act as critics of my lengthy manuscript, I owe special thanks and gratitude. I sincerely appreciate their insight on several key issues in the text and their detailed comments and

useful proposals, which I gratefully accepted. I am sure they will note the improvements.

And I owe special thanks to my friend and colleague Petr Brod, BBC bureau chief in Prague, who since the inception of the project has steadily provided information on new publications relating to my field of inquiry. To him and his wife I am also indebted for their warm hospitality whenever I visit Prague.

Throughout all these years my beloved nephew Yoel Minz and nieces Rina Vizer and Tamar Barkan-Lederer and their spouses and children have provided me with spiritual help and comfort. Last but not least I would like to express my thanks to the Yad Vashem Editorial Board and especially Dr. Bella Gutterman, head of the Publication Department, for her untiring help in bringing this work to press.

I see the overall task of the volume as providing both the student and the general reader with a survey from the earliest history of the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia up to the modern era: the birth of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918–38) and the crucial post-Munich period (1938–39). The core of the work deals with the tragic situation of the Jewish entity in the Protectorate during the dark, harrowing years of the Holocaust—the mass deportations, the dumb suffering, and at the same time the heroic stance and mutual help and resistance on the threshold of death in the ghetto of Terezín.

It is my hope that the effort will broaden perception and stimulate scholarly research into the unique contribution and achievements of Czech Jewry in commerce and industry as well as in the various fields of cultural endeavor.

Prologue

Prague and Jerusalem
Spiritual Ties between Czechs and Jews

It is the ancient Jewish quarter in the heart of the city of Prague that most authentically bears witness to the checkered history of the centuries-old Czech-Jewish coexistence.[1] The echoes of bygone times still reverberate in Josefov, the former Josefstadt, known also as the first district. Countless monuments, synagogues, and the ancient Jewish cemetery with "the multitude of quaint tombs" keep firing the imagination of poetic souls.[2]

No wonder that from time immemorial Prague has inspired poets, artists, mystics, and travelers. A most imaginative saga attaches to the founding of the neo-Gothic Altneuschul, the Old-New Synagogue, the construction of which was completed in 1270.[3] Legend has it that its cornerstone was formed from the ruins of the Second Temple brought to Prague by exiles under solemn oath, as the Hebrew term *al-tnai* (on condition) implies: once the Temple of Jerusalem is restored, these stones will be returned. It was this unique message of continuity that inspired Theodor Herzl in 1899 to name his utopian novel *Altneuland* (Old new land).[4]

Two sculptures created by Czech artists and located in the heart of the Old City symbolize spiritual values and universal greatness. The statue of Moses the Lawgiver, carved by František Bílek in 1937, stands in the tiny romantic park in the vicinity of the Altneuschul.[5] Not far away, in front of the New Town Hall, one encounters Ladislav Šaloun's striking sculpture of the mysterious High Rabbi Judah ben Bezalel (Liwa) Loew—the Maharal (c. 1525–1609). The artist portrayed the venerated sage in his death, as described by the poet Jaroslav Vrchlický.[6]

There is a distinct symmetry between Czech and Jewish renascence unparalleled between other nations, augmented by the unique role played throughout history by both Prague and Jerusalem as citadels of national struggle and fulfillment.[7] The genesis of spiritual rapprochement is exemplified as early as the eleventh to thirteenth centuries in Slavic-Bohemian glosses of Talmudic scholars' manuscripts, described as "the earliest traces of written Czech."[8] Three hymns have come down from Hussite days preserved in the so-called *Jistebnický kancionál*.[9] One of these hymns—"Povstaň, povstaň" (reminiscent of the famous "Arise, arise, Jerusalem, great city!")—originated in Prague in 1420, evoking the prophet Isaiah's "Awake, awake; put on thy strength O Zion" (52:1).

One should also bear in mind that the translation of the six-part *Kralice Bible*, a labor of love accomplished in the years 1579–94 by the later followers of Hussitism, the Unity of Bohemian Brethren, was carried out in Moravia in secret because of continuing persecution. More recent studies indicate that the Maharal, while officiating in 1553–73 as chief rabbi of Moravia and head of the famous Yeshiva of Mikulov, located close to Ivančice—as of 1558 the cultural center of the Bohemian Brethren—maintained steady contact with Czech humanists and read the Calvinist writings (in Hebrew translation). The theologian J. B. Čapek refers to "traits of mutual influences" in their works.[10] It may thus be surmised that the treatises of the "Great Rabbi of Prague," especially those dealing with universal aspects—"ideas of nationhood," "the dilemma of exile"—as well as educational and pedagogical theories might have generated reciprocal influences.[11]

In the wake of the 1947 discovery of the Qumran Scrolls shedding new light on the "Dead Sea Sect," Stanislav Segert discussed the fifteenth-century *Unitas Fratrum* in a profound study.[12] He pointed to the striking analogies in the sacred songs of the Essenes and the hymns of the Bohemian Brethren: the very same passages that once inspired the Maccabees rallied the Hussite "Warriors of God" (*Boži bojovníci*).[13] It transpires that the return from the Babylonian exile inspired the Bible-loving Czechs more than any other people.

The Brethren can be credited with the publication of four renditions of Josephus's *Wars of the Jews*, in Czech, in the second half of the sixteenth century. However, while expressing deeply felt sympathy for the Jews' cause, they warned their own people to cling together, citing the internal discord leading to the disastrous fate that befell the Jews.[14] The Scriptures were eventually embraced by the spiritual leaders of the Czech reformation, whose hallmark was a new and just social order. As of the sixteenth century the Bible became a *centrum securitatis*—a source of hope and of freedom of conscience, of yearning for the rebirth of the nation and deliverance from the Habsburg yoke.

Jan Amos (Comenius) Komenský's (1592–1670) profound attachment to the Bible and his use of the Old Testament in presenting his pansophistic ideas are widely known. Of special significance is his unique "Bequest of the Dying Mother, the Unity of Brethren," conveying to future generations his belief in redemption.[15] His apt use of the metaphor "heirloom" brings to mind Heinrich Heine's famous "portable homeland."

One should also realize that the Restoration of Judah in the fifth to sixth century BCE fired the imagination of many a nation, as the American archeologist William F. Albright noted: "At no other time in world history, so far as is known, has a people been destroyed, and then come back after a lapse of time and reestablished itself."[16]

In effect, this motif gained new impetus with the efflorescence of modern Czech literature in the first half of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the national revival in Bohemia.[17] The work of Karel Hynek Mácha (1810–36), the greatest Czech romantic poet, which bears a strong resemblance to Byron's *Hebrew Melodies*, is considered to be a milestone in the development of Czech lyrical poetry. The imagery of the Bohemian forests in his love song "Máj" evokes the "Song of Songs."[18]

Antonín Dvořák, too, turned to the book of Psalms in attempting to overcome his profound sorrow—"the darkness and thunderclouds"—over the approaching death of his father. Far off in another land, and longing for his home, he sought solace in the Book of Books: no wonder his own liturgical "Biblical Songs," opus 99, are considered to be the most beautiful of his liturgical works.

In more recent Czech literature four major figures, three of whom were of partly Jewish origin, made a lasting contribution to the popularization of the Bible: Julius Zeyer (1841–1901), Jaroslav Vrchlický (pseudonym of Emil Frída, 1853–1912), and Ivan Olbracht (pseudonym of Kamil Zeman, 1882–1952).[19] Jaroslav Seifert (1901–86), the 1984 Nobel Prize laureate, related to the Bible on the basis of his personal outlook and approach to Judaism as a whole.[20] He often turned to Jewish motifs, recreating in his poems the image of Rabbi Loew and the Golem as well as the ancient Jewish cemetery. His attitude to Jewish historic relics is projected in one of his poignant essays on Prague, lamenting the disappearance of the Gothic Jewish town. In 1958 he also enriched Czech literature with *Píseň Písní*, a modern but classical translation from the original Hebrew of Song of Solomon.[21]

It appears that Czech affinities and attraction to Judaism continued unabated through the centuries. However, as is well known, influence flows both ways. Mention of the issue of reciprocity is thus unavoidable. One has to recall that although Jewish historiography had had a glorious beginning, it also suffered

from a protracted hiatus. According to Bernard Lewis, despite the abundance of significant intellectual events it became stagnated and fragmentary, thin and sparse: "Virtually it came to an end some time after the return from Babylon and did not resume until comparatively modern times."[22]

It was only in the nineteenth century that the interconnection between Jewish history and what is called general history commenced anew. In the Bohemian lands the movement of national awakening, heralding the Czech renascence, acted as an incentive. The unique example of its harbingers (Jungmann, Kolár, Šafařík, and Palacký), who succeeded in reviving the native language, ancient Czech history, and literature, struck a responsive chord among the members of the Bar Kochba Association of Jewish Students in Prague. They realized that the time was ripe to revitalize the Zionist movement by launching cultural enterprises, to "breathe life" into Jewish national conscience.

