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JEWS IN THE CZECH LANDS IN YEAR ONE*: IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, IN THE STATE, AND AMONG NEIGHBOURS. A RETURN TO THE FIRST REPUBLIC OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA?

ABSTRACT

After the Second World War, the fraction of the Jewish population in the Czech lands that survived the Shoah coped with this tragedy in various ways. This text addresses the main minority strategies: emigration (primarily to Palestine/State of Israel), engagement with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, unconditional assimilation into the Czech nation (intentional departure from Judaism), the reconstruction of Jewish religious communities and Jewish life in general, and seeking solace in faith (especially typical of those repatriating from Carpathian Ruthenia/Transcarpathian Ukraine). It also analyses the perspectives of these life strategies, the manners in which they were pursued, and both their successes and failures in relation to the previous attitudes of survivors and their situation following the liberation of Czechoslovakia in May of 1945 (loss of relatives, property, confrontation with the anti-Semitism of individuals as well as the rise of state anti-Semitism). Various rituals, organized by Jewish religious communities in cooperation with state authorities, were often used as a particular way to cope collectively with the Shoah (celebrations, the unveiling of monuments and memorials to deceased and fallen members of the Jewish minority, and Shoah-themed exhibitions).

KEYWORDS:

Jews, Czech Lands, Czechoslovakia, Shoah

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* "Year One" does not designate an exact point in time (such as the year of 1945 to 1946). It is a metaphor expressing an entirely new beginning of life for the Jewish minority under entirely different socio-political circumstances. The corresponding temporal period stretches roughly from the liberation of Czechoslovakia (May 1945) to the February Coup (1948). Year One means we are talking about "lived history".

PERSECUTION OF THE JEWISH POPULACE IN THE PROTECTORATE OF BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA

When the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was declared on 16 March 1939, approximately 135,000 Jews and "half-breeds" lived in these areas and from June of that year became subject to the Nuremberg Race Laws.[1] However, the first anti-Semitic regulations had already been issued on 15 March, the day that the rest of Czechoslovakia was occupied by German soldiers.[2] The persecution of the Jewish populace began with the issue of new documents and professional liquidation.[3] By mid-July 1939, the Central Office for Jewish Emigration had been established in Prague.[4] In the summer of the same year, Jews were excluded from all German schools. At the same time, they were prevented from entering associations, hospitals, pubs and restaurants, parks, baths and swimming pools.[5] From autumn 1939, there was a curfew preventing them going out after 8 pm. At the same time, Jews had their radio receivers confiscated.[6] From the following year on, Jews could not dispose of their property and were entirely excluded from public life.[7] Their movement was restricted and they were evicted from their apartments. On 7 August 1940, it was decided that Jewish children could not attend Czech schools.[8] From 5 October 1941, Jews over the age of six had to be marked with a Jewish star.[9] Then, the deportations began to concentration and extermination camps (KL Terezín, KL Auschwitz, KL Treblinka, KL Majdanek and others). KL Terezín, which was set up by the Nazis in 1941, began in November of that year to function as a collection and transit camp.[10] Up until its liberation, 75,000 former Czechoslovak citizens passed through here (8,500 of whom lived to see the liberation of KL Terezín). Roughly 60,000 Protectorate Jews were deported from KL Terezín to extermination camps. Approximately 1,100 people managed to hide during the Protectorate.[11]

1 Tomáš Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě* (Prague: Sefer, 2001), p. 341.
2 Helena Petrův, *Právní postavení* židů v *Protektorátu* Čechy *a Morava (1939–1941)* (Prague: Sefer), p. 74; Miroslav Kárný, 'Konečné řešení židovské otázky v Čechách a na Moravě', in *Stín šoa nad Evropou*, ed. by Miloš Pojar (Prague: Židovské muzeum v Praze, 2001), pp. 46–56 (p. 17). Also see Miroslav Kárný, *Konečné řešení: genocida českých židů v německé protektorátní politice* (Prague: Academia, 1991).
3 Petrův, *Právní postavení židů*, pp. 74–76.
4 Ibid., pp. 77–80.
5 Ibid., pp. 80–83.
6 Ibid., p. 83.
7 Ibid., pp. 84–107.
8 Ibid., pp. 109, 110–11.
9 Ibid., pp. 122–23.
10 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, pp. 342, 345–46.
11 Ibid., p. 346.

PERSECUTION OF THE JEWISH POPULACE IN SLOVAKIA

Following the declaration of national independence (14 March 1939), numerous anti-Semitic regulations were issued in Slovakia,[12] which were ultimately compiled into a "Jewish Code" with 270 paragraphs (9 September 1941)[13]. Young Jews were demobilized in 1940 and organized into labour units (6th battalion, 1940–1943). Slovak Jews were deported to collection and labour camps from March to October 1942, and again after the defeat of the Slovak National Uprising (August 1944).[14] The Slovak government paid Nazi Germany for these deportations. Specifically, 5,000 Slovak crowns were paid for each deported (murdered) person.[15]

THE SOCIAL SITUATION FOLLOWING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

> ... belief in returning; the image of the Vltava River with its old stone bridge lined with statues of saints, the cathedral and the castle high above. There our flag should fly and will fly again... The future therefore meant returning in the actual and figurative sense. To no longer be outcast, cursed, an exile. But from another perspective, the future was equal to the past. The closed gate of paradise opened once again, and in the meantime emptiness. It sounds strange but it is literally true: although they all knew that their former possessions had been sold and stolen, scattered to the winds, they still thought they would find everything as they left it. They did not know that they would have to enter a fundamentally different and changed world, that hard times would await even in the best of cases, full of worry.

These are the words used in 1947 by Emil Utitz (1883 Roztoky – 1956 Jena), practical philosopher, psychologist, and head of the KL Terezín concentration camp library during his internment there, characterizing the completely unrealistic notions of Jewish prisoners about returning home after

12 Ľudovít Hallon, *Kronika Slovenského štátu* (Prague: Ottovo nakladatelství, s. r. o., 2019), pp. 43, 46, 61, 62, 72, 89, 148, 167, 173, 176, 181, 184, 186, 192, 193, 197, 200, 202, 206, 209, 219, 224–25, 232, 234, 237, 240, 243, 249, 254, 255, 256; Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec, *Holocaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939–1945)* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Židovská náboženská obec Bratislava, 2003), pp. 14–16. On the Holocaust in Slovakia see Eduard Nižňanský nad Ján Hlavinka, *Arizácia* (Bratislava: Stimul, 2010).

13 Hallon, *Kronika Slovenského štátu*, p. 180; Katarína Hradská and Ivan Kamenec, *Slovenská republika 1939–1945* (Bratislava: Veda, 2015), p. 213; Nižňanský and Kamenec, *Holocaust na Slovensku 2*, p. 9; Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragedie* (Bratislava: Archa, 1991), pp. 125–32.

14 Peter Salner, *Prežili holokaust* (Bratislava: Veda, 1997), p. 41, 51, 55; Hradská and Kamenec, *Slovenská republika*, pp. 218, 222.

