

“SONDERWEG” OF CZECH ANTISEMITISM?

Nationalism, National Conflict and Antisemitism in Czech Society in the Late 19th Century

On May 16th, 1898, in the pleasant atmosphere of the Choděra restaurant in Prague, a group of men (a “table society,” *Tischgesellschaft*) came together – as they used to do regularly. All of them were respected and publicly active personalities and could be described as radical Czech nationalists. Their informal gatherings were named after a famous Czech writer, feuilletonist and poet, Jan Neruda.

On that evening these respectable radicals focused their discussions on the topic of antisemitism and, as a police spy was also present, we can at least partly reconstruct their deliberations. They complained about the insufficient dissemination of antisemitism in Czech society, even though – they claimed – the Jews ignore the Czech national movement, support every government and in Prague they constitute the core of “German elements.” They further discussed the possible ways of promoting “practical antisemitism” and decided to advance through a network of informal private societies named after “our great antisemite Neruda” (a reference to a fierce antisemitic pamphlet “Pro strach židovský” (For Jewish Fear)¹ published by Neruda in 1869) that should promote antisemitism. For the police official who compiled the report the fact that these men were “radical antisemites” was clear enough and there was no need for further explanation of the motives of their antisemitism.²

But for a historian the question, why these radical Czech politicians, journalists, businessmen or small entrepreneurs were antisemitic, is of crucial importance. What made these people believe the Jews were the most treacherous and dangerous enemies of the Czech nation? What made these busy men invest time and energy to spread the “Gospel” of antisemitism?

The existing Czech historiography seems to provide us with quite an unanimous answer to this question. As expressed by Martin Kučera, an expert on Czech radical nationalists,

¹ Neruda, Jan: Pro strach židovský [For Jewish Fear]. In: Národní listy 22.6.1869, 1. – 24.6.1869, 1. – 25.6.1869, 1. – 1.7.1869, 1. – 2.7.1869, 1. The text was later republished in several editions, for instance: Neruda, Jan: „Pro strach židovský“. Politická studie. Praha 1870. – *Idem*: Pro strach židovský. Praha 1942.

² Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives, Prague; further quoted as NA], Presidium místodržitelství [Czech Governors Office, further PM] 1891-1900, 8/1/9/1, report of Prague police director, May 5, 1898. – Zur čechischen Agitation. In: Bohemia 19.5.1898. – Zasláno. P. T. členům rozpuštěné “Národní Obrany” [Sent to the Editor. To the Members of Disbanded National Defence]. In: Hlasy z Podřipska, 6.5.1898, 5. – Z Prahy [From Prague]. In: Hlasy z Podřipska, 17.5.1898, 1.

[...] a Czech nationalist from less well-to-do social classes would not become an antisemite had the Jews with their relative financial strength spoken Czech and supported Czech national and state-right struggle [...].³

And another Czech historian, Helena Krejčová, who publishes widely on the topic of Czech antisemitism, repeats in numerous texts – with slight variations – that “in Bohemia the antisemitism was perceived rather in the national way,” even though there also existed social (“also nationally tinged”) and religious antisemitism. With some exceptions, there was no “racial” antisemitism in Bohemia before World War II.⁴ To give yet another example we can quote Jiří Kořalka, author of important studies on Czech history of the 19th century and of an impressive biography of František Palacký, who asserts that in Czech cities the

[...] the occasional outbursts of antisemitism were related chiefly to the Czech-German national conflict. Local Jews in many cities in the Czech interior were accused of giving preference to German language and culture, even though they lived among a linguistically Czech population.⁵

Not only Czech historians share this persuasion. It suffices to quote the doyen of the historiography on modern antisemitism, Peter Pulzer, who suggests that only in the German-speaking part of Austria antisemitism was a “Streitfrage zwischen [politischen] Parteien.” In Bohemia and Galicia on the other side, “gerieten die Juden nach den friedlichen achtziger Jahren erneut zwischen die Fronten ethnischer und ökonomischer Gegensätze.”⁶ A similar interpretation can be found in William O.

³ Kučera, Martin: Reakce na hilsneriádu v táboře českých radikálů [The Reactions to the Hilsner Affair in the Camp of Czech Radicals]. In: Pojar, Miloš: Hilsnerova aféra a česká společnost 1899-1999 [The Hilsner Affair and Czech Society, 1899-1999]. Praha 1999, 73-88, here 84.

⁴ Krejčová, Helena: Židovská komunita v moderní české společnosti [The Jewish Community in Modern Czech Society]. In: Veber, Václav (ed.): Židé v novodobých dějinách [Jews in Modern History]. Praha 1997, 17-27, here 22. – Similar for instance: Krejčová, Helena: Hilsneriáda [The Hilsner Affair]. In: Dějiny a současnost 3 (1992) 20-24. – Idem/Mišková, Alena: Anmerkungen zur Frage des Antisemitismus in den böhmischen Ländern Ende des 19. Jahrhundert. In: Hoensch, Jörg K./Bíman, Stanislav/Lipták, Lubomír (eds.): Judenemanzipation – Antisemitismus – Verfolgung in Deutschland, Österreich-Ungarn, den böhmischen Ländern und in der Slowakei. Essen 1998 (Veröffentlichungen der Deutsch-Tschechischen und Deutsch-Slowakischen Historikerkommission 6) 55-84, here 55.

⁵ Kořalka, Jiří: Národní identita Židů v českých zemích 1848-1918 mezi němečtstvím, češtvím a sionismem [National Identity of Jews in Czech Lands, 1848-1918 Between German, Czech and Zionist Allegiances]. In: Tomaszewski, Jerzy/Valenta, Jaroslav (eds.): Židé v české a polské občanské společnosti [Jews in Czech and Polish Civic Society]. Praha 1999, 9-25, here 20.

