

'ANTI-ZIONISM' AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1967–1969

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This article analyses the phenomenon of 'anti-Zionism' and anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia during the remarkable years 1967–1969. The reactions to the Arab-Israeli War of June 1967, the political liberalisation during the Prague Spring of 1968, and the period of 'normalisation' after the Soviet invasion in August 1968 were the main determinants shaping its development. Anti-Israeli rhetoric and 'anti-Zionism' were political instruments manipulated by the communist regimes of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union and had various functions. They expressed frustration about the defeat of the Arab client states of the Eastern Bloc and about the fact that many East European citizens disagreed with their governments' one-sided anti-Israeli policy. The 'anti-Zionist' campaign also had to discredit oppositional and reform-minded political forces by associating them with Israel and the Jews. Indeed, this campaign could only work if at least a part of the population proved susceptible to the reactivating of anti-Semitic prejudices and sentiments, which had a long history in many parts of Eastern Europe. However, another section of the population, especially in Czechoslovakia, decided to fight against the anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist propaganda. This added a, perhaps underrated, dimension to the events in Czechoslovakia – and to some extent, Poland – during the period 1967–1969. An analysis of these political developments increases our understanding of the nature of anti-Semitism and 'anti-Zionism', but also of the character and evolution of the communist regimes as well as of their critics.

Key words: Anti-Semitism. Anti-Zionism. Czechoslovakia. Communism. Political reforms.

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The Six-Day War between Israel and a number of Arab states (5–10 June, 1967) had some remarkable repercussions in Czechoslovakia and other communist states in Eastern Europe. Especially the Soviet Union, but also Poland and Czechoslovakia experienced a wave of anti-Israeli, 'anti-Zionist', and even plainly anti-Semitic propaganda which was initiated and politically manipulated by the official media and communist ideologists. This 'anti-Zionist' campaign was

triggered – but cannot be exclusively explained – by the painful defeat suffered by the Arab allies of the Soviet Union, especially Egypt and Syria, in a war in which Soviet weapons and military advisers had proved amazingly ineffective. To some extent, it could also be seen as a reaction to the fact that many people in the Eastern Bloc countries, not just Jews, sometimes visibly sympathised with Israel and apparently were happy about the military humiliation of the Soviet Union's clients and, therefore, of the Soviet Union itself. According to Walter Laqueur, indeed, in Eastern Europe there was a great deal of *Schadenfreude* that the Soviet Union had suffered a defeat by proxy, and the Israeli victory 'gave a great uplift to the latent mood of revolt in Czechoslovakia and Poland'.¹ Especially in Czechoslovakia, the Six-Day War became an external-cum-internal factor of a special kind – one that proved, besides other factors, a cause of internal upheaval and antagonistic interaction between the regime and a growing pro-reform section of the population. The situation, so it would seem, was actually more complex than simply one of official anti-Israeli policy versus critical voices reacting to it. On the one hand, the fact that some people in Czechoslovakia and Poland openly criticised the pro-Arab rhetoric of the official spokesmen and communist press organs may have intensified the 'anti-Zionist' aggressiveness of state propaganda. On the other hand, this in turn caused students, writers, and others to protest even more vehemently against a propaganda campaign which many felt was not only anti-Israeli but anti-Semitic. Thus, there emerged a process of escalation. Moreover, both in Czechoslovakia and in Poland the 'anti-Zionist' propaganda of the years 1967–1969 was used to attack pro-reform communists, critical intellectuals, and protesting students. Especially the Czechoslovak reform policy in 1968 gave a remarkable dynamic to both the phenomenon of 'anti-Zionism' among anti-reformists and the fight against anti-Semitism among reformers and progressives. 'Anti-Zionism' was a weapon used by orthodox communists and opponents of democratisation, including some of the most primitive and socially reactionary elements in Czechoslovakia and other East European societies. At the same time, it awakened the more democratic and civilised part of the population.

Already for years, there must have been a degree of friction between the pro-Arab rhetoric of the Novotný regime and the feelings of a major part of the Czechoslovak population. The problematic of the Middle East was not insigni-

1 LAQUEUR, Walter. *Europe since Hitler*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1972, p. 431. ISBN 0140214119. In Warsaw there were expressions of pro-Israeli feeling which 'greatly displeased' the Polish party leader Gomułka; see FEJTŐ, François. *Die Geschichte der Volksdemokratien, Band II. Nach Stalin, 1953–1972*. Graz; Vienna/Cologne: Styria Verlag, 1972, p. 339. ISBN 3821850019. In Czechoslovakia the response among people seems to have been above all a reaction to the government's anti-Israeli campaign.

ficant in Czechoslovakia, because the country played a key role in the political and military strategy of the Soviet Union in the region. Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union had actually belonged to the first nations recognising the State of Israel in May 1948. Communist Czechoslovakia exported a considerable amount of arms and ammunition to Israel to help the young Jewish state survive at that critical moment, when it was attacked by several Arab countries.² Czechoslovakia's foreign minister Vladimír Clementis, a Slovak and a major supporter of this policy, later paid the price for it (and for his 'Slovak bourgeois nationalism') in the political trials of the 1950s. The late 1940s had been a time when Stalin and other communist leaders saw Israel as a potentially socialist state and a bulwark against British imperialism in the Middle East. After 1950 the Soviet Union began to change course and to support Egypt and other Arab countries, now regarding Israel as an ally of American imperialism and hoping that the Arab states would become Soviet allies in the unfolding Cold War. Czechoslovakia, of course, was forced to follow suit and in 1955 an agreement of military co-operation was signed between Czechoslovakia and Egypt. Czechoslovakia, with its strong tradition of machinery and armaments industry, had to carry a major part of the burden of giving military and economic assistance to Arab countries that were seen as friends of the Soviet Union. This was accompanied by the new phenomenon of pro-Arab propaganda and anti-Israeli or 'anti-Zionist' campaigns.