15 Hradská and Kamenec, *Slovenská republika*, p. 218; Nižňanský and Kamenec, *Holocaust na Slovensku 2.*, p. 10; Kamenec, *Po stopách tragedie*, p. 198.

the end of the Second World War.[16] People naively believed that they would not only return to their apartment or house, but even to their job and, above all, to their families and the first democratic republic of Czechoslovakia. On the one hand, the Terezín prisoners' idealized remembrances of home that we encounter in a number of sources[17] undoubtedly helped people endure incarceration; however, these completely unrealistic expectations complicated the return of survivors to a Czechoslovakia entirely different than they remembered. The surviving Jews found themselves in a country forced to come to terms with its past: the reverberations of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the Slovak State, the demoralization of part of society, as well as general post-war shortages.

In the initial period after the Second World War, from 9 May 1945 (the liberation of Czechoslovakia) up to 26 May 1946 (the last democratic election before the Velvet Revolution in 1989), Czech society experienced a moment of optimism and consensus with respect to land reform, nationalization, and the expulsion of Germans and Hungarians. The state sought guarantees of its security from both the East and the West. Jews fell in line with the desire to punish the native Germans, but their main interest turned to reconstruction of Jewish life. The renewed Jewish Religious Community in Prague became a distinguished partner of the Prague magistrate. At the same time, however, there were differences of opinion within the Jewish community. The Jewish minority had to face renewed instances of anti-Semitism in terms of verbal slanders and the first post-war pogrom. The second period (up to February 1948) was marked by the continuing reconstruction of Jewish life, but this took place against the background of a radicalizing society. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, relying on the post-war rise in importance of the Soviet Union and leftist movements in Europe, was moving towards totalitarian forms of government. During the Partisan Congress in Bratislava (2–5 August 1946), anti-Semitic demonstrations occurred in a number of Slovak cities. However, anti-Semitism was also growing in the Czech lands.[18]

The majority of Jews, however, did not return to their homes. According to the December 1945 Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, the "privilege of survival" was enjoyed in the Czech lands by a mere 10,000 Jews who self-identified by faith, and by 5,000 persons

16 Emil Utitz, *Psychologie života v terezínském koncentračním táboře* (Prague: Dělnické nakladatelství, 1947), pp. 22, 24.
17 Cf. eg. Irma Semecká, *Terezínské korso/Terezín Korso* (Prague: Ant. Vlasák, 1946), p. 31.
18 A detailed description of the situation after the Second World War in both Czech and Jewish society is given in Blanka Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa. Identita poraněné paměti* (Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2016), pp. 51–104. For more on the situation of the Jewish populace after the Second World War, see also Jan Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938-48: Beyond Idealisation and Condemnation* (Basingstoke–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Kateřina Čapková, 'Periferie a centrum: Židé v českých zemích od roku 1945 do současnosti', in *Židé v českých zemích: společná cesta dějinami*, ed. by Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval (Prague: NLN, 2022), pp. 293–306.

who were understood to be Jews based on the Nuremberg Laws. After the war, the Jewish Religious Community took care of its members (Jews by faith) as well as those who were not members before the war but were persecuted based on the Nuremberg Laws (in the Czech lands, this was about 5,000 people). According to these laws, anyone with three Jewish grandparents was considered a Jew. Then there were the "half-breeds", people who were members of the Jewish Religious Community, or children of a Jew born after 15 September 1935. The people returning included not only Jews who survived the concentration camps, but also emigres returning after the war (this amounted to 26,111 people from the Czech lands[19]).[20]

In Slovakia, there were 20,000 Jews of faith and 8,000 other persecuted persons based on the Nuremberg Laws[21]. Tomáš Pěkný, a Czech publishing editor and columnist, estimated 40,000 survivors (including, of course, emigrants) and 80,000 perished Jews from the Czech lands.,[22] The number of Jewish losses was particularly tragic with respect to prewar numbers. In 1921, 79,777 people in Bohemia declared Jewish faith and 11,251 declared Jewish nationality. In Moravia and Silesia, 37,989 and 7,317 persons professed the Jewish faith, with 15,335 and 3,681 claiming Jewish nationality, respectively. In the second Czechoslovak census in 1930, there were 76,301 Jews by faith and 15,697 by nationality in Bohemia. In Moravia and Silesia, there were 41,250 Jews by faith and 21,396 by nationality.[23] In 1938, there were about 117,000 Jews in Bohemia and Moravia and about 137,000 Jews in Slovakia, according to their faith. About 30,000 Jews from Bohemia and Moravia managed to emigrate.[24] In addition, after the Second World War, most of the Jewish religious communities virtually disappeared. Between 1945 and 1950, some 25,000 Jews emigrated from Czechoslovakia. Most of them headed for Palestine/the State of Israel.[25] When Jewish leaders surveyed the Jewish wartime tragedy, they considered this an unprecedented event of the Second World War. This was the conclusion drawn, for example, by Arnošt Frischer (1887 Heřmanův Městec – 1954 London), from September 1945 the chairman of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Historical Lands, and by Otto Muneles (1894 Prague – 1967 Prague), Hebraist, Judaist and classical philologist.[26] The legendary

19 2,803 people were not deported. Eva Schmidtová-Hartmannová, 'Ztráty československého židovského obyvatelstva 1938–1945', in *Osud Židů v protektorátu 1939–1945*, ed. by Milan Šimečka and Milena Janišová (Prague: Trizonia for the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 2001), pp. 81–116 (pp. 95, 104).
20 Saul Friedländer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008), pp. 159–60.
21 'U pana presidenta', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.4 (1945), 26–27 (p. 26).
22 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, p. 143. See also Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, p. 24.
23 Jana Machačová and Jiří Matějček, *Sociální pozice národnostních menšin v českých zemích 1918–1938* (Opava: Silesian Institute of the Silesian Museum, 1999), p. 116.
24 'U pana presidenta', p. 26.
25 Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, pp. 26–29; Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, p. 143.
26 "There is no community in the world from which the war and the Nazi regime exacted greater sacrifices than the Jewish people", Frischer believed, see Arnošt Frischer, 'Přežili jsme', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, VII (1945), 1. Cf. also id., 'S tribuny sjezdu', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.2 (1945), 10–12 (p. 10). Summarized in Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, pp. 16–17, 19.

