

## JEWISH POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE: THE CASE OF THE JEWISH PARTY IN INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA<sup>1</sup>

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Jewish politics, its appearance and geo-political borders, have been readdressed in recent historiography and the commonly held opinion that Jewish politics appeared before the end of the nineteenth century in Eastern Europe has been revised. Historians and political scientists have explored the tradition of Jewish political practice and theory throughout history and shown that it was reflected both in the internal governance of the autonomous Jewish community and in its relations with external political institutions. Jews as an oppressed minority were constantly involved in seeking a *modus vivendi* with the ruling power in order to secure their existence. In modern times Jewish politics in the West did not disappear but were transformed. The emancipated Jewish communities exhibited diverse degrees of political agility both on the internal political scene (primarily to defend their full civic equality and freedom of religious expression) and on the international level when speaking on behalf of the persecuted East European Jews.<sup>2</sup>

The classics of historical writing on modern Jewish politics, like Jonathan Frankel or Ezra Mendelsohn, propose that modern Jewish ideologies and movements were born in the old multinational Russian and Habsburg empires where they won large numbers of followers among the 'truly Jewish' population (that is, the non-assimilated and non-aculturated strata). As Mendelsohn argued, a certain degree of acculturation and secularisation had occurred in Eastern Europe, but it took place gradually in the context of socio-economic backwardness and general anti-Jewish hostility and led most typically not to assimilation, but to modern Jewish nationalism. The settings conducive to a flourishing Jewish political activism presupposed a combination of nationalism, antisemitism, and a Jewish population suited for political mobilisation – that is, a population deeply rooted in Jewish traditional life but undergoing a crisis resulting from the process of modernisation.<sup>3</sup>

Drawing on this theory, one might assume that interwar Czechoslovakia, contrary to Poland or Lithuania, was not really an ideal environment for Jewish political activism. It was not ruled by a nationalist antisemitic regime, and it certainly lacked Jewish masses deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, retaining their Jewish identification, and preoccupied with the modern Jewish currents of thought and ideologies.<sup>4</sup> However, a distinctive branch of modern Jewish politics did emerge in interwar Czechoslovakia as an influential, though not victorious, force. This paper is intended to present how Jewish politics were implemented in liberal and tolerant interwar Czechoslovakia, and show that due to its unusual setting and the complex structure of the Jewish population, Jewish politics represented a somewhat 'middle-of-the-road', transitional case, which exhibited the features of typically 'Western' Jewish political patterns, combined with a rather 'East European' national political programme. By Jewish political aspiration the author means the activities of political parties, youth movements and non-political organisations (civil associations, cultural and social support funds, and so on) that declared as their aim the protection of the rights and interests of the Jewish population, and which sought to cultivate a distinctively Jewish identity, national or religious.

Interwar Czechoslovakia was heir to the mixed traditions of the Habsburg Empire. It brought together Jewish communities that were very much divided in cultural, social and economic respects. The Jews of the former Austrian provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, the previously Hungarian Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia each possessed significant potential for a cultural, religious and political creativity which was all their own. This diversity showed up most strikingly in the interwar period, when the democratic Czechoslovak regime provided a forum for the presentation of diverse political and ideological trends. Jews had to deal with the establishment of Czechoslovakia, the great national achievement of the Czechs and Slovaks, and their new position as a minority within a nation-state dominated by previously suppressed peoples. The emergence of Czechoslovakia raised a lot of expectations in the Jewish population, depending on national, religious, or ideological identifications. On the whole, the Jews of Czechoslovakia did not indicate a strong tendency to form independent political movements and groupings, as did the Jews of Poland. The assimilated, largely secularised and urban Jewish strata of German, Czech, and Hungarian cultural orientation (Slovak assimilation was a weaker element) had no specific demands as a group and hoped to secure civil and political equality.

Orthodoxy, which still held sway in the east, in Slovakia, and the Hassidim in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, put emphasis particularly on freedom of religious profession. There was hardly a strong Jewish proletariat to ally with the Czech or Slovak working class and thus there was no strong Jewish left as in Poland. There was, however, a small but significant group of Zionist-oriented Jewish nationalists, stemming from the distinctive Prague Zionist circle of Jewish intellectuals, which sought to achieve a national minority status and protection for the Jews in Czechoslovakia. Similarly to the Jewish national forces in the neighbouring countries they desired some form of Jewish cultural autonomy and an independent educational system, which would enable them to educate young people in the spirit of national consciousness.

The new regime met the hopes of the Jews for recognition and equality, and offered generous latitude for specifically Jewish cultural and political life as well. The Zionist movement after 1918 emerged as the single strongest (though hardly legitimate) spokesman for the Jewish community of the new state and as such organised itself on a political party platform. Due to the favourable political conditions the Zionists in Czechoslovakia succeeded in justifying their position, find anchor in the political scene, and retain a significant influence throughout the interwar period, although they were not dominant. The Jewish party and its Zionist-oriented Jewish-national programme did manage to attract a large proportion of the Jewish electorate, but it was far from being the dominant power within Czechoslovak Jewry, and its achievements in terms of its political programme should not be overestimated.

## THE ORIGINS OF JEWISH NATIONAL POLITICS

Jewish national politics in interwar Czechoslovakia were born from the initiative of the Zionist-oriented Jewish intellectuals of the Czech lands. Zionism emerged as the third national orientation among the Jews of the Czech lands (alongside the German and the Czech) in the last decades of the nineteenth century when the bicultural environment imbued with the Czech–German strife and antisemitism on the part of both conflicting sides led some acculturated Jews to Zionism. Although Zionism was a lesser factor within the Jewish community of the Czech lands, Zionists were a very active element within society and they played a distinctive role in the Austrian Zionist Organisation. By the time of the First World War a slight majority of the Jews in the Czech lands was assimilated to Czech language and culture, the rest retaining the older German linguistic and cultural orientation. Though around twenty percent of Bohemian Jews still declared their nationality Jewish, the unequivocal majority was uncommitted to the activities of Jewish nationalists in Zionist student clubs and associations. The Zionists' strength lay, alongside the German-speaking Jews of Prague and the Jewish inhabitants in the industrial northern and north-western German-language sectors of the country, in Moravia.<sup>5</sup>

Jewish national ideas had a limited appeal in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia, though the Jews represented a much larger proportion of the population than in the Czech lands. The Jews in Slovakia were partly Magyarised, especially in the urban centres, but largely retained the older German-language affiliation and in the north-east also Yiddish, particularly among the Orthodox and the Hassidim.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the Czech Jews that were, as Ezra Mendelsohn noted, one of the most de-Judaised communities in Europe, the Jews of Slovakia included a strong Orthodox element whose potential strength could not be underrated.<sup>7</sup> While socially emancipated and linguistically assimilated, the Jews in Slovakian cities and towns still remained 'a class apart', and as Livia Rothkirchen remarks 'certain enduring "Jewish" traits and the religious differences between Jew and Gentile combined to form an invisible barrier between them',<sup>8</sup> which led to the maintenance of a strong Jewish national identification. But the influential position of Orthodoxy, as well as the strong Magyarisation campaign made Slovakia a rather unfavourable setting for any kind of Jewish national movement, including Zionism. Zionist organisations operating on Slovakian territory (as well as in Subcarpathian Ruthenia) constituted territorial groups of the Hungarian Zionist Organisation, founded at the Pressburg conference in March 1903. Contrary to the West Austrian Zionists, the Zionist movement in Hungary did not develop into a strong and active organisation, but relied mostly on individual initiative.<sup>9</sup> Only the Orthodox Zionist movement (*Mizrachi*) enjoyed support and maintained itself throughout the period.

There were other reasons that prevented Jewish nationalism taking hold in by far the largest Jewish community of interwar Czechoslovakia residing in the territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. It had been one of the most backward regions of Hungary, inhabited by the largely peasant Ruthenian population (including a thin layer of Magyarised Ruthenian intelligentsia), Hungarian landowners and bureaucrats and a huge Jewish community, which was close to the East European Orthodox and Hassidic tradition in its cultural outlook and social structure. The majority of the Jews, as well as most Ruthenians, lived

in small towns and villages and pursued all the occupations (the main income was agriculture) that were common in the region and shared the general poverty. There were important Hassidic communities in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which was practically untouched by the modern trends of Haskala, and reformed (Neolog) Judaism had few adherents there. The first Zionist ideas arrived in the region, probably from Poland, only in the war period, and were carried primarily by young Jewish students, who got in touch with Zionism during their studies at European universities.<sup>10</sup> But the Zionist movement did not make much progress there because of the strong opposition of the Hassidic rabbis.

It was against this background that the Jewish national activists from Prague began their work in 1918. Oskar Rabinowicz assumes that the sharp contrasts (between the Jews of Bohemia and Subcarpathian Jews) within the borders of the republic did not represent a decisive obstacle for developing Jewish minority politics in Czechoslovakia and were actually beneficial. Rabinowicz observes that while in the Czech lands Jewish nationalists

had by 1918 shaped its Zionist image, the eastern part had no such established configuration. On the contrary, the eastern part was an open field for Zionist penetration, which in the course of the two decades of Czechoslovak independence was accomplished with marked success.<sup>11</sup>

Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia certainly constituted a territory where the Jewish nationalists could look for mass support, a setting suitable for the implementation of their national programme. But due to the ideological barriers against Jewish nationalism, which had existed there already before the First World War, their progress was hardly a smooth one and their achievements were not too impressive. The Zionist activists did spend enormous efforts cultivating Jewish national ideas as well as demanding the social and economic betterment and equal treatment of the Jews in the east. However, as we shall see, Zionism in Eastern Czechoslovakia did not develop into a mass movement and in their political progression the Jewish national politicians often had to rely on the Jewish voters residing west of the largest communities.