The change of line in the Middle Eastern policy of the Soviet Union and its East European satellites had also influenced the character of the Stalinist show trials in the early 1950s, especially in Czechoslovakia. The 'anti-Zionist' and anti-Semitic statements made during the trials against Rudolf Slánský and other accused of Jewish descent sometimes assumed amazing proportions, demonstrating the criminal and perverse nature of Stalinism and communist totalitarianism.³ Since this article is concerned with the anti-Semitic episodes of the late

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- 2 Czechoslovakia even supplied a number of fighter planes to Israel; see DRAPER, Theodore. *Israel and World Politics*. New York: The Viking Press, 1968, pp. 7–8. ISBN 0765805138; KRAMMER, Arnold. *The Forgotten Friendship: Israel and the Soviet Bloc, 1947–53*. Urbana-Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1974, pp. 54–123 passim. ISBN 0252003969; SACHAR, Howard M. *Israel and Europe: An Appraisal in History*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, pp. 56ff. ISBN 0307486435.
 - 3 LÖBL, Eugen and POKORNÝ, Dušan. *Die Revolution rehabilitiert ihre Kinder. Hinter den Kulissen des Slánský-Prozesses*. Wien: Europa Verlag, 1968, pp. 45–50 and passim. ISBN 0455006819; LONDON, Artur. *L'Aveu: Dans l'engrenage du Procès de Prague*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968. ISBN 2004504520; LENDVAI, Paul. *Antisemitismus ohne Juden. Entwicklungen und Tendenzen in Osteuropa*. Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1972, pp. 221–34. ISBN 3203504170; OSCHLIES, W. Neo-Stalinist Anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia. In WISTRICH, Robert (ed.). *The Left Against Zion: Communism, Israel and the Middle East*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1979, pp. 156–7. ISBN 0853031932; SOUKUPOVÁ, Blanka. *Židé v Českých zemích po šoa*:

1960s, this is not the place to pay detailed attention to the events of the 1950s. The main thing to note is that the so-called ‘Zionist’ or ‘Titoist-Trotskyist-Zionist conspiracy’ in Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s had been fabricated in Moscow. However, it is also true that the campaign against ‘Zionism’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ acquired a dynamic of its own in the context of Czechoslovak politics and society. Although this campaign – at least its high level of intensity – was ended in the mid-1950s, the existing and now reactivated anti-Semitic sentiments did not disappear but only went ‘underground’ again. However, in the Czechoslovak Communist Party a tradition was established of playing on anti-Jewish prejudice whenever this was considered useful by one or other party faction, especially socially conservative and anti-reformist communists.⁴ The June 1967 war, the crisis of the Novotný regime in the last months of 1967, and the onset of the reform policy in 1968 were factors encouraging again a politically targeted anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia among old Stalinists. It is important to establish who were principally responsible for reviving anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe; how and why this happened; and which individuals and social groups responded to it. The first thing to note in this connection is the remarkable reaction in the Soviet Union to the Arab defeat in June 1967. This was quickly followed by a series of similar reactions in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Since Czechoslovakia was deeply involved in Soviet policy in the Middle East, it is not surprising that the June 1967 war had a profound and multifaceted impact. Moreover, the controversy over the Arab-Israeli conflict overlapped with the tense internal situation in both Poland and Czechoslovakia.

After Moscow had digested the hard facts of the outcome of the 1967 war, it launched an unprecedented propaganda campaign against ‘Zionism as a world threat’, making allegations about a global Jewish conspiracy and so on. The Arab defeat was attributed, not to little Israel alone – this would have been too painful – but to an ‘all-powerful international force.’ The increasingly vulgar and racist Soviet propaganda offensive almost assumed Nazi-era characteristics and paradoxically – but perhaps ‘logically’ from a psychological and propagandistic point of view – included the assertion that the ‘Zionists’ were racists and similar to the Nazis. ‘International Zionist threat’ or ‘Zionist racism’, indeed, were terms and theses of the Soviet discipline of so-called ‘Zionology’, which had been in the making for years already. Extracts from the Ukrainian Trofim Kychko’s notorious anti-Semitic publication from 1963, *Judaism without Embellishment*,

Identita poraněné paměti. Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2016, pp. 132-43. ISBN 9788081148422.

4 LENDVAI, ref. 3, p. 234. The fact that by 1967–68 there were only some 12,000 Jews left in Czechoslovakia and hardly more than 25,000 in Poland was not a reason for anti-Semites to be more reticent in making claims about ‘Zionist conspiracies’ and so on; indeed, there could be anti-Semitism without Jews.

were extensively republished in the Soviet media. In January 1968 Kychko was awarded a 'diploma of honour' by the Supreme Council of the Communist Party of Ukraine. In the same year he published another book, *Judaism and Zionism*, which spoke among other things of the Jewish 'idea of ruling over other people of the world'. In 1969 yet another anti-Semitic work appeared in the Soviet Union, Yuri Ivanov's *Beware: Zionism*, which essentially replicated the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and which was given nationwide coverage.⁵ An example of how the Soviet media portrayed the 'Zionists' (i.e. the Jews) and the Israeli leaders as being engaged in a world-wide conspiracy along the lines of the *Protocols of Zion* was given by the newspaper *Sovietskaya Latvia*, which wrote on 5 August 1967 about Zionism as an '*international Cosa Nostra*' with '*a common centre, common programme and common funds*'.⁶ It is clear that the Israeli victory in the 1967 war had an enormous impact on the political atmosphere in the Soviet Bloc.