Czech-Jewish rabbi Richard Feder (1875 Václavice u Benešova – 1970 Brno) could not even find any genocide in the history of mankind which was comparable to the Jewish tragedy.[27] Awareness of the Jewish catastrophe shaped the post-war fate of the Czech Germans, who were humiliated and subsequently displaced. The generalized anti-German sentiment that had been whipped up was characteristic not only of the Jewish minority, but also of the majority of Czech society. For Jewish survivors, the defeat of Nazi Germany was understandably exceptionally satisfying. Jewish leaders devoted considerable attention to this, interpreting it as yet another of the many victories achieved by Jews over the three thousand years of their history. Acceptance of this narrative would help Jews come to terms with the loss of friends and family and to regain their collective self-confidence. Part of this strategy included emphasizing the fact that the Germans had been humiliated and punished after the war.[28]

> No more impudent Nazis walking the streets of our cities. They are defeated and humiliated as no vile caste has ever been defeated. With a sense of shame, they carry their 'N' on their breasts and backs as, weakened, they are led through the streets. We have survived them. While it is true that few of us have lived to see this day, we must take the following view:
>
> Judaism survived... We are here – and where are they...? They have not been sufficiently punished for their atrocities, and there is no punishment in this world severe enough for what they have done... conceited with the notion that humanity is ranked according to the blood of nations, and that they stand at the top of this scale with the Jewish people at the bottom; the German people are hated, despised and justly punished and humiliated by the whole world... Once again, the world has witnessed a titanic struggle between paganism and barbarism on the one hand, and faith in God and the equality of mankind before Him on the other",

wrote Arnost Frischer in the first issue of the Minority Bulletin.[29] However, in that triumphant and confidence-inspiring we survived statement, rather than joy we find many question marks about returning home. "We are still in Germany, but we are nearing our liberated homeland. The final kilometres are ahead of us; soon the border will appear and we will be in Czechoslovakia, then Prague and soon home. But again, the nagging thought: home?

27 Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, pp. 21–22.
28 Ibid., pp. 52–53.
29 Frischer, 'Přežili jsme', p. 1.

Where is our shattered home? This was the question Hana Posseltová-Ledererová (1919 Mladá Boleslav – 1977?), a Czech of Jewish descent who was liberated together with her mother from KL Bergen-Belsen, asked herself on the journey from KL Buchenwald to Prague.[30] The experience of returning to liberated Czechoslovakia was from the beginning shaped by the activity of Jewish leaders, the politics of the liberated state, and the neighbours of the returnees. Let us look at all three of these factors in turn.

FIRST JEWISH IMPRESSIONS UPON RETURNING HOME

"At the Czech-German border we stopped for an inspection. Everyone climbed down from the truck, quietly gathered, and began earnestly singing the Czech hymn 'Where My Home Is'. Suddenly, although I was also taken with the excitement, a feeling came over me: that's not me, I'm not Czech, I don't belong here, and although the words of the song say it, the 'Czech lands' are not my home". These thoughts accompanied the first moments on liberated Czechoslovak soil of Prague Zionist Ruth Bondyová (1923 Prague – 2017 Ramat Gan), later an Israeli publicist, writer and translator.[31] Already before the First World War, the Zionist press and Zionist associations were forming a relationship with the fatherland/motherland, which they perceived as their ancestral home in Palestine. It was sometimes referred to as the Old Country. After the rise of the Hitler regime in Germany (January 1933), the question of returning to this Land became increasingly urgent. Nazi anti-Semitism understood Zionism as evidence of failed assimilation. General support for the future Jewish state was expressed in the diaspora.[32] For this reason, emigration to Palestine after the Second World War was a logical strategy for many Jews who had lost their relatives and were disappointed with the attitude of the majority of the population during and after the war.

On the other hand, Czech Jews experienced intense emotion upon their immediate return from concentration camps or emigration to their liberated homeland. "Sixteen days after liberation, twelve days after the end of the war. In clean clothes, hand sewn from SS sheets, with a full stomach, in a second-class compartment of a passenger train... the platform at Wilson Station... I'm standing by the window with great hot tears streaming down my cheeks. Tears of joy and happiness. Finally Prague, at long last Prague. Finally home", wrote Helga Hošková (1929 Prague), later the painter

30 Hana Posseltová-Ledererová, *Máma a já (Terezínský deník)* (Prague: G plus G, 1997), p. 139.
31 Ruth Bondyová, *Víc štěstí než rozumu* (Prague: Argo, 2005), p. 126.
32 Blanka Soukupová, *Identita intenzivní naděje. Čeští Židé v první Československé republika* (Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2021), pp. 103, 112–13, 147–48.

Hošková-Weiss, when describing her emotions on the night of 21 May 1945.[33] For many members of the Jewish minority, however, their joy was tempered by news of their family's tragic fate.

> And then we finally found ourselves over Prague. Almost untouched by bombs, looking sleepy in the midday haze, Prague was beautiful, with not two but hundreds of towers rising to the sky. And so many bridges, all intact, not like those on the Rhine – arched over the Vltava... And towering above it all was Prague Castle, magnificent as ever. My heart overflowed with pride and emotion. This was the capital of my country. Finally, I was home again... I had often dreamed of this moment, but in my dreams my mom and dad were waiting for me... Time buried all my dreams and now I had to face reality. Yet I still could not imagine a future or a home without them,

said Vera Gissing, née Diamantová (1928 Čelákovice – 2022?), one of Winton's Children,[34] recalling her arrival from England.[35] Líza Scheuerová, a Varnsdorf native whose family had to flee to Prague after Munich, decided to voluntarily follow her husband from KL Terezín to KL Auschwitz. The news of his death reached her in Prague on 20 May 1945, after her return from KL Mauthausen. She commented bitterly on her initial emotions: "This is what my happy return looks like! Exhausted, the mother of a dead child, a homeless beggar, and now I finally learn that I don't even have a husband".[36] After the war, Zdenka Fantlová (1922 Blatná – 2022?), an actress and writer from a Czech-Jewish family who lived in exile (Sweden, Australia, England), laconically described her return: "No one survived. No one came back. My family disappeared. My home disappeared".[37]

The first impressions of returning to Czechoslovakia, however, could also be spoiled by an indifferent social system. All returnees had to go through the repatriation office in the Prague Medical House. While former prisoners understood this regulation, they also perceived it as an additional obstacle impeding their journey home. However, they were afraid to circumvent the regulation.

33 Helga Weissová, *Deník 1938–1945. Příběh dívky, která přežila holocaust* (Brno: Jota, 2012), p. 174.
34 These were the 669 mostly Jewish children saved by Nicholas Winton (1909–2015), a philanthropist and stockbroker of Jewish origin who found adoptive families for them in the UK. These children left Czechoslovakia/the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in several transports on 14 March 1939, in June and on 2 August 1939. The last transport (1 September 1939) was turned back due to the outbreak of war. https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kindertransport-organizer-nicholas-winton-dies-106-32152995.
35 Věra Gissingová, *Perličky dětství* (Prague: Odeon, 1992), p. 125.
36 Líza Scheuerová, *O smrti, která se nedostavila* (Prague: Sefer, 1994), p. 141.
37 Zdenka Fantlová, *Klid je síla, řek' tatínek* (Prague: Primus, 1996), p. 262.