⁶ Pulzer, Peter: Die Wiederkehr des alten Hasses, in: Lowenstein, Steven M./Mendes-Flohr, Paul/Pulzer, Peter/Richarz, Monika (eds.): Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit. Vol. 3. München 1997, 193-248, here 218. – In his often quoted and – especially in the time of its publication – substantial history of modern antisemitism in Germany and Austria, Pulzer argues in a similar way: “In Prague and several other cities the German minority would have disintegrated but for Jewish support. [...] We have seen the reasons for this stubborn anti-Czech attitude among Jews. It in turn, lay at the root of much Czech anti-Semitism.” Pulzer, Peter: The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany & Austria. Cambridge/Mass. 1988, 134.

McCagg's "History of Habsburg Jews".⁷ However, it should be noted that other historians provide us with a more balanced – even when sometimes slightly simplified – description of Czech antisemitism.⁸

It appears that a large number of historians tends to stress the importance of the specific conditions of German-Czech national conflict for the development and character of Czech antisemitism. According to this interpretation Czech antisemites reacted to the – real or perceived – siding of Bohemian and Moravian Jews with the Germans.

In depicting a very distinct, special way of Czech antisemitism these historians desist from a comparative approach and avoid placing the phenomenon of Czech antisemitism into a broader European context. If they do compare, then rather in a negative way by stressing a fundamental typological difference between German and Czech antisemitism: the former being described as a racist ideology and movement, the latter as "only" national, or social and sometimes religious hate. In stressing the non-racist character of Czech antisemitism, these interpretations also imply that Czech antisemites would have been willing to accept the Jews as equal members of the nation had the Jews declared themselves Czech, spoken Czech, or – for instance – had sent their children to Czech schools.

Far from denying the significance of the Czech-German conflict for Czech 19th century history generally and for the history of Czech antisemitism specifically, I would like to open – in this paper – a different and broader perspective. Primarily, I would like to point out two aspects: firstly that the type of exclusive nationalism and antisemitism was in no way specific for the Czech Lands and did not necessarily originate in the concrete conditions of the Czech-German conflict. Secondly, I would like to highlight the – it seems to me, neglected – aspect of Czech political antisemitism. At the same time, I do not attempt to provide in this paper a complete or concise history of Czech antisemitism of the last quarter of the 19th century, nor do I harbour an ambition to touch upon all significant aspects, events or personalities that relate to this phenomenon.

Thumbing through Czech newspapers published in the 1880s or reading police reports, not much effort is needed to realize that an antisemitic discourse was in the making in a part of Czech journalism and society at large, as it was in other neighboring countries. Especially a number of Czech regional journals plunged into denouncing Jews as the enemies of the nation, as social exploiters, as "germanising" elements etc. The police and district officials' reports gathered in the Czech Governor's Office also reveal a growing number of – both Czech and German – antisemitic leaflets, books or posters – partly imports from Germany or Austria,

⁷ McCagg, William O.: *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670-1918*. Bloomington, Indianapolis 1989, 174-180.

⁸ See Riff, Michael A.: *Czech Antisemitism and the Jewish Response before 1914*. In: *The Wiener Library Bulletin* 39/40 (1976) 8-20. – Stölzl, Christoph: *Kafkas böses Böhmen. Zur Sozialgeschichte eines Prager Juden*. München 1975. – Kieval, Hillel J.: *The Making of Czech Jewry. National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918*. New York, Oxford 1988, esp. 64-77.

partly "domestic products." Wide publicity was awarded to the ideas of August Rohling, professor at Prague Theological Faculty, who depicted the Talmud as the source of Jewish negative and anti-Christian behavior and attempted to "prove" the existence of Jewish ritual murder cases. His texts, distributed widely in both German and Czech versions, proved to have the potential to mobilize Christians against the Jews and to worsen the relations of the majority to the Jewish minority. Eventually, the dissemination of Rohling's ideas forced both the Czech Governor and the Education Minister to make Rohling reduce his public antisemitic engagement.⁹

In April 1882, for instance, Prague police headquarters informed about growing antisemitic sentiments among the Czech public and specifically stressed that this holds true also with many respectable, wealthy and moderate men. These allegedly complained that the Jews were characterized by the effort to control the largest possible part of the national (meant is Czech national) income in order to gain political significance in the state. The Jews were said to – in their drive for money and profit – proceed in an unfair manner and to misuse journalism for their interests.¹⁰

The influence of this new antisemitic discourse could be also measured on the basis of the number of minor anti-Jewish incidents – such as stone throwing into the windows of Jewish houses, businesses or flats, threatening letters, or even planted explosives. Often, these incidents grew out of specific local conditions and did not exceed their local dimensions.

Certainly, quite a few conflict lines could be found between the perceived needs and interests of Czech nationalism and the linguistic and social patterns of a large part of the Jewish minority in Bohemia and Moravia. A significant part of the Jewish population gravitated towards German culture and language, a process that was catalyzed by the "enlightened" policies of the emperor Joseph II. who attempted to make the Jews "useful" for the state: through German education or – for instance – through the assignment of German names. At the same time, at least until the 1870s the German option opened wider cultural horizons and offered better professional or economic chances. German liberalism was indeed an attractive political option for the Jews, as it was credited with definitive abolition of discriminative anti-Jewish laws and with the introduction of civic and economic freedoms. The liberal ideology seemed to promise further progress of sciences, education and tolerance and – in the end – also to do away with old anti-Jewish prejudices.