The impetus for political mobilisation on the part of the Czech Zionists came from the Austrian Zionist Organisation, which in October 1918 founded the Jewish National Council in Vienna to defend the interests of the Jewish people in the negotiation of the new European settlement. The same month the Jewish National Council was founded by the Bohemian Zionist Organisation in Prague, and called for the recognition of Jewish nationality, minority rights for Jews, their full civic equality, and the democratisation and unification of Jewish religious communities under a supreme Jewish organ.<sup>12</sup> The Jewish National Council was the only Jewish organisation on the territory of Czechoslovakia which mobilised itself to political action after the stagnation of the war years and as such declared itself to be the spokesman of the Jewish population in the negotiations with the representatives of the new Czechoslovak state. But just as in Poland, the Prague Council did not emerge on the basis of democratic elections, but consisted of appointed Zionist leaders of the Czech lands.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore in the immediate post-war period the Jewish National Council made an effort to legitimise its position as a representative of all Jewish inhabitants of the new state. The Zionists expected that sooner or later they would succeed in persuading other Jewish organisations to send their delegates to the Council. Membership of the Council was conditional on the acceptance of the Jewish national programme, which made the decision on the part of the religious organisations rather difficult. However, in the first month of the Council's existence the Federation of Jewish Communities in Moravia and Austrian Silesia and the Federation of Jewish Communities in Bohemia approved the national programme and recognised the Jewish National Council as a supreme representative of the Jews in the struggle for equality.<sup>14</sup> The support of the Jewish congregations was an essential achievement for the Zionists because the Jewish communities were recognised by the state. With their support, the efforts to unify Czechoslovak Jews both on the national and the religious levels seemed to be more realistic.<sup>15</sup> Slovakia, though rather a late-starter in terms of Jewish political mobilisation, saw the foundation of a Jewish national organisation in March 1919 when the nation-oriented Jews of Slovakia established the National Federation of Jews in Slovakia in Piešťany and declared support for the Prague Jewish National Council.<sup>16</sup>

The representatives of the Prague Jewish National Council held public meetings and manifestations in various localities of the Czech lands and Slovakia. The Jewish Council leaders appealed to the Jewish population to support their claims for the recognition of the Jews' national rights in the Czechoslovak state. The Jewish leaders warned against 'hot-headed conversions to Czech nationality' that might at best cause suspicion in the Czech national camp. Thus, the Zionists wanted to encourage the Jews not to be afraid of proclaiming their identity Jewish in the impending democratic state, because 'the

Czechoslovak nation will respect an honest declaration of one's origin rather than the endorsement of another nationality'.<sup>17</sup> The Jewish national leaders hoped for an understanding of Jewish national distinctiveness by Czech society, which would not demand the assimilation of the Jews to the Czech nation. The Zionists often pointed out the similar fate of the Czech and Jewish nations, which had both lost their independence in the struggle for their national religion and longed for its restoration. Both nations fought, as did other small European nations, for freedom and the right to self-determination. It was claimed that for Jews, the Czech nation served as the model of untiring national work, which achieved the respect of the world. There is no doubt that President Masaryk played a significant role in the formation of support for Jewish national politics. The Jewish National Council's delegation met Masaryk as a well-known sympathiser of the Jewish national revival in October 1918 and presented a memorandum which included the basic Jewish national claims that conformed to the above-mentioned Council's programme.<sup>18</sup> Masaryk promised that the Jews of Czechoslovakia would enjoy the same rights as the other inhabitants of the republic.

The Prague Jewish leaders led negotiations with the Czechoslovak delegation in Paris since they aimed to have Jewish minority rights explicitly formulated in the treaty with Czechoslovakia, that is, to include also Articles 10 and 11 of the Polish treaty (the so-called 'Jewish Articles'), which dealt with Jewish cultural and religious freedom.<sup>19</sup> However, the Czechoslovak political representation refused to include specific Jewish articles in the Czechoslovak treaty and insisted that minority rights be widely defined and in conjunction with general civil rights.<sup>20</sup> The reason for the refusal was probably an apprehension that this step would set a precedent for the other minorities of Czechoslovakia, primarily the Germans, Hungarians, and Poles, who had exhibited irredentist tendencies since the founding of the state in October 1918. Moreover, the general tendency prevailing at the Peace Conference was to make general rather than specific treaties, which also contributed to the success of Czechoslovak diplomacy. Although the main Jewish delegates, Ludvík Singer and Markus Ungar, returned to Prague and contacted Masaryk immediately after the discussion with Beneš, they did not succeed in pushing their case. The World Zionist Organisation considered such a result a great failure because, in its view, Czechoslovakia constituted a favourable setting for the implementation of Jewish minority demands. American Zionists blamed the Prague Jewish Council's representatives for having missed the chance to attain Jewish national rights in Czechoslovakia. Both Singer and particularly Ungar (a non-Zionist) were suspected of not being persuaded of the desirability of incorporating the 'Jewish Articles' into the Minority Treaty with Czechoslovakia.<sup>21</sup> The assumption that the Prague Jewish National Council did not consider the 'Jewish Articles' as a basic precondition of the future equal treatment of the Jewish population in Czechoslovakia was probably right. Ludvík Singer, as head of the Jewish National Council, expressed his satisfaction with the Czechoslovak Minority Treaty as signed at Saint-Germain on 10 September 1919 and declared that the Prague Jewish Council actually did not insist on these international guarantees of the Jews' minority rights, having full confidence in the state.<sup>22</sup>

## IDEOLOGY AND PROGRAMME

For Jewish national politics in Czechoslovakia the Zionist organisation represented a formative force. Throughout the interwar period there was an ongoing debate within the Zionist movement concerning whether Zionists should be involved in the interior politics of the republic (the so-called *Landespolitik* or *Gegenwartsarbeit*) or focus exclusively on the Palestinian issue and on Jewish national revival.<sup>23</sup> Actually the former was not really possible without the latter due to the obvious interdependence between the Jews of the diaspora and those in Palestine. Zionists undoubtedly had to fight against oppression and antisemitism in the diaspora to secure the lives of Jews. Equally important was the cultivation of Jewish national life outside *Eretz Israel* as a reservoir of aliyah and the preservation of that part of Jewish nation which would not be able to move to Palestine in the future. Pursuing these goals could be achieved only via political action.

But for the fear of being dragged into the internal political disputes, the Zionists preferred not to be directly involved in *Landespolitik*. Therefore, they initiated the establishment of the Jewish National Council as an umbrella institution representing the Jewish inhabitants of Czechoslovakia, regardless of their national, religious, and political affiliations, and defending their rights and interests. The Council worked as the major spokesman for Czechoslovak Jews and its programme was to be championed via the political action of the Jewish Party. Although the Zionists dominated both the Jewish Party and the Council (in both institutions they had majority representation), these were not officially Zionist oriented or subordinated to the Zionist Territorial Federation. *Landespolitik* was an independent branch of the Zionist activities, for which a special committee was established in the Zionist Territorial Federation in

1921. The National Political Committee (*Politische Reichskommission*) co-ordinated the work of the Zionists in the Jewish National Council and the Jewish Party, and monitored the observance of Jewish national and Zionist principles in the Jewish Party. The extent to which the Jewish Party was related to the Zionist organisation is clearly demonstrated by the fact that for a whole decade (between 1925 and 1935) the head of the *Politische Reichskommission*, Dr Emil Margulies, was also the chairman of the Jewish Party. The question of the Zionists' involvement in the interior politics of the state was also raised later on. A group of revisionist Zionists proposed the organisational separation of *Landespolitik* from the Zionist Federation following a split over the principle of minority politics in the Zionist Organisation of Slovakia in 1928, which threatened the Zionists' unity. The subsequent difficult search for a solution at the Zionist congress led a group of Zionists to protest against such a disturbance of Zionist work.

The Jewish Party conformed to the Zionists' idea of an independent course in *Landespolitik*. The underlying belief was that Jews should restrict themselves to a wide-ranging Jewish political camp uncommitted to any political ideology and not get involved with other nations' political forces because they would be suspected by the state of duplicity or of supporting irredentism. Throughout the interwar period they demonstrated loyalty to the Czechoslovak state and government. Since 1929, when the Jewish Party entered parliament for the first time, it had stood on the side of the governmental parties. Declarations of loyalty and praise for the state, which retained its democracy and the equal treatment of citizens, appeared more frequently after the transformation of antisemitism into a state doctrine in neighbouring Germany. In 1933 deputy Goldstein asserted: 'For the rights granted to Jews in the democratic state we have to respect the state and be better citizens, better than the most loyal Czech citizen.'<sup>24</sup>

The Jewish national leaders consciously worked to reverse the trend of German–Jewish (and Hungarian–Jewish) cultural alliance. They assigned their struggle great moral significance. Similarly to other modern Jewish national movements, the Zionists sought to win the respect of the Gentiles and were preoccupied with the creation of the 'new Jewish man'. Zionists sought to strengthen their relations with the Czech nation and distance themselves from German culture, therefore they paid more attention to cultivating the Czech and Slovak languages among Jews.<sup>25</sup> The first Czech-language Zionist weekly, *Židovské zprávy* [Jewish News] was established as early as April 1918, 'to inform the Czech-speaking nationally-conscious Jews and the Czech public about all events concerning the question of the right of the Jewish minority to self-determination'.<sup>26</sup> Though the majority of the Zionist leaders came from the German-speaking (or Hungarian-speaking) social strata, the Jewish politicians chose their representatives and candidates for parliament primarily from among Czech- and Slovak-speaking Jews. There was a growing tendency to switch over to Czech among the Zionists from the beginning of the 1930s, when the Czech–German clashes intensified in Czechoslovakia. German was seen as an obstacle to creating a positive image of Zionist Jews and at least their representatives were expected to have a good command of Czech. The language question became an important issue and at the Party's meeting in June 1933 Margulies, before giving his speech, apologised for addressing the audience in German.<sup>27</sup> Later he was exposed to open criticism for not speaking the state language and at the Jewish Party's congress in Moravská Ostrava (1935) protests against his chairmanship emerged.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of the Jewish national programme, one of the goals of the Zionists was to reform the Jewish congregations. The Jewish congregations (*Kultusgemeinde*) as the basic units of Jewish society were to be transformed into Jewish national communities (*Volksgemeinde*) and represent all Jews regardless of their political affiliation, degree of departure from Judaism, or the depth of Jewish national conviction. Each *Volksgemeinde* was to be a subject under public law, authorised to collect taxes. An important change was planned in the elections of the community representatives. They were to be elected on the basis of a universal, equal, and secret ballot (valid for both men and women) and a proportional electoral system.<sup>29</sup> The Jewish national community would have wide authority in social, educational, and religious affairs. In the social sphere, the community would retain the traditional solidarity principle, but the earlier practice of giving charity was to be replaced by systematic work for the benefit of the poor members of the community, the foundation of credit and loan institutions, and the co-ordination of the work of charity organisations. The Jewish community would also support many other initiatives, including Jewish trade unions, legal advice bureaus, sports activities, and cultural and interest groups, and pursue occupational statistics, which would help Jews to choose an occupation. In religious affairs, the Jewish National Council demanded freedom of the individual so that religion would not be an obstacle to the unity of the Jewish community, which should limit itself to the maintenance of synagogues and other religious institutions. Finally, all the Jewish national communities were to be united in one territorial federation.<sup>30</sup>

In respect of education, the Jewish National Council planned to establish a new Jewish educational system on a national and democratic basis. The purpose of education was to spread the knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish history. Religious schools and rabbinical seminaries (*yeshivot*) were not to be abolished but beside them a network of elementary and secondary Jewish schools, and institutes for the education of Jewish teachers was to be established. All Jewish schools were to be at least partly supported from public resources. As language of instruction Czech was to be used in both Czech-speaking and mixed areas, and the pupils would start learning German from the third, fourth or fifth class, and, depending on local conditions and the parents' wishes, 'the individual subjects could be taught in either Czech or German'. The specific Jewish character of the schools was to be maintained by learning Hebrew, Jewish history and literature, and by 'some distinctive methods of instruction'.<sup>31</sup>