The Six-Day War in June 1967 also influenced the situation in Poland, both directly and indirectly. To the embarrassment of Polish party leader Gomułka, a part of Polish public opinion appeared to sympathise rather emphatically with Israel, if only because the Arab states were regarded as clients of the Soviet Union. To forestall criticism or political intervention from Moscow, Gomułka (whose wife was of Jewish origin) not only severed diplomatic relations with Israel – as in effect all Eastern Bloc states except Romania did – but also launched an 'anti-Zionist' campaign which included a purge of the remaining Jews in Polish public life as well as Poles who were seen as being too close to them. It would seem that Gomułka's conduct was largely constrained by (fear of) Soviet pressure, but also by the intimidating agitation of the influential 'patriotic', anti-intellectualist, and quite openly anti-Semitic faction within the Polish party known as the 'Partisans', a movement led by General Mieczysław Moczar. The 'Partisans' indeed were agitating over an alleged 'Zionist conspiracy' and trying to promote anti-Semitism among the working class, but Gomułka wanted to differentiate between what he called 'Zionist Jews' (who he said must leave Poland), 'cosmopolitan Jews' (who should be kept out of responsible positions), and 'patriotic and communist Jews'. In March 1968 student protests in Warsaw were suppressed with the help of arguments and slogans derived from the anti-Zionist campaign, which claimed that many of the liberal and oppositional students and intellectuals were Jews or had been incited by Zionists and Jews. This

5 SACHAR, Howard M. *A History of the Jews in the Modern World*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005, p. 722. ISBN 101400030978; BEHBEHANI, Hashim S.H. *The Soviet Union and Arab nationalism, 1917–1966*. London: Routledge, 1986, p. 69. ISBN 1138925519.

6 Quoted in JOHNSON, Paul. *A History of the Jews*. London: Harper Publishers, 1987, p. 575. ISBN 0060915331.

illustrated the link between anti-reformism and anti-Semitism, but also between the crisis in the Middle East and the internal situation in a country like Poland.⁷ Moreover, in 1968 it became clear that there were mutual influences between the events in Poland and developments in reformist Czechoslovakia.

After the outbreak of the Six-Day War in June 1967, the Novotný regime in Czechoslovakia started an anti-Israeli and ‘anti-Zionist’ propaganda campaign which possibly was even more intensive than that in any other East European country apart from the Soviet Union itself. Czechoslovakia indeed was after the Soviet Union the first communist state to break off diplomatic relations with Israel, and also the first to send a high-level military and political delegation to aid Egypt and Syria. Soviet pressure, the late-Stalinist character of the regime, and Czechoslovakia’s importance in the military sphere all played a part in this. Within just one week, Novotný heavily attacked Israel in no less than three speeches. On 11 June 1967 he went so far as to denounce Israel in a speech delivered at the commemoration of the destruction of Lidice by the Nazis in 1942, suggesting that there were similarities between Israeli and Nazi policies. The Czechoslovak party newspapers *Rudé právo* (Czech) and *Pravda* (Slovak) printed large numbers of ‘spontaneous’ pro-Arab and anti-Israeli resolutions passed at factory meetings and by various mass organisations. They also published a series of violently ‘anti-Zionist’ and anti-Israeli articles, some of which were openly anti-Semitic. The *Rudé právo* of 15 June reported that the severing of diplomatic relations with Israel was related to the ‘unacceptable activity’ of Israeli diplomats in Czechoslovakia, who had been ‘*in contact with Jewish religious communities*’, visited some of their representatives, ‘*used several Jewish holidays as an opportunity to exert ideological influence and meet with the youth*’, and ‘*organised illegal emigration*’. The paper reported that as a consequence at least two members of the Jewish religious community in Czechoslovakia had been arrested. Reviving an anti-Semitic practice used during the trials against Slánský and other Jewish accused in the 1950s, it also published the old names of Israeli diplomats in Czechoslovakia who originally came from the country together with their new names (‘*the second secretary at the Israeli embassy Karel Yaaron, formerly Karel Grünwald*’, and so on). This created an image of Jewish cosmopolitanism, elusiveness, and conspiratorialism. The *Rudé právo* none the

7 ROTHSCCHILD, Joseph – WINGFIELD, Nancy M. *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 155. ISBN 9780195334746; LESLIE, R.F. – POLONSKY, Antony – CIECHANOWSKI, Jan M. – PELCZYNSKI, Z.A. *The History of Poland since 1863*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 387–92. ISBN 0521275016; FEJTŐ, ref. 1, pp. 271–2, 340, 569–70 n24, where Moczar is hyperbolically described as a ‘*typical theoretician of Marxist fascism*’.

less assured its readers that 'in Czechoslovakia there is no place for anti-Semitism, which will always be suppressed uncompromisingly. We have proved many times how highly we esteem the victims of Hitler's Nazism'.⁸