> The Medical House in Vinohrady. There is a de-worming station there (they say it is a quarantine station), which everyone returning from a concentration camp has to go through... The regulation made sense, but why didn't they also provide accommodation...? ... We hobbled to some room in the Medical House and waited there... Most of the other former prisoners slowly disappeared. Suddenly, I realized I was alone with my mother and still nobody was paying attention to us... afraid that we were committing some offense in liberated Prague, we simply left. Without the paper... My mother went bravely... and I was afraid that we wouldn't make it, that they would send us back to the de-worming station, or that we might be sent back to Bergen-Belsen because of this,

recalled Hana Posseltová-Ledererová.[38] Helena Lewisová (1916 Trutnov – 2009?), a promising Prague dancer from a German-Jewish family, as well as Ruth Bondyová[39] had to spend the night at Wilson Railway Station (now Hlavní nádraží) after their return.

> At midnight we arrived in Prague, at Wilson Station. We literally staggered off the train and with the last of our strength managed to find the Red Cross centre in the station. We asked the nurse on night duty for tea, but she was about to leave and told us she didn't have any at this time. We tried to persuade her and explained where we were coming from. 'How long have you been in the camp?' 'Three years.' 'If you've been there for three years, you'll survive one more night without tea,' she said, and closed the door. We couldn't go into town anymore because there was a curfew, so we stayed in the station and slept on the stone floor",

recounted Lewisová, recalling her "first night home" on 4 June 1945.[40]

THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY AS A LIFESAVER

"The Jews who have returned from the concentration camps have found their community again and have found support and help again". This assessment was written in the autumn of 1945 by lawyer Kurt Wehle (1907 Jablonec nad Nisou – 1995 USA), senior secretary of the Jewish Religious

38 Posseltová-Ledererová, *Máma a já*, p. 141.
39 Bondyová, *Víc štěstí než rozumu*, pp. 165–66.
40 Helena Lewisová, *Přišel čas promluvit* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 1999), pp. 101–02.

Community in Prague, and from September 1945 to February 1948 secretary of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Lands of Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia, the umbrella minority body.[41] The decision to rebuild the Jewish Religious Community was made as early as 8 May 1945, when the National Committee began liquidating the Protectorate Jewish Council of Elders. The Jewish religious community in Prague was forced to formally assume jurisdiction over the Protectorate's Jewish religious communities from the spring of 1940. In doing so, it was forced to arrange for the deportation of the Jewish population to concentration camps. It was completely subordinated to the Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung in Prague and the SS Sicherheitsdienst in Brno.[42] In March 1942, the regional Jewish religious communities were disbanded. In January 1943, even the Jewish Religious Community in Prague was abolished and replaced with the Jewish Council of Elders in Prague (Ältestenrat der Juden in Prag). It was tasked with carrying out deportations.[43] After the liberation of Czechoslovakia, it was liquidated.

The community assisted repatriated Jews (and Jews according to the Nuremberg Laws) with financial, material and legal support (especially with regard to retaining Czechoslovak citizenship). It tried to secure property that remained in KL Terezín,[44] provided kosher food, and actively opposed anti-Semitism. Jewish leaders tried to confront anti-Semitism actively: they publicly commemorated the high percentage of Jewish soldiers fighting on all fronts of the Second World War. In December 1945, the idea arose to establish an institution to map anti-Semitic excesses. Jewish functionaries (such as Arnošt Frischer) then informed representatives of the Czechoslovak government on the situation of the Jewish minority.[45]

The registration department compiled lists of survivors; the registry office mainly issued death certificates of deceased KL Terezín prisoners, legalized their marriages, and provided information on the fate of relatives and acquaintances. The Worship Department took care of religious services (services returned to the Old New Synagogue[46] in Prague 3 and

41 Kurt Wehle, 'Židovská náboženská obec za okupace a po osvobození ČSR', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.1 (1945), 2–4 (p. 3). In the summer of 1945, preparations were made for a congress of delegates of the preparatory committees of Jewish religious communities. This congress was held in Prague in early September, 1945, with the participation of 46 Jewish religious communities. The organizing body was the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech and Moravian-Silesian lands. It consisted of a 15-member committee and an eight-member board of directors. It endeavored to ensure that assimilationists, Zionists and Orthodox Jews were represented in proportion to their number of survivors. It was not until after the February Coup that the Council's activities were restricted by the state (especially in terms of financing) in connection with the Church Laws (1949). Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, p. 116–27.

42 These problems are examined in detail by Livia Rothkirchenová, 'Osud Židů v Čechách a na Moravě v letech 1939–1945', in *Osud Židů v protektorátu 1939–1945*, ed. by Milena Janišová (Prague: Trizonia, 1991), pp. 17–80; and Miroslav Kárný, *Konečné řešení: genocida českých židů v německé protektorátní politice* (Prague: Academia, 1991).

43 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, pp. 346–47.

44 Wehle, 'Židovská náboženská obec', pp. 3, 4.

45 Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, pp. 58, 69–71, 74.

46 Frischer, 'Přežili jsme', p. 1.

the Skořepka[47] synagogue in Brno no later than September 1945), arranged weddings, and distributed ritual objects.[48] On 13 March 1946, the first Day of Mourning for Czechoslovak Jews was held in the Spanish Synagogue with about 3,000 people in attendance, commemorating the murder of the entire family camp at Auschwitz on the night of 8–9 March 1944.[49]

Jewish officials worked on rebuilding the community, regardless of ideological disagreements before the war. In addition to Frischer, who served in the Czechoslovak State Council in Benešov during the war, attorney Emil Kafka (1880 Nový Bydžov – 1948 Prague), the last pre-war chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague, was also involved in the community. He too had returned from England. Military rabbi Hanuš Rebenwurzel/Rezek (1902 Strážnice – 1948 Greece), a lawyer from Vsetín, was an active Zionist who fought on the Western Front and served as a worship official of the Council until his tragic death in December 1948. Engineer František Fuchs, who became vice-chairman, and lawyer Karel Stein, head of the rural department of the Prague community in 1939–1943 and chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague from September 1945, both survived the concentration camps. Active members of the community included Judaist, Hebraist and classical philologist Otto Muneles (1894 Prague – 1967 Prague) and Rabbi Vojtěch (Benjamin Béla Vojtech) Gottschall (1907 Szeged – 1978 Australia).[50] All hese figures helped make former prisoners' adaptation to post-war conditions less painful. The community became a surrogate for murdered families and broken homes. In March 1946, it organized a Purim celebration with the participation of 1,400 (!) people. On 15 April of the same year, the Seder brought together 240 people.[51] Nevertheless, the community was accused by some repatriates of having collaborated with the Nazis during the war.[52] All members of the community employed under the Protectorate therefore had to appear before a Court of Honor.[53] Since the Jewish Religious Community was forced during the war to impose Nazi regulations concerning Jews and carry out Nazi orders to deport the Jewish populace to concentration camps, it was suspected of collaboration. As part of the restoration of the community after the war, in the autumn of 1945 it established a Court of Honor to investigate claims brought against employees and functionaries

