Czechoslovakia peacefully split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia on January 1, 1993.

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA, republic in Central Europe.

Founded in 1918, it united within its political framework the Jewries of the "historic countries" (Bohemia, Moravia, and part of Silesia), connected with the Hapsburg Empire from 1526 and under its direct control from 1620, and of Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia, an integral part of Hungary, from the tenth century. As of January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist as a separate entity and its territory became two independent nations, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Jewish communities of the various regions hence differed substantially in their demographic, economic, and cultural aspects, with influences of assimilation to the Czech and German cultures prevailing in the west, and the Hungarian in conjunction with the traditional Orthodox Jewish way of life in the east.

Demographic Structure

In the western part of Czechoslovakia Jewish life was mainly regulated by Austrian legislation (of 1890) and in the eastern areas by Hungarian (of 1870). The communal leadership was initially predominantly assimilationist-oriented to German, Hungarian, or Czech culture.

By 1930, over 80% of the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia lived in towns with over 5,000 inhabitants (60% of these in towns with over 50,000 inhabitants, i.e. Prague, Brno (Bruenn)). Between 1918 and 1938 the number of Jews in the small towns decreased by 20% to 50%, while the Jewish population of Prague, Brno, Ostrava, and several industrial centers in the Sudeten area increased. In 1930, the proportion of children up to the age of 14 was 13.04% among Bohemian Jews and 14.25% among Moravian-Silesian Jews, compared with 22.63% and 26.13% respectively among the general population. The occupational structure of the Jewish population was similar to that for the rest of West European Jewry.
During the century before World War I the number of Jews in Carpatho-Russia had increased almost fivefold because of the influx from Galicia, Rumania, and Russia. In 1930, 65% were living in villages, constituting the highest proportion of rural dwellers among European Jewry. The communities in western Slovakia were closer to the way of life of the Moravian communities whose members had originally founded them. Bratislava (Pressburg) had an individual character.

**Communal Structure**

The initiative to organize Jewry within the new state came from Zionists. Ludwig Singer had already suggested in November 1917 that the communities should be reorganized to provide a framework both for religious activities and toward achieving Jewish national and cultural autonomy. On the initiative of Rudolph Kohn of the Prague Po’alei Zion, the Jewish National Council (Narodne Rada Cidovske) was established on Oct. 23, 1918, headed by Ludwig Singer, with the writer Max Brod and Karl Fischel as his deputies. On Oct. 28, at the proclamation of the republic, the council declared Jewish loyalty to the provisional government and put forward its principal claims: recognition of and the right to declare Jewish nationality, full civic and legal rights, democratization of the Jewish communities and expansion of their competences, establishment of a central supreme representation of the communities, cultural autonomy in Jewish education, promotion and use of Hebrew, and contact with the "center in Palestine." By November the federations of the communities of Moravia and Silesia had accepted the council's authority. On Jan. 4, 1919, a Prague conference of adherents to Jewish nationality adopted a program to convert the communities, as the "living cells of Jewish society," into the bearers of Jewish autonomy, but the program was not realized; nor could a unified communal organization be created. The conference decided to found the Cidovske Strana (Jewish party) as its instrument for electoral activities. Many communities reorganized themselves on democratic lines, granting franchise to women and to Jews from Eastern Europe who had settled there. Besides the demands urged on the authorities, as contained in the National Jewish Council's proclamation, the council also made demands on Jewish society itself, calling for a modern social policy to replace old-style philanthropy, establishment of Jewish secular schools, and provision of facilities for religious worship according to the wishes of the members of the community. The council dispatched a delegation to the peace conference in Versailles (Singer, Samuel Hugo Bergmann, and Norbert Adler), which became part of the Jewish delegation there. Though Zionist influence predominated in the council, non-Zionists such as Alois Hilf and Salomon Hugo Lieben collaborated. The Czech assimilationist movement and the extremist orthodox group contested the council's right to represent the whole of Czechoslovakian Jewry. The state under President Thomas Garrigue Masaryk agreed to the council's basic claims, and the 1920 constitution expressly recognized Jewish nationality, corresponding to the conceptions of the minority rights granted to all minorities in Czechoslovakia.

**Political Affiliation**
The 354,342 Jews by religion (Israelites) enumerated in 1921, and 356,830 in 1930, declared their nationality.