However, several peculiar events and actions taken by the regime clearly demonstrated that this assurance was hypocritical. Postage stamps which had been designed in connection with the Millennium of the first Jewish settlement in Prague and the 700th anniversary of the city's famous Old-New Synagogue were withdrawn from circulation after the outbreak of the Six-Day War. An ironical letter published in the Czechoslovak writers' journal *Literární noviny* on 4 August 1967 was wondering why. 'What was the connection between the stamps and the Israeli aggression? It certainly would be feeble-minded to suppose that the Hebrew stamps issued by the Prague postmaster inspired the Israeli aggression. Yet someone has linked these matters together.' The claim of the Novotný regime that it was anti-Israel but not anti-Semitic was questionable in view of other remarkable facts as well. While the festivities in connection with the Jewish Millennium were cancelled, Arab students in Prague were given permission to hold a demonstration on 6 June 1967 where they were carrying banners with the slogan, 'Israel is an imperialist stronghold that must be destroyed.' Despite Czechoslovakia's official pro-Arab policy, the Egyptian ambassador in Prague was dissatisfied with local press reports about the crisis in the Middle East. At a special press conference he denounced Czechoslovak journalists because they 'were not writing objectively' and were supporting Israel. Indeed, according to the Egyptian ambassador this was happening because 'the Czechoslovak press is still full of Jews'. He may have referred to the *Literární noviny* and there was no official reaction to this remarkable statement, which later was disclosed to the outside world in an open letter by the Slovak writer Ladislav Mňačko following his departure from Czechoslovakia (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 August 1967). During the democratisation process in 1968 details regarding the slogans of the demonstrating Arab students were critically recalled and discussed, for example in the Czech paper *Práce* of 8 June 1968.⁹

8 Quoted in LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 236, 323 n30 (here and elsewhere, our English translations); see also SOUKUPOVÁ, ref. 3, pp. 173–4.

9 Quotations in LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 236–7, 323 n32. In 1968 the celebrations of the Jewish Millennium and the 700th anniversary of the Old-New Synagogue were prepared anew but there was not enough time for their realisation, while during the 'normalisation' the renewed anti-Semitism suppressed Jewish life again, resulting in one third of Czechoslovakia's Jews (some 4,000 people) leaving the country; see SCHULZE WESSEL, Martin. *Der Prager Frühling. Aufbruch in eine neue Welt*. Ditzingen: Reclam, 2018, pp. 252–3. ISBN 9783150111598; SOUKUPOVÁ, ref. 3, p. 225. According to Petr Brod, eventually some 6,000 Jews left Czechoslovakia after August 1968, a third of the total number; see BROD, Petr. *Židé v poválečném Československu*. In VEBER, Václav (ed.). *Židé v novodobých dějinách*. Prague: UK Nakla-

In 1967 a significant part of the Czechoslovak population was watching with mistrust the support given by the party and the government to the anti-Israeli policy of the Soviet Union. As a historian of Czechoslovak communism writes, some of the official pronouncements about Israel ‘*uncomfortably resembled the Nazi vocabulary*’ and recalled the memories of both the German occupation and the ‘anti-Zionist’ tenor of the political trials of the 1950s.¹⁰ The biased anti-Israeli and pro-Arab campaign caused indignation among many Czechoslovak writers and intellectuals, who saw it as a feature which was typical of the Novotný regime. Two prominent non-Jewish communist writers initiated a series of protests against the official party line on the Middle East. The Czech writer Jan Procházka (a candidate member of the party’s central committee), the chess master Ludek Pachmann, and the Jewish author Arnošt Lustig even wrote a letter to the party leadership protesting against what they called ‘*the amorality of the Middle East policy*’ of the country. Procházka and two other writers also tried to start a serious discussion in *Literární noviny*, the cultural weekly published by the Union of Czechoslovak Writers, but these initiatives and letters of protest were suppressed by the censorship. However, at a meeting of communist writers in Prague and especially at the Fourth Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers on 26–29 June 1967, an open conflict broke out between various conference participants and some party functionaries. Lustig read the letter sent to the party leadership on the ‘amorality’ of its Middle East policy to the conference. This letter, the censorship, the fate of Jan Beneš (a young author who had recently been arrested) and the Middle East controversy triggered some heated debates. Speakers condemned Czechoslovakia’s uncritical support for Soviet policy, particularly the zeal with which the government had met Moscow’s request to break off diplomatic relations with Israel. They also protested against the thinly veiled anti-Semitic propaganda in the official press organs and in the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Almost a year later, Lustig revealed in an open letter to the Slovak poet Ladislav Novomeský (published in the *Literární listy* of 23 May 1968) that Jiří Hendrych, a member of the party presidium, had said to him in private in June 1967 that he understood the objections to the party’s policy, but that ‘*in the fight for strategic positions in the Middle East and in the question to whom would belong the richest oil reserves of the world, there could be no scruples*’. Now such arguments ‘from above’ could not impress the regime’s critics any longer, including the communists among them. The playwright Pavel Kohout gave a speech at the Fourth Writers’ Congress in which he compared the

datelství Karolinum, 1997, pp. 147–62, here p. 153. ISBN 8071844128. Brod’s figure may be closer to the truth than Schulze Wessel’s.

10 SUDA, Zdenek. *Zealots and Rebels: A History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1980, p. 315. ISBN 0817973427.

situation of Czechoslovakia in September 1938 with that of Israel in June 1967. Israel had struck against Egyptian and other Arab military forces, who were preparing to attack her, in an action of a pre-emptive and defensive nature. Kohout argued that if the Czechs, instead of capitulate, had done the same against the Germans in 1938, they similarly would not have been seen as the aggressor from a moral point of view. The Czechoslovak press was using a one-sided definition of 'aggression' in the Arab-Israeli war and a 'loyal citizen' of Czechoslovakia living in *'the twenty-second year of socialist democracy ought to have the right to publicly express his opinion'* on a question like this. It may be true that critical Czechoslovak writers were saying what a large section of public opinion was thinking. It is revealing that some official press organs admitted that *'certain parts of public opinion allowed themselves to be influenced by sentimental arguments'*, including the alleged parallel between Czechoslovakia's position in 1938 and Israel's position in 1967. Commentaries along these lines were made by Radio Bratislava on 22 June 1967 and by the Slovak party paper *Pravda* (18 June), the Magyar-language paper *Uj Szo* (1 July) and the *Rudé právo* (18 July).¹¹ Meanwhile, the *Literární noviny* was punished for its critical attitude. It was banned after the Fourth Czechoslovak Writers' Congress and only began to appear again – now as *Literární listy* – in February 1968.¹²