This – in effect – paved the way for the numerous possible conflicts between Czech nationalism and parts of the Jewish minority – the main visible "battlefields" being the population censuses, the up-keeping of German Jewish schools in Czech cities, and the persistence of the largely German character of Moravian Jewish communities. Anyway, the situation was far more complex and changed dynamically. Especially the 1880s and 1890s were characterized by a radical acceleration of the

⁹ A number of documents relating to Rohling's texts and activities can be found in: NA, PM 1881-1890, 8/1/9/1. – See also: *Hellwing, Isak A.: Der konfessionelle Antisemitismus im 19. Jahrhundert in Österreich.* Wien, Freiburg, Basel 1972.

¹⁰ NA, PM 1881-1890, 8/1/9/1, report of Prague police director, April 26, 1882.

development of Czech Jewish assimilationist movements, as well as of the overall integration of Jews in Czech society.¹¹

Nevertheless, it seems that the theme of Jews who allegedly inclined to the German side and supported the – unjust, as Czech nationalists perceived it – German character of Czech towns was prevalent in the argumentation of Czech antisemites. The Jews were accused of supporting German liberal (hence centralizing and oppressive) politics, of speaking German, of reading German newspapers and books, attending German theater, sending their children to German schools, up-keeping “private” German schools in Czech towns, generally of “Germanizing.”

Given the frequency and the cardinal importance of the image of Jews as “germanizing elements” it is useful to analyze the way these “facts” were built in the nationalist discourse and how this “knowledge” about the Jews was achieved and maintained while facing changes in the pattern of national allegiances of the Jewish minority. As a full analysis of this process clearly goes beyond the limits of this short paper I will attempt to describe – as a sort of litmus test – selected examples of the attitudes of Czech nationalists towards the Czech-Jewish movement and generally towards the Jews who considered themselves to be Czech.

In Czech journalism of the period, the perception of Jews as a distinct nation or race was rather commonplace. For instance, in a belligerent article “Kdo s námi a kdo proti nám” (Who is With Us And Who Against Us) published in several Czech regional newspapers after the population census of 1880, this fact is taken for granted: Jews are “as is commonly known, a nation of a different human race than we or our neighbors, the Germans. They belong to the Semitic race [...]”¹² For most of the – at least originally more or less liberal – publicists this did not necessarily exclude the theoretical possibility of the assimilation of the Jews, but the guilt for the persistent existence of the separate Jewish “nation” was placed with the Jews, who allegedly refused to assimilate to the host nations. František Schwarz, an important Czech national activist from the Plzeň/Pilsen region, asserts in a long article on the “Jewish Question”: “Hadt’ its racial character been artificially maintained by the inner institutions [of the Jews] [...], the Jewry would [...] long-ago have merged with the rest of the human society.” But, according to Schwarz, the Jews resisted the possibility to mix with non-Jews and to get rid of their Jewish specifics and chiefly despised the only way to achieve this goal: the intermarriage.¹³

In my opinion, these statements demonstrate a process of transformation of the liberal vision of full assimilation of the Jews into a modern antisemitic discourse, similar to the development of the ideas of Wilhelm Marr, the German “patriarch of antisemitism” who turned from the concept of merging the Jews with the rest of the society through intermarriage in the 1860s to the image of a separate Jewish race

¹¹ For an account of the rise of Czech-Jewish movement see: *Kieval: The Making of Czech Jewry* (cf. fn. 8).

¹² Kdo s námi a kdo proti nám [Who is With Us And Who Against Us]. In: Jičínský obzor 16.1.1881, 1. – Pozor 10.2.1881, 1. – Podřipan 8.1.1881, 1-2.

¹³ Schwarz, František: Otázka židovská [Jewish Question]. In: Osvěta 10 (1880) 583-592, 677-686, 772-781, 910-922, here 589.

ruling over Germany by 1879, pessimistically complaining about the infiltration of the German society by Jews and "Jewish spirit."¹⁴

Some of the reactions to the above mentioned census of 1880 could be of interest in this context. The Austrian population censuses did not research the nationality but the *Umgangssprache* (obcovací řeč, the language of daily use) which came to be considered a mean to measure the affiliation with this or the other nation. The censuses accordingly turned into being a major battlefield between the nationalities in the Czech Lands and the nationalists from both sides – especially in mixed regions – bitterly fought for every single "soul." As such, the censuses beginning with that of 1880 are a sign of the growing pressure to restructure the individual and collective identities along clearly national lines and to force every person to declare an unequivocal affiliation with one nation.

To be sure, registering to be Czech or German in the census form has not necessarily left us any proof of the person's subjective identification with the particular nationality. The decision to side with Czechs or Germans should rather be understood as a public declaration, a nationalist-political decision, as an act of public demonstration of the adherence to a national community.

It was for the first time in the census of 1880 that a significant part of the Jews in Czech towns and regions apparently declared themselves to be Czech (to use Czech *Umgangssprache*) even though the majority of the Jews in the Czech Lands still decided to fill in "German" *Umgangssprache*. But there certainly were regional differences: for instance in the Czech city of Tábor as many as 97 per cent of the Jewish population sided with the Czechs in this census,¹⁵ while in ethnically mixed regions, the record seemed to be a different one – the Jewish inhabitants tended to register that they use the German *Umgangssprache*.