The model of the Czech Reformation highlighting moral values also had a profound impact upon members of the Bar Kochba Association. As the philosopher Felix Weltsch put it: "National independence was not a goal in itself but the means to a higher end—improving the lot of mankind."[23] This trend was further enhanced by the spiritual conception of Ahad Ha'am, which left an indelible mark on a whole generation of intellectuals.[24]

Masaryk, "the apostle, who taught equality in all things," drew upon the Bible for both philosophical and religious conceptions. His public stance in defense of Leopold Hilsner in the infamous 1899–1900 "blood libel" trial, his courage and rectitude in speaking out for justice, made of him a true hero in the eyes of civilized nations and especially of Jewry throughout the world. As his contemporary Josef Penížek observed, "they constituted an army upon which Masaryk was able to rely."[25] Only twenty years later, when embarking on his campaign for the establishment of Czechoslovakia, did Masaryk become aware of his popularity abroad. The ovation accorded to him on the occasion of his visit to the United States was overwhelming. He kept referring explicitly to the aid of his countrymen, recalling especially the political support and devotion of Congressman Adolf J. Sabath and of Judge Louis D. Brandeis, both of whom originated from Bohemia.[26]

In his conversations with Czech-Jewish intellectuals Masaryk would often remark: "Without Judaism and the Old Testament you cannot understand the bases of European thought and feeling."[27] What he valued most about Jews was their creed, the way they adhered—more than any other people—to the faith of their fathers. This "ingrained perseverance and patience of the Jews," Masaryk realized, could serve as a paradigm for the Czech nation.

On the whole Masaryk perceived Zionism as the regeneration of Judaism—

"a drop of oil of the prophets." Even though he considered its political fulfillment as purely utopian for the time being, he set out to translate his conception into realistic terms. Ahad Ha'am's thesis led him to define the difference between assimilation and dissimilation in terms of an ethical struggle distinguishing between right and wrong. First and foremost it brought him to condemn assimilation strongly: "That which is most holy within the nation is its moral character. The Czech [who] becomes a German [does it] only out of ulterior motives . . . he is without character . . . A person who possesses character will not be unfaithful to his nation under any circumstances."[28]

Masaryk, as is well known, disliked any manifestation of hyper-nationalism. He could not fathom those Czech Jews who, forgetful of their Jewishness, "upheld their Czechness."[29] Even though some of his close associates came from Czech-Jewish circles he never abandoned this stance and in fact often found himself in a quandary when choosing to side with Jewish national aspirations.

It was therefore symbolic that with the rebirth of the independence of Czechoslovakia in 1918, the newly elected president T. G. Masaryk, delivering his first message to the nation, cited Komenský's prophetic lines from his "Bequest," thus bridging the gap of three hundred years of political vacuum in the history of his people.[30]

For their part, the Jewish leadership learned much from Masaryk's relentless campaign abroad and his efforts for self-determination. His arduous "small work" (*drobná práce*) served as an example for the Jewish/Zionist struggle for independence. Thus, during his historic visit in Palestine in 1927 President Masaryk was greeted as a hero and a prophet by the Yishuv in general and by his countrymen, many of whom were members of kibbutzim, in particular. This admiration was briefly expressed in Vladimir Jabotinsky's tribute on the occasion of Masaryk's eightieth birthday: "He has proved that dreams based on right come true . . . what a lesson that man!"[31]

Czech-Jewish symbiosis reached its apex during the interwar period (1918–38): along with the president a range of Czech intellectuals related to Jewish nationalism in their writings and public activities, giving their full support to Zionist aspirations. Many of these were greatly influenced by Martin Buber's famous *Three Addresses* (1909, 1911). The most eminent prewar intellectual, F. X. Šalda, in his essay "The Greek and the Hebrew Genius," highlights the core of Jewish thinking and its primary concerns for spiritual values.[32] Citing Buber's lecture on the topic of nation-building, Šalda underscores the Jewish genius in creating a superior collective, united by a spiritual mission, a concept he was ready to adopt as his own.

Since most of Kafka's biographers have overemphasized Kafka's German

cultural orientation, it seems appropriate to pay more attention to the Czech point of view. The first scholar to bring into focus Kafka's belonging to Prague ("genius loci") was Pavel Eisner in his pioneering study *Franz Kafka in Prague*.[33]

In fact it was František Kautman who in an eloquent presentation raised the argument of Kafka's allegiance to Prague (*pražantsví*) at the 1963 Liblice conference, with these remarks: "Kafka's native land is Bohemia (Čechy), notwithstanding the fact that he was not a Czech and that he wrote in German . . . The particular location of the Old City of Prague, the traces of the demolished ghetto, the narrow tortuous streets, the gloomy churches and synagogues, the dusty offices, taverns below ground level, the quays of [the River] Vltava and the baroque gardens . . . all these together formed the atmosphere of Kafka's tortured visions."[34] By coining the phrase "Der jüdischer Schriftsteller deutscher Zunge," Max Brod himself inadvertently contributed in his writings to this theory of Kafka's allegiance to Prague.[35]

The idea of affinity emerges poignantly from Dr. Gustav Sicher's solemn address delivered at the Altneuschul on June 29, 1947, on the occasion of the festive ceremony of his reinstatement as chief rabbi in the Czech lands.[36] His discourse, rich in biblical texts, imbued with profound grief and human warmth, evokes the emotional aura and timeless appeal of the two cherished cities: Prague and Jerusalem.[37]

> When the summons to take up the office of Chief Rabbi of Prague reached me, I felt as if Isaiah's vision had come alive: "I have blotted out . . . thy transgression . . . I have redeemed thee.' (Isaiah 44, 22) . . .
>
> Returning to Prague after the crucial period when human dignity was utterly trampled, recalling the prewar Jewish community, one feels ashamed to be a man, and seeing what has become of it, how can one not cry? . . .
>
> And lo! When I walk through the streets of liberated Prague—where, thank God, the merry crowds of people throng again, passing by the walls of buildings in which my acquaintances and friends used to live, I sense as if here too there are "Wailing Walls" upon which echoes the lament of Israel on the ruins of the ancient Temple: Woe over the House, my children where have you gone: priests, sages, teachers, where are you?
>
> . . . And to this Lord of the House of Israel, who is the Lord of the fate of all of us, I turn with the prayer of Moses, the God-fearing man, for the Jewish and for the Czech people: Rejoice us the same way as we were humiliated in the days of affliction.

The traditional spiritual ties between Czechs and Jews suffered a long hiatus during the era of Nazi persecution and Communist tyranny. The November

1989 revolution opened up new vistas for future interaction. On the occasion of his historic visit to Israel in May 1990, President Václav Havel emphasized how Jews and Czechs revered the written word and those works that have kept their language and traditions alive. Thus both nations were especially indebted to the Book of Books, seeking in it a source of strength and solace. "We were both small nations whose existence could never be taken for granted. An unceasing fight for survival, a feeling that our existence was always being called into question, was projected into the cultural and behavioral patterns of both our nations."[38]

This assertion on the common traits in Czech and Jewish traditional values adds a new dimension to our understanding: placing the issue of Czech-Jewish relations on the doorstep of our own generation, the particular aspects of which the present research aims to explore.