In August 1967 two dramatic events took place which were directly linked to the Middle East controversy. The Slovak author, critical communist, and former partisan fighter Ladislav Mňačko decided to make a journey to Israel as an act of protest against the pro-Arab policy of the Czechoslovak government. In his open letter of 11 August, mentioned above, Mňačko declared that he could not support a policy *'that would lead to the destruction of an entire people'*. He condemned the censorship that silenced the critics of Czechoslovak foreign policy and stressed that his country was stuck in a moral crisis whose causes went back to the Slánský trial and which had never been discussed. Mňačko indeed saw a connection between Czechoslovakia's anti-Israeli policy in 1967 and the fact that the country had not come to terms with its Stalinist past, *'with the Slánský trial and its consequences, the anti-Semitic tendencies'*. Those who were res-

11 LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 237–8, 323 n33, n36; SVAZ ČESKOSLOVENSKÝCH SPISOVATELŮ. *Reden zum IV. Kongress des Tschechoslowakischen Schriftstellerverbandes, Prag, Juni 1967*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968. ISBN 1000153421; HAMŠÍK, Dušan. *Writers against Rulers*. London: Random House, 1971, pp. 74–93. ISBN 0394470222; KOHOUT, Pavel. *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Konterrevolutionärs*. Lucerne: Bucher Verlag, 1969, pp. 202–22. ISBN 1100125413; SUDA, ref. 10, pp. 315–6; SOUKUPOVÁ, ref. 3, pp. 200–1.

12 SIKORA, Stanislav. Slovakia and the attempt to reform socialism in Czechoslovakia, 1963–1969. In TEICH, Mikuláš – KOVÁČ, Dušan – BROWN, Martin D. (eds.). *Slovakia in History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 299–314, here p. 312. ISBN 9780521802536.

possible for the events of the 1950s still held their party functions and *‘for them it is perhaps more convenient to justify themselves by means of a new wave of anti-Semitism’*. In recent Czechoslovak press reports he had read the same kind of ‘unseemliness’ with regard to Israel, ‘Zionism’, and ‘cosmopolitanism’ as at the time of the Slánský trial. What had finally made him decide to travel to Israel and to express his protest against what he saw as plain anti-Semitism was a ‘minor’ but significant detail. Indeed, in a press report about the trial against Pavel Tigríd (a Czech Catholic opponent of the communist regime living in exile in Paris) Tigríd’s original ‘Jewish’ name was mentioned alongside his present name, a phenomenon already noted above and known from the show trials of the 1950s. As Mňačko explained: *‘I know that Tigríd converted to the Catholic faith during the war. Now they mention his name as Tigríd-Schönfeld. I cannot see any coincidence in this. There was a time when, with a similar technique, persecutions were prepared ...’*¹³ Pavel Tigríd had left Czechoslovakia after the communist coup in 1948 and now was the editor of a Czech anti-communist journal published in Paris. The paper may have had some influence in Czechoslovakia, because in July 1967 Tigríd was convicted *in absentia* to fourteen years imprisonment by a Prague court. Jan Beneš was convicted to seven years but pardoned in March 1968. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and during the subsequent normalisation campaign, Tigríd was designated again as a major ‘contact person’ between ‘foreign secret services’ and internal ‘anti-socialist’ forces in Czechoslovakia.

Mňačko’s open letter – one from an old non-Jewish communist and decorated writer – received widespread publicity and infuriated the Novotný regime. Five days after its publication in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Mňačko was expelled from the Czechoslovak Communist Party and deprived of his various badges and titles of honour and even of his Czechoslovak citizenship. In the evening of the very day that Mňačko’s punishment was announced, another

13 Quoted in LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 238–9. See also MATEJOVIČ, Pavel. Kultúrne časopisy ako indikátory politických zmien na konci šesťdesiatych rokov. In TÍŽIK, Miroslav – KMEŤ, Norbert (eds.). *Príliš ľudská tvár socializmu? Reforma zdola a okolnosti reformného procesu v Československu 1968*. Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2016, pp. 411–428, here p. 415. ISBN 978-80-85544-97-8; MARUŠIAK, Juraj. Kultúrny život a reformný proces v roku 1968. In *ibid.*, pp. 430–461, here p. 441; LEIKERT, Jozef. *Taký bol Ladislav Mňačko*. Bratislava: Luna, 2008, *passim*. ISBN 8096965425; LEIKERT, Jozef. Emigrácia kontroverzného spisovateľa a novinára Ladislava Mňačka do Izraela v rokoch 1967 a 1968. In MICHÁLEK, Slavomír (ed.). *Slovensko v labyrinte moderných európskych dejín. Pocta historikov Milanovi Zemkovi*. Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2014, pp. 454–475. ISBN 978-80-89396-28-3. In the latter publication (p. 454) Leikert also mentions the fact that, until recently, the non-Jewish Slovak Ladislav Mňačko (1919–1994) was regarded as a Jew by some people in Slovakia including certain writers, perhaps a typical ‘misunderstanding’.