47 'Zprávy z obcí', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.1 (1945), 8.
48 'Zpráva sekretariátu Židovské náboženské obce', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.1 (1945), 5.
49 'Nechť živí slyší hlas mrtvých', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.2 (1946), 12; ''Z kroniky ŽNO pražské', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.3 (1946), no. 3, p. 22.
50 Blanka Soukupová, 'Životní světy českých židů po šoa – kompenzace ztracených jistot. Několik poznámek k životním strategiím ŽNO a židovské menšiny v bezprostředně poválečném období', in *První pražský seminář. Dopady holocaustu na českou a slovenskou společnost v druhé polovině 20. století*, ed. by Helena Machačová (Prague: Varius Praha s. r. o., Spolek akademiků - Židů o. s., 2008), pp. 47–64 (p. 48).
51 'Kronika', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.4–5 (1946), 39. 'Chanukové oslavy', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 9.2 (1947), 19.
52 Wehle, 'Židovská náboženská obec', p. 3.
53 'Vyhláška', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.2 (1945), 15.

working in the Jewish Religious Community during the war. The Chairman of the Court of Honor was Hanuš Rebenwurzel, J.D. (Rezek).[54] From July 1945, some Jewish religious communities in the regions were also reconstituted. By September 1945, there were already 51 to 52 of them in the Czech lands,[55] and by the beginning of November there were 59 in the Czech lands and 105 in Slovakia.[56] From the end of 1945, assimilationist, Zionist, and Orthodox Jewish associations were also re-established under the auspices of the Prague Jewish religious community.[57] A list drawn up on 16 April 1951 mentions 47 of them.[58] A new association, Agudat Yisroel, was founded with the aim of not only educating young Jews in Torah Judaism but also teaching them crafts and agricultural skills that they could apply in Palestine.[59]

The Prague community's agenda included caring for abandoned rural cemeteries and synagogues. Most of the synagogues had to be rented out (sometimes repeatedly) or possibly sold.[60] At the beginning of 1946, the community also began caring for Jewish refugees from Poland who were passing through Czechoslovakia.[61] Their number increased after the Kielce pogrom.[62] In conclusion, we may state that the Jewish religious community in Prague, housed in the Jewish Town Hall, did indeed become the centre of Jewish life again after the Second World War.

THE STATE AS AN INTEGRATING FORCE?

In the Jewish milieu, the state was deemed to have mostly failed to help survivors adapt to post-war conditions. Former concentration camp prisoners mainly ran up against bureaucratic walls. In particular, they had problems obtaining housing, getting documents[63] and obtaining citizenship, which in turn was required for any restitution[64]. These problems often resulted in human tragedy. The most famous case is that of Dr. Markéta Ungerová, a native of Katowice, a German of Jewish faith, who studied at the German University in Prague in the second half of the 1930s. During

54 Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, p. 57.
55 Pěkný, *Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě*, pp. 657, 638; and 'K novému životu!', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.1 (1945), 14.
56 'U pana presidenta', p. 26.
57 'Obnovení židovských spolků', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.4 (1945), 31.
58 'Výzvy', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.1 (1946), 8.
59 Seznam židovských spolků, Prague City Archives, Police Presidium Fund (PP) SK XXII/761.
60 Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, pp. 359–444.
61 Howard M. Sachar, *Dějiny Státu Izrael* (Prague: Regia 1998), pp. 218–19; Jiří Friedl, *Do domu, ku wolności. Rola Czechosłowacji w migracji ludności polskiej w latach 1945–1948* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo IPN, 2023), pp. 315–37.
62 Robert rev. Smith, 'Židovský vlak z Náchoda', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.11 (1946), 95.
63 'Doklady, doklady...', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.15 (1946), 141.
64 Post-war restitution should have applied to 20,000–25,000 people. In the end, 16,000 applications were submitted. Drahomír Jančík, Eduard Kubů and Jan Kuklík Jr., *"Arizace" a restituce židovského majetku v českých zemích (1939–2000)* (Prague: Charles University in Prague, 2003), p. 58.

the war she treated fellow prisoners in the KL Terezín concentration camp, and after the war she worked at the hospital at Bulovka. Nevertheless, she was unable to obtain citizenship because she was accused by the District Council for Prague VIII of indifference to the Czech language and the Czech nation.[65]

The restitution of Jewish property had its legal basis in Presidential Decree No. 5/1945 Coll. of 19 May 1945 "on the Invalidity of Certain Property-related Acts Effected in the Period of 'Non-freedom' and concerning the National Administration of the Properties of Germans, Hungarians, Traitors and Collaborators and Certain Organizations and Institutes". However, if an owner was an "unreliable person" with regard to the state, the property was placed under national administration. People who declared their German or Hungarian nationality in the 1930 census fell into the category of "unreliable" citizens. An exception was made for those who had taken an active part in the struggle to preserve the integrity and restoration of the state. Unreliable Germans and Hungarians were subject to Presidential Decree No. 108/1945 on the Confiscation of Enemy Property and the National Renewal Funds.[66] In certain cases, it was not possible to demonstrate one's loyalty to the nation and state (old Jewish émigrés, like concentration camp prisoners, could hardly have fought fascism with a gun in their hands). Jewish applicants found their position particularly difficult because of the national committees, which in many cases perceived Aryanized property to be German property. Some 1,500 to 2,000 people faced problems from the decrees,[67] which allowed for restitution on the grounds of racial persecution, but applicants had to prove their national and state "reliability". In addition, property that had been Aryanized was often perceived as German property.[68] Thus, it often remained in the hands of the "new Aryanizer", i.e., municipalities and the state.

Offenses were often proved in a comical way. Václav Nosek, Minister of the Interior, authored instructions on how to accuse applicants of Germanizing the Czech nation. His instructions were then given to lower state administrative offices.[69] The National Committee in Ostrava ordered Jewish repatriates applying to have their citizenship restored to work 100 hours for free as part of the *Building Ostrava* campaign.[70] A second wave of restitution

65 'Jedna "zbytečná" demonstrace a dvě tiché, které jí předcházely', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 10.9 (1947), 121–22. See also Jana Svobodová, 'Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu v českých zemích 1949–1992', in *Emancipácia Židov – antisemitizmus – prenasledovanie v Nemecku, Rakúsku-Uhorsku, v českých zemiach a na Slovensku*, ed. by Jörg K. Hoensch, Stanislav Biman, and Ľubomír Lipták (Bratislava: Veda, 1999), pp. 191–205 (p. 193); Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews*, p. 149.
66 Jančík, Kubů and Kuklík ml., *"Arizace"*, pp. 49–50, 52.
67 Ibid., pp. 54, 56.
68 Ibid., pp. 49–50, 52, 54, 56, 61.
69 Šárka Nepalová, 'Židé v Českých zemích v letech 1945-1949', *Dějiny a současnost*, 21 (1999), pp. 54–55.
70 Gabriela Vjačková, 'Osudy Židovské náboženské obce v Ostravě v letech 1945–1962', *Silesian Proceedings*, 104 (2006), 292–306, (p. 301).

began in April 1946. However, Arnošt Frischer characterized it as nationalization with elements of socialization.[71] Restitutions were also coming to a standstill because of the effective slander of applicants, who were accused of not only Germanizing the Czech nation, but also of bourgeois origins and anti-social behaviour.

