

“SONDERWEG” OF CZECH ANTISEMITISM?

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

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Historiography has tended to link Czech antisemitism to the nationalities' conflict between German and Czechs and to the situation of the Jews between Czechs and Germans. Thus, the Czech nationalists' hostility towards the Jews was ostensibly due to the pro-German attitude of the Jewish minority. In reality however, the emergence of the Czech anti-Semitic movement was closely linked to changes in Czech nationalist sentiment, to the latter's embracing an integral nationalism employing archetypical enemies and conspiracy theories. The rise of Czech antisemitism was accelerated in the first place by a rift appearing in the Czech political environment, and the elections of 1897, when limited universal suffrage applied for the first time, with the first social-democratic MPs being elected. The elections were accompanied by antisemitic propaganda employed by the Young Czechs, the dominant Czech nationalist political party, by the Christian Social party and other political parties mobilizing the electorate against an alleged threat to national integrity embodied by the social democratic party which was said to be a mere instrument of Jewish conspiracy. Czech anti-Semitism coming to the fore during the final years of the 19th century was caused above all by nationalist sentiment becoming increasingly radical and by the political split-up, by no means was it due to the Czech-german nationalities' conflict.