I

The Historical Setting

Throughout the centuries early Jewish settlement in the Bohemian Crownlands has intrigued many a scholar trying to determine the precise date of its beginning. The crux of the ongoing discussion appears to be the presence of Jews in the city of Prague.[1] Legend has it that "they had dwelt unmolested in that city from time immemorial. No one knew when they had first settled there; but tradition said it was in times when Bohemia was yet heathen." Even today views differ widely, and in fact historiography to all intents and purposes avails itself both of records and of ancient chronicles and legends as points of departure.[2]

Owing to its geopolitical situation, laying astride important trade routes, Prague acted from the beginning as crossroads connecting East and West. First reference reaches back to the early tenth century, to the so-called Raffelstatten Toll Ordinances (903–906), which regulated relations between the Great Moravian and Carolingian empires, and which note the Jewish slave-traders in this enclave.[3] The second important record is the description of the noble Spanish Jew Ibrahim Ibn Yaqub, who in his travelogue from the year 965 presents Prague as a highly prosperous center of trade where among merchant caravans, converging from near and far, Jewish traders barter their goods and wares.[4]

The relatively favorable conditions were disrupted at the time of the First Crusade in 1096. Many of the Jews were massacred, their property looted; others were forced to convert.[5]

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries economic conditions encouraged the growth of Jewish settlements. As elsewhere, the Jews engaged in trading, money lending, agriculture, and manufacturing, rendering them useful to the monarchs. Their function as *servi camerae regiae* (servants of the royal chamber) afforded them status and protection. Historians describing the relationship between the monarch and his Jewish subjects likened their usefulness to that of bees, whose personal safety had to be guaranteed for the benefit of the royal treasury.[6]

As in other European countries, in Bohemia and Moravia life became harsh and insecure with the burgeoning of social and religious unrest, while the flourishing of Judaism coincided with general progress and well-being.[7]

In the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the power struggle among the monarchs, the nobility, and the towns for the right to control the Jews and to collect their taxes led to the repeal of protection. This in turn resulted in holding for ransom; massacres under various pretexts, such as allegations of blasphemy and desecration, culminated in the onslaught upon the Jews of the Prague Ghetto at Easter of 1389—hundreds were murdered in the streets, the great cemetery was devastated, and the tombstones destroyed.[8]

The changes in the social structure of the Jews introduced by the Hussites created more tolerant conditions: "they had to give up money-lending and mingled with the rest of the town people, working as artisans, shopkeepers. On the other hand they were freed of the humiliating signs which they were earlier forced to wear and also later, pilloried as impure by the Christian society."[9]

The ceaseless influx of learned immigrants from neighboring Germany, Poland, the Balkans, Spain, and Portugal enhanced the cosmopolitan nature of the community. In the Middle Ages Prague was the seat of famous rabbis and talmudic scholars, renowned for their high standards of learning.

The rule of Maximilian (1564–76) and of Rudolph II (1576–1612)—"the Golden Era of Czech history"—is associated with Mordechai Maisl (1528-1601), the burgomaster of the old Jewish town in Prague, and Jacob Bassevi of Treuenberg, in charge of the output of Bohemian silver mines, the first Jew in Bohemia to be elevated to the nobility.[10] It was during this period that the monumental Jewish Town Hall and the nearby synagogues were erected.

The towering figure known as the Maharal lived in the Jewish community of Prague for over three decades. Both his interpretations of halakhic (ritual) rules and his treatises on worldly affairs, pedagogical theories, and ethics left an indelible mark on Jewish life in the Czech lands as well as on Judaism in general.[11] Between the years 1553 and 1573 he officiated as *Landesrabiner*—chief rabbi of Moravia—and headed the famous Nikolsburg (Mikulov) Yeshiva.

Bohemia existed as an independent kingdom until the late Middle Ages, when it became affiliated with the Holy Roman Empire. From 1526 it constituted part of the hereditary Habsburg dominion, and after the Battle of the White Mountain (1620) Bohemia lost its independence. The execution of the Czech noblemen in the Old Town Square in Prague and the ensuing Counter-Reformation unleashed a wave of persecution. All non-Catholic religions except for Judaism were declared illegal. Protestant priests were ordered to leave the country. Czech lands and fortunes were confiscated, the Czech language was

proscribed, the Czech faith condemned; bibles and books were burned and individuals were put to death. Habsburg absolutism was imposed and the ensuing seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became engraved in Czech historical consciousness as the time of darkness (*Temno*).[12]

The Peace of Westphalia (1648), "the seventeenth-century Munich," as the historian Otakar Odložilík put it, transformed Bohemia and Moravia into a mere administrative appendage of the Habsburg Empire.[13] The native Czech language, being overwhelmingly replaced by German, fell into decay, bringing general intellectual life to a standstill. It was this situation that triggered the gradual Germanization process of Bohemian Jews, to evolve later into a firm attachment to German education and culture.

By the end of the seventeenth century almost half of Bohemian Jewry (around ten thousand persons) lived in Prague.[14] The rest, the so-called *Landesjudenschaft* of twenty-five to thirty thousand, were scattered throughout the countryside and townlets as traders under the protection of local nobility. Their main function was to sell the surplus produce of the domains, such as wool, hides, down, and cheese, and to supply the nobles' households with articles of luxury.

In Moravia the Jewish population at the time is estimated to have been around 25,500, for the most part acting as merchants and tradesmen. After they had been expelled from the royal cities (Jihlava, Brno, Olomouc, Znojmo, Neustadt, and Uherské Hradiště) they settled in villages and small towns under the protection of feudal lords on whose estates they performed various functions. Some of the Jews became military purveyors, attaining status and respectability. A large section engaged in crafts as artisans and tailors and as cloth and wool merchants, laying the foundations of the textile and clothing industry.

At the end of the century Prague was widely known to be the best established and most thriving site of Jewish residence; the population of the Jewish Town amounted to 11,500. John Toland (1670–1722), one of the radical followers of the Enlightenment in Britain, who visited the European continent prior to issuing his protest pleading for the naturalization of the Jews in Britain and Ireland (1714), made special mention of this. He reviewed the situation of the Jews in the major European cities, demonstrating how valuable their presence was, and he referred to Prague as the greatest of all.[15]

The government census of 1724 indicated that the Jews of Bohemia were scattered among eight hundred localities, six hundred of which were small villages in which only a handful of Jews lived. At the same time Moravian Jewry was distributed among fifty-two communities of "medium" size.[16]

The accession to the throne of Charles VI was marked by the Familiants'

Law (Familiantengesetz) in 1727, which limited the number of Jewish families in Bohemia to 8,541 and in Moravia to 5,106; only one son from any household was permitted to marry and establish a family. Maria Theresa's forty years of absolute rule (1740–80) were marked by steady adherence to the policy of curtailments in mobility and family life as well as heavy taxation of the Jewish population. For alleged espionage activities during the Prussian War, the Jews were ordered in 1744 to leave Prague with no delay; four years later, following diplomatic intervention, the empress rescinded the law and the Jews were allowed to return.[17]

The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a Messianic upheaval among Jews in Bohemia and Moravia: Sabbateian Frankism spread among sections of the populace. Joseph II's accession to the throne in 1780 ushered in a new era of wide-ranging changes and reforms engendering the process of modernization within the Jewish communities. His ultimate goal was to bring about administrative unification in his various domains—making German the lingua franca of the whole empire. One outcome of the new reforms was the suspension of Jewish judicial autonomy. The emperor's new policy encompassed in the 1782 Edict of Tolerance (Toleranzpatent) aimed at the gradual abolition of existing limitations.[18] His policy set out utilizing the Jews' potential to the benefit of the state economy.

At the same time a systematic process of Germanization compelled the Jews to adopt family names and to establish secular schools, with the German language as the medium of teaching. They were to cease using Hebrew and Yiddish in business transactions, to be replaced by German for their records.

The Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment movement) reached Prague at the turn of the century. It may be assumed that in addition to the Mendelssohnian trend, contemporaneous cultural yearnings were influenced by Herderian nationalism, namely by Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829), the harbinger of the Czech Awakening. With the spread of Haskalah throughout Bohemia, enlightenment evolved into a vehicle paving the way for assimilation and integration into society at large.[19]

The Mendelssohnian trend put German alongside Hebrew as a language of religious life, thus bringing German into the synagogues, the communal institutions, and the rabbinates and granting it a dominant role in everyday usage. The transition from the vernacular Judeo-German of everyday life to a language spoken by many millions of people the world over had some real advantages and was regarded by many as the gateway to the "great wide world." At this period Czech scholars also availed themselves of the German language. František Palacký, founder of modern Czech historiography, first published his seminal

history of the Czech people in Bohemia and Moravia in German (1836). And so did T. G. Masaryk at a later date. It has been recorded that in the 1830s "it was quite exceptional to hear better-clad people conversing in Czech in the streets of Prague."[20]

After the Josephinian emancipation, during the reign of Leopold II and Francis I, a regression set in, followed by a dramatic change in the year 1848, viewed as "the spring of the nations." In Bohemia and Moravia the most important innovation was the law of free movement (*Freizügigkeitsgesetz*) of 1849, which allowed Jews to leave the narrow confines of the ghetto and to scatter throughout the country. It also opened up new vistas of thinking, opportunities for individuals, and not least a radical break with tradition.