Adherents of the Jewish religion in 1930 represented 2.4% of the total population, and Jews by nationality 1.3% of the total. While in general mother tongue served as the criterion for nationality, Jews could declare Jewish nationality irrespective of it: 156 persons who were not Jewish by religion declared their nationality to be Jewish in 1921, and 317 in 1930. After 1918 five regional federations of communities existed in Bohemia-Moravia; in 1926 they established the Supreme Council of the Jewish Religious Communities. It was first headed by the Czech-Jewish leader Augustin Stein and then by Joseph Popper. The chief rabbi of Prague (then Hayyim Heinrich Brody) was an ex officio member. In Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia, as in Hungary, three trends of community affiliation existed. The orthodox communities of Slovakia had an autonomous organization (confirmed in 1920) which from 1923 also included those of Carpatho-Russia. Its statute limited the franchise to due payers. The neologist and status quo-ante communities amalgamated into the Jeshurun federation in 1928. There was no supreme communal organization or chief rabbinate. From 1926 the salary of rabbis was augmented by the Kongrua, a government fund for the upkeep of religious life.

The Jewish party succeeded in achieving representation on a number of municipal councils. However, as it did not attain the minimum quota required for the parliamentary elections in any single electoral district, it succeeded in returning two representatives only in 1929, as a result of an agreement with the Polish minority (Ludwig Singer, succeeded after his death in 1931 by Angelo Goldstein, and Julius Reisz) and in 1935, after an arrangement with the Czech Social Democrats (Goldstein and Hayyim Kugel). The party was opposed by Czech, Slovak, German, and Hungarian assimilationists, as well as by the extreme Orthodox, who gave their votes to the strongest Czech party, the Agrarians. Jews, however, also attained leading positions in other political parties: Alfred Meissner and Lev Winter in the Czechoslovak Social Democrats, Ludwig Czech and Siegfried Taub in the German, and Julius Schulz in the Hungarian, Bruno Kafka in the Deutsche Arbeits-und Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft, and Rudolf Sifniski and Viktor Stern in the Communist party. Jews were also active in political journalism. There were several Jewish weeklies, the Zionist Cidovski zpravy, Selbstwehr, and Medinah Ivrit in Prague, Max Hickl's Juedische Volksstimme in Brno, and the Juedische Volkszeitung in Bratislava.

Education
In Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia Jewish children attended general schools on all levels: Prague and Ostrava both had a Jewish elementary school, while the only Jewish secondary school was in Brno. In most towns of Slovakia there were Jewish elementary schools where the language of instruction was Hungarian, most adopting the Slovak language subsequently. In Carpatho-Russia, Jewish education was substantially based on the traditional heder and yeshivah. Government records of 1931 listed five yeshivot as institutions of higher education, in Bratislava, Komarno, Prešov, Košice, and Mukachevo; but there were others, as in Galanta and Huncovce. A network of Hebrew schools developed; the first school was opened in Torun, and then, supported by the Tarbut organization, expanded to nine elementary schools and two secondary, in Mukachevo (1925) and Uzhgorod (1934). In 1934 the Supreme Council of the Jewish Religious Communities established a course for cantors and teachers of religion. A large number of Jewish children in Carpatho-Russia attended the Czech schools established for the children of civil servants and police officers. Many Jews attended universities and technical colleges, which also attracted numbers of students from countries where there was a numerus clausus. A number of Jews were appointed to professorships in Prague at the Czech and the German universities.

Economic Life

Jews played an important role in the economy and were among the pioneers of its development, notably in the textile, foodstuffs, and wood and paper industries. (It was estimated that 30%-40% of the total capital invested in Czechoslovakian industry in the 1930s was Jewish-owned.) The firm of Petschek and Weimann was instrumental in the development of mining in north Bohemia, and Jewish enterprise was prominent in the steel industry and mining of the Ostrava area, insurance, and private banking. Later the concentration of capital in the national banks, agrarian reform, the development of agricultural and consumers' cooperatives, and the preference given to enterprises set up by veterans of the Czechoslovakian army tended to limit the extent and importance of Jewish economic activity, and the number of Jews in industry and commerce declined. The slump of 1929-30 affected many Jewish businessmen. After this crisis many Jews emigrated from Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia to the West; on the other hand, after 1918 Czechoslovakia received several thousand refugees from Eastern Europe, most of them in transit. They were supported through the Jüdische Fuersorge-Zentrale, founded in 1921. After the Nazi advent to power in Germany in 1933, several thousand Jewish refugees, of whom 4,000 held Czechoslovakian citizenship, entered Czechoslovakia. A special committee was founded for their support. A particular problem was the provision of legal aid for the many Jewish stateless persons, who were permanently in danger of losing their permits of domicile and work. Prominent in social welfare work in the 1930s were Joseph Popper, and the Wizo leaders Marie Schmolka, Hanna Steiner, and Gisi Fleischmann.
Cultural Sphere