dramatic event took place in Prague. Charles Jordan, the 51-year-old European director of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee ('Joint') which tried to support the remaining Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, disappeared, having probably been arrested by State Security or attacked by people who regarded him as an enemy. Four days later his dead body was found in the River Vltava. Jordan, who was staying with his wife in a Prague hotel, had gone out that evening possibly to meet with representatives of the local Jewish community. The Joint had often been accused by communist governments of having contacts with the CIA and with 'international Zionism', indeed of being an 'American espionage agency', and the atmosphere in Prague, of course, had not been improved following Mňačko's departure and open letter. The Joint demanded that foreign physicians be admitted to Czechoslovakia in order to examine Jordan's corpse, but when some of them arrived from Switzerland they found that Czech physicians had already done the job and removed some vital organs. In October 1967 Louis Broido, the Joint's American chairman, declared that he excluded the possibility of Jordan's death being the result of an accident, suicide, or criminal act. He believed that 'someone from a communist or an Arab country' had murdered Jordan. According to Broido, there were three possible perpetrators: the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, or an agent of an Arab state.¹⁴ Was the Czechoslovak government, perhaps, protecting a Soviet or Arab murderer? The story continued. In December 1967 a Swiss physician, professor Hardmeyer, who had examined the corpse of Jordan in Prague and was about to publish his findings, was found dead near Zürich; his death could not be explained. Then, in March 1968 as the Prague Spring was getting underway, half-official rumours emerged in Czechoslovakia trying to clear State Security (StB) from any suspicions of involvement in the murder of Jordan. Some people associated with State Security hinted that his murderers were agents of the 'Arab world', but that the Czechoslovak government could not disclose the facts 'because of its relations with Arab countries'.¹⁵ Had the Czechoslovak government or State Security protected Arab murderers? If so, had they done so on instructions from Moscow or the KGB?

It would seem that the turmoil engendered in Czechoslovakia by the pro-Arab policy of the Novotný regime, and by the reactions to this of prominent intellec-

14 WASSERSTEIN, Bernard. *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945*. London: Penguin Books, 1996, p. 198. ISBN 0674931998; LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 239–40; article by R.H. Estabrook in the *Washington Post*, 29 October 1967, reprinted in RUBIN, Ronald I. (ed.). *The Unredeemed: Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968, pp. 196–206. ISBN 0111066345.

15 LENDVAI, ref. 3, p. 240, quoting the periodical *Jews in Eastern Europe* (May 1968), pp. 25–9, and the Austrian daily *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Vienna), 17 March 1968.

tuals and a part of Czechoslovak public opinion, was a factor of more than minor importance in the rise of the reform movement, which achieved its first victory with the ousting of Novotný as party leader in January 1968. It is significant that during the course of the historic year 1968 the issue of Israel, 'Zionism', and anti-Semitism resurfaced continually and appeared to play an important, perhaps an increasingly important, role in Czechoslovakia's internal debates and political conflicts. As the censorship largely disappeared, those who were involved in anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic propaganda, but also those who protested and campaigned against it, made themselves heard all the time. 'Anti-Zionist' agitation obviously had a political function for authoritarian anti-reformists and populist anti-Semites, while the fight against it had a moral and political significance for reformists of various kinds.¹⁶ During the period March-July 1968 there were many moments when the issue of Czechoslovak policy towards Israel and the Middle East was hotly debated. The first question in this connection was that of resuming diplomatic relations with Israel, which had been broken off in June 1967 under Soviet pressure. Czechoslovak students and various newspapers and other mass media were putting this to the fore as a political demand, arguing among other things that maintaining normal relations with all sides in the Middle East would show a higher level of maturity and independence in the field of foreign policy. Severing relations with Israel had not been a logical step given that during the War of Algerian Independence or the Vietnam War, Czechoslovakia had not broken off relations with France or the United States. Pointing to the example of Romania, critics and commentators also argued that maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel did not necessarily endanger the existing friendship with Arab states. In fact, having normal relations with both sides in the Middle East would create the possibility for Czechoslovakia to contribute to a peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Other, rather unpleasant aspects of the problem resurfaced as well. Some press organs drew attention to the earlier protests against the government's Middle Eastern policy in 1967 and condemned

16 It would be wrong, however, to think that only the anti-reformists were using anti-Semitic rhetoric. The Czech students' leader Jana Kohnová, who attended a mass meeting in Bratislava on 19 March 1968, noted that a speech delivered by Gustáv Husák contained anti-Israeli statements and a 'plain anti-Semitism'; see SCHULZE WESSEL, ref. 9, p. 167; PAŽOUT, Jaroslav. *Mocným navzdory. Studentské hnutí v šedesátých letech 20. století*. Prague: Prostor, 2008, p. 115. ISBN 9788072601868. Another prominent Slovak, Ladislav Novomeský, criticised in an article published in the *Rudé právo* of 12 May 1968, what he called Lustig's '*passionate pro-Israeli and pro-Zionist declarations*', which he said contrasted sharply with his disinterest in the Slovak cause. In his open letter of 23 May, Lustig replied that Novomeský had always remained silent during the anti-Israeli campaign conducted since June 1967; see LENDVAL, ref. 3, p. 326 n83. Was anti-Semitism in Slovakia more widespread than in the Czech lands? Was there a political reason for this, also in terms of Czech-Slovak antagonism or perceived Czech-Slovak inequality? More research is needed on this.

the bloodthirsty anti-Israeli propaganda made by Arab students in Prague during their demonstrations ('destroy Israel' etc.). Examples of comments about these matters were statements by Věra Stovičková of Radio Prague on 30 April and 8 June 1968, articles in the Prague weekly *Student* of 29 May and 26 June, and the interview with Mňačko in the paper *Svobodné slovo* of 5 July after his return to Czechoslovakia.¹⁷