Within a relatively short time, following the law of free movement, Prague became the center of German-Jewish culture and a hub of developing trade and industry. Of special importance was the entry of Jews into the cotton industry in Prague and other localities (by 1835, of the 117 cotton-processing establishments, fifteen of the largest were owned by Jews).[21]

A large number of Jews settled in predominantly German northern Bohemia (called Sudetenland by the Nazis) and integrated relatively smoothly into various occupational fields. In the Czech countryside, however, the newcomers were greeted with distrust, the peasants viewing them as Germans, exploiters, and villains.[22] It took long years to win over the confidence of the overwhelmingly suspicious and bigoted local inhabitants. In contrast to their co-religionists in the big cities who had become assimilated, the village Jews, for the most part peddlers, remained devoted to Judaism.

One of the immediate consequences of the large-scale population movement was a radical change in the Jews' social structure. Their advance in the fields of industry and commerce elicited growing rivalry and ill-feeling accompanied by occasional riots and strikes against Jewish manufacturers. According to Alfred Meissner, a staunch liberal and socialist of the era, the Jews' inroads into society created a "sort of medieval Jew-hatred," which in practice meant larger or smaller daily burglaries of innocent inhabitants of the Jewish quarter in Prague and elsewhere.[23]

The year 1848 became a political landmark in the life of the ethnic groups of Bohemia, the beginning of conflicts and hostility between Germans and Czechs that had long been smoldering beneath the surface. Nevertheless, the genesis of spiritual and national awakening of the Czechs had already begun, gaining momentum during the ensuing revolutionary period of brewing national strife.

It was at this juncture that a window of opportunity for a Czech-Jewish dialogue opened up. The harbingers of this new approach were two literati:

Václav Bolemír Nebeský and his Jewish friend, the physician-poet Siegfried Kapper.[24] Both men believed in the possibility of a true symbiosis between the Czechs and the Jews. Nebeský claimed that old-established Jews could be viewed as Czechs by nationality and Jewish by faith.[25]

Prompted by the desire for a rapprochement with the Czech nation, a group of "Young Bohemian" poets published a series of poems, some drawing a parallel between the plight of the Czech people longing for redemption and the fate of unredeemed Palestine and the people of Israel. The foremost representatives were Moritz Hartmann and Siegfried Kapper.[26] Hartmann was the first to conjure up the vision of the Czech national defeat at the White Mountain in the "Böhmische Elegien." Kapper began his literary activities by translating folk songs, publishing *Slavische Melodien* (1844), followed in 1846 by his poetical work *České listy* (Czech leaves), the first literary composition written by a Jew in Czech. Moreover, while expressing a heartfelt allegiance to the homeland, he at the same time nurtured a warm and genuine attitude toward Judaism.[27]

His "intrusion into the sanctuary of Czech literature" was, however, greeted with devastating criticism by Karel Havlíček Borovský, the most prominent journalist of his time, who represented the Czech national bourgeoisie. In a series of articles he reviewed Kapper's poems, exploring the question of interrelationship between "Czechs and Jews" and their historical implications. Havlíček, however, on national grounds, categorically rejected Kapper's ideas of friendly interaction, consequently blocking the way for all those Jews who desired cultural assimilation with the Czech nation. Although Havlíček's criticism contained phrases of unmitigated anti-Semitism, Guido Kisch viewed his interpretation in a positive vein, stressing that "Havlíček was far ahead of his time": in his evocative associations of Jewish past and glory he spoke of Judaism in terms of the nascent modern Jewish nationalism.[28]

Notwithstanding the massive opposition to the integration of Jews in social and public life, the process of equal opportunity begun in 1848 and with it the constant interaction with the surrounding non-Jewish population was well under way. While the descendants of the prominent Jeiteles and Landau families associated with the Enlightenment period were passing on, acculturation and assimilation were steadily gaining a foothold within Jewish society. Moses Israel Landau (1788–1852), the grandson of Prague's noted chief rabbi Ezekiel Landau, although still officiating as a rabbi in Prague, was already a fully emancipated "free-thinker."[29] Although entirely self-taught, he became a translator and wrote poetry.

In 1849 Landau was the first Jew to be elected a representative on the Board of Prague Magistrates, and as of 1850 he became a town councilor. His public

and social activities may be considered a milestone in the transformation of Jewry on the road toward acculturation and assimilation. Dr. Wolfgang Wessely (1801–70) was the first Jew to receive a doctorate in law as well as a Ph.D., in Vienna and at Charles University.[30] As of 1846 he gave lectures on the Hebrew language and rabbinical literature at Prague University, and in 1861 he became a full professor, a position he retained until his death (1870).

The historic compromise (*Ausgleich*) in 1867 resulted in the dualistic state of Austria-Hungary; in the Czech territories a new momentum for the national struggle began. Overwhelmed by an awakening nationalist consciousness, the Czechs viewed the Jews with rancor, blaming them for being instruments of Germanization, whereas German circles, influenced by the then proliferating ideas, considered the Jews aliens. Under the impact of the new racist doctrine the German university in Prague was a hotbed of anti-Judaism. August Rohling, who served as professor of theology at Prague University, published in 1871 his *Der Talmudjude*, a compilation of quotations in which he defended the veracity of accusations of ritual murder leveled against the Jews in the Middle Ages; this volume gained popularity among wide strata of the learned population and clerics.[31]

In the years 1870–71 two Catholic political associations were formed in the Czech lands: one for Bohemia and one for Moravia. Simultaneously a Catholic press alliance (Katolický spolek tiskový), was founded in Prague, which initiated a massive outpouring of popular anti-Jewish diatribes and pamphlets.[32] The late sixties witnessed an additional innovation: religious services in the Czech language paving the way to a closer link with the surrounding native population.[33]

The struggle for political liberty and growing national consciousness together with booming industrial and commercial activities produced a wealthy Czech middle class, competing for positions with their German counterparts. The growth of a new intelligentsia fostered the establishment of several national institutions, which in turn nurtured the genesis of a literary and artistic renaissance. The pivotal event in the revival of the Czech nation was the division of the Charles Ferdinand Prague University into separate German and Czech institutions in 1882.[34]

Other major landmarks were the founding of the first Czech political newspaper, *Národní listy* (1861); expansion of the gymnastic association Sokol (1862); establishment of the first major Czech bank, Živnostenská Banka (1868), and the Czech Academy of Science, Literature and Arts (1880); culminating in the opening of the National Theater in Prague (the edifice was built by private subscription in 1881). The regeneration and rebuilding of the Czech entity was under way.

With the persistent growth of the Czech nationalist movement, Jewish academic youth perceived the urgent necessity of changing their orientation. In 1876 they established Spolek českých akademiků-židů (sČAŽ, Society of Czech-Jewish academics) and began openly supporting the aspirations of Czech progressive circles.[35] Among the active members who were later to play a dominant role in Czech-Jewish interaction we find Adolf Stránský, Leopold Katz, Jakub Scharf, Augustín Stein, Josef Žalud, Karel Fischer, Bohumil Bondy, and Alois Zucker. One of the tangible outcomes of their efforts in public life was a successful campaign among the Jews of the Josefov district when in 1881 Dr. Tomáš Černý was elected the first Czech mayor of the city of Prague.

The Czech-Jewish movement was to serve several aims: it encouraged study of the Czech language and established in Prague a society for the promotion of worship in Czech and Hebrew (Or-Tomid—"Eternal light"), advocating the publication of some of the Hebrew prayerbooks in Czech translation.[36] Among its major publications was the annual *Kalendář česko-židovský*, launched in 5642 (1881–82).[37] For the first four years it appeared under the editorship of Augustín Stein, with articles on Jewish life, history, and culture openly supporting Czech national aspirations.

Thanks to the endeavors of the second editor, Karel Fischer, numerous first-rate Czech writers (J. Arbes, A. Heyduk, H. Jelínek, A. Jirásek, Fr. Kvapil, J. S. Machar, G. Preissová, L. Stroupežnický, F. X. Šalda, Z. Winter, and others) became contributors to the annual, enhancing its prestige in the eyes of the Jewish and non-Jewish readership alike.[38]

In 1883, at the height of growing Czech nationalism, the Neues Deutsches Theater (New German theater) came into being. Although the German nobility of the city were the founding members of the Theaterverein (theatrical society), the Jews of Prague also played a major role in its creation.[39] The first director of the theater was a Jew, Angelo Neumann, a former opera singer. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the audience consisted of Jews who were regularly attending the gala performances of the Königliches Landestheater, opened a decade earlier. Jewish social and cultural life in the capital centered mostly around these two theatrical institutions. Jews also constituted a solid element in the Lese und Redehalle deutscher Studenten (Reading and lecture hall of German students) as well as in the German casino.[40]

The end of the nineteenth century saw the birth of several assimilationist organizations, the most important of which was the National Union of Czech Jews (Národní jednota českožidovská) founded in 1893, headed by Jakub Scharf, Bohumil Bondy, Alois Zucker, Mořic Baštýř, and Julius Reitler.[41] One year later (1894) the bimonthly magazine *Českožidovské listy* made its appearance. A sec-

ond journal with a similar ideological basis, *Rozvoj* (Development), began publication in Pardubice ten years later in 1904, under the editorship of the physician and humanitarian Dr. Viktor Vohryzek. (The two merged in 1907; the new publication continued to appear as a weekly under the name *Rozvoj* until March 1939, with a short suspension.) Vigorous efforts were made to inculcate Czech education among the Jews of the rural areas.