The two basic programmatic planks of the Jewish Party's national programme for the diaspora were never implemented. The reform and unification of the Jewish congregations in Czechoslovakia was doomed as early as April 1920 when the Minister for Slovakian Affairs granted the Orthodox congregations in Slovakia full autonomy. It was part of the Slovak authorities' practice of concessions to the Orthodox, which in turn followed their political interests. Autonomy was given to the Orthodox only three days before the parliamentary elections in 1920. The Orthodox rabbis established the Central Autonomous Orthodox Bureau in Bratislava, which administered all the Orthodox communities in Slovakia, had the right to approve or overturn the results of the elections to the communities' representations, to remove rabbis, and to intervene in the affairs of any Orthodox congregation in Slovakia.<sup>32</sup> Although the Zionists sharply protested against privileging the Orthodox, they could not change it.<sup>33</sup> The Orthodox leaders showed their gratitude to the Slovak representatives during the first election campaign of 1920, when they campaigned for the government parties, and later, in 1925, when they established a satellite of the parliamentary party. Jewish national circles were distrustful of the Slovak authorities, not only because of their willingness to meet the demands of the Orthodox, but also because they disregarded latent antisemitism in Slovakia. The propagation of Jewish national ideas aroused sharp attacks in the Slovak press and there were anti-Jewish excesses in several localities.

Given the constraints under which Jewish political and cultural activists laboured, the opposition between the integrationists and the Orthodox and the realities of Czechoslovak politics, it was not easy to implement their major programmatic planks. As to the Jewish national school system, the Jewish leaders faced primarily two questions: how to attract pupils and how to secure funding. In the Czech lands, where acculturation was well under way, the Jewish national schools were not too prosperous and therefore the Jewish Council managed to establish only a few of them in the largest communities of Prague and Brno.<sup>34</sup> The major source of income for these schools came from the donations of the Jewish National Council and the Zionist cultural organisation (*Tarbut*) with occasional contributions from local municipal councils. Jewish education was certainly much more widespread in the east of the republic. There was actually not much work for the Zionists because three types of Jewish school were operating there very well. The strictly religious schools (the *talmud torah* schools, and the institutions of higher theological studies, *yeshivot*), where secular subjects were not taught, received no state financial support and the Jewish congregations had to provide for them themselves. But the third type of Jewish schools, denominational schools with both religious and secular education, fell in the category of public schools and received state support.<sup>35</sup> In the Czech lands the schools run by religious congregations were registered as private schools (even if secular subjects were taught too), and were therefore not eligible for state support.<sup>36</sup> The pupils of these Jewish denominational elementary schools with the status of parochial schools (*Židovské obecné školy*) constituted close to half of all the Jewish pupils in Slovakia. And approximately fifty percent of them, numbering around three thousand pupils per year, declared their nationality Jewish, which was a source of pride for the Jewish national leaders. There were over seventy Jewish denominational schools in Slovakia in the 1920s but their number declined over the interwar period and in the school year 1931–1932 there were only sixty-one.<sup>37</sup>

But the real testing ground for the Jewish national programme was Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where the Zionists hoped to establish the Hebrew school system on the Polish model, which was flourishing in interwar Poland and Lithuania. Since the Jews constituted a proportionally high percentage of the population in the province, the Jewish politicians sought to establish minority education eligible for state support. The Jewish national school system with Hebrew-language instruction allowed Jewish children to obtain a modern secular education from kindergarten through high school. The Zionist Territorial Federation and *Tarbut* were not able to collect all the necessary financial support for the increasing number of Hebrew schools, therefore some more prosperous East Slovakian Jewish communities also acted as patrons of the Subcarpathian schools.<sup>38</sup> The politicians of the Jewish Party often took the floor in the parliament appealing to the government to respect the demands of the Jewish

minority schools in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, because the fact that the Jewish children who were not attending religious schools (*cheders*) constituted ninety percent of the pupils at the local Czech state schools stirred up national tensions in Subcarpathian Ruthenia:

. . . I would like to spell out in this place our basic demand that Jewish minority education and the social protection of Jews in Subcarpathian Ruthenia be treated in the same way as other minority demands. . . . It is not wise that the Jewish population is pressed to play the same role in Czechoslovak Ruthenia as it did under Hungarian rule (that is, the Jews were not to become means of Czech assimilation similarly as they had been agents of Magyarisation).<sup>39</sup>

The activities of the Jewish deputies were successful and from 1932 the Subcarpathian Hebrew schools and the Zionist cultural organisation *Tarbut* were granted state subsidies.

Since the establishment of the first Hebrew elementary schools in Subcarpathian Ruthenia in 1920, the highpoint of the Zionists' endeavours was the opening of the Hebrew *Reformrealgymnasium* in Mukačevo (1925) and by 1933 there were altogether nine Hebrew elementary schools and one more *gymnasium* in Užhorod.<sup>40</sup> At that time the number of Subcarpathian Jewish students attending the Hebrew schools reached almost eight hundred, which was not a striking success considering the size of the Jewish community, which was more than a hundred thousand. But we have to take into consideration the strong Orthodox opposition and boycott which the Zionists met in this province.<sup>41</sup> But generally there was no significant trend in the interwar period to send Jewish children to the Jewish schools. Jews continued the pre-1918 tradition of attending state schools, which had been the principal tool of Germanisation and Magyarisation.<sup>42</sup> The Jews in Czechoslovakia did not feel compelled to send their children to exclusively Jewish schools, regardless of the extent to which they considered their nationality Jewish. We can agree here with Aharon Rabinowicz, who states that Jews felt themselves free to choose the education they considered best.<sup>43</sup>

Although the major concern of the Zionist politicians was the cultivation of national life built on minority politics, they also acted as protectors of the Jewish population in Czechoslovakia and fought for equal rights for the Jews. One of the key issues addressed by Jewish politicians was the problem of thousands of stateless inhabitants in the east of the republic, most of whom were Jews formerly living in Galicia and Russia.<sup>44</sup> The reform of the citizenship law was initiated by the Jewish Party's representatives and the Czechoslovak Social Democratic deputies at the turn of 1929–1930. The amended citizenship code defined 'naturalisation' (citizenship) as a legitimate right claimed by former citizens of Austria, Hungary, or Germany who had been residing on Czechoslovak territory at least since 28 October 1918, when the Czechoslovak republic was proclaimed by the National Council.<sup>45</sup> The equal status of Jewish citizens was legally guaranteed in Czechoslovakia, and in terms of antisemitism the interwar period represented a relatively quiescent period, with only occasional upheavals connected usually with the charged social atmosphere and clashes between the state and its largest minorities, the Germans and the Hungarians. But at the beginning of 1930s, the changes in the international political scene, the intensifying Nazi pressure, and the increasingly irredentist tendencies of the German minority had serious implications for Czechoslovakia and the position of its national minorities. The protective measures of the state taken against the irredentism of the German minority and the tensions among national groups created an unfavourable situation also for the Jews.<sup>46</sup> As early as at the beginning of 1930 Jewish politicians faced attempts at the introduction of a *numerus clausus* at the universities. Students' demonstrations and riots for the implementation of a Jewish quota took place primarily in Prague and Brno, where the students of both Czech and German universities started negotiations on the introduction of the *numerus clausus*. The unrest was of an antisemitic character and several Jewish students were physically attacked.<sup>47</sup> The Zionist students' organisations contacted the Jewish Party's deputies to intervene in this affair at the Ministry of Education, and the Associations of Zionist Academics appealed to the rectors of the universities to take appropriate measures so that Jewish students might go on studying without interruption. Some non-Jewish students' organisations also declared their protests against the *numerus clausus*.<sup>48</sup> Jewish deputies Ludvík Singer and Julius Reisz addressed this issue in parliament in February 1930 and contacted the minister of education to guarantee Jews free entrance to Czechoslovak universities. The *numerus clausus* was not introduced into Czechoslovakian law until the collapse of the republic after the Munich Agreement of September 1938. Street unrest directed against Jews, however, appeared from time to time, for example at the end of 1934 when the university insignia of the Prague German University were handed over ("passed on") to the Charles University.

The population in the east of the republic was more affected by the economic crisis since the unemployment rate was higher there, industry weaker, and traders could withstand the impact of the economic crisis much less effectively. The particular difficulty for the Jews was the tax burden and its levying. In the first half of the 1930s the Jewish deputies asked the government to take note of the situation and give state support for Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia to overcome the economic crisis and asked also for more liberal proceedings of the tax offices.<sup>49</sup> An important cause of the miserable economic situation of the Slovak and Subcarpathian Jews was the prolonged period of turmoil and military intervention in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. This turbulent period brought destitution and hardship to the majority of Slovak Jewry. Only in 1920 did the Czechoslovak army restore order in the province and the situation was gradually consolidated.<sup>50</sup> The economic crisis seriously aggravated the situation of both Jews and Gentiles in the poorest regions of the republic, the Subcarpathian countryside. In 1933 a large part of the Subcarpathian inhabitants were in fact threatened by famine.<sup>51</sup> It was not only the government that Jewish politicians turned to for help. Various Zionist organisations were trying to help Subcarpathian Jews by establishing foundations and endowments for their material support (an important organisation was, for instance, the Aid Committee of Jewish Women for Subcarpathian Ruthenia). But the most effective work for the benefit of Subcarpathian Jews was carried out by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.<sup>52</sup>

The deteriorating economic situation, especially in the eastern sector of the republic, did bring about incidents of discrimination against the Jews, which were resisted by the Jewish organisations. The discrimination appeared primarily in the economic sphere,<sup>53</sup> where there was a tendency to get rid of Jewish competition by attempting to eliminate the Jews from trades (license withdrawals in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia), or to introduce the 'Law on Compulsory Sunday Rest' (forcing businesses to remain closed on Sundays). There was also a general trend to debar Jews from work in the state administration, to take state-protection measures against foreign (predominantly Jewish) students entering Czechoslovak universities, or the above-mentioned state authorities' unwillingness to grant citizenship to Jewish inhabitants in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia. All these phenomena were certainly related to the stereotypical view of the Jews as a German (Hungarian) and potentially irredentist element threatening Czechoslovak integrity.<sup>54</sup> The deputy Ludvík Singer referred to this in January 1931:

Jews are often censured for their permanent adherence to German. It is a difficult problem. When a young Jewish man graduates from a Czech school, he cannot find a position in the state authorities, the Czech banks or businesses, but he can find a position in German finance houses and companies. Better propaganda for eliminating the Jews' affiliation with German culture would be to accept Jews in state and provincial authorities and the like.<sup>55</sup>