The above mentioned article "Kdo s námi a kdo proti nám" was written before the results of the census were available for most places. The (unknown) author seems to support the assimilation of the Jews and complains that, unlike as in other countries, in Bohemia the Jews refuse to merge into the Czech nation and to adopt the local (Czech) language. But between the lines we can read that the author does not reckon with the possibility of integration of the Jews into the nation:

When our German neighbors, even though the Jews always defended the interests of the German nation, find it proper to emancipate themselves in every respect from the Jewish influence, how should we provide for our national causa against the Jewish elements that exploit us not only in the material and financial respect, but also counter the spiritual, national and political interests of our nation, [and] in Czech communities and districts erode the organism of the national society [...].¹⁶

That this declaration served rather as a construction of the image of the Jews as national enemies than as an attempt to pressure them to switch to the Czech side, became clear soon after the census. The local newspaper of the Jičín region, to pro-

¹⁴ For details see: Zimmermann, Moshe: Wilhelm Marr. The Patriarch of Antisemitism. New York, Oxford 1986.

¹⁵ Kořalka: Národní identita Židů 15 (cf. fn. 5).

¹⁶ Kdo s námi a kdo proti nám (cf. fn. 12).

vide an example of the reactions of Czech radicals, commented on the results in an article titled "Otázka židovská" (Jewish Question) and reacted to the fact that many Jews declared themselves to be Czech: "But the 'language of daily use' does not mean the nationality yet, and accordingly we cannot accept those Jews who registered as Czechs to really be Czech." "Jičínský obzor" expresses its concern that with Jews embracing Czech nationality the Czech nation could become as "judaized" as the Germans, an undesirable option in any case: the assimilation of the Jews, who care only for their profit, would not benefit the nation.¹⁷ I have quoted at length some of the reactions to the census of 1880 to demonstrate that it might have been exactly the opposite way than widely believed: the attempt of the Jews to integrate with the Czechs could cause the antisemitic outbursts rather than their preference for German. Apparently, the turn of many Jews towards the Czech side contradicted the picture of the Jews as the prime enemies of the nation. The reaction of "Jičínský obzor" can thus be interpreted as an attempt to rule out the facts that could be noncompliant with the nationalist ideological construct of "the Jews." Accordingly, not a real conflict (that may have existed), but a constructed conflict is characteristic of this type of nationalist antisemitism.

Many Czech radical nationalists propagated the perception of Jews as parasites that exploit the weaknesses of the national bodies of all Christian or non-Jewish nations and came so far as to blame the Jews for the alleged oppressive tendencies of the Germans against the Czechs. The Jews were said to profit from the national conflict and to instigate it whereas the "real Germans" (read: the antiliberal and antisemitic Germans) were more moderate and a compromise could be reached with them – a compromise that would require to cleanse both nations of the Jewish influence. During the 1880s and 1890s this view was for instance propagated by the "Vyšehrad" newspaper, edited by Jan Klecanda and read chiefly in the countryside.¹⁸ Klecanda and others also often mocked the possibility of Jews becoming real Czechs. His newspaper attacked consistently the Czech-Jewish movement and denounced the Czech preference of a part of the Jewish minority as a tactical and egoistic move. The image of the Jew secretly laughing and making profit while the Germans and Czechs fight each other can be found in many variations in the Czech press of the 1880s and 1890s.

The presented anti-Jewish arguments of a part of the Czech press from the 1880s are indicative not so much for the "situation on the ground" but in the first instance for the attempts to forge the Czech nation into a more cohesive and deeply integrated national body, attempts that were embodied by the propagation of the catchword "svůj k svému" (roughly: "each to his own"). This extremely popular and intensively popularized slogan did not only function as an appeal for an economic boycott (against either the Jews, or against the Germans – or usually against both groups) but is an implication of a broader shift in the nationalist movement towards

¹⁷ Jičínský obzor, 18. 4. 1881, 1-2.

¹⁸ See for instance: Přihledněme trochu k jádru! [To the Core (of the Problem)!]. In: Vyšehrad, 28. 4. 1888, 246-247. – Proč si Židé hrají na Němce [Why the Jews Pretend Being German]. In: Řip, 15. 1. 1881, 1-2.

a brand of nationalism labeled by historians with different adjectives: integral, organic, or for instance "nationalisme fermé." This flavor of nationalism seeking to create an – indeed artificial, constructed – unity within the nation, widely employed the image of the nation as an organism whose parts (classes or social groups) must cooperate and fulfill their "natural" role. Not only that this nationalistic dogma requires to get rid of all foreign elements and to create a self-supporting and closed-in-itself nation, it also makes wide use of the image of an enemy.

The images of inner and outer enemies functioned as indispensable components of this ideological construct. Accordingly, for the development of modern antisemitism, the (ideal) notion of the own nation is perhaps more important than the success or failure of the Jews to assimilate. Or, very often, the image of the Jew is constructed as a negative reflection of the idealized picture of the own nation. But this "construction of the nation against the Jews"¹⁹ was in no way specific for Czech antisemitism, it was a typical feature of all European antisemitic ideologies. From this perspective the development of the Czech antisemitic discourse with its frequent use of the image of the "Germanizing" Jew fits well into the overall schema of the nationalistic construction of enemy pictures and it seems – in my opinion – to be much less specific than often asserted.

"In our country [u nás], most journals exhibit a cold attitude towards the question of antisemitism [...]," the newspaper "Vyšehrad" complained in 1888.²⁰ At approximately the same time, the revue "Čas" (the press mouthpiece of the group of Realists [realisté] gathered around the personality of Tomáš G. Masaryk) complained, in a long and rather positive review of Edouard Drumont's "La France juive", that while everywhere in Europe antisemitism was manifest, only Czech political leaders denied its relevance.²¹ This would seem to confirm the thesis of Peter Pulzer about the non-political ways of Czech antisemitism. And really, thumbing through the main Czech political newspapers from this time (the end of 1880s) – such as Young Czech "Národní listy" or Old Czech "Národní politika" – does not reveal any significant signs of antisemitism.