> Ten out of a hundred returning victims of Nazi cruelty do not find even their most modest possessions in their homeland. Any real estate has been Aryanized, placed into German hands, or transferred to national administrations. In vain does the hotelier demand the return of his hotel, which the partisans have taken over from the Aryanizer. The owner of a small electrical shop in Prague which was taken over by a German and then by his head worker, who displayed a pogrom flag in the shop window, has no recourse to have his meagre property returned to him. The owner of a workshop with 25 workers refuses to hand over the plant to the previous owner, who has returned as a foreign soldier. The only reason is the workers' claim that the boss was anti-social during the First Republic",

said Karel Kučera, explaining these practices.[72]

The most well-known case was the unsuccessful restitution claim of factory owner Emil Beer, who, after returning from emigration to Britain in November 1945, demanded the return of his business, which he had been forced to sell to the Reich Germans in 1939.[73] In 1947, however, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, with the help of the trade unions,[74] launched a struggle for industrial confiscation (taking over small and medium-sized enterprises under national administration that were not subject to nationalization).[75] Beer was eventually successfully accused of Germanization and anti-socialism. His restitution claim was rejected.[76] Even more complicated, however, was the situation in Slovakia, where the government was still

71 Arnošt Frischer, 'Rok osvobození', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.4–5 (1946), 25–29 (p. 26).

72 Karel Kučera, 'Masky antisemitismu', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.6 (1946), 45–46 (p. 46).

73 Summary of the Pěkný case, Pěkný, Historie Židů v Čechách a na Moravě, pp. 372–74; Jančík, Kubů, and Kuklík Jr., *"Arizace"*, pp. 63–64; Karel Kaplan, *Československo v letech 1945–1948* (Prague: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1991), pp. 65–66. See also 'Varnsdorf: genius loci', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 9.6 (1947), no. 6, pp. 70–71; 'Dvě prohlášení', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 9.7 (1947), p. 95.

74 Report of the Minister of the Interior on the investigation of the Varnsdorf case National Archives (Prague), Archives of the Institute of the History of the Communist Party in Prague, fund 83, sign. 209, XLVIII. Jančík, Kubů, and Kuklík Jr., *"Arizace"*, pp. 66–67.

75 Jančík, Kubů and Kuklík Jr., *"Arizace"*, pp. 62, 65; Helena Krejčová, 'Čechy na úsvitu nové doby: český antisemitismus 1945–1948', in *Antisemitismus v posttotalitní Evropě* (Prague: F. Kafka Publishing House, 1993), pp. 103–10 (p. 105).

76 Jančík, Kubů, and Kuklík Jr., *"Arizace"*, pp. 63–64. Also Šárka Nepalová, 'Židovská menšina v Čechách a na Moravě v letech 1945–1948', in *Terezínské studie a dokumenty*, ed. by Miroslav Kárný and Eva Lorencová (Prague: Academia, Terezín Initiative Foundation, 1999), pp. 314–37.

administrated by people associated with the clerical fascist Slovak State, a satellite of Nazi Germany. The number of collaborators who became government administrators after the war in Slovakia is unknown. However, from numerous sources (complaints from the Jewish public) we may surmise that this was not an isolated phenomenon. Similarly, members of the Hlinka Guard who carried out the deportations of Jews were not even punished.

> To this day, all those 'confiscations' of Jewish property by the Slovak state have not been declared null and void... Thousands and thousands of people are still squatting land, shops, and houses that were taken away from Jews by the fascist Slovak regime, in violation of the laws of the republic... Slovak kingpins transported 60,000 Jews to Poland to be murdered. The Germans were paid 4,000 K per deported [i.e., murdered] person. These unfortunates were transported by the Hlinka Guards with all the cruelties seen in the Nazis. To this day – years after liberation – no one has been punished for these transports. Apparently, none of the guardsmen who raped Jewish girls, beat old Jewish men, robbed and stole have been identified either. But that's not all! Many of those who created the system still sit in the offices today; these same people refuse Jewish applications for the return of business licenses and make life difficult for Jews wherever they can,

stated Arnošt Frischer in May 1946.[77]

The greatest absurdity, however, is the inclusion of Jews who declared German nationality in the last census in the deportation.[78] German Jews in Ústí nad Labem even had to wear a discriminatory white armband as alleged Germans.[79] Many of them were sent to internment camps for Germans. For example, Ela Fischerová (1902–1950), mother of Anita Franková, archivist and historian, was interned in a camp in Prague-Motol after her return from a concentration camp in February 1946.

77 Frischer, 'Rok osvobození', pp. 27–28. 57,752 people were deported in the first wave of deportations. The price per person was 5,000 Slovak crowns. Hradská and Kamenec, *Slovenská republika 1939–1945*, p. 218; Kamenec, *Po stopách tragedie*, p. 198.

78 For a summary of the position of German Jews, cf. Reuven Assor, '"Deutsche Juden" in der Tschechoslowakei 1945–1948'", in *Odsun – Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen*, ed. by Jörg Kudlich and others (München: Sudetendeutsches Archiv, 1995), pp. 299–304; Tomáš Staněk, 'Němečtí Židé v Československu 1945–1948', *Dějiny a současnost*, 5 (1991), 42–46; Tomáš Staněk, *Odsun Němců z Československa 1945–1947* (Prague: Academia, Naše vojsko/Our Army, 1991), pp. 339–44.

79 'Malá legenda', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.3 (1945), 20.

> I was herded under German, Russian and finally Czechoslovak bayonets", she recalled.[80] "It seems incredible to us that applications recommended for rejection by the Ministry of the Interior include persons of Jewish faith or origin, or members of their families. This rumour seems simply incredible to us, and we therefore respectfully request that before making such recommendations, consideration be given to whether such a course of action would be consistent with the spirit and tradition of the leaders of our capital and the intent of the legislator. Note that we are far from defending persons who actively Germanized or committed crimes under the occupation, and we are far from opposing the removal of Germans. We do not, however, consider it compatible with the spirit of the Decree and with the democratic character of the Republic that a Jew or a person of Jewish origin who suffered under Nazi persecution and who declared himself to be of German nationality in 1930, according to his mother tongue, should be regarded as having failed to remain loyal to the Republic or as having committed an offense against the Czech and Slovak nation. Equally incredible to us are the rumours according to which persons whose applications are recommended for rejection are to be deported or put into detention camps before the Ministry of the Interior issues a decision. It does not seem possible to us that persons who miraculously survived the horrors of the concentration camps should now find themselves through no fault in a camp again",

said Arnošt Frischer in April 1946 in a letter addressed to Václav Vacek, the Communist mayor of Prague.[81]

The exemption for persons of German and Jewish nationality of "Jewish origin" who "had not committed Germanization or Hungarianization in Slavic countries" was not granted until 10 September 1946,[82] when the displacement of the German and Hungarian population had already practically been completed. German Jews also often had problems in the liberated state because of their poorer knowledge of the Czech language or their

80 Ela Fischerová, 'Dopis přítelkyni', in *Svět bez lidských dimenzí. Čtyři ženy vzpomínají* (Prague: State Jewish Museum, 1991), p. 37.
81 National Archives (Prague), Fund 88, Václav Vacek, box no. 20, sign. 241, in Prague, date 12. IV. /19/46.
82 These persons retained their Czechoslovak citizenship and property and were exempted from deportation, or their voluntary move was facilitated. Josef Šebestík and Zdeněk Lukeš, 'Přehled předpisů o Němcích a osobách považovaných za Němce', in *Příručky pro národní výbory* (Prague: Státní tiskárna v Praze, 1946), X, pp. 16, 55–57. See also 'Aby pravda zvítězila', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.11 (1946), 90.