The developments in Germany and its nationalist and separatist campaign in the Bohemian borderland stirred up tensions in Czechoslovak society. The attacks against Jews as 'Germanisers' appeared largely in the Czech press. The Jewish Party's leaders frequently turned to the state authorities to intervene in cases when antisemitism was promoted in the press. For instance, in September 1934 the Jewish Party successfully intervened against antisemitic rhetoric in Moravian newspapers, and the import of some antisemitic newspapers and magazines to Czechoslovakia from Nazi Germany.<sup>56</sup> In June 1934 the deputy Angelo Goldstein showed an antisemitic leaflet on the deluge of the five thousand Jewish immigrants that had settled in Czechoslovakia since 1918 to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Ministry consequently impounded the leaflets that were being distributed in the region around Moravská Ostrava.<sup>57</sup>

The worsening of the economic situation at the beginning of the 1930s resulted in a sharpening of social conflicts and the re-emergence of ritual superstitions. The first case of a 'ritual affair' appeared in Subcarpathian Ruthenia in September 1930 when two Subcarpathian Jews were accused of using Christians' blood for ritual purposes. The *Political Reichskommission* of the Jewish Party immediately intervened at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The information quickly spread in both the Czechoslovak and foreign press, and stirred up considerable unrest in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The affair was eventually disproved and the prosecution stopped (so were the few other affairs of this kind that appeared in Ruthenia later), but the fact that a trial of this kind was opened constituted a serious warning for the Jewish population. It reflected the growth of antisemitism among the population of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, who at that time were experiencing the serious effects of the economic crisis and employed religious antisemitic prejudices in order to attack the group of people who were seen as both economic and national oppressors.



## STRATEGIES: ELECTIONEERING AND ALLIES

The minority rights in the Treaty of Saint Germain were incorporated in the Czechoslovak Constitution of 1920, which recognised Jews as a national minority. However, the Constitution lacked a definition of ‘minority’, as did the international codification of minority rights. Minority rights then might have been interpreted as guarantees of the human and civil rights of an individual rather than the rights of a collective minority. The fact that rights of national minorities as such were not defined complicated the claims for collective rights and decreased the possibility of establishing minority representations. But there was a possibility of enforcing additional legal measures important for minorities via parliament.<sup>58</sup> The Jewish national leaders therefore considered it their primary task to participate actively in the legislative process to uphold Jewish rights and enforce legal measures for the fulfilment of their national programme. The primary aim of achieving parliamentary representation was declared after the first participation of the Jewish Party in the elections of 1920. The programme of the *Associated Jewish Parties* included five general planks; the others reflected the local interests and needs of particular districts. The general stipulations called for the unity of ‘nationally conscious’ Jews, declared the will of the Jews to co-operate in the democratic building up of legislation and administration, required compliance of the equality of Jews in all sectors of social and economic life, guarantees of the undisturbed practice of Judaism, and the state’s support for Jewish cultural institutions and welfare.<sup>59</sup> It was characteristic of the Jewish Party’s political programme that its principal points were put in very general terms so as to attract as many Jews from the various social strata as possible.

But the Jewish Party did not have an easy time during the election campaign. Its major opponents were the assimilationists, the Orthodox and the socialists. The Czech–Jewish assimilationists carried out their campaign primarily in the Bohemian countryside and designated the national Jews as ‘treasonous Germanisers’, whereas the promoters of German assimilation in large cities like Prague and Brno appealed to Jews ‘raised in German culture’ with the assertion that voting ‘in the Jewish way’ would draw them back into the ghetto.<sup>60</sup> In Slovakia Jewish nationalists faced a massive campaign by the Hungarian assimilants.<sup>61</sup> But even the Jewish national camp itself suffered from disunity. As early as January 1920 the Jewish National Council lost the support of the Zionist social democratic party Poale Zion, which resigned from the Council and agitated for leftist parties. Poale Zion thus clearly showed that it was much closer to socialism than Zionism in the period immediately preceding the elections.<sup>62</sup>

Although the Associated Jewish Parties polled almost eighty thousand Jewish votes (that is, over thirty percent of the eligible Jewish votes), they did not achieve a single mandate in 1920. This was the result of the election law directed against minority representation which stipulated that political parties which in one electoral district did not achieve at least twenty thousand votes or the quorum (that is, the total of all cast votes in the district divided by the number of mandates) were ineligible for the first round.<sup>63</sup> Since the proportion of Jewish voters in the Czech lands was desperately low as far as achieving the quorum was concerned, the political leaders set their hopes on the numerous Jewish communities residing in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia to win parliamentary representation. However, this strategy was very difficult to carry out. The Slovak authorities tolerated antisemitism (for example, in the press) and obviously favoured the Zionists’ opponents – the Orthodox, who led a campaign against the Jewish national list in the Slovak Jewish communities, and recommended to Jews to vote for government parties.<sup>64</sup> The Slovak leadership was certainly not interested in any form of separatism, including the Zionist variety. Moreover, they perceived Zionism as an offshoot of Hungarian irredentism, as contemporary reports show very well. In one of the pre-election reports by the district chief in Hlohovec (from October 1925), a Zionist candidate, is described in the following way:

Dr Eisler is not an excellent speaker and has not learned Slovak well yet. But he is the chairman of the Jewish scouts’ organisation and intensively occupies himself with Zionism. These young scouts speak mainly Hungarian and German amongst themselves. Under the veil of Zionism they keep the Hungarian spirit and culture. The Orthodox Jews recognise the government’s interests and also the danger that the Zionists represent as they deepen the chasm between Jews and the local population.<sup>65</sup>

Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where the Jewish population lived in large numbers and retained their religious and national distinctiveness, seemed to have more potential. Poverty and economic hardship could make Zionist ideas attractive to many Subcarpathian Jews, who respected Jewish traditions, and largely knew Hebrew, and among whom Hungarian assimilation was not too pronounced. However, the profound differences in social structure, traditional way of life, and religious Orthodoxy, as well as the political immaturity of Subcarpathian Jews, made the success of Jewish national politics in Subcarpathian

Ruthenia rather problematic as well. Subcarpathian Ruthenia was an unexplored territory, inhabited by a large but politically still not crystallised Jewish population. The Jewish National Council endeavoured to co-operate with the Subcarpathian communities and incorporate them into the Jewish National Council in order to promote the impression that there was a united call for minority rights among the Jews of Czechoslovakia. But the first attempt at the unification of the Jews on a national basis (a Subcarpathian branch of the Associated Jewish Parties was set up at the beginning of 1921) failed after six months, one of the obvious reasons being a lack of experience on the part of the Czech Zionists. They founded the Associated Jewish Parties as a purely electoral political organisation with the aim of achieving parliamentary representation. However, in August 1921 the Associated Parties of Subcarpathian Ruthenia declared their secession from the Prague Jewish National Council and their transformation into the Jewish Conservative Party (*Židovská konzervativní strana*). It was particularly symptomatic that the secession was not the act of local Orthodox authorities but came on the initiative of Markus Ungar, a former deputy of the Jewish Council in Prague. As he explained, the purely electoral purposes of the Associated Parties had proved to be insufficient and therefore the scope of the Jewish Conservative Party's work was extended to represent Subcarpathian Jews and defend their rights in political, economic, and social respects (religious and cultural issues did not fall within the Party's scope) in the period between elections. The word 'conservative' was used to indicate that the party represented 'more than ninety percent of Subcarpathian Jews whose majority was conservative (Orthodox)'.<sup>66</sup>

The Jewish National Council in Prague sent complaints against Ungar to the Subcarpathian authorities accusing him of working for personal profit. When they did not receive an appropriate hearing they did not hesitate to accuse the provincial administration of corruption and favouring the Zionists' political opponents. In November 1921 the *Jewish News*, weekly of the Prague Jewish National Council, published on the front page the article 'The Rule of Darkness' scandalising the Subcarpathian authorities to the extent that the Subcarpathian vice-governor initiated an investigation of its content and the article had to be revised.<sup>67</sup> Such affairs certainly did not increase the popularity of the Jewish nationalists in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The conservative camp used the opportunity to discredit the Zionists in the press.<sup>68</sup> A month later the Zionists presented their cause to the prime minister during his visit to Subcarpathian Ruthenia, and complained about the local administration saying it was 'unlawful' and 'subversive'.<sup>69</sup> The Zionists' asking the state authorities to intervene on their behalf aroused displeasure both in Subcarpathian Ruthenia and in Prague. In January 1922 Moric Juszkovicz, the head of the Užhorod Zionist Organisation, asked the Presidential Bureau in Prague to ban the Jewish Conservative Party for its support of pro-Hungarian irredentism. Juszkovicz, however, received only a recommendation that the Jewish parties should compete between themselves and not demand outside intervention. Moreover, the Prague Presidential Bureau noted that Ungar's Party repeatedly demonstrated a devotion and loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic.<sup>70</sup> Ungar in response accused the Council of interfering in the affairs of Subcarpathian Jewry and supporting disloyal (Hungarian) elements.<sup>71</sup> The issue of Hungarian irredentism was a popular political tool in Ruthenia, as well as in Slovakia (similarly to the pro-German issue in the west). In fact, many leaders on all sides of the Jewish political spectrum were Hungarian-speaking. In this context it is particularly ironic that the press organ of the Jewish Conservative Party was the Hungarian-language *Déli Újság*, which in November 1921 published an article about the Conservative Party that was accompanied by a parallel Czech translation. However, the texts differed in one point – the Czech version included a remark on the former chauvinistic Hungarian regime, while the Hungarian text expressed the good will of conservative Jews to struggle along with the Hungarian Jews for the recognition of the Hungarian language in the state administration.<sup>72</sup> The ideological and political antagonism, as well as the personal ambitions of the Jewish leaders did not offer much hope that united political action which would bring a parliamentary seat was possible in Subcarpathian Ruthenia.

The reason for the early split in Subcarpathian Jewry seemed to be a natural consequence of the Prague Zionists' misunderstanding of the different setting and character of the province's Jews. Although the Conservative Party's leaders certainly overestimated the support they had among Jews, claiming that they represented ninety percent of Subcarpathian Jews, who were conservative in their views,<sup>73</sup> Ungar and his colleagues definitely played on the right string by criticizing the Prague Jewish National Council's programme of minority rights, parliamentary representation, and transformation of religious congregations to Jewish national communities. Subcarpathian Jews needed, much more than minority status, social and economic aid and support. Moreover, all the Subcarpathian political parties endeavoured to implement the province's autonomy as promised in the Czechoslovak Constitution, and thus a centrist party like the Associated Jewish Parties, directed from Prague, might stir up tensions

between Jews and the Ruthenian population.<sup>74</sup> A precondition of electoral success in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was a simple and comprehensible ideology and programme, which would primarily promise an improvement of the social-economic situation and living standards. The problems of national-cultural orientation and constitutional establishment of the state, which the intelligentsia discussed, were less interesting to the voters.