University students in Prague were probably the vanguard of the movement against anti-Israeli policy and anti-Semitism. During the May Day demonstrations in 1968 some groups of young people were carrying along an Israeli flag and a banner with the slogan, 'Let Israel live!' At the end of May students at the Philosophical Faculty of Prague's Charles University started an action which was probably unique in the history of communist Eastern Europe. They organised a petition proposing the resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel, calling on the general population to sign it with the argument that Czechoslovakia could only play a positive role in helping to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict if she had normal relations with both sides. There were also moral arguments. As the *Student* wrote on 29 May: 'In view of the fact that diplomatic relations with Israel were broken off at a time when many spokesmen of the Arab states were preaching mass murder, we are of the opinion that this step was wrong, not only politically but also morally. Therefore we demand the immediate and unconditional resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel.' Students were busy collecting signatures in the streets of Prague for three weeks and on 21 June a student delegation appeared at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to submit the petition, which also proposed to hold a referendum on the issue. The petition had been signed by 13,662 people in Prague, perhaps a considerable number given that they were not used to openly supporting an action like this. It is probably true that a relatively large proportion of the Czechoslovak population (not just inhabitants of Prague) were willing to support the demand of resuming relations with Israel and rejected the one-sided policy following the 1967 war and the 'anti-Zionist' propaganda. The government's reply to the petition and the demands of its initiators was that relations with Israel would be resumed once Israel accepted the U.N. Security Council resolution demanding her withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories. But this was not considered satisfactory by critical public opinion. Indeed, a few days later the *Student* printed an open letter of a

17 See LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 240–1, 324 n41. In April 1968, the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia and Moravia presented a list of demands including that the government condemn the anti-Semitic tendencies of the political trials of the early 1950s and allow the free celebration of the Jewish Millennium in the Czech lands. The Council also explicitly rejected the discrediting of Zionism as an 'imperialist ideology' and the like; see SOUKUPOVÁ, ref. 3, p. 213.

group of historians to Foreign Minister Jiří Hájek which supported the demand to resume relations with Israel forthwith. The journal also published an interview with the head of the East European Department of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 26 June the editors of the Student presented to Hájek another written protest concerning Czechoslovakia's foreign policy and also informed him about the foundation of a 'Society for Friendship with Israel.' The collision between official Czechoslovak policy on Israel – which apparently continued to follow the Soviet line – and the views of critical groups of Czechoslovak citizens became ever sharper in the new democratised conditions. Significant in this context was also the return and rehabilitation of Mňačko. At the end of April the Ministry of Internal Affairs revoked the decree which had deprived him of his Czechoslovak citizenship. Already on 14 March 1968 *Kulturný život*, the weekly of the Union of Slovak Writers, had published an interview with him and in May Mňačko returned to Czechoslovakia. In interviews with *Kulturný život* on 24 May, and with *Svobodné slovo* on 5 July, Mňačko explained why he had gone to Israel. He expressed his 'moral and political conviction' that Czechoslovakia should radically change her policy on the Middle East.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the events in Poland had begun to have an impact on the debate about Israel and anti-Semitism as well, not only in Czechoslovakia but also in Yugoslavia. The harsh suppression of the protests of Polish students in March 1968 and the strongly anti-Semitic overtones of the Polish government's propaganda campaign coincided with the onset of the liberalisation movement in Czechoslovakia, many of whose supporters criticised the blatant anti-Semitism in Poland. In Yugoslavia, 160 prominent intellectuals, including two members of the central committee of the Communist Party, and 1,520 university students signed a letter of protest against the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland, which they sent to the Polish embassy in Belgrade and the rector of the University of Warsaw. The Polish anti-Semitic rhetoric was also condemned by many Yugoslav newspapers, ranging from the central organ of the Yugoslav party to various literary and scientific journals. But while the Polish regime chose to ignore the protests in Yugoslavia, it sharply denounced the 'tendentious' and 'slandorous' attacks coming from its 'socialist' Czechoslovak neighbour and Warsaw Pact ally.

18 LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 241–2; MATEJOVIČ, ref. 13, pp. 415–417 for the interview with Mňačko by Agneša Kalinová, the article about Mňačko by Ján Rozner (also in *Kulturný život* in March) defending him against the attack by the journalist Gavril Gryzlov in Smena, and the consequences. In April 1968 Ladislav Novomeský, Miroslav Válek and Vojtech Mihálik decided to leave the editorial board of *Kulturný život*, its pro-Mňačko tendency at that time being a major reason for making this step. In the same month the 'Mňačko case' was a major theme at the conference of the Union of Slovak Writers, with several speakers defending Mňačko but Novomeský declaring that he refused to follow what he considered their pro-Israeli and anti-Arab orientation; see also MARUŠIAK, ref. 13, p. 447.