At the same time, this appears to stand in a sharp contradiction to the presence and intensity of antisemitism in a part of the Czech public and press as demonstrated above. This seeming paradox leads us to question the role antisemitism played in Czech politics in the late 19th century. What factors in the development of Czech politics influenced the spreading of antisemitism and in what situations did Czech political parties and Czech politicians make use of antisemitic propaganda to mobilize the voters? Finally, these questions will lead us back to the group of Czech radicals sitting and drinking beer in the Choděra restaurant and help us understand better the motives of their antisemitism.

The antisemitic political movements of the 1880s in Germany and German speaking Austria attempted first and foremost to call into being effective and powerful

¹⁹ I have borrowed the phrase from: Alter, Peter / Bärsch, Ekkehard / Berghoff, Peter (eds.): *Die Konstruktion der Nation gegen die Juden*. München 1999.

²⁰ Antisemitismus mezi čechy [Antisemitism Among the Czechs]. In: *Vyšehrad*, 11.8.1888, 486-488.

²¹ Časová otázka ve Francii [A Question of our Time in France]. In: *Čas*, 20.3.1888, 97.

mobilization of the society against the liberal establishment, predominant until the turn of the 1870s to the 1880s. Antisemitism was understood as a part of a complex of national, social and economic questions and as a common denominator of the proposed anticapitalist reform measures. At the same time, antisemitism proved to be an extremely effective mean of mobilization that very often specifically targeted certain social groups, such as the lower middle classes and helped to confirm, strengthen and manipulate their perception of social crisis.

Many of the factors that made antisemitism one of the most acute political questions in the neighboring countries were also in play in the Czech Lands. The attempts to overthrow the traditional liberal elitist *Honorationspolitik* and to mobilize the lower classes with an admixture of nationalist, democratic, social and economic ideas were typical mainly for the so-called Young Czech Party. Officially named National Freethinking Party (Národní strana svobodomyšlná), the Young Czechs existed since the 1860s as a faction inside the National Party (Národní strana, to be later called Old Czechs – staročesi) and in 1874, they finally founded an independent party. The Young Czechs, a very diverse and disunited party even in terms of the 19th century, successfully attempted to integrate within the party many of the agricultural, artisan or other interest groups, as well as many radical nationalists dissatisfied with the moderate policies of the Old Czech party. Not surprisingly, many of these groups and politicians harboured antisemitic ideas and had the ambition to use antisemitism in the political process.

On the other side of the political spectrum antisemitism was common among the catholic-conservative movement forming since the late 1860s to counter the liberalizing trends of the era. The Catholic Conservatives perceived the society as being undermined by revolutionary forces that aimed at destroying the church and weakening religious devotion among the people, that disseminated materialism, liberalism and socialism. Exhibiting alternative (and rather paternalistic) social concepts they attacked liberal economic freedoms, as well as the socialist program. Even if antisemitism was not an absolutely indispensable ideological and propagandistic tool, it nevertheless was more than common in Catholic conservative newspapers – such as “Čech”, “Večerní noviny” in Bohemia, or “Hlas” in Moravia.

At any rate, in the 1880s and at the beginning of 1890s this antisemitic political potential could hardly materialize into political action due to the specific development of the Czech political scene that prevented any real political splitting and competition. The radical antisemite Jaromír Hušek, who tried to run on numerous occasions in elections in many places in the 1880s and 1890s, was rather an exception and was destined to stay an unsuccessful outsider – and this not only for his antisemitism. Both main Czech political parties – the Old and the Young Czechs – tried during most of the 1880s to overcome their different views in order to present a unified Czech opposition against German centralism. Only in 1889 did the Young Czechs decide for a definitive break with the Old Czechs and in the elections to the Czech Diet in 1889 and to the Reichsrat in 1891 defeated the Old Czechs and took over the role of the strongest “national” party.²²

²² Vojtěch, Tomáš: Mladočeši a boj o politickou moc v Čechách [The Young Czechs and the

Accordingly, in the 1880s, Czech political parties had no political enemies to exploit antisemitism against. Moreover, both main parties – even though not all of their fractions – adhered to their particular version of the liberal world view. Thus, for instance, the Catholic Conservatives could occasionally denounce the Young Czechs as “Jew-liberals,”²³ but – as they still resided politically on the right wing of the Old Czech party – were paralyzed in translating their antisemitic ideas into politics.

While on the run for the political predominance in Czech politics and fighting against the Old Czechs, the Young Czechs did not necessarily need to use antisemitism: they could take advantage of the widened franchise and of the general feeling of dissatisfaction among the lower classes. And it also seems that – at this time – the Young Czech's leadership considered antisemitism to be inconsistent with the party program; it was viewed as a “clerical”-conservative ideology incompatible with the “free-thinking” world view. At the same time, it was rather difficult to use antisemitism against the National Party that was opposed to German liberals and could hardly be accused of any coalition with “the Jews”. Yet another factor could have helped to develop the negative attitude towards antisemitism: both “national” parties, taking into account the proceeding Jewish assimilation to the Czechs, competed for Jewish voters, especially in places with a high share of Jewish population. That is why in Prague's neighborhood of Josefov/Josephstadt – the former ghetto – both parties got used to nominate Jewish candidates in the elections.