Jews contributed to all spheres of cultural activity, whether Czech, German, or Hungarian oriented. Many were outstanding authors in the Czech language. Gifted German-language authors were Adolf Donath, Friedrich Adler, and Hugo Salus of the elder generation, and Franz Kafka, Max Brod, Franz Werfel, Ludwig Winder, F. C. Weisskopf, and Egon Erwin Kisch, among others. Authors who wrote in German did not necessarily consider themselves German nationals, and some, like Max Brod, were active Zionists. Many Jews were intermediaries between the cultures, such as Otakar Fischer in translating from German to Czech, and Kamil Hoffmann, Max Brod, and Pavel Eisner in presenting Czech culture to the German-reading public. Jews prominent in music included the composer Jaromir Weinberger and on the Czech stage the actors Hugo Haas and Jiří Voskovec. Jewish journalists were on the staff of many newspapers, excepting those of the extreme right, and in all languages. Jews were active in all types of sports, within Jewish organizations as well as clubs of the other nationalities, notably the swimmers and water-ball teams of the Hagibor association in Prague and Bar Kochba in Bratislava. The refusal of the Jewish champions to represent Czechoslovakia at the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936 was a subject of heated public discussion. Jewish youth was organized in the numerous Zionist youth and student organizations, as well as in many organizations of the other nationalities.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism among all the nationalities of the republic was of old standing. At the time of the establishment of the republic in 1918 there were anti-Semitic riots in Prague and Moravia. In Slovakia, serious anti-Semitic violence continued until summer 1919. Among the Czech elements it was less noticeable, mainly because of the personal example of Thomas Masaryk and Eduard Bene, and the democratic political philosophy as expounded by them and other leaders of public opinion. However, right-wing groups National Union, founded by Jere Stríbrný in 1927, the Czech Fascist Community, headed by the former general of the Czech army Radola Gajda, and the Vlajka (Flag) group explicitly supported anti-Semitism in their platforms. Andrej Hlinka's Slovenske L'udove strana (Slovak People's Party) adopted an increasingly aggressive anti-Semitic policy. The Sudeten, where most of the Germans lived, was already a stronghold of racial anti-Semitism under the Hapsburg monarchy, and anti-Semitism grew even more violent, influenced by the rise of Nazism in Germany, the advent of Hitler to power, and the founding of Konrad Henlein's Sudetendeutsche Partei (1935). Anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia was strongly associated with the general conflicts among the nationalities there: the Czechs would not forgive the adherence of many Jews to German language and culture and their support of the German liberal parties, and regarded them as a Germanizing factor. In Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia they were considered the bearers of Magyarization, and later, supporters of the Czech establishment. All groups alleged that the Jews were
supporters of Communism, while the Communists claimed that they supported reaction. After Hitler's rise to power, his growing support for German extreme nationalist demands, and the enmity he manifested to the Czechoslovak establishment, the Jews drew increasingly closer to the state, which all Jewish groups supported in its stand against Nazism. Post-World War I Czechoslovakia, which was relatively progressive and stable, was a congenial milieu for Czechoslovakian Jewry. Hence, most of them failed to see the dangers threatening them even inside the country. However, the subdued popular anti-Semitism was soon to be rekindled. At the beginning of 1938 anti-Semitism gained in strength when in Rumania the Goga government came to power and Jewish refugees tried to enter Czechoslovakia. Ferdinand Peroutka, the editor of a respected liberal weekly, published a series of articles in which he called for restriction of Jewish rights. A project for a rabbinical seminary, connected with the Prague Czech University, which was to begin functioning in 1938, was not realized. The problem of Jewish refugees became even more acute with the Nazi Anschluss with Austria, when many Jewish refugees, a large number holding Czechoslovakian passports, entered the country. Manifestations of anti-Semitism in Slovakia and the Sudeten area increased. At the time of the Munich conference (Sept. 29, 1938) the Jews from the Sudetenland (more than 20,000), which was handed over to Germany, fled to the remaining territory of the state. Parts of Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia, with a Jewish population of about 80,000, were ceded to Hungary by decree of Hitler and Mussolini as "arbiters" on Nov. 2, 1938. Anti-Semitism gained virulence in the truncated "Second Republic" mainly in Slovakia. The Second Republic did not last long. On March 14, 1939, Slovakia declared its independence and became a vassal of Nazi Germany; the next day the remaining parts of Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Germans and transformed into a German "Protectorate," while Hungary occupied Carpatho-Russia.