From the inception of the reform movement in Czechoslovakia, Gomułka had belonged to its strongest opponents and his attitude was further embittered by the criticism of Polish developments coming from Czechoslovak citizens. Their protests against the 'anti-Zionist' campaign in Poland began with statements by the Czechoslovak and Slovak writers' unions, Czechoslovak universities, and student organisations. The Czech Marxist philosopher Karel Kosík invited some Polish professors who had been dismissed during the repression and propaganda campaign, to give lectures in Prague. The author Arnošt Lustig condemned the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland on Czechoslovak TV and in an open letter challenged Ryszard Gontarz, one of the worst Polish 'anti-Zionist' propagandists, to prove his claim that a number of Polish writers and scientists were 'enemies of the people' (in the eyes of some, indeed, Jews were by definition enemies of the people). The French newspaper *Le Monde* reported on 10 April 1968 about the Czechoslovak protest actions against Polish anti-Semitism. On 27 April the Polish ambassador in Prague in his turn protested against the 'anti-Polish declarations'.¹⁹

The writers Pavel Kohout, Jan Procházka, and Arnošt Lustig decided to write an open letter to the Polish party leaders. They called upon Gomułka and his colleagues 'to end the shameful anti-Semitism which is polluting the common struggle of the Poles and the Jews against Nazism. The official campaign against Zionism is a cause for fear that the phantom of anti-Semitism may be revived, which in our century has always announced a catastrophe'.²⁰ On 6 May there followed an official Polish note addressed to the Czechoslovak party leadership and the Czechoslovak government, protesting against 'the anti-Polish campaign in the press, the radio and recently at certain public meetings'. Indeed, on 3 May a mass meeting of students had been held in Prague at which several thousand people adopted a resolution expressing solidarity with the Polish students and condemning the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland. The resolution was sent to the Polish embassy and to the students' union in Warsaw, and on 4 May the *New York Times* carried an article on the students' meeting in Prague. The Czechoslovak government took some distance from the criticism of Polish anti-Semitism, but the *Student* wrote that the 'anti-Zionist' campaign was used by some as a trump-card in the power struggles within the Polish party leadership. In Czechoslovakia the ongoing debate about the revelations and implications of the Slánský show trial had obviously generated a climate of unprecedented sensitivity about political demagoguery, ideological primitivism, and injustice. On 8 June the Czech actress Jana Brejchová wrote in the *Práce*: 'The word Zionism reminds us of the

19 Quotations in *ibid.*, pp. 242–3, 324 n45.

20 *Práce*, 4 May 1968.

*six million victims and of the fact that a few years ago, when people were thrown into jail and hanged, a campaign against Zionism was launched here. Our concern is therefore justified when neighbours of Czechoslovakia are reviving the spectre of Zionism.*²¹

The situation further escalated when Polish anti-Semitic communists began to accuse their Czechoslovak critics of ‘Zionism’, which now became part of the growing pressure by East Bloc party leaders on the Czechoslovak reformers. In a broadcast on Polish TV on 11 May 1968, J. Barecki, an editor of the Polish party paper *Trybuna ludu*, spoke of ‘anti-socialist and Zionist forces in Czechoslovakia’ who were conducting an anti-Polish campaign and promoting ‘the admission of bourgeois political parties’ and ‘better relations with West Germany and Israel’. Polish newspapers were writing about ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘Zionist’ elements who controlled the Czechoslovak mass media.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of Czechoslovak journalists, students, and intellectuals who were protesting against Polish anti-Semitism were not Jewish at all was of course no problem in accusing them of ‘Zionism’. The allegation that pro-reform communists and intellectuals were Zionists was no Polish invention, however, even if at this juncture the Poles were the most blunt in this regard. Politically targeted anti-Zionist rhetoric existed in other communist states as well, and after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 a concerted anti-reform and anti-Semitic propaganda campaign was launched from Moscow, Warsaw, East-Berlin, and again by orthodox Czechoslovak communists themselves. In Czechoslovakia such a campaign – if on a smaller scale than in Poland and from ‘below’ rather than from ‘above’ – already had started in February 1968, when anti-reform communists like the old Czech Stalinist Josef Jodas began to cultivate anti-Jewish resentment in a way reminiscent of the early 1950s. Jodas and four other dogmatic communists wrote a pamphlet – the so-called *Letter from Libeň*, a working-class district in Prague – which they sent to various party organisations, functionaries, and factories and in which the fall of Novotný was described as a ‘bourgeois putsch’.

The pamphlet described the reformers around Dubček as an anti-communist ‘fifth column’ and spoke in a bizarre way of their ‘Zionism as a means to defend Hitler.’ It mentioned the names of those who should be seen as the main culprits – and as ‘provocateurs’, ‘imperialist agents’ etc. – behind the putsch against Novotný. They were allegedly eight people, six of whom were actually survivors of the show trials of the 1950s while five were Jews, including Eduard Goldstücker, Bedřich Hájek, and František Kriegel. Hájek was consistently referred to as ‘Hájek-Karpeles’, adding once again in the anti-Semitic style of the show trials

21 Quotations in LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 243–4, 324 n47.

the original Jewish name of the 'accused' to his later-adopted Czech or Slovak name.²²

In January 1968 Goldstücker had been elected chairman of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers and in April Kriegel became a member of the party presidium. The two men were the only Jews with a prominent official position in Czechoslovakia's public and political life. However, the editors of the leading pro-reform newspapers were flooded with hundreds of anonymous anti-Semitic letters suggesting that the Jews and the 'Zionists' were behind the reform policy. Goldstücker, Kriegel, and others also received threatening personal letters. Dozens of prominent intellectuals, including non-Jews like Pavel Kohout, Ludvík Vaculík, and Jiří Hochmann, received letters calling them 'Zionists', 'revisio-nists', or 'imperialist agents'. Unlike the pamphlet distributed by Jodas and his group these letters were anonymous, but they clearly hailed from the same milieu of populist, primitive, and authoritarian-minded individuals, in which anti-Semitism, Stalinism, and fascism seemed to overlap. This social and ideological milieu was politically manipulated by the anti-reformists and probably contained a mix of conservative party members, people from the Militia and the lower ranks of State Security, and fascist-minded anti-Semites (people who survived under any regime and even could be used by it). Numbers of Czechs and Slovaks with German-