As the major opponent of the Jewish nationalists in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia the Orthodox sought to prevent them from achieving parliamentary representation and founded its own electoral party in October 1925, less than a month before the elections. The Jewish Economic Party (*Jüdische Wirtschaftspartei*) was founded on the initiative of the Autonomous Orthodox Bureau in Bratislava and its head, Rabbi Koloman Weber.<sup>75</sup> The Economic Party had the support of the leading personalities of the Orthodox congregations, who could influence Orthodox Jews, thus the Jewish Economic Party achieved maximum support. The Party's list in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was headed, as one might guess, by the founder of the Jewish Conservative Party of Orthodox Jews, Markus Ungar.<sup>76</sup> The Party's programme included demands for the observance of the Jewish rights guaranteed by the Constitution, the support of the economic, cultural, and social interests of the Jews, and respect for the autonomy of Jewish congregations, and its primary goal was to reject 'Jewish national minority claims of a political character'.<sup>77</sup> The Jewish Economic Party did not promote a Jewish economic programme. It was founded only to prevent the Jewish national leaders from achieving parliamentary mandates, and to limit their influence in Slovakia. The Orthodox feared that the Zionists could achieve a strong position in the Jewish congregations and thus undermine the status of the Autonomous Orthodox Bureau in Bratislava, and also that their victory might arouse anti-Jewish excesses.<sup>78</sup>

The Jewish Economic Party relied upon the expression of loyalty to the state and devotion to the government.<sup>79</sup> The success of these tactics was shown by the letter that the Minister for Slovakia sent to the Prague Ministry for Internal Affairs: 'According to my information the Jewish Economic Party's leadership is loyal to the government and I recommend that at tomorrow's meeting of the Slovak district chiefs we might start thinking whether, and to what extent, the activities of the Party should be supported.'<sup>80</sup> Before the Economic Party was founded the representatives of the Orthodox in Slovakia (as well as a delegation of Mukačevo Jews) led negotiations with Prague government officials on appropriate election tactics in the forthcoming elections. In order to limit the votes for the Zionists the Orthodox in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia offered co-operation to the Agrarian Party as the strongest party in the government. But the Agrarian Party leadership (well known for its antisemitism) refused to place a Jewish candidate on the electoral list. Instead they offered the Jews support in founding a new Jewish pro-Agrarian party. The support that the Orthodox received from the Agrarians constituted a sum of 100,000 Czechoslovak crowns. When Ungar learned about the scandalous circumstances of the Economic Party's origin he decided to leave the Orthodox camp and come back to the Jewish national movement.<sup>81</sup> The Jewish Economic Party's representatives in Subcarpathian Ruthenia consisted almost exclusively of prominent religious personalities (for instance, the Munkaczer rebbe Hayyim Eleazar Shapira, the chief rabbi of Moldava Mozes Tannenbaum, and the chief rabbi of Hundsorf Eugen Horowitz).<sup>82</sup> The election campaign of the Jewish Economic Party in Subcarpathian Ruthenia conformed with the purpose of its foundation. Its activities focused largely on criticism of the Zionists, the Party's programme consisted primarily of proclamations of loyalty to the government (namely the Agrarian Party), and included some demands that the Jewish Party also had in its programme.<sup>83</sup> The Orthodox Jews attacked the Zionists by warning the Jewish public that the Zionists were planning to play an opposition role in the parliament, which might bring about a difficult situation for the Jews. The Orthodox emphasised that the Economic Party supported the government, that is, the power from which Jews could obtain support and which did not favour any 'national and minority' selection. The Orthodox leaders rejected Zionism as nationalism, which therefore could not contribute to peaceful coexistence in Czechoslovakia.<sup>84</sup>

The Jewish Party polled almost a hundred thousand votes, which constituted a gain of almost twenty thousand as against the elections of 1920 but due to the Jewish Economic Party it did not reach the quorum. The head of the Jewish Party, Emil Margulies, put on trial the leaders of the Autonomous Orthodox Bureau, rabbis Koloman Weber and Hirschler, and accused them of corruption.<sup>85</sup> Although the Jewish Party scored a moral victory at the trial, it did not increase the popularity of the Zionists in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The elections also showed that Jewish nationalists could not achieve the necessary block of votes in the eastern part of the republic. But the election returns from Bohemia and Moravia were more encouraging. There the Jewish Party achieved higher support in every constituency than in 1920 (growth of three thousand in Bohemia, and four thousand in Moravia).<sup>86</sup> That is why, in the years following the elections of 1925, Jewish national politicians sought a suitable means

which would bring them electoral success and a parliamentary mandate. The next parliamentary elections of 1929 were to prove whether this objective was realistic in Czechoslovakia.

In the course of the following year the situation for the Zionists deteriorated in the eastern regions of the republic. The Jewish nationalists had to fight not only the outside opposition (the Orthodox and Hungarian assimilation) but also an internal crisis. In March 1928 at the common convention of the Jewish Party of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia in Košice a unified Jewish Party organisation for both regions was established. The party retained the name 'Jewish Party' but in its 'renewed programme' it abandoned the Zionist principle of minority politics. The Slovak Jewish national leaders thus again intended to demonstrate their loyalty to the government and show that the situation in Czechoslovakia was so consolidated that Jews did not need to carry out minority politics.<sup>87</sup> The reformed Jewish Party constituted a de facto new party and worked virtually independently of the Zionist headquarters in Moravská Ostrava. The spiritual father of the new Jewish Party of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia was its chairman, Julius Reisz, an ambitious Zionist, lawyer and member of the Bratislava Municipal Council. Reisz sought to unite all the Slovak and Subcarpathian Jewish camps in the new party, and finally achieve parliamentary representation. He realised that in order to achieve this objective he had to win the support of Orthodox circles.<sup>88</sup> Reisz started negotiations with the Orthodox and came to an agreement with the Jewish Economic Party for the elections to the Provincial Diet. The Zionists accused Reisz of attempting to divert Jewish voters from national principles and of collaborating with the Orthodox under the pretext of unity. Therefore the Zionist Territorial Federation refused any form of support to Reisz's Jewish Party list and gave their Zionist adherents in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia freedom to vote as they wished.<sup>89</sup>

In this situation it was important for Zionist politicians to retain Jewish national principles and stick to minority politics. Since the Jewish electorate of the Czech lands was not large enough to achieve the quorum unless the Jewish Party co-operated with another political force, the Zionist leaders decided to find an ally and test this strategy in the elections to the Provincial Diets in December 1928. The Zionists achieved the largest percentage of support within the Jewish communities in Moravia and therefore the Jewish politicians planned to co-operate with the Polish minority parties in the Northern Moravian constituency (the constituency of Moravská Ostrava/Mährish Ostrau). The reason was simple; such co-operation helped both sides to overcome the unfavourable electoral laws and increased their chances of getting into parliament. Both the Polish and Jewish sides pointed out that the coalition constituted purely 'technical electoral co-operation' and would not have implications for the Parties' programmes or post-election action.<sup>90</sup> A letter sent to all the Jewish Party's trustees by the Central Zionist Electoral Commission in November 1928 declared:

The Moravská Ostrava constituency has to fulfill the task which Subcarpathian Ruthenia so far could not accomplish, and we are convinced that we will fulfill this difficult but rewarding task by virtue of our political maturity and disciplined electorate.<sup>91</sup>

Although the common Polish–Jewish list in the elections to the Provincial Diets (Electoral Union of the Polish People's Party and the Jewish Party – *Wahlgemeinschaft des Polski Związek Ludowy und der Jüdischen Partei*)<sup>92</sup> failed to win a mandate because the quorum (the minimal number of votes necessary for a Party to be eligible for the first round) was higher in the elections to the Provincial Diets, it received enough votes to secure parliamentary seats. Reisz's reformed Jewish Party supported by the Orthodox (Electoral Union of the Jewish Party and the Jewish Economic Party) received enough votes to win a mandate in the Slovakian Diet but the victory was not impressive and the alliance with the Orthodox was fragile, so negotiations between Reisz's camp and the Jewish Party were started soon.<sup>93</sup> The leadership of the Jewish Party (primarily chairman Margulies and a few other radical Zionists) took a strict stance concerning the Slovak 'heretics' and stood up for the necessity of purifying Zionist politics. For Margulies the elections to the Provincial Diets, before which the split in the Slovak Zionist Organisation appeared, were to show that the Zionists would not abandon their principles and never support any concessions to the Orthodox.<sup>94</sup> In a letter to the Zionist Executive (from late December 1928) the Jewish Party's chairman wrote:

If we did not have the courage to exclude the people, who openly opposed our decisions and explained that they had discarded the national ballast, allied with our enemies, from the Zionist Organisation, then our organisation has proven not to have any moral authority and power. One must have courage for such an act, even if it is revolutionary. In normal times it is sufficient to proceed via arbitration. In the case of revolution, martial law is unavoidable.<sup>95</sup>

The superiority of the Zionists in the Party was reconfirmed. But Margulies's radical position was isolated and to avoid a further division of the Zionist organisation and the Jewish Party the Slovak 'renegades' were not expelled. The Jewish Party was reunited on a Zionist basis, the Slovak Zionists had to sign a resolution which confirmed that the interior politics of the republic constituted part of the Zionist organisation's work and therefore Zionists' political activities were subordinated to the *Political Reichskommission* of the Zionist Organisation.<sup>96</sup> In the parliamentary elections of October 1929 the Electoral Union of the Polish and Jewish Parties achieved the quorum and brought two parliamentary seats for the Jewish and Polish camps.