But – probably against the directives of the party leadership – quite a few local Young Czech branches tried to channel the wave of radicalism and discontent into antisemitic ways and to use antisemitic propaganda in their struggle against the Old Czech predominance in their regions. A good example of this use of antisemitism could be found in the Czech city of Kolín/Kolin where the Old Czech party stayed in power long after the landslide victory of the Young Czechs in the elections of 1891. For Kolín Young Czechs and their newspaper “Polaban” antisemitism was certainly no new phenomenon when they – after they had lost the communal elections in March 1892 – launched a fierce antisemitic campaign accusing local Jews of supporting the Old Czechs, but also disseminating legends about Talmud and about world Jewish conspiracy.²⁴ Apparently, the antisemitic mobilization of the public worked: in March 1893 a young girl serving in a Jewish household disappeared to be later found drowned in the Labe/Elbe river, an apparent suicide. At any rate, catalyzed by the local Young Czechs, the rumor of Jewish ritual murder started to spread quickly throughout the city and the region and culminated in violent anti-Jewish riots in Kolín that had to be suppressed by the army.²⁵

Struggle for Political Power in Bohemia]. Praha 1980. – On Young Czechs generally: Garver, Bruce M.: *The Young Czech Party, 1874-1901 and the Emergence of a Multi-Party System*. New Haven, London 1979.

²³ See for instance: Pro strach židovský [For Jewish Fear]. In: *Pražské večerní noviny*, 29.2.1888, 4.

²⁴ For instance: Demaskovali se [They De-Masked Themselves]. In: *Polaban*, 23.3.1892, 1. – Našim křesťanským firmám [To Our Christian Firms]. In: *Polaban*, 9.4.1892, 2. – Alliance israélite universelle. In: *Polaban*, 23.4.1892, 1.

²⁵ Kieval, Hillel J.: *Languages of Community. The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands*.

With further diversification of Czech political landscape antisemitism started to gain momentum. In addition to the – now consolidated and growing – Social Democracy a Christian Social party was officially founded in 1894: similarly as it was the case with other European Christian Social (or Christian Democratic) movements, antisemitism was a stable component of the ideology and political practice of the party.²⁶ Moreover, the compromise between the curial electoral system and the demand for general franchise, known as the Badeni election reform, introduced in 1896 a new electoral curia enabling men aged over 24 to elect a part of the Reichsrat MPs and thus for the first time made it possible for Social Democracy to seriously run for the Reichsrat seats. As the first elections according to the reformed electoral system were supposed to take place in early 1897 busy preparations and propaganda was underway already in the second half of 1896. During the electoral campaign the inroads antisemitism made in Czech political groupings and public life became evident.

Before the elections new clearly antisemitic newspapers were founded and several groups of staunch Czech antisemites (the group around Jaromír Hušek, the “Vyšehrad” group, and a group of antisemitic university students) tried to unite in a new organization called Česká družina (Czech League). That the effort finally failed was much more due to the problematic and quarrelsome personality of Jaromír Hušek than to the weakness of antisemitism. In 1896, even Moravian Young Czechs adopted an antisemitic clause in their program.²⁷ Also the Christian Socialists were busy organizing antisemitic meetings and propagandizing their antisemitic program.²⁸

The elections took place in February and March 1897 under heavy and unprecedented intensive propaganda and caused a major political upheaval.²⁹ The Young Czechs entered the campaign with an appeal to national unity safeguarded – of course – by their own party: “We speak to the Czech people as a whole, not to farmers, small business people, workers, physicians, engineers or other professional groups in particular [...],” reads their election manifesto written by Josef Kaizl and published in the “*Národní listy*” on February 20, 1897.³⁰ Based on this manifesto,

Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 2000, see esp. the chapter Death and Nation. Ritual Murder as Political Discourse in the Czech Lands 181-197. – *Frankl*, Michal: Obvinění z rituální vraždy v Kolíně [The Accusation of Ritual Murder in Kolín]. In: *Dějiny a současnost* 6 (1998) 14-18.

²⁶ *Idem*: “Can We, the Czech Catholics, Be Antisemites?” Antisemitism at the Dawn of the Czech Christian-Social Movement. In: *Judaica Bohemiae* 33 (1997) 47-71.

²⁷ *Malý*, Jiří: Vývoj liberálního proudu české politiky na Moravě [The Development of the Liberal Current of Czech Politics in Moravia]. Brno 1985, 205.

²⁸ For instance, Rudolf Horský, one of the party leaders, held a speech on the topic “Can We, the Czech Catholics, Be Antisemites?”. See: *Frankl*: “Can We, the Czech Catholics, Be Antisemites?” 57-58 (cf. fn. 26).

²⁹ Details and more references on the spreading of antisemitism during and after the elections of 1897 can be found in: *Idem*: The Background of the Hilsner Case. Political Antisemitism and Allegations of Ritual Murder 1896-1900. In: *Judaica Bohemiae* 36 (2000) 34-118.

³⁰ Lide český, voličové! [Czech People, Voters!]. In: *Národní listy*, 20.2.1897, 1. – *Váňa*, Jaromír: Volby do říšské rady v Království českém roku 1897 [Elections into the Reichsrat in the Czech Kingdom in 1897]. Prague 1897, 5-7.

the "Národní listy" mounted a sharp attack against all rival parties and candidates who would attempt to break up the national unity.

When the first results from rural districts came to be known the party was surprised by the considerable support the Social Democratic candidates obtained in many places. Still, the Young Czech reporters (mostly local party trustees) in their dispatches for the "Národní listy" usually excused the failure of their party by secret activities of Jewish agitators aiding the Social Democratic Party whose presence in the respective locations had apparently not even been suspected. It was above all the Jews – at least according to the reports printed in the "Národní listy", "Katolické listy", and other dailies – who apparently voted en bloc for Social Democracy.³¹ In a situation in which the Young Czech Party tried desperately to mobilize the widest possible spectrum of voters, the antisemitism of its radical wing was given ample space in the Young Czech propaganda, above all on the pages of the "Národní listy" – one of the most influential Czech newspapers. The antisemitic propaganda came in very handy: it helped to create the feeling of an imminent threat to the national identity posed by the contesting parties, above all by the Social Democratic Party which proved to be the most formidable adversary.