On the whole the Czech-Jewish movement made its mark only upon a thin stratum of the more liberal, urban Gentile society. The majority, especially the village populace, deeply imbued as it was with prejudices and superstitions, remained hostile in outlook.

Between the years 1894 and 1896 sixty-four Catholic clubs were founded in Bohemia and Moravia.[42] Many of these published weeklies and gazettes, spreading their views among party followers. Behind the hectic political activism against the "destructive blaze" was the Christian socialists' antagonism toward lawyers and physicians—both spheres considered Jewish domains, labeled as foreign elements whose aim was "to destroy the Christian social order" in order to rule over all nations.

It is not without interest that almost at the same time the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and other forgeries were published elsewhere. An event of special importance was the First Congress of the Czech Slavonic Working People at Litomyšl (September 8, 1894), attended by several clerics who were authors of notorious anti-Jewish pamphlets. The speakers described the invasion of society "by liberal and atheistic bacteria," be they Freemasons or Jews.[43]

Two years later, in 1896, an international congress against Freemasonry took place in Trento, with the blessing of Pope Leo XIII and with the participation of prominent church dignitaries. The Bohemian daily *Čech* carried detailed accounts of the meeting. Robert Neuschl, professor of theology in Brno, wrote in his "Christian Sociology" that "Jewish talmudism begot freemasonry that begot liberalism . . . which in turn begot social democracy."[44] His arguments were obviously influenced by Rohling's *Talmud Jude*, which had gone into several Czech translations. There is no doubt that anti-Semitic ideas spread by other popular authors, such as Karl Lueger and Edouard Drummond, exerted great influence upon the Bohemian clerics. Their use of these incitements, especially in the pre-election campaigns, referring to the "Jews' rule over the entire industrial sector, trade, and press" was echoed in an essay by Rudolf Vrba entitled "National Self-protection."[45] He suggested the adoption of measures (set out in sixteen paragraphs) to protect the Czech people from material and moral ruin. Among others things he proposed compulsory marking of all Jewish businesses and newspapers; removal of Jews from public office; and cancelation of voting

rights. He recommended a special order forbidding any change in their names.[46] This and other ideas were later used in various campaigns aimed at boycotts of Jewish enterprises.

Under the influence of a constant outpouring of virulent anti-Semitic literature—pseudoreligious pamphlets "For the people" (*Pro lid*)—distributed by Catholic preachers, ill feeling mounted.[47] It was under these circumstances that rumors of various blood libels spread throughout the country, occasionally reaching the law courts.

With the upsurge of nationalism the growing political pressure soon focused on economy and business: in 1892 a countrywide campaign was launched against German and Jewish merchants and shopkeepers under the slogan of "each to his own" (*Svůj k svému*); rioting and looting occurred in towns and villages such as Kladno and Kutná Hora.[48] Further disturbances occurred in the wake of the 1897 Badeni language ordinances (issued in order to ensure Czech-German linguistic equality for employees of the courts and administration). Two years later, following the revocation of the Badeni ordinances aimed at pacifying German nationalist elements, new disturbances instigated by Czech nationalists directed against Germans and Jews broke out in many localities both in Bohemia and Moravia.

It was in this atmosphere that the infamous blood libel trial of Leopold Hilsner took place, rocking the entire society.[49] Masaryk's courageous stance, and his two pamphlets tearing to shreds the argument of ritual murder and demanding a retrial to demonstrate that the forensic evidence was inadequate, turned the whole affair into a *cause célèbre*. Masaryk confided that he was prompted by a sense of humanity, based on his conviction that "belief in ritual murder casts disgrace on the Czech people."[50] What disturbed him most was the effect of anti-Semitism on the highest circles of the intellectual class and the fact that "university professors here and elsewhere had succumbed to blood libel."

The turmoil in 1897 and subsequently in 1899 generated a popular outpouring of anti-Semitism. The anti-Jewish slogans, the attacks of the National Liberals (in their mouthpiece *Národní listy*), and the betrayal of the so-called *Mladočeši* (Národní strana svobodomyslná)—regarded as natural allies—left the younger wing of the Czech-Jewish camp bewildered. The leading spokesmen, Vohryzek, Lederer, and Klineberger, felt it imperative to redefine their goals and drastically revise their manifesto in order to carry on with their task.

In 1900 Dr. Viktor Vohryzek issued a call for cooperation on behalf of the National Union of Czech Jews entitled "Letters to Czech Jews," signed by thirty leaders, setting forth the Czech-Jewish relationship on new grounds and

arguing that neither recent developments nor patterns of cultural allegiance could account for anti-Semitic outbursts.[51] He described anti-Semitism as a moral flaw, and as such, he claimed, it was ultimately a Czech and not a Jewish problem.

Lederer also tried to offer a remedy. In his treatise *Žid v dnešní společnosti* (The Jew in contemporary society, 1902), presenting a substantive defense against the charges leveled against the Jews, he advocated a new ethical approach based on traditional Judaism to match Masaryk's ideas with regard to cultural transformation.[52] It is worth noting Vohryzek's admission in the first issue of *Rozvoj* in 1904 that as far as their program was concerned, "the intellectual fund has not sufficed" in coping with the difficult task of promoting integration into Czech society.[53]

Masaryk for his part is known to have challenged one of the basic tenets of the Czech-Jewish movement by urging its leaders to spell out precisely to what extent they envisaged their assimilation would progress. His own views were clear. Although he genuinely believed in cultural assimilation, he had strong doubts with regard to national assimilation. He clarified his stance thus: "Of course the Jews can become culturally Czech, but there still remains a difference: that of separate origins, of race—which of course cannot be exactly established—of religion and tradition."[54]

Masaryk never retreated from his original position and continued to view the Jews "as a distinct element within a nation." In one of his encounters with Lev Vohryzek in 1908 he made a pointed remark about the initial Czech-Jewish movement.[55] Masaryk stressed that Vohryzek's view, putting Jewish nationality on a par with religion, appealed to him much more.

The last year of the turbulent decade, 1900, heralded the "national turnabout" of the Jews in Prague. While in 1890 about two-thirds of Bohemian Jewry and three-quarters of the Jews of Prague declared their language of daily use to be German, ten years later more than 54 percent of both Bohemian and Prague Jews proclaimed Czech as their everyday language.[56] The breakup of the traditional system of German-Jewish primary education, the radicalization of Czech national politics, the anti-Semitic outbursts that began in 1892 and swept the country in 1897 and 1899, and finally the political pressure exerted by Czech Jews in an effort to challenge the predominance of German in various spheres of Jewish community life—all these forces combined to produce the surprising census results, which signaled the beginning of a new trend toward the "Czechization" of Bohemian Jewry.

One of the signs of this change was the removal of bilingual or German-only store signs, to be replaced by signs in Czech.[57] The changing of the names of the

shopkeepers themselves, rendering them Czech or Czech-sounding, would wait another two decades.

The Jews of Moravia were more conservative and observant in religious practice than those in Bohemia. They also differed from their co-religionists in the use of language: in 1900, 77 percent declared German as their mother tongue, 16 percent Czech, and 7 percent other languages.[58]

At the turn of the century in Prague and Brno, the two major centers of Jewish population, a large Jewish textile industry developed. Numerous well-established Jewish families (Bondy, Teller, von Hahn) reached important positions in industry and the economy—in textile, leather, chemical, and dye businesses—attaining a high-water mark of prosperity some decades later.[59]

The Jews' advancement was impeded at higher levels in the various branches of the national economy, where they were not able to attain positions. In banks, financial institutions, insurance companies, or other Czech financial concerns and factories, Jewish investors often faced the sullen barrier of anti-Semitism. Most instructive on this point is a series of articles by Dr. Alois Zucker.[60] He informed the Czech public about the liberal approach toward Jewish entrepreneurs prevailing in Hungary, where recent arrivals from other parts of the monarchy often benefited the national economy.[61] A case in point were several Hungarian Jewish magnates, members of the Upper House, who had originally hailed from Bohemia and Moravia and subsequently made sensational careers in Hungary proper.