By the end of the Jewish Party's first parliamentary period, the Jewish nationalists had to search for a new political ally. The reform of the election laws in 1935 raised the quorum from 20,000 to 25,000 votes in one constituency and the required minimum number of votes for the ticket in the republic was set at 125,000. Although Jewish politicians maintained close co-operation with the Polish deputies, who also supported the coalition parties in the parliament, the mid-1930s was a period of deteriorating relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia and this made further electoral co-operation with the Jewish and Polish political camps inappropriate in the eyes of the Jewish leaders. At times the Czech press pointed to the previous Jewish collaboration with the pro-Warsaw Poles.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, before the parliamentary elections of 1935 the Polish minority parties entered into the so-called Autonomous Block of Slovak and Ruthenian parties.<sup>98</sup>

The Zionist leaders agreed that it was necessary to retain the Jewish Party's parliamentary representation. Chairman Margulies stated at the congress of the Jewish Party in January 1935 that '[w]e emphasise that in 1935 elections to the National Assembly will be held. It is important that the Jewish Party has its deputies, so the Jewish Party must win. We must retain what we have been building for eighteen years, because to lose it would be worse than never to have won.'<sup>99</sup> The central question of allies became the subject of controversy in the Party's leadership. At the beginning of 1935, negotiations were held in Prague between the leadership of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party and some Jewish Party leaders,<sup>100</sup> which resulted in an agreement on a common list of candidates for the Social Democratic and the Jewish Party. According to this agreement the Social Democratic Party was to put two Jewish candidates on its list of candidates and secure two deputies for the Jewish Party,<sup>101</sup> who would enter the parliamentary faction of the Social Democrats. The Jewish politicians once again emphasised that electoral co-operation with another political party did not prevent them from independent action and from keeping their programmatic aims after the elections. They explained that the Jewish Party and Social Democracy were very close, because they both fought against the reactionary and fascist forces.<sup>102</sup>

Yet this strategy met with the strong ideological opposition of the Jewish Party's chairman Margulies and several other radical Zionists. Margulies rejected the open collaboration of the Jewish Party with a political force that promoted a concrete political ideology. Instead he suggested co-operating with the Traders' Party. Margulies insisted that the Jewish Party should stand for elections alone or at least under its own name. Joining forces with the Social Democratic Party meant that the Jews would not receive their mandates on their own, but under the aegis of a party representing a specific political ideology. However, at the meeting of the Jewish Party's presidium in April 1935 in Moravská Ostrava his proposal was rejected as too risky. The majority of the Party's leadership agreed with the deputy-chairman Arnošt Frischer (a Zionist from Moravská Ostrava), who, pointing out the difficult international circumstances and the complex situation in Czechoslovakia, asserted that the electoral agreement with the Social Democrats was the best available option. In the subsequent long discussion deputy Angelo Goldstein stressed that the Social Democratic Party enabled the Jewish deputies to participate in parliamentary committees and deputy Reisz stated that although he was not particularly enthusiastic about the agreement, it could bring success and he would support it. Subsequently, Margulies left the meeting and Arnošt Frischer was elected the Party's chairman.<sup>103</sup> We can assume that there were deeper issues involved in Margulies' isolation. As already mentioned, Margulies was increasingly seen as an uncomfortable leader because he spoke German, and because his uncompromising radical stances on Zionist principles were perceived as problematic in the complex situation of the 1930s. Primarily the deputy Reisz could not forget Margulies's radical opinion about his transformation of the Jewish Party of Slovakia and the politics of purification that Margulies sought to implement afterwards. Reisz complained, 'the Party's leadership intentionally slighted him and indirectly showed him its disfavour'.<sup>104</sup> On the whole, however, the discrimination of Jews in neighbouring countries brought psychological despair to the Jews in Czechoslovakia, and a tendency towards accommodation and compromise grew stronger. Therefore, the Jewish Party found it comfortable to make an alliance with the Social Democrats, who struggled with rightist opponents, as

did the Jews. In the Zionists' view the Social Democrats fought against discrimination of all kinds, displayed an understanding of minority issues, and supported their Jewish colleagues in the enforcement of their rights. The common plank of the Jewish and Social Democratic programmes was aid for the poorest layers of society, particularly those struck by the economic depression. Both parties stood in opposition to the strongest Czech party, the Agrarians, and their corrupt methods.

## CONCLUSION

The Jewish Party's political activity in interwar Czechoslovakia constituted part of the minorities' endeavours to establish a multifaceted national life in the new states of East Central Europe and to implement the rights guaranteed to national minorities by international law. Within the distinctively heterogeneous Jewish communities of Czechoslovakia, it was the Zionist camp which represented the most active political force after the First World War and adopted the role of the guardian and advocate of Jewish rights and interests. Although Czechoslovakia was not a fertile ground for the ideas of modern Jewish nationalism, given the extent of acculturation among the Jews of the historical lands (and partly also Slovakia) and the strong Orthodoxy in the east of the republic, Zionist politicians succeeded in obtaining considerable support in the interwar years. However, the support of the Jewish Party was far from absolute and the Zionist representatives in its leadership underwent a period of difficult struggles before they could enter parliament in 1929. The support of the Jewish Party may have largely stemmed from the specific situation in Czechoslovakia, where the tensions among the national camps created a favourable environment for a united Jewish organisation, which sought to keep its neutral position in the national and political clashes in Czechoslovakia and focused exclusively on the safeguarding of Jewish rights. The Zionist politicians conformed to the spirit of the time, promoting a democratic political system and Wilsonian principles. The Zionists' path to political participation was full of obstacles, from the unfavourable election laws to the corrupt state authorities and the hostile Orthodox circles in the east of the republic. The Jewish parliamentary deputies then proved that they were able to support the interests of all Jews, not only those of the Zionists.

One of the most important characteristics of Jewish national politics in Czechoslovakia was its relative dogmatism. Some Zionists associated with radical Zionism and revisionist Zionist politicians questioned the very notion of diaspora politics (*Landespolitik*) from the beginning and saw the Jewish Party as disrupting their work and causing dangerous splits. They were also very uncompromising and insisted on the Zionist principles of national minority politics, often to the detriment of broader action or coalition. The choice of electoral allies was a very important issue for Jewish politicians. The co-operation of the Jewish Party and the Czechoslovak Social Democrats indicated a certain shift in the Jewish political camp. In the mid-1930s the Jewish Party of Czechoslovakia established its place in the political spectrum. Although it still operated independently and did not openly promote any rightist, leftist, or centrist ideology and claimed that it was a national minority party that sought to unite Jews on a national basis, it found itself very close to the Social Democrats.

Via parliamentary politics the Jewish Party was given the opportunity to fight effectively for Jewish minority rights. The 1930s brought dramatic changes to the international scene and substantially shaped the activities of Jewish politicians. Apart from the growth of antisemitism, Jewish national leaders had to face the impact of the Great Depression, rising refugee flows, and ideological controversies within the Party. The Jewish national politicians were, however, less successful with their policy of nation building, which sought to raise national consciousness. This was due to a general unwillingness on the part of the state to make concessions to national minorities and also to the lack of an audience for such a programme in Czechoslovakia. The Zionists faced insurmountable obstacles in trying to win support for Jewish minority politics among the acculturated and socially integrated Jews of the Czech lands, the Hungarian-speaking and largely Orthodox Jews of Slovakia, and the numerous, compact and traditionally Orthodox Jewish settlements of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. We can see here the gap between the Zionists' political rhetoric and Czechoslovak reality. The Zionists' national-revival programme and slogans could hardly be implemented since the Jewish population did not show any particular interest. A few examples have been mentioned – the Hebrew school system drew flocks of students only in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia but the great majority of Czechoslovak Jews declared Czech and Slovak as their mother tongue. In general, the ever-increasing inroads of Czech and Slovak in Jewish public and private life and the strong acculturating tendencies among the youth corresponded to the larger Central and East European trend.

Progressive acculturation did not necessarily preclude the acceptance of Jewish politics. Although acculturation was a major social process, the Jewish Party did make a profound impression upon the

Jewish population; not perhaps as a vital force of Jewish nationalism but rather as an effective spokesman for the rights and interests of the Jewish population in a setting increasingly affected by national conflicts and a complex international situation, as well as economic crisis. Although Jewish political organisations were not deeply rooted in Jewish life and did not succeed in mobilising overwhelming support, they did achieve considerable respect for their tireless efforts for the betterment of the life of Jewish population in Czechoslovakia.

<sup>1</sup> My gratitude goes to the American Jewish Committee, which supported my research through the CEU Jewish Studies Research Support Grant by the American Jewish Committee.

<sup>2</sup> Paula E. Hyman, 'Was There a 'Jewish Politics' in Western and Central Europe?', in *The Quest for Utopia: Jewish Political Ideas and Institutions Throughout the Ages*, ed. Zvi Gittelman (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, 'Jewish Politics in Interwar Poland: An Overview', in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Yehuda Reinharz, and Chone Shmeruk (London: Brandeis University Press, 1989), pp. 16–17.

<sup>4</sup> A possible exception was the former Hungarian province of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where a largely poor, Yiddish speaking and Orthodox Jewish population lived in large numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Unlike Bohemia, in most Moravian towns and cities high-school and university students established Zionist societies long before 1918. Oskar K. Rabinowicz, 'Czechoslovak Zionism', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> The languages of everyday communication among Slovakian Jews were Hungarian, German, and Yiddish. Yiddish survived primarily in the small towns of Eastern Slovakia, where the Jewish communities very much resembled those of neighbouring Galicia. E. Nižňanský, *Židovská komunita na Slovensku medzi československou parlamentnou demokraciou a slovenským štátom v stredoEurópskom kontexte* [The Jewish community in Slovakia between Czechoslovak parliamentary democracy and the Slovak state in the Central European context] (Prešov: Universum, 1999), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 134. In the Czech lands Orthodoxy was significantly weaker than in Austria or Hungary. The reasons for this were not only the rapid progress of assimilation and secularisation but also the fact that the contacts of Bohemian Jewry with the Eastern Orthodox world were not much pronounced and, by comparison with Vienna, there was no similar mass immigration from North-Eastern Hungary and Galicia in the nineteenth century. See William O. McCagg, *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 202.

<sup>8</sup> The distinctiveness of Jews was felt more in North-Eastern Slovakia, where the concentration of Jews was higher and increased after the emigration flows from Russian Poland at the end of the nineteenth century. Livia Rothkirchen, 'Slovakia: I, 1848–1918', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), pp. 76–77.

<sup>9</sup> The strength of Hungarian Jewish assimilation made the fight for Zionist ideas almost impossible: 'the struggle of Hungarian assimilationism against Zionism was fought with a bitterness that probably surpassed that found in any other land. The Hungarian assimilationists were extremely strong and influential, particularly in high circles, with the result that the government was greatly influenced by their wishes. Thus, for instance, the statute of the Hungarian Zionist Organization had not been approved by the authorities for twenty-four years', Rabinowicz, 'Czechoslovak Zionism', p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> The first Zionist associations appeared only after the First World War: 'The Hebrew-Speaking Union', Ha Tehiyah, Kadimah, the Mizrachi, etc. See A. Sole, 'Subcarpathian Ruthenia: 1918–1938', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, Vol. 1, p. 141.

<sup>11</sup> Rabinowicz, 'Czechoslovak Zionism', p. 25

<sup>12</sup> Aharon M. Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Minority', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, Vol. 1, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> There were five delegates from the Zionist District Federation for Bohemia, another five for Poale Zion, and three from Moravia. Among the representatives from the Bohemian Zionists organisation there were Ludvík Singer (head of the Council), Norbert Adler, and writer Max Brod, who together later represented Czech Jews in Paris. See *Židovské zprávy* (7 November 1918), p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Also a few Prague Jewish Orthodox associations entered the Council, for example, the Orthodox society *Sinaj* (Zion) and *Spolek synagogy* (Synagogue Society). *Židovské zprávy* (25 November 1918), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> A. M. Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Party', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, Vol. 2, pp. 258–60.