[Chaim Yahil]

Emigration and Exile (1938-45)

The emigration and escape of Jews from Czechoslovakia started immediately after the Munich conference (Sept. 29, 1938) and increased considerably after the German occupation (March 15, 1939). Half a million pounds sterling, part of a grant made by the British government to the Czechoslovak government, were earmarked for the financing of the emigration of 2,500 Jews to Palestine. In addition, about 12,000 Jews left with "illegal" transports for Palestine. Many others emigrated to the United States and South America or escaped to neighboring Poland, from where a number succeeded in reaching Great Britain, France, and other countries. He-Halutz and Youth Aliyah transferred hundreds of children and youth to England, Denmark, and the Netherlands for agricultural training. The Anglican Church and missionary institutions succeeded in removing children. When after the outbreak of World War II the Czechoslovak National Council in London, later recognized as the government-in-exile and an ally, called upon army reservists in allied and neutral countries to enlist, many Jews responded. Even in Palestine, where many Jews from Czechoslovakia had already put themselves at the disposal of the Yishuv's war effort, about 2,000 Czech Jews enlisted in Czechoslovak army units within
the Allied Middle East Forces, where Jews constituted the great majority in these units. After the recognition of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union in 1941, a Czechoslovak division was established in the U.S.S.R. Up to 70% of the members of some of its units were Jews. The high percentage of Jews in these units created some tension and anti-Semitic reactions. The Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London, with Eduard Benes as president and Jan Masaryk as foreign minister, maintained good relations with Jewish organizations and supported the Zionist cause. In the State Council, Arnolt Frischer represented the Cidovske strana (Jewish party). Other Jews on the Council were Julius Friedmann, Julius Fuerth, and Gustav Kleinberg.

Contemporary Jewry

DEMOGRAPHY

Various estimates of the number of Jews living in Czechoslovakia in 1945 have been given, as postwar statistics do not classify the population according to religion. Many of the surviving Jews in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia decided to leave in the brief period between its annexation to the Soviet Union (June 29, 1945) and the closing of its frontiers (September 30, 1945). They succeeded in fleeing to Bohemia, while only a few hundred moved to Slovakia. Most of the newcomers registered with the Jewish communities only later. In 1948, 19,123 Jews were registered with the communities in Bohemia and Moravia. The number of Jews in Slovakia in 1947 was estimated at about 24,500. This brings to 44,000 the number of Jews living in the whole of Czechoslovakia in early 1948, when the Communists came to power. However, this figure has to be augmented to include those who were in no way affiliated with organized Jewish communities, but in the past were classed as Jews by German authorities and registered after World War II as victims of racial persecution. In this category there were 5,292 persons living in Bohemia and Moravia in 1948. In Slovakia their number is not known; on the other hand, about 5,500 Slovak Jews, in an effort to save their lives, agreed to pro forma baptism during the war. It can therefore be estimated that out of the 356,830 Jews living in Czechoslovakia (including Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia) in 1939, less than a sixth remained in the country in 1948. The Communist coup of February 1948, and the establishment of the State of Israel in May of that year, led to a mass migration of Jews from Czechoslovakia. Between 1948 and 1950, 18,879 Jews went from Czechoslovakia to Israel, while more than 7,000 emigrated to other countries. When emigration was barred by the Communist authorities, in 1950, the number of Jews still remaining had dropped to some 18,000, while some 5,500 of them were still registered for migration to Israel. There were sporadic instances of Jewish emigration after 1954 but only from 1965 were 2,000-3,000 Jews allowed to leave Czechoslovakia. After the Soviet invasion in August 1968, 3,400 Jews left the country, according to a spokesman of the American Joint Distribution Committee in Vienna. It may therefore be assumed that at the end of 1968 there were less than 12,000 Jews left in Czechoslovakia. In June 1968, Rudolf Iltis of the Council of Jewish Communities in Bohemia and Moravia gave their average age as 60, while in the 15-20 age group there were only 1,000 Jews left. He also added that "with the
exception of a few communities in Slovakia, the demographic situation of Czechoslovak Jewry does not necessitate religious instruction, because there are not enough.

**ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The renewed Council of Jewish Communities in Bohemia and Moravia held its first conference after World War II, under the chairmanship of Ernst Frischer, in September 1945. Delegates of 43 communities participated. In Slovakia a similar body, the Central Union of the Jewish Communities in Slovakia, was created at the end of 1945, presided over by Armin Frieder. Both Frischer and Frieder were Zionists. In 1947 the two organizations set up a coordinating committee. At a Council conference in November 1963 representatives from only 16 communities took part and in 1968 the editor of the Council's publications listed only seven active communities in Bohemia and Moravia (Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Plze, Karlovy Vary, and Teplice-Sanov). Ten communities in Slovakia were listed as active (Bratislava, Kosice, Nitra, Michalovce, Cilina, Galanta, Trnava, Dunajska Streda, and Ruomberok). A small number of Jews were also living in some other places where, however, Jewish life had no organizational framework. The strongest communities in June 1968 were Prague, with 3,500 members (more than 4,000 in 1945), Bratislava, with 2,000 (8,000 in 1947), and Ko2ice with 1,800 (4,000 in 1947). Religious life was practically limited to the High Holidays. On the Sabbath few places had a minyan. One of the main problems was the lack of rabbis. Religious education was nonexistent. The budget of the pauperized communities was covered entirely by State subsidies. The State Bakery in Zlata Moravce supplied mazzot from 1965. There were four Jewish old-age homes, in Bratislava, Brno, and Podbrady; only in the first two was kosher food prepared. Of the 800 Jewish cemeteries only those were being kept in good order where a community was still in existence. A few, like the old cemetery of Prague, had become museums. The same applied to some old synagogues. In the years preceding the Communist coup of 1948, there were still signs of Jewish political life and of contacts with Jewish bodies abroad. In Slovakia, for instance, an Organization of Victims of Racial Persecution was created under the chairmanship of Oskar Neumann, a leading Zionist. The Central Union of Jewish Communities in Slovakia was affiliated to the World Jewish Congress from 1946, while the Council of Jewish Communities in Bohemia and Moravia joined the WJC only at the beginning of 1948. There were organized Zionist activities, and the American Joint Distribution Committee was permitted to undertake social work among the Jews of Czechoslovakia. All this was stopped when the Communists came to power in February 1948. After the Communist coup an Action Committee composed of Jewish Communists took over the Council of Jewish Communities and eliminated noncommunists from the leadership. At the beginning of 1949 the Zionists still succeeded in holding a conference at Pielany; but by the end of 1949 the ties with the World Jewish Congress were broken, and at the beginning of 1950 the "Joint" was ordered to stop all activities and its workers were expelled. The Jewish Agency closed its Prague office voluntarily the same year, after all Jewish migration from Czechoslovakia had been stopped. The organ of the Council and a quarterly in German, Informationsbulletin, became party mouthpieces, following the official line, including the hostile attitude to Israel. Some changes for the better could be discerned after 1964. In that year the hevra kaddisha of Prague was permitted to celebrate its 400th anniversary. The small Jewish Museum in
Prague was enlarged during World War II by the Germans and later was taken over by the Ministry of Culture and officially reorganized. (In 1963 it was visited by 327,000 people.) In 1966 a more liberal-minded leadership, led by Frantisek Fuchs, succeeded the dogmatic Communist group in the Council of Jewish Communities, headed until then by František Ehrmann. The Prague community created a special Committee for Youth which, for the first time in a quarter of a century, organized lectures and seminars on Jewish themes, attended regularly by dozens of Jewish students. A delegation of the Council was received by the minister of culture and submitted a detailed plan for the celebrations of the millennium of Prague Jewry and the 700th anniversary of the Altneuschul, which were to have taken place in August 1968. Contacts with Jewish communities and organizations outside Czechoslovakia were renewed. In January 1967, the presidents of the Council and of the Central Union attended a World Jewish Conference in Paris and, on their invitation, Nahum Goldmann visited Czechoslovakia in the spring of that year. At the time, a series of stamps depicting Jewish subjects was issued. The stamps were taken out of circulation at the time of the Six-Day War in June 1967, when Czechoslovakia, like other countries of the Soviet bloc, broke off diplomatic relations with Israel, but were reissued after the liberal community leadership of Alexander Dubček came into power in January 1968.

JEWS IN CZECHOSLOVAK PUBLIC LIFE

Thousands of Jews fought in the Czechoslovak armies formed both in the West and in the Soviet Union during World War II and many worked in various capacities in Beneš’s government-in-exile. Many of those who returned after the war continued their work in the newly formed administration. The percentage of Jewish intellectuals among the Communists was also high, and after the Communist coup of February 1948, many of them were entrusted with responsible tasks in the government machinery. Thus, in 1948 there were three Jewish deputy ministers of foreign affairs, of defense, interior, foreign trade and finance. The Party’s secretary general, Rudolf Sifniski, was a Jew, and Jews played an important role in the party apparatus. This led to an increase of the anti-Semitism which was latent especially in Slovakia. Already in 1945, a delegation of the Council of Jewish Communities led by Ernst Frischer complained to President Beneš about anti-Jewish excesses in the Slovak towns of Precov, Bardjov, and Topolcany. The same year two Jews were killed.