There were, of course, several exceptions. The most remarkable was Bohumil Bondy (1832–1907), scion of the patrician Bondy family, whose father Lazar Gottlieb Bondy was the founder of the old Prague L.G.B. iron firm. Bohumil Bondy, industrialist and patron of the arts, was a member of the Prague Town Council (1864–69).[62] In 1877 he became president of the Prague Chamber of Commerce and was highly regarded by both the Czech nation and the imperial court. His son Leon continued in his footsteps, becoming president of the chamber of commerce in 1902, to hold this position for many years.[63] Bohumil Bondy's interest in and general financial support for cultural enterprises led him in 1906 to the publication of the two-volume documentation project *The History of the Jews in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia 906–1620*. He also initiated the establishment of the Museum of Arts and Crafts (Umělecko-průmyslové Muzeum) in Prague.

Another prosperous stratum developed in the rural areas. These were Jewish landowners and leaseholders who were among the first to utilize various technological innovations and agricultural machinery for modern crop cultivation. A prime example of these prosperous farmers was Alexander Brandeis (1848–

98), known as “a friend and patron in the generation of the National Theater,” who was himself an enthusiastic connoisseur of the arts.[64] His estate served as a retreat and venue for many figures of the Czech cultural scene and for artists including Mikuláš Aleš, Josef Václav Myslbek, Václav Brožík, František Ženíšek, Chitussi, Mauder, and many others.

IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

The traditionalist Orthodox way of life gave way in the second half of the nineteenth century to modernization and innovation, a shortened liturgy, and use of the organ and a mixed choir at services. Henceforth the rabbis, cantors, and sextons of the Orthodox synagogues also wore clerical robes. Still, the only one of the twenty congregations in Prague to adopt the characteristic features of Reform worship was the liberal Altschul synagogue, on Dušní Street. This synagogue became widely known for its association with two Czech musicians, the brothers Johan Nepomuk and František Škroup.[65]

The vast majority of the urban Jewish population grew indifferent to religion and their links with the community became feeble. In Prague there remained only a few families who were faithful to tradition. František Langer referred to them in his recollections as “the remnant of the religious aristocracy.” Max Brod, Felix Weltsch, Hans Kohn, Robert Weltsch, Hugo Bergmann, and other contemporaries reminiscing about this period touched in a similar vein upon this total ignorance of normative Judaism. Kafka, in a letter to his father, spoke of the prevailing religious void: “the insignificant scrap of Judaism” he himself possessed, which in the course of time “all dribbled away.”[66]

The Jews nevertheless retained a feeling of deep reverence for their past, cherishing their ancient synagogues, historical monuments, cemeteries, and organized community framework known for its social and charitable activities. Those who emigrated carried with them this amalgam of tradition: in the United States, “Bohemian” synagogues and congregations are known to have observed the customary rituals of the home country.

Under the impact of assimilation and urbanization, Jewish society underwent a radical transformation, losing its cohesive structure, the rabbinate ceasing to dominate the mainstream of communal life. Although the officiating rabbis of Prague, such as Alexander Kisch (1886–1917); Nathan Ehrenfeld (1890–1912) and Heinrich (Hayyim) Brody (1912–30), were university-educated and liberal men, their influence upon their flock and public life nevertheless diminished distinctly. The once religious community of Bohemia evolved into a pluralistic society of liberals and socialists, nihilists and atheists, assimilationists

and Zionists. The marked internal mobility caused further havoc in Jewish communal life already plagued by alienation from Judaism and the new phenomenon of mixed marriages (in 1881, 0.15 percent; in 1910 reaching 1.75 percent).[67]

Torn between the deeply hostile camps, a small section of Jews sought a solution in Theodor Herzl's political aspirations and later in Ahad Ha'Am's cultural Zionism. A proclamation issued in 1894 by the nationalist students' organization Maccabi in Prague claimed that "the Jews are neither German nor Slavs, they are a nation in their own right."[68] Moravian students were the first to organize a Zionist student club, Veritas, in Brno in 1894 under the guidance of Berthold Feiwel, which in turn led to the founding of Zionist organizations throughout the Moravian communities.

Reflecting on the identity dilemma of Czech Jews in an article titled "The Hunt in Bohemia," Herzl himself mused: "In Prague they are reproached that they are not Czech, in Žatec (Saaz) and in Cheb (Eger) for being Germans. Poor Jews, where should they stand? Some tried to be Czechs; these were assaulted by the Germans. Others wanted to be Germans, and then both the Czechs and the Germans attacked them. What a situation! One can lose one's mind."[69]

As of 1899 with the establishment of the Bar Kochba Association of Jewish University Students in Prague, the influence of two thinkers, Ahad Ha'Am and especially Martin Buber, grew steadily. Noteworthy are Masaryk's influence and his contacts with the founding members of the association. Under the leadership of Hugo Bergmann (1903–8), Bar Kochba became a focus for disseminating Jewish cultural values.

In Prague the first Zionist association was formed in 1900 under the name of Jüdischer Volksverein. Among the founders were Moritz Löwy, Professor Jakob Wertheimer, Filip Lebenhart, Rabbi Aladar Deutsch, and Anton Glaser. In 1901 the women organized a group of their own, Der Jüdischer Frauenverein. The first chair of this group was Sophie Roubitschek, educator and principal of a Jewish boarding school in Prague.[70]

In 1907, after the new edition of *Rozvoj* appeared, the Bar Kochba Association created a new platform for promoting ideas and discussions by launching the Prague Zionist weekly *Selbstwehr* (Self-defense). It was to portray the social, economic, and cultural activities of the community and challenge the attacks both of German and Czech assimilationists.[71]

Caught as they were in the throes of the Czech-German nationality controversy, Prague Zionists sought a way out, determined to steer clear of both sides. Dr. Leo Herrmann, a young Socialist who was elected leader of Bar Kochba in 1908, took a new initiative.[72] With a view to igniting self-awareness he invited

the Berlin-based Jewish philosopher Martin Buber to address the student body on the social history of Jews.[73]

Buber's three lectures "On Judaism," "Judaism and Mankind," and "The Renewal of Judaism" (January 1909 and April and December 1910) offered hope and justification as a new challenge and provided a genuine service to the intellectuals of Prague, cut off as they were by time and place from the well-springs of national Jewish culture. Buber's presentations resulted in the publication of *Drei Reden über das Judentum* (Three addresses on Judaism) in 1911, bringing home to his audiences the significance of Jewish heritage and Hebrew language.[74] In due course Czech Zionists became bearers of what was described as the *Prager Richtung im Zionismus* (the Prague orientation of Zionism).[75]

It is noteworthy that in 1909 a Czech-oriented branch of the Bar Kochba Association was formed in Prague under the name Theodor Herzl (Spolek židovských akademiků Theodor Herzl), the founding members of which were to play a considerable role in public and cultural activities.[76] One of the tenets of the society was "to make the values of Zionism available to Jews whose daily language is Czech, without adopting at the same time German cultural traits."

Hugo Herrmann's declaration "The Czech-Jewish Question" spelled out the new line adopted on the Czech-German conflict: "We Jews are Jews as a nation (*der Nation nach*) and do not seek to assimilate with anyone." At the same time he pledged commitment to participate "as reliable, true allies" in the struggle of the Czech nation.[77] Herrmann's unequivocal assertion acknowledged "the influence of our [Czech] environment." One is aware that these were not merely empty words. It is apparent that already in 1911, before the dawn of Czech nationhood, Prague Zionist leaders were cognizant of the immense impact exerted upon them by the burgeoning national upsurge of the Bohemian capital.

What is singularly remarkable was Buber's impact on a whole range of foremost Czech intellectuals, including F. X. Šalda, František Krejčí, Arne Novák, J. S. Machar, and J. J. Svátek.[78] The basic tenets of Zionism appealed to them, and they came to view the Jewish entity as a distinct ethnic group and spoke out in favor of Jewish nationalism.[79] Thus, for instance, the poet J. S. Machar, when answering a questionnaire distributed by the editor of *Rozvoj* as to whether Jews could be considered a nationality, replied that he found himself in a ridiculous situation: "I persistently write Jews (Židé) with a capital *Ž* to prove that they are a nation while they themselves use a small ž to imply that they are not to be considered as such."[80]

The philosopher František Krejčí spelled out his views in 1909 in an article entitled "Assimilation and Zionism from the Ethical Point of View," arguing that the prime element of Czech nationality was the Czech language whereas

Judaism was faith tightly interwoven with national identity, a phenomenon unique among the nations.[81]

The last decades preceding World War I, dubbed "Kafkas böses Böhmen," were marked by the mounting Czech-German national conflict, tension stirring every aspect of social and economic life.[82] These years of "nervous splendor," as Harry Zohn put it from a different angle, produced the unique group Der Prager Kreis (the Prague Circle). Several members of this group are of special interest in our context because of their role as bridge builders, promoting and translating the works of Czech authors and poets into German.