German-sounding names.[83] Many people therefore replaced their "German" names with "Czech" names (between 1945 and 1946, the City of Prague recorded 349 changes of names and surnames; another 76 applications were pending).[84] The state also failed to allocate flats. The authorities gave priority to those who were able to offer a bribe. This situation was eloquently described by Heda Margoliová-Kovályová (1919 Prague – 2010 Prague), wife of Rudolf Margolius, Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, who was executed as a result of the Slánský Trial (1952):

> The biggest concern of all those who have returned is apartments. And so partisans from the forests, widows of the executed who have slept for years on a piece of mattress on a floor somewhere, and sick concentration camp survivors stand on aching legs in endless queues outside the housing offices, while butchers and grocers walk straight into the office through the back door. They all have good apartments, but now they're richer and want better and nicely furnished ones since there are plenty left over from the Germans, and they supplied the lords of the town hall with meat and flour all through the war.[85]

SURVIVING JEWS, THEIR NEIGHBOURS, ACQUAINTANCES AND FRIENDS

In the declamation of Hanuš Koldovský at the end of 1945, there was the bitter observation that the few Jews who had managed to survive the concentration camps were usually met with a cold reception in their homeland after the war. Many even had to stomach caustic remarks that too many Jews had returned.[86]

Survivor memoirs are full of stories of Jewish apartments and homes occupied by new tenants who were disappointed that the original inhabitants had returned, or stories of property that Jews had hidden with supposed friends before being deported, only to have these people deny the fact or directly refuse to return the property. "My mother and I had nowhere to go; my father never returned and our former apartment was occupied. I was fifteen and a half years old and had to make up the lost school

83 Jan Osers, 'Jak jsem přežil', Židovská ročenka/The Jewish Year of 5756 (1995–1996), 60, 96. See also the fate of Jewish doctor Klara Fischer-Pollak from Karlovy Vary. Monika Hanková, 'Klara Fischer-Pollak (1899–1970). (Po)válečné osudy židovské lékařky z Karlových Varů', in *Židé v Čechách 2/Jews in Bohemia 2*, ed. by Vlastimila Hamáčková, Monika Hanková, and Markéta Lhotová (Prague: Jewish Museum in Prague, 2009), pp. 61–64.
84 'Z činnosti ústřední matriky', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.11 (1946), 97.
85 Heda Margoliová-Kovályová, *Na vlastní kůži* (Prague: Academia, 1992), p. 59.
86 Hanuš Koldovský, 'Po šesti letech....!', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.4 (1945), 31.

years", Helga Weissová stated.[87] "It took me a long time before I resolved to go to Huť. Huť was as much a home for me as Prague, maybe more so... I rang the bell, and a moment later a fat, unshaven man answered the door, glared at me and yelled, 'So you're back, well that's a fine how-do-you-do!'", said Heda Margoliová-Kovályová, recalling her return home.[88] "On their faces I saw an expression I was forced to slowly get used to; an expression I feared, an expression that clearly screamed, 'Why did my Jew have to come back?'", commented Věra Gissingová on the behaviour of the "friends" with whom her mother had hidden her property.[89] Some were allowed to enter their house but were overwhelmed by the memories of their dead family members and preferred to leave.[90] "I looked at my family home only from a distance and saw it hadn't been ruined. But I didn't dare go any further – I didn't even go near it during the subsequent years I spent in Opava", recalled Heinz H. Hermann (1921 Opava – 1993 ?), who came from a family of assimilated German-speaking Jews.[91] "I didn't even think to file a request for my parents' apartment, I didn't even want to know if it was available or not. I didn't go near Ruská Street, where we had lived – my mental equilibrium was too fragile to bear a direct confrontation with the past", said Ruth Bondyová.[92] Rudolf Roden (1923 Prague – 2015 Montreal), later a successful psychiatrist, gave up trying to acquire the family property after anti-Semitic remarks by family friends:

> I felt strange and hesitant to visit many of my parents' former Czech friends because many of them had behaved quite horribly during the war... I didn't make any particular effort to get back the clothes, paintings, carpets, china or small jewellery that my parents had left with these people because, after trying several times, each time I learned how the Germans had come and found everything, or how they had gotten rid of it all out of fear, all the while standing there looking at my father's suit. Then one day, after hearing one complain that 'six million of those Jews died, and mine is the one who had to come back', I just gave up".[93]

Nearly everyone encountered verbal anti-Semitism such as 'it's a pity Hitler didn't finish his work, the Jews are coming back like rats'.[94] Many

87 Weissová, *Deník 1938–1945*, pp. 11, 174.
88 Margoliová-Kovályová, *Na vlastní kůži*, pp. 53–54.
89 Gissingová, *Perličky dětství*, p. 135.
90 Ibid., p. 132.
91 Heinz J. Herrmann, *Můj boj proti konečnému řešení. Z Opavy a Prostějova přes Terezín, Osvětim-Birkenau a Dachau do Izraele* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2008), pp. 16–17.
92 Bondyová, *Víc štěstí než rozumu*, p. 158.
93 Eva Rodenová and Rudolf Roden, *Životy ve vypůjčeném čase* (Prague: Academia, 2009), p. 181.
94 See also e.g. Gissingová, *Perličky dětství*, pp. 148–49; Adolf Hermann, *Mých prvních pět životů* (Prague: Triáda, G plus G, 2000), pp. 191, 193, 204–05; Margoliová-Kovályová, *Na vlastní kůži*, pp. 53–54.

even had to explain the fact that it was they who survived.[95] However, the slander of the Jewish population also lead to tragedy, as was the case of the first post-war pogrom on 24 September 1945, in Topoľčany.[96] Aside from the accusation that a Jewish doctor who had vaccinated children against typhus had been trying to poison them, other factors also came into play. For six years, Slovakia had been a clerical fascist anti-Semitic state, and there was no denazification after the war. In addition, Slovak historian Ivan Kamenec has pointed out that former Aryanizers still held influential positions in Slovakia, and that there was also an aversion to Germans and Hungarians, with whom Jews were traditionally associated.[97]