In Prague, the Young Czechs nominated for the fifth (general) curia Václav Březnovský, a Young Czech politician and glove maker who was known to be a fierce antisemite. Antisemitism probably did not play a major role in Březnovský's controversial nomination by the Young Czech executive committee. The main reason for choosing this candidate was his exceptional popularity among the lower middle class, above all among tradespeople and small business owners whose possible shift to Social Democracy was feared by the Young Czechs. At the same time, they did exploit antisemitic feelings and made no positive attempts to attract Jewish voters. During the election to the Reichsrat in 1897 they did not nominate a single Czech Jewish candidate in any of the curiae. Not surprisingly, the political organization of Czech Jews that traditionally stood near to the Young Czechs started – as a reaction to the nomination of Březnovský – to discuss the possibility of voting for the Social Democratic candidate, even though it eventually left upon its members to decide.³² "Národní listy" exploited this reaction to mount a sharp antisemitic attack under the title "Free-Thinking Party in Battle":

Enemies – open and hidden – are gathering from all directions ready to strike; myriads of conflicting interest groups threatening to dynamite our national unity swarm together to attack the only unwavering stronghold amidst the fray – the Young Czech Party. [...] and yet, the painful truth can no longer be disproved by any sane person: the Social Democratic poison has

³¹ Z Mírotic [From Mírotice]. In: Národní Listy, 21.2.1897, 2. – Z Hlinska [From Hlinsko]. In: Národní Listy, 23.2.1897, 10. – Z Roudnice [From Roudnice]. In: Národní Listy, 23.2.1897, 11. – Ze Sobotecka [From the Sobotka Region]. In: Národní Listy, 24.2.1897, 3. – Z Příbrami [From Příbram]. In: Národní Listy, 27.2.1897, 4. – Z Kard. Řečice [From Kardašova Řečice]. In: Katolické Listy, 25.2.1897. – Volby volitelů [Elections of the Electors]. In: Katolické Listy, 1.3.1897.

³² Voličská schůze českého židovstva [Voters' Meeting of the Czech Jewry]. In: Národní Politika, 23.2.1897. – To the reaction of Czech Jews to the antisemitic election campaign see also: Kieval: The Making of the Czech Jewry 67–68 (cf. fn. 8).

already invaded even our country cottages [...]. In this mortal fight against Social Democracy, the Free-Thinking Party is here to defend the Holy Grail of our national ideals and preserve the national unity of the Czech people. It is indeed an interesting phenomenon, that the Social Democrats, both Czech and German, are aided by – Jews.³³

The antisemitic propaganda was intensified after the first ballot in the Prague election when the Young Czech candidate Březnovský failed to obtain a clear majority over the Social Democrat Karel Dědic and had to run in the second ballot. Between the ballots Březnovský – even though he was also known for his anticlericalism – made an alliance with the Christian Social candidate – apparently on the basis of antisemitism – and with the support of Christian Social voters he succeeded to win the mandate in the second round.

The open use of antisemitism mainly by the Young Czechs in the struggle between Czech political parties and the “story” of the treason committed by the Jews and Social Democrats on the nation during the elections created an unprecedented antisemitic momentum and enabled the formation of new antisemitic organizations. After the elections, and as their by-product, two new antisemitic parties emerged, the National Social Party and the State Right Party, both sharply nationalist, antidynastic and antisemitic. After the elections the antisemites succeeded in founding a new (officially non-political) organization called “*Národní obrana*” (National Defence) that had as its goal the social and economic “emancipation” of Czech national society from the Jews. The quickly growing organization with numerous local branches disseminated radical integral nationalism and the “*svůj k svému*” slogan and practically propagated boycott of the Jews and Germans.³⁴

The last few years of the 19th century were characterized by a strong presence of antisemitic propaganda in Czech politics and journalism where “the Jew” became a symbol of all allegedly destructive forces working against the integrity of the Czech nation, be it Social Democracy or German centralism. The image of “the Jew” exploiting the Czech nation politically, economically, socially and nationally made it possible even to integrate an accusation of ritual murder into the political campaign against the Social Democrats, the murder of a Christian girl and drawing her blood to symbolize the Jewish exploitation of the Czech nation. Only in this context could the accusation of ritual murder in Polná (known as the Hilsner Affair) become a major national affair of 1899-1900.³⁵

Indeed, not only antisemitism belonged to the perception of an imminent crisis, the sharpening of the national conflict before and after the fall of the Badeni government, the political uncertainty caused by the foundation of new parties, and an economic crisis connected with a series of industrial actions – all these factors

³³ Strana svobodomyšlná v boji [The Free-Thinking Party in Combat]. In: *Národní Listy*, February 23, 1897, 2-3.

³⁴ For a more detailed analysis of “*Národní obrana*” see: *Frankl: The Background of the Hilsner Case* 63-75 (cf. fn. 29).