A particular common denominator positively affected the older generation of Jewish writers (Czech Jews, German Jews, and national Jews as well): their receptiveness to all the resources existing within the empire—German, Czech, Austrian, and Jewish. This situation lent their writing a broad cosmopolitan outlook and a quality of exaltation bordering on transcendental metaphysical contemplation. An illustrious example is Franz Kafka, the symbolic figure of this era. Other leading members of the Prague Circle were Max Brod, Franz Werfel, Egon Erwin Kisch, Oskar Baum, Hugo Salus, Johannes Urzidil, and Kamil Hoffmann. They partook of a triple world of contrasts and rivalry.[83]

Kafka, like others, was conscious of the fact that they were not fully accepted by either German or Czech society. In Pavel Eisner's interpretation the triple dimension of Jewish existence in Prague is embodied in Kafka's *The Trial*: his protagonist Josef K. is (symbolically) arrested by a German (Rabensteiner), a Czech (Kullich), and a Jew (Kaminer). He stands for the "guiltless guilt" that imbues the Jew in the modern world, although there is no evidence that he himself is a Jew.[84]

In his essay "A Chapter of Czech-German Co-Existence" Eisner added a new dimension to this complex issue, claiming that almost everything created in "German Prague" by the last generation of Jewish artists and men of letters revealed a measure of "positiveness vis-à-vis Czech culture." He regarded this development as a kind of "biological process," the Jews thereby ridding themselves of the depressing ghetto atmosphere. Moreover, Eisner saw in the German-speaking intellectuals of Prague the initial intermediaries between Czechs and Germans, bridging the spiritual gap between them. It was through their translation of Czech literature into German (and to a lesser degree vice versa) that the Germans were made aware of the creative potential and spiritual values inherent in the Czech nation. Siegfried Kapper, Viktor Vohryzek, Hugo Salus, Friedrich Adler, Otto Pick, Rudolf Fuchs, Kamil Hoffmann, and Max Brod became the foremost cultural intermediaries, translating the best works produced by Czech authors.[85] The most telling example of the "positive" approach is the translation

by Rudolf Fuchs of the "Silesian Songs" written by Petr Bezruč in 1916. The book appeared in the midst of World War I when the Czech nation was engulfed in a struggle for self-determination. The poetry of the rebellious Bezruč was a national and social outcry of miners against the owners' exploitation; a protest against the Polonizing and Germanizing of the regions of Ostrava and Teschen by the Austrian aristocracy and some Jewish overlords (Rothschilds, Guttmans). Both the translator and Franz Werfel, who wrote an emotional introduction, gave voice to their utmost empathy with the Czech cause, notwithstanding the anti-Semitic overtones that prevailed throughout this book of verses.[86]

On the eve of World War I a second generation of educated professionals and writers emerged within the ranks of the Czech-Jewish movement who from their early childhood identified with the native national culture and who felt totally devoted to the Czech cause. The foremost representatives of this period—Jindřich Kohn, Otakar Guth, and Viktor Teytz—left an indelible mark on the movement: Kohn as the leading philosopher, whose credo embraced the universal mission of Judaism, and Guth and Teytz as editors of *Rozvoj* and *Kalendář česko-židovský*. They were still cognizant of their Jewish roots and within the historical context spoke of their "distinctiveness." They contended that they would never call themselves "the descendants of the Hussites" but could fully identify with Czech history in their own lifetime.[87]

With the outbreak of war the issue of loyalty surfaced to give rise to psychological stress: old ethnic resentments took new forms, gaining in intensity. On the whole the Jewish entity, caught between the Russophile nationalist sentiment of the Czech people and German-Austrian patriotism, tended to side with the latter, especially the German-speaking Jews who embarked on a vociferous campaign for the war effort, thus drawing down upon themselves harsh criticism. Before leaving for abroad Masaryk exhorted "the more reasonable" Jewish leaders "to curb the zealous patriotism" of their co-religionists lest it provoke anti-Semitic outbursts.[88]

The war brought to a standstill the activities of the major Czech-Jewish organizations, most of the youngsters enlisting in the army. The situation was similar in the Zionist camp, where the various organizations engaged in social work, launching relief campaigns for those in need. The streams of refugees fleeing from Galicia and the Carpathians brought the misery of Eastern Jewry to the threshold of the Bohemian and Moravian communities. The last year of the war signaled the impending changes following the Wilsonian declaration on national self-determination for the peoples of Austria-Hungary. To the Czech Jews it meant the fulfillment of their aspirations.

The struggle for Czechoslovak independence inspired not only Zionist

leaders abroad, who maintained close contact with exiled Czech leaders, but also leading figures in Prague. The latter, emboldened by the Czech example, made the first move to consolidate Jewish nationalism within the context of the Czechoslovak state in the making. During their meetings with members of the Czech national leadership toward the end of 1917 and in 1918, the Zionist representatives led by Dr. Ludvík Singer reassured the Czech leaders of their forthcoming support and of their intention to constitute a loyal body in the nascent Czech state, linguistic and cultural affiliation notwithstanding.[89] In keeping with this line in April of 1918 a new Czech-language paper was launched—*Židovské zprávy* (Jewish news), edited by Dr. Ludvík Singer—to keep the readership abreast of current activities and policies.[90]

Many of the key figures of the Bar Kochba student association left for Palestine before the end of World War I or in the first years following the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic.[91] Their departure as well as the withdrawal of Martin Buber from active political life brought about the decline of the Bar Kochba Association. Henceforth the Czech-oriented sister society, the Theodor Herzl group, gained strength in all spheres of public life.[92] Some of its foremost members were mainly active as editors and writers.

In his perceptive study *The Making of Czech Jewry*, Kieval convincingly illustrates the two poles that arose within post-emancipatory Jewry in the wake of the Czech-German national conflict: two trends of self-affirmation and search for identity striving toward different objectives.

2

Years of Challenge and Growth
The Jewish Minority in Czechoslovakia (1918–38)

A national state or a state of nations? This question touches the core and the essence of the First Republic and its fate and as such lends itself to various interpretations. The Czechs constituted but half the population of the new state; however, together with the Slovaks, they made up the decisive majority, the *raison d'être* of the "Czechoslovak nation," which in a broader context was embraced by the "Czechoslovak Jews" as well.[1]

Aside from Czechs and Slovaks, the new democratic Czechoslovakia established on October 28, 1918, in the wake of the collapse of the multinational Austro-Hungarian monarchy included a number of other ethnic groups: Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenes, Jews, Poles, and Gypsies. It was the thirteenth largest state in Europe, with an area of 54,244 square miles, incorporating the provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, part of Silesia, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Ruthenia.[2]

According to the Declaration of Independence issued by President Masaryk on October 18, 1918, in Washington, the new state was to "guarantee complete freedom of conscience, religion and science, literature and art, speech and press, and the right of assembly and petition. The Church shall be separated from the State . . . The rights of the minorities shall be safeguarded by proportional representation. National minorities shall enjoy equal rights. The Government shall be parliamentary in form and shall recognize the principles of initiative and referendum."[3]

The main feature of future foreign policy of the Czechoslovak state was outlined by the president in his first message (December 22, 1918) to the members of the Prague National Assembly: "The Republic will be a barrier against the German plan of conquest toward the East," and for this purpose a

confederation of the small states extending from the Baltic to the Adriatic should be created.[4]

On the very day the republic was proclaimed the representatives of the newly created Jewish National Council (Národní rada židovská), led by its chairman Dr. Ludvík Singer and vice-chairmen Dr. Max Brod and Karel Fischl, appeared before the Czech National Committee (Národní výbor).[5] They submitted a memorandum the gist of which was a claim for recognition of a Jewish nationality with minority rights as well as for state recognition of the religious community.

