

ON THE HISTORY OF THE BOHEMIAN JEWS IN THE AGE OF MODERN NATIONALISM

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By virtue of its economic activity (in commerce and industry) the Jewish minority in Bohemia held a position in Bohemian society that was far greater than the relative weight of the Jewish population share. The preeminent goal of the Bohemian Jews prior to 1848 was civil emancipation and assimilation into the ruling (German) culture. With the development of the modern Czech national movement since the beginning of the 1840s, part of the Jewish intelligentsia was also fired by the national idea. A group of Czech Jews around David Kuh and Siegfried Kapper — small in number but influential in its publicistic

activity — sought from 1844 on to win support among the Jews for the cause of Czech nationalism and at the same time to induce the leadership of the Czech movement to accept Jewish emancipation as part of its national program. This effort failed after the events of the year 1844, which though social-revolutionary in nature also had an anti-Semitic tinge; the reason was lack of interest on the part of the Jewish bourgeoisie, which saw close dependence on the Austrian state as a better guarantee of its future. But a role was also played by the negative attitude of the Czech-national leaders, who were being pressured by anti-Semitic moods among the Czech petty bourgeoisie. The question of Jewish emancipation remained unresolved during the 1848 revolution. Following an initial period of cooperation of the upper Jewish bourgeoisie with the Czech-dominated National Committee (Národní výbor), the Czech-Jewish relationship deteriorated as a result of an anti-Semitic campaign led by the petty bourgeoisie of Prague, issuing in pogrom-like occurrences in early May 1848. After the Whitsun insurrection, the upper Jewish bourgeoisie completely moved over to the German Bohemian camp. The full emancipation proclaimed by the March 1849 constitution laid the foundation for that striking loyalty to Emperor and the Empire which was henceforth to be characteristic of Bohemian Jewry.