The general feeling of Jewish survivors was sadness for their dead relatives, disillusionment with the inhumane behaviour of mankind, and a sense of emptiness.[98] "...there was no continuation, no family, nothing left of previous certainties, plans and life prospects – only broken shards", recalled historian Toman Brod (1929, Prague) upon his return from Terezín, Auschwitz and Gross-Rosen.[99] Young people could no longer rely on the help of their own family and when starting their "new life" (getting an education, a job, acquiring property, health problems) – they were left to fend for themselves. "We were constantly searching. We looked for surviving relatives, we looked for apartments to make new homes, we looked for employment to begin a new life, to be able to support ourselves. Most of us did not yet have a profession – we wanted to learn, to study, we wanted to start families, to dress, to learn to shop; most difficult of all, we wanted to integrate into society". This was how the situation of the returnees was described by Ruth Elias (1922–2008), an Ostrava Jew with a Zionist upbringing who was forced to put her newborn to death in Auschwitz.[100]

In such a situation, any insensitive remark could lead to a major tragedy. On 16 March 1947, at a meeting of the local organization of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in Teplice-Šanova, Václav Kopecký (1897 Kosmonosy – 1961 Prague), the Minister of Information (1945–1953), referred to the Jewish Optants from Transcarpathian Ukraine (formerly Subcarpathian Rus[101]) as bearded Solomons fleeing from the socialist regime.[102] He further accused them of joining the army only when the Red Army

95 Helena Epsteinová, *Nalezená minulost* (Prague: Rybka Publishers, 2000), p. 275.
96 'Topoľčany', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 7.3 (1945), 20–21.
97 Ivan Kamenec, 'Protižidovský pogrom v Topoľčanoch v septembri 1945', in *Study of Nitra History VIII* (1999), ed. by Eduard Nižňanský (Nitra: University of Constantine the Philosopher, 2000), pp. 85–99 (pp. 86–89). See also Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, pp. 71–75.
98 Hermann, *Mých prvních pět životů*, pp. 206–07.
99 Toman Brod, *Ještě že člověk neví, co ho čeká. Života běh mezi roky 1929–1989* (Prague: Academia, 2007), p. 208.
100 Ruth Elias, *Naděje mi pomohla přežít* (Ostrava: Sfinga, 1994), p. 283.
101 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rusyns.
102 Petr Brod, 'Židé v poválečném Československu', in *Židé v novodobých dějinách*, ed. by Václav Veber (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, Nakladatelství Karolinum, 1997), pp. 147–62 (p. 154); Kurt Wehle, 'The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia: 1945–1948', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia. Historical Studies and Surveys III* (New York, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984), pp. 499–530 (pp. 522–23); Soukupová, *Židé v českých zemích po šoa*, pp. 90–93.

had already decided the outcome of the war.[103] As a direct consequence of Kopecký's slurs, Staff Sergeant Ejsik Weiss of the Liberation Army committed suicide.[104] His funeral became a rallying cry against anti-Semitism; it was attended by more than 1,000 people, soldiers from foreign armies, domestic Jewish leaders, and the American Joint and World Jewish Congress.[105]

However, it appears that expressions of anti-Semitism were balanced with expressions of solidarity and aid. Eva Erbenová (1930 Děčín), an assimilated Czech Jew, was taken in by a Czech family in Postřekov after escaping a death march.[106] Miloš Pick (1926 Libáň u Jičína – 2011?), later an economist, found his sense of home in the villa of the Hájek family in Spořilov, who had joined the resistance during the war.[107] Genuine friends also helped many other survivors.[108] Rudolf Roden recalled his visit to his high school three days after his liberation from a death march. The principal and his class teacher, moved by his story, presented him with a full high school diploma.[109] Many people returned the property they had kept without being asked to do so.[110] Germanist Pavel Eisner therefore exhorted the survivors: "Do not lament an unreturned fur coat... Above all remember one thing: Czech maids, servants, housekeepers, Czech friends and employees gave their lives to harbour Jewish people".[111]

CONCLUSION

Jewish survivors of the Shoah returned home with hopes of experiencing the dawn of "a Czechoslovak era", an era of freedom and justice.[112] Unfortunately, these hopes proved fleeting in the harsh post-war era. The first post-war months passed in the spirit of the unified opinion of Jewish citizens. However, their collective and individual fear ("the awareness of a joint tragic fate" and the awareness of personal misfortune) was worsened by the intensity of the bureaucracy when acquiring documents or someplace to live and during restitutions at the time. German Jews even found it very difficult to re-obtain citizenship. Many survivors also suffered serious medical issues as well as a sense of the loss of their home, which they had

103 Hb. (Jiří Hrbas), 'A co říkají jiní', *Právo lidu*, 50.71 (1947), 3.
104 'Tragická příhoda', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 9.8 (1947), 101–02.
105 Dr. I. (Rudolf Iltis), 'Pohřeb Ejsika Weisse', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 9.8 (1947), 103.
106 Eva Erbenová, *Sen* (Prague: G plus G, 2001), p. 72.
107 Miloš Pick, *Naděje se vzdát neumím* (Brno: Doplněk, 2010), p. 74.
108 Gissingová, *Perličky dětství*, pp. 132–34, 136–38; Oldřich Stránský, *Není spravedlnosti na zemi* (Středokluky: Zdeněk Susa, 2002), pp. 100–01; Pick, *Naděje se vzdát neumím*, pp. 76–77; Margoliová-Kovályová, *Na vlastní kůži*, p. 55.
109 Rudolf Roden, *Paměť naruby* (Prague: Academia, 2003), p. 44.
110 Gissingová, *Perličky dětství*, pp. 134–36, Heda Kaufmannová, *Léta 1938/1945. Válečné vzpomínky* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1999), p. 192–93, Stránský, *Není spravedlnosti na zemi*, p. 100.
111 Pavel Eisner, 'Vita nova', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.4–5 (1946), no. 4–5, pp. 34–35 (p. 34).
112 Bedřich Zimmer, 'Židovská náboženská obec chce pomoci', *Bulletin of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague*, 8.2 (1946), 13.

clung to during their imprisonment or emigration. A feverish search for relations, accommodations, jobs..., and also lost time, became the leitmotiv of their post-war lives. The importance of religious holy days receded in relation to the significance of the Day of Mourning for Czechoslovak Jews, held in memory of the extermination of the concentration camp in KL Auschwitz. It was very difficult for people to face new anti-Semitism cases...

Although the Jewish community provided all kinds of assistance to the survivors, mitigating the consequences of the slow or hostile actions of the state bureaucracy, it could not replace the family members who perished. The state failed in many ways, primarily because it did not take into account the specifics of the Jewish tragedy and did not deal more forcefully with the legacy of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the Slovak state.

The situation was further complicated by the rapid rise of the new totalitarian regime. The behaviour towards Jews of neighbours and acquaintances cannot be assessed in a blanket way. Some people made it difficult for Jews to return, while others showed their humanity and helped effectively. Bedřich Zimmer believed that during the Protectorate, the Czechs secretly sympathized with the Jews because German Nazism was a common enemy. After 9 May 1945, however, indifference allegedly set in. "We are living in a revolutionary age; in such times people are not happy and content", he concluded.[113]

113 Zimmer, 'Židovská náboženská obec chce pomoci', p. 13.

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