<sup>16</sup> The head of its Bratislava bureau, Emil Waldstein, was appointed an intermediary in Jewish affairs at the Ministry for Slovakia. Livia Rothkirchen, 'Slovakia: II, 1918–1938', in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), pp. 89–90.

<sup>17</sup> *Židovské zprávy* 4 (11 December 1918).

<sup>18</sup> The three delegates were Ludvík Singer, Karel Fischel, and Max Brod. In the memorandum they emphasised each nation's right to self-determination, the Balfour Declaration, which recognised Jews as a nation and guaranteed their national homeland in Palestine, the support of Zionism by President Wilson and several European governments, and a justified claim of Jews living in the diaspora to minority rights. For the text of the memorandum see *Židovské zprávy* (7 November 1918), pp. 3–6.

<sup>19</sup> Article 10 laid down that the Jewish communities of Poland were entitled to establish 'educational committees', which would receive a proportionate share of public funds. Article 11 guaranteed that the Jewish Sabbath was to be respected and particularly not to be employed as a weapon against the Jews themselves. See *The Jew in the Modern World. A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Yehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 437–38.

<sup>20</sup> Rabinowicz quotes a report on Beneš's appointment with Nahum Sokolow (chairman of the Jewish Delegations), during which Beneš described the Jewish articles as 'a sort of "yellow badge" of which only Poland and Romania were deserving'. Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Minority', p. 175.

<sup>21</sup> The meeting with Masaryk did not even take place because of the difficulties created by the Polish–Czechoslovak dispute over the nationally mixed border in the Těšín region. Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Minority', p. 321.

<sup>22</sup> *Židovské zprávy* (1 March 1920), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Landespolitik* had been a subject of dispute among Zionists prior to the First World War. It was generally accepted that Zionists must take an interest in the politics of the diaspora country (for example, in the struggle for the recognition of Jewish nationality and their right to self-determination) because it was a necessary precondition for the realisation of Zionist ideas. However, there was no clear programme for *Landespolitik* and Zionists remained largely uncommitted politically.

<sup>24</sup> See the report from the Jewish protest meeting in the Jewish Town Hall of Prague in April 1933. Prague, *Státní ústřední archiv Praha* (State Central Archives Prague, hereafter SÚA Prague), collection: Prezidium Ministerstva vnitra [Presidium of the Ministry for Internal Affairs], file: 225-980-8, X/Ž/6/9. Other protests followed in Prague, Brno, and Bratislava.



<sup>25</sup> See the police report on the 'Campaign for the re-orientation of Jews' carried out by the Central Zionist Federation in Moravská Ostrava, which was to promote a Czech linguistic and cultural orientation among the Jews. *Zemský archiv Opava* (Regional Archives Opava, hereafter ZA Opava), collection *Policejní ředitelství Moravská Ostrava* (Police Directory in Moravská Ostrava, hereafter PŘMO), file: 353/ 1513.

<sup>26</sup> *Židovské zprávy* (5 April 1918), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> The police report from the Jewish Party's meeting in Prague, in June 1933. SÚA Prague, collection: Prezidium Ministerstva vnitra, file 225-980-8, X/Ž/6/9.

<sup>28</sup> ZA Opava, collection: PŘMO, file: 10/1043-1220.

<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of the interwar period a large proportion of Jewish congregations retained the old election laws, which gave the vote to men on taxation basis and excluded women from voting.

<sup>30</sup> See Hugo Bergmann, 'These pro program Národní rady židovské v otázce židovských obcí' [Theses for the Programme of the Jewish National Council in the question of Jewish communities], *Židovské zprávy* (31 December 1918), pp. 3–4.

<sup>31</sup> See Alfred Engel, 'These pro školský program Národní rady židovské' [Theses for the educational programme of the Jewish National Council], in *Židovské zprávy* (31 December 1918), pp. 4–5.

<sup>32</sup> Besides, the right to vote was granted only to one-tenth of the congregation's members (depending on taxes), and women were excluded from voting. See the statutes of the Organisation of Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Congregations in Slovakia (*Organizácia autonómnych ortodoxných židovských obcí na Slovensku* – Slovak and German versions) in Štátny oblastný archív v Levoči [State Regional Archives in Levoča], collection: 'Spišská župa' [The Spiš District], file 2916/2964.

<sup>33</sup> Jewish national leaders emphasised that a group of Orthodox rabbis was given preference over the National Federation of Jews in Slovakia, which stood for the democratic reform of religious congregations (the introduction of a universal and proportional electoral system). The percentage of votes the Jewish Parties received in the 1920 elections constituted a weighty argument for their demands. See *Židovské zprávy* (4 July 1920), pp. 5–6, and *Židovské zprávy* (11 December 1920), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> The first Jewish elementary school with Czech as the language of instruction was opened in Prague in August 1920. The same year another Jewish elementary school (with German as the language of instruction) was founded in the Moravian administrative centre Brno, and subsequently also the Jewish Reform-type Modern Grammar School (*Jüdische Reformrealgymnasium*) for elementary-school leavers was opened in the same city.

<sup>35</sup> Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Minority', pp. 213–14. Ezra Mendelsohn considers these schools private (Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe*, p. 160), but in fact the schools did not have the status of private schools and their budget was covered largely by the state. For instance in the school year 1921–1922 the Jewish elementary (confessional) schools in Slovakia received 2,971,540 crowns from the state and the Jewish congregation provided the schools with 238,352 crowns. See František Friedmann, *Židovské konfesijní školy na Slovensku* [Jewish confessional schools in Slovakia], in *Židovské zprávy* (10 February 1933), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> There was an old Habsburg law still in force according to which the Jewish congregations in Bohemia and Moravia were obliged to see that the young were given proper instruction in religious subjects.

<sup>37</sup> Friedmann: *Židovské konfesijní školy na Slovensku*, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Rothkirchen, 'Slovakia: II, 1918–1938', p. 100.

<sup>39</sup> Singer's speech in the parliament on 22 February 1930 is available from the Internet (<http://www.psp.cz/eknih/>).

<sup>40</sup> Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Minority', p. 216.

<sup>41</sup> In October 1934 the famous Mukačevo rabbi Spira, after another campaign of curses and insults against the Zionists launched by a typhus epidemic that broke out in Mukačevo, attempted to abolish the Hebrew gymnasium. *Židovské zprávy* (5 September 1934), p. 3. The Zionists organised a protest meeting in Prague, where, along with Angelo Goldstein, also several non-Jewish deputies and a delegate of the Ministry of Education were present and expressed their support for the Jewish national endeavours in the struggle against the abuse of rabbinical posts for political objectives. See *Židovské zprávy* (21 December 1934), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Mendelsohn, *The Jews between the East Central Europe*, p. 160.

<sup>43</sup> Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Minority', p. 217.

<sup>44</sup> According to the Czechoslovak Constitution, only those inhabitants received Czechoslovak citizenship automatically who were domiciled on the territory of what was then Czechoslovakia at least since January 1910.

<sup>45</sup> See the English translation of the Social Democratic Club's bill in Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Party', pp. 286–87.

<sup>46</sup> In 1932 and 1933 the German nationalist political parties (*Deutsche national-sozialistische Arbeiterpartei* and *Deutsche Nationalpartei*) were banned in Czechoslovakia.

<sup>47</sup> *Židovské zprávy* (22 November 1929), p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> For example the Union of Czechoslovak Socialist Students' Organisations (for instance the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft sozialistischer Hochschüller* in Brno) sharply protested against the introduction of *numerus clausus* and high entrance taxes as a fascist instrument against poor students and the proletariat. See the police report from the meeting of the Association of Socialist Students in Brno in June 1930. *Moravský zemský archiv Brno* (Moravian Regional Archives Brno, hereafter MZA Brno), collection: *Zemský úřad Brno* (Regional Council Brno, hereafter ZÚ Brno), file: 149/17548.

<sup>49</sup> See Reisz's parliamentary speech on the state budget for the year of 1933, on 7 February 1933 (<http://www.psp.cz/eknih/>)

<sup>50</sup> Livia Rothkirchen asserts that there was hardly a Jewish community in the east of the republic that was spared the pillaging.

<sup>51</sup> See Reisz's parliamentary speech on 7 February 1933.

<sup>52</sup> Joint set up twenty-three loan institutions in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, established youth centres where five hundred young Jews were trained in crafts, and organised food subsidies for starving Subcarpathian regions. Joint co-operated also with the Czechoslovak government, which contributed financially to these activities. *Židovské zprávy* (20 January 1933), p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> See the speech of Ludvík Singer at the meeting of the Jewish national association 'Zion' in Moravská Ostrava in January 1931: "There is anti-Semitism in our state as well. It is not however the Austrian or German, open and virulent anti-Semitism, but economic anti-Semitism, which is in many ways more dangerous. The state, provinces and boroughs remove Jews from jobs in the administration. The Jews are expelled from supplies, etc." MZA Brno, the collection of ZÚ Brno, file: 157/752.

<sup>54</sup> See the police report on the Jewish Party in the Northern Moravian, largely German city of Opava: 'From the state-policy point of view we cannot regard all Jews as a state-forming element. There are many influential and economically strong individuals among them, who, due to expedience, pose as loyal citizens, but a number of Jews, particularly the young generation, coquet with German nationalist irredentism. There are even Jews who seek to please the leaders of the German National Social Party, despite its openly anti-Semitic programme.' MZA Brno, collection: ZÚ Brno, file: 188/33944

<sup>55</sup> See the speech of Ludvík Singer at the meeting of the Jewish national association 'Zion' in Moravská Ostrava in January 1931. MZA Brno, collection: ZÚ Brno, file: 157/752.

<sup>56</sup> See a report on the newspaper *Moravský večerník* (Moravian Evening Post) in *Židovské zprávy* (14 September 1934), p. 5; and prohibition of the import of *Der Seher* in *Židovské zprávy* (3 August 1934), p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Židovské zprávy* (8 June 1934), p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> For example, the Language Law (1920), which stipulated that the citizens of language groups other than Czech or Slovak, in case they constitute more than twenty percent in the region, would enjoy certain language concessions. This law, however, could not be applied to the Jewish minority, which was not over twenty percent in any part of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>59</sup> The election campaign was co-ordinated by the Central Office of the Associated Jewish Parties in Prague. The regional bureaux were to cast the lists of candidates so that these corresponded proportionally (as far as possible) with the social and political structure in the electoral district. *Židovské zprávy* (13 March 1920), p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Židovské zprávy* (22 April 1920), p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> The Hungarians called on the Jews in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia in their press organ *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* to remain faithful to the Hungarian culture which had bred them. Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Party', p. 272.