³⁵ On the Hilsner case see above all: *Kovtun, Jiří: Tajuplná vražda. Případ Leopolda Hilsnera* [Mysterious Murder. The Case of Leopold Hilsner]. Prague 1994. – *Černý, Bohumil: Hilsneriáda* (k 100. výročí 1899-1999) [The Hilsner Affair (100th Anniversary, 1899-1999)]. Polná 1999. – *Pojar: Hilsnerova aféra a česká společnost* (cf. fn. 3).

contributed to the upheavals of the time and lead to numerous nationalist riots. The best known of them on the Czech side were the riots of November and December 1897 that erupted after the fall of the Badeni government under the expectation of the cancelation of the Badeni language ordinances (that introduced the equality of Czech and German in the inner agenda of most of the state authorities in Bohemia and Moravia). Starting as anti-German demonstrations the protests in Prague soon turned into a clear-cut anti-Jewish riot with plundering and damaging of Jewish businesses, stores, houses, flats and synagogues. After martial law was imposed on Prague, the riots continued in other Czech cities.³⁶ Once again Jews were attacked as perceived symbols of all anti-Czech forces, as alleged supporters of the Germans and as patrons of Social Democracy. As the riots in Prague mainly affected poor Jews in Prague suburbs, many Czech-speaking Jews became the victims of this symbolic (but very much real) violence.³⁷

The group in Choděra restaurant discussing the ways of disseminating anti-semitism in Czech society was partly a by-product of these riots. As a consequence of them, the authorities seeking a culprit disbanded the "Národní obrana" association on the pretext that it had organized the Prague riots. While their guilt of organizing the violent acts might have been exaggerated, the association definitely contributed to the heightening of anti-Jewish and anti-German passions among the Czech public. The disbanding of one of the main institutional centers of anti-semitism made these Czech nationalists and antisemites gather over the beer table by Choděra in order to discuss – as we have already seen – new and unofficial ways to "organize" antisemitism.

To relate to the initial question of the antisemitic motives of this radical group: I hope to have demonstrated that these men were not antisemitic because the Jews kept – for instance – a school with German instruction in the Czech town of Polná or because some of them used to read German newspapers, but that the antisemitism of these nationalist radicals stemmed from their particular version of – organic, or integral – nationalism where "the Jews" served as a common denominator and symbol of all hostile forces. At the same time, the political use of their antisemitism was catalyzed by the ideological and organisational polarization of Czech politics that came to be especially apparent since 1897. Many of them were active members of "Národní obrana" and took part in establishing new antisemitic parties.

On the margin of this paper, it is perhaps worth reproducing an episode typical of the attitudes of these radicals towards Czech Jews. Jan O. Jech, one of those around the table by Choděra, a coach manufacturer, Young Czech radical and a member of

³⁶ Jiskra, Jan: Pražské bouře roku 1897 [The Prague Riots of 1897]. Praha 1897. – Krejčová, Helena: Pražský prosincový pogrom roku 1897 [The Prague Pogrom of December 1897]. In: Documenta Pragensia 16 (1998) 73-78. – Sutter, Berthold: Die Badenischen Sprachenverordnungen von 1897, ihre Genesis und ihre Auswirkungen vornehmlich auf die inner-österreichischen Alpenländer. Köln, Graz 1960-1965, 231-236 (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für neuere Geschichte Österreichs 46, 47).

³⁷ Archives of the Jewish Museum in Prague, box 147657. The collection contains the documents of the relief committee of the Prague Jewish community and numerous applications of Prague Jews for financial support on the basis of damage suffered during the riots.

Prague municipal council, quarrelled in November 1896, during a Young Czech meeting in Prague, with the long-standing Jewish member of his party and the editor of "Řeznické listy" (Butchers' Journal) Isaiáš S. Kraus. It is a shame, Jech concluded beside other antisemitic hints, that the butcher trade in Prague could not find "a more qualified and competent person than the Jew Isaiáš Kraus."³⁸ Kraus took Jech to court for libel, but during the court hearing (that took place in March 1897, a few days after the election of Březnovský in Prague) he found himself ridiculed – to the delight of the antisemitic audience – by Jech's defence counsel, the Young Czech member of Czech Diet Karel Černohorský, and to listen to him declaring that [...] it is a fact that the Czech nation will never consider the Jews to be its fully integrated members, particularly after the recent election in the Fifth Curia when they evidently chose to put their cards on the table and switch to the non-national camp in order to avoid voting for the Czech national candidate!³⁹

Jech was finally cleared of the accusation under stormy acclaim of the antisemites present in the court room.⁴⁰ A double bitter experience for Kraus, as he was one of those Jews for whom the loyalty to the Young Czech party outweighed Březnovský's antisemitism during the elections: just a few days before the trial he publicly called on Prague Jews to vote for Březnovský.⁴¹

Even though the national conflict between Czechs and Germans was an extremely important topic for the development of Czech nationalist discourse, its impact on the shaping of Czech antisemitism of the late 19th century should not be exaggerated. Czech antisemitism, as the other antisemitic movements of the time, had its root in the plethora of social and ideological developments of European societies and cannot be reduced only to the concrete situation of national conflict in the Czech Lands. Czech nationalists – while denouncing Jews for their alleged hostility towards the Czech causa – used similar mental schemes and constructed the image of the own nation on one side and of the Jews on the other in a similar way as their German or French counterparts. Czech antisemitism indeed had some specifics – and I attempted to demonstrate how the different timing of Czech political antisemitism depended on the restructuring of the Czech political scene in the 1890s.

³⁸ Městský radní pražský p. Jech před soudem pro antisemitskou aféru [The Municipal Representative Mr. Jech Faced Trial for an Antisemitic Affair]. In: *Národní Politika*, 25.3. 1897, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Ze soudní síně. Židovská drzost [From the Court Room. Jewish Impudence]. In: *České zájmy*, 1.4.1897, 4.

⁴¹ Českým voličům židovským ve skupině V. kurie v Praze, v Karlíně a na Smíchově! [To Czech Jewish Voters in the V. Curia, the Prague, Karlín and Smíchov Group!]. In: *Národní Listy*, 7.3.1897, 2.