The demand for minority rights was taken up at the Paris Peace Conference by the Comité des délégations juives, augmented by the Prague representatives—Ludvík Singer, Hugo Bergmann, and Norbert Adler. In the course of discussions with the Jewish National Council in Paris, Foreign Minister Eduard Beneš clearly rejected including "any specific clause pertaining to the protection of the Jews," his opposition stemming from the conviction that such a clause would hint at some mistrust on the part of the Allied Powers.[6] (Talking with Nahum Sokolow, Beneš even claimed that signing the Jewish articles of the Polish treaty would constitute a "yellow badge"—a stigma that Czechoslovakia would not deserve.) His second argument, perhaps carrying even more weight, implied that inclusion of Jewish minority rights would imply taking sides with one party, namely Zionism, versus assimilationism. Notwithstanding his overt sympathies, even Masaryk could not publicly approve such a motion. (Such an act would have antagonized the Czech-Jewish movement already aggravated over the achievement of national Jews functioning as political representatives.)

Although uneasy about the chauvinistic euphoria, the Jewish public at large viewed the new development favorably, pinning its hopes on President Masaryk's uprightness and moral rectitude.[7] But the transition period after the overthrow of the old Austrian regime loosed evil temper and hypernationalistic ill feeling. Anti-Semitic demonstrations and looting took place in Prague and some other localities, occasionally accompanied by bodily attacks.[8] The most severe assault occurred in the Moravian Holešov; the riots in December 1918 were initiated by members of an army unit from Kroměříž, who together with the local mob looted and destroyed Jewish homes and institutions.[9] Among the victims were Hugo Gratzer (aged forty-three) and Heiman Grünbaum (twenty-one); ironically enough, both were assaulted on their return from the front. Police curfew and a special unit brought in from Brno finally put an end to the three-day pogrom.

This was not the last of the rioting. May 1919 saw demonstrations against high prices and profiteering, and Jewish shops and businesses were looted again

in greater Prague. After a year of respite more severe disturbances occurred on November 16, 1920: mobs attacked the ancient Jewish Town Hall, which was temporarily sheltering Galician refugees. The mobs destroyed furniture and paintings and vandalized part of the community archives. The rioting became so violent that the American consul in Prague ordered that the American flag be hoisted over the Town Hall in order to protect the community premises.[10] An alarmed Franz Kafka, witnessing the disturbances from the window of his apartment, recorded some of the appalling scenes.[11]

The declaration of minority rights, the so-called treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye of September 10, 1919, was signed by the foreign minister of the Czechoslovak Republic, Dr. Edvard Beneš. The minority clauses were subsequently embodied in article 128 of the Constitution of the Republic of February 29, 1920, stipulating equality for all national, religious, and language minorities within the republic.[12] The preamble expressly stated that the Jews, before all authorities and at all times, could declare their national identity and be recognized as such. This principle was subsequently embodied in the census regulations, on the basis of which the Jews were free to declare themselves as belonging to the Jewish nationality irrespective of their mother tongue. The Czechoslovak Government regarded this act as a means for decreasing the numbers of Germans and Hungarians in the country, for a portion of the Jewish population had claimed these nationalities during the Austro-Hungarian era.

In an effort to bring the Jews professing Jewish nationality under one umbrella organization and thereby strengthen their political status, a conference was called in Prague in January 1919 at which the Jewish Party of Czechoslovakia was established as an instrument for electoral activities.[13] Though Zionist influence was prevalent in the Jewish National Council established in 1918, there were also liberal groups led by Alois Hilf and Salomon Hugo Lieben, who identified with and supported the council's more general policy. The Czech assimilationists openly contested the council's legitimacy in representing the entire Jewish population of Czechoslovakia.

At the same time, however, alarmed by the growing anti-Semitic campaign in the press, the Czech-Jewish movement issued a proclamation in its newly established daily *Tribuna*, under the editorship of Ferdinand Peroutka, declaring their unwavering loyalty to the republic.[14] The main aim of the daily was to help build the nation and the state. Numerous articles in the first issues, some penned by the editor himself, dealt in depth with the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, responding to continuous attacks in the various right-wing newspapers.

Among external events, it was first and foremost the Russian Revolution that in the immediate postwar period exerted its impact on the newly formed Czech-

oslovakia, where a segment of the leadership and political parties shifted to the left. This trend was also apparent within the Zionist factions, where the so-called left center youth groups were on the move. The impact of the Balfour Declaration (1917) and the incorporation of national minority rights in the peace treaties and in the Czechoslovak Constitution afforded the Zionist leadership an official basis for a long-range national Jewish policy that viewed its fulfillment in Eretz Israel.

It is noteworthy that the Jewish leaders of Bohemia and Moravia took up the struggle for nationality rights and led the election campaign for the Jewish Party, although the bulk of the voters came from the eastern parts of the republic, mainly from Subcarpathian Ruthenia.[15] At the same time the Jewish Party faced vociferous opposition from the ultra-Orthodox section and the Hasidic *rebbes* of these areas, who viewed Zionism as "heresy and atheism."

In 1921 the Jews of the republic numbered 354,000 out of the population of 13,613,172. Of these, 180,855 claimed Jewish nationality (in Bohemia 11,251 out of 79,777 and in Moravia-Silesia 19,016 out of 45,306). It should also be mentioned that many Jews listed Czech, German, or Magyar as their mother tongue or nationality.[16]

As of the first elections the Jewish minority took an active part in political life: its representatives sat on the town councils and on the district and provincial councils. Paradoxically, despite the fact that religion per se was losing ground, those adhering to religion still outnumbered the sector adhering to Jewish nationality, as was clearly indicated by the census returns of 1921 and 1930. This pattern began to change in the late thirties under the impact of National Socialism in Germany and the rise of anti-Semitism.

Within the new republic the Jews of the historic crownlands of Slovakia and of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (former provinces of Hungary) came to live within the same political framework. The Jewish communities of the eastern regions, the majority of whom remained Orthodox, differed significantly from their co-religionists, the assimilated Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, in their way of life, level of education, and economic and cultural standards.[17]

One of the immediate issues affecting the communities was a new influx of several thousand Jewish refugees from Bukovina and Galicia, hundreds of whom reached Prague during and immediately after the war. A great part of these newcomers settled in Moravian localities, namely in Moravská Ostrava. The conspicuous presence of Yiddish-speaking *Ostjuden* with beards and side-locks, wearing shabby garments and black hats, caused embarrassment, especially in Prague and other Czech-assimilated environments.[18] At the same time their poverty, lack of education, and poor physical condition placed a burden

upon the community, whose reduced resources also had to provide for this new stratum of proletariat. The cultural gap between native and immigrant Jews gave rise in this country, as in Germany, to intracommunal tensions. Nevertheless integration in Czechoslovakia was much smoother. A group of Prague Jews volunteered their services to care for the newcomers' welfare and spiritual needs. Upon the initiative of Dr. Alfred Engel a school for young refugee girls was set up, instructing them in commerce and agriculture.[19] Some of the noted intellectuals such as Dr. Max Brod gave language instruction and literature courses in an effort to help with immigrant integration into the new surroundings. It is noteworthy that in the course of time this nationally conscious element stemming from Bukovina and Galicia became the solid base of the Zionist party, especially in Moravia.

Although a Zionist tradition had existed in prewar Bohemia and Moravia, it never became a mass movement. It did, however, put out roots, which came to develop during the late thirties. Initial activities began early. After the end of the war Zionist local centers were set up in the various provinces: the Prague office acted as central headquarters. After the Second Zionist Territorial Conference in Brno in 1921, the seat of the Czechoslovak Zionist Executive was transferred from Prague to Moravská Ostrava.[20] The midway position of this city enabled the executive to maintain close contact with the two eastern provinces of the republic. Dr. Josef Rufeisen served as chair of the executive until 1938 when he was succeeded by Dr. Paul März, while Dr. Franz Kahn acted as secretary of the executive throughout the whole period of the First Republic.

One of the main characteristics of Czechoslovakia's constitutional life was the large number of political parties, reflecting the plethora of sociocultural backgrounds and religions, finding expression through proportional representation.[21] The constitution provided for 300 deputies and 150 senators in the Parliament of Prague. It can, however, be safely established that apart from a period in the late twenties, of the twenty-three parties it was five Czechoslovak parties that constituted the backbone of coalition governments. The most prominent were the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party (the largest force in the National Assembly), Czech Socialist Party (in 1926 renamed Czechoslovak Nationalist Socialist Party), Czechoslovak Populist Party, Czechoslovak National Democratic Party (after 1935 renamed the National Union), and the Agrarian Party. Of the minor Czechoslovak parties, many of which were short-lived, the most important was the Tradesmen's Party (Živnostenská strana), representing small businessmen and tradesmen, which cooperated closely with the Agrarians and which managed by manipulation to draw votes from Jewish religious circles in the eastern provinces. In addition there were a