<sup>62</sup> The leadership of Poale Zion recommended to its followers to vote 'in the social democratic and revolutionary way'. MZA Brno, collection: ZÚ Brno, file: 14/2897.

<sup>63</sup> 50,000 people voted for the Associated Jewish Parties in the Slovak districts in 1920, but they did not reach the quorum in any single constituency. *Ústava republiky československé* [The Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic] (Prague, 1926), pp. 260–63.

<sup>64</sup> Rothkirchen mentions that before the 1920 elections in two Slovak districts (Banská Bystrica and Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš) the county chiefs (*župani*) placed various obstacles in the way of the Associated Jewish Parties, which therefore ran for election only in four districts. Rothkirchen, 'Slovakia: II, 1918–1938', p. 91.

<sup>65</sup> Štátny oblastný archív Bratislava [State Regional Archives Bratislava], collection: Župný úrad v Bratislave [District Office in Bratislava], file: 8833/1925.

<sup>66</sup> Ungar's letter to the governor of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. SÚA Prague, collection: *Prezidium ministerské rady* (Presidium of the Ministries' Council, hereafter PMR), file: 329/865.

<sup>67</sup> The text of the article started as following: 'It is not true that the Zionists are discriminated in Subcarpathian Ruthenia . . .'. *Židovské zprávy* (19 December 1921), p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> The Conservative Party's press wrote about the Jewish National Council as an institution which acted as a state institution, sent directives to the authorities, sought to remove officers and dissolve parties. 'It is certain that in Bohemia and Moravia the tiny circle of its (the Council's) adherents, which in 1919 supported it, will resign now for serious reasons . . .'. *Ungvári Hírlap* (29 November 1921), p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> See the text of the memorandum in the letter of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Presidium of the Subcarpathian Administration (January 1922). SÚA Prague, the collection of PMR, file: 329/865.

<sup>70</sup> See the report of the Presidential Bureau on Juszkovicz's visit. SÚA Prague, the collection of PMR, file: 329/865.

<sup>71</sup> *Židovské zprávy* (20 October 1921), p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> See SÚA Prague, collection: PMR, file: 329/865.

<sup>73</sup> See the article 'The Jewish Conservative Party in Subcarpathian Ruthenia' published in November 1921 in the Užhorod newspaper *Déli Újság*. SÚA Prague, collection: PMR, file: 329/865.

<sup>74</sup> Although autonomy was promised to Subcarpathian Ruthenia by the Czechoslovak state in 1919, its specific form was not spelled out and the Prague government postponed its implementation until 1938. The Czechoslovak representatives argued that the local Subcarpathian inhabitants were not yet mature enough to participate in a modern democratic political process and the local leaders (especially the traditionally influential Greek Catholic clergy) favoured or anticipated a return to Hungarian rule. P. R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>75</sup> SÚA Prague, collection: PMR, file: 329/865.

<sup>76</sup> Rabinowicz, 'The Jewish Party', p. 272.

<sup>77</sup> 'Ablehnung aller jüdisch-nationalistischen Minderheitsforderungen politischer Natur'. SÚA Prague, collection: PMV, file 225-657, X/V/17.

<sup>78</sup> See the pre-election situation reports. SÚA Prague, collection: PMV, file: 225-657, X/V/17.

<sup>79</sup> See the police report from the meeting of the Jewish Economic Party in Košice in November 1925: 'The speeches were extraordinarily loyal and when Schweid mentioned that the regime allows Jews to live and work freely, and the state authorities do their best to meet Jewish demands, everybody exclaimed, "That's right", "That's right" and clapped their hands as a sign of approval.' SÚA Prague, collection: PMV, file: 225-657, X/V/17.

<sup>80</sup> SÚA Prague, collection: PMV, file: 225-657, X/V/17.

<sup>81</sup> See the police report from the meeting of the Jewish Party in Užhorod on 12 November 1925. SÚA Prague, collection: PMV, file: 225-657, X/V/17. Together with Ungar three other candidates of the Jewish Economic Party resigned – Mermelstein (from Berehovo), Reiszmann (Mukačevo) and Weinberger (Užhorod). See *Židovské zprávy* (6 November 1925), p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> SÚA Prague, collection: PMV, file: 225-657, X/V/17.

<sup>83</sup> For example, the amendment of the law on Sunday rest or the change in the stipulations of the Trade Law concerning the compulsory education of the applicants for a trading license. SÚA Prague, the collection of PMV, file: 225-657, X/V/17. Frequently the police reports from the Economic Party's meetings were as following: "The chairman of the meeting, Davidovič Benő, opened the meeting . . . and gave the word to chief rabbi Spira who did not speak about politics at all but concentrated exclusively on

religious issues. He used the presence of a large number of people to agitate against the Zionists and criticise their activities, appealing to Jews not to be misled by them. The following speaker, chief rabbi Spitzer, spoke in the same vein, and although each of them spoke at least an hour there was no content in their speeches that should be described in this report.” SÚA Prague, collection: PMV, file: 225-657, X/V/17.

<sup>84</sup> ‘The Jew living in Hungary should be Hungarian, in France French, in Czechoslovakia Czechoslovak. Zionism is nationalism. Jewish nationalism is chauvinism and such chauvinism is detrimental for us’ – the meeting of the Jewish Economic Party in November 1918 in Berehovo. SÚA Prague, collection: PMV, file: 225-657, X/V/17.

<sup>85</sup> The subject of the trial was an open letter which Dr Margulies sent to both rabbis after the failure of the Jewish Party in the elections of 1925. In the letter Margulies branded the Orthodox Bureau as a corrupt organisation which destroyed Jewish unity and abused religious means for the manipulation of the Jewish masses. Margulies challenged both rabbis to sue him for these statements. See Margulies’s documentation on the trial in Okresní archiv Litoměřice – pobočka v Lovosicích [The District Archives in Litoměřice – a branch of Lovosice], collection: Okresní úřad Litoměřice [District Council in Litoměřice], file: 66, 293/2491.

<sup>86</sup> In some Bohemian and Moravian cities the growth of votes for the Jewish Party constituted even more than a thousand (for example in Prague, Česká Lípa, Olomouc, Moravská Ostrava).

<sup>87</sup> The fact that the Jewish leaders of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia primarily followed tactical reasons confirms also the police report from the Košice convention: ‘According to other information from a reliable source, the Jewish Party awaits the stance the government will take to the revised programme in view of the upcoming elections. It is certain that the Party’s reform was intended to clarify its attitude to the so-called Jewish opposition and it is expected that the future will show whether the good will of the Jewish Party will be rewarded.’ Slovenský národný archív v Bratislavě [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava, hereafter SNA Bratislava], collection: Krajský úrad Bratislava-prez. [Regional Council Bratislava-presidium], file 115/ PIV.

<sup>88</sup> The contemporary police reports commented on Reisz: ‘It is an open secret that the recently elected chairman of the Jewish Parties, Dr Julius Reisz, a Bratislava lawyer, wants to get into the House of Representatives in Prague at any price, or at least he wants to become a member of the new Regional Administrative Council . . . According to my confident source, it is generally held that the unification of the Jewish Party is only apparent and took place only because it was in the interest of Dr Reisz, while most of the Zionists are not happy with the abandonment of minority politics.’ SNA Bratislava, collection: Krajský úrad Bratislava-prez., file: 115/ PIV.

<sup>89</sup> SÚA Prague, collection: Pozůstalost Dr. Emila Marguliese [The Legacy of Dr. Emil Margulies, hereafter PEM], file: 9/36.

<sup>90</sup> See also Margulies’ letter in SÚA Prague, collection PEM, file 9/36: ‘Durch diesen Pakt wird in keiner Weise die selbstständige Politik, die bisher von der Jüdischen Partei betrieben wurde, berührt; die Wahlgemeinschaft ist eine durchaus technische, nur für Wahlen bestimmt. Der Pakt gilt auch für die Wahlen in die Nationalversammlung; darin liegt die besondere Bedeutung für die Jüdische Partei.’

<sup>91</sup> SÚA Prague, collection: PEM, file: 9/36.

<sup>92</sup> The Polish–Jewish list was designed so that first place on the list was taken by the Polish candidate, the second by a candidate of the Jewish Party, the third again by a Pole, etc. SÚA Prague, collection: PEM, file: 9/36.

<sup>93</sup> The total number of votes that the common list of the Jewish and Economic Parties polled in Slovakia in 1928 was 45,244. Compared to the parliamentary elections of 1925, when the Jewish Party in Slovakia polled 38,442 and the Economic Party 5,144 votes, Reisz’s coalition therefore managed to win a slight growth in votes. The mandate in the Slovak Diet was granted to a Slovak Zionist, Gestätner, who still assured the Zionist headquarters about his loyalty shortly before the elections. *Židovské zprávy* (7 December 1928).

<sup>94</sup> Shortly before the elections in December 1928 Margulies wrote to Paul März: “Unsere Wahlen waren Wahlen der Reinigung, hier liegt eine weitere Aufgabe für uns.” SÚA Prague, collection: PEM, file: 9/36.

<sup>95</sup> SÚA Prague, collection: PEM, file: 9/36.

<sup>96</sup> SÚA Prague, collection: PEM, file: 9/36.

<sup>97</sup> Severe criticism of the Polish–Jewish co-operation appeared for instance in the daily of the Czech National Democratic Party, *Moravskoslezský denník* (Moravian–Silesian Daily). *Židovské zprávy* (10 August 1934), p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> ZA Opava, collection: PŘMO, file: 372-1/247.

<sup>99</sup> See the police report from the congress in ZA Opava, collection: PŘMO, file: 1220-10/1043.

<sup>100</sup> There is no note in the literature on these negotiations, I came across them only in the police report on the Jewish Party’s presidium meeting in Moravská Ostrava in April 1935 (MZA Brno, collection: ZÚ Brno, file: 230-15879), which mentioned that these negotiations took place in Prague but did not include information about the Jewish politicians involved in them and the character of the discussions.

<sup>101</sup> The Social Democrats promised that the Jewish Party would keep its two seats in parliament; in turn, the Jewish voters were encouraged to vote for the Social Democratic list of candidates throughout the republic. ZA Opava, collection: P MO, file: 386/980.

<sup>102</sup> See Goldstein’s speech at the meeting of the Jewish Party in Brno in May 1935. MZA Brno, collection: ZÚ Brno, file: 233/21445.

<sup>103</sup> MZA Brno, collection: ZÚ Brno, file: 230/15879.

<sup>104</sup> See Reisz’s speech at the Convention of the Jewish Party in Moravská Ostrava in 1931. ZA Opava, collection: PŘMO, file: 1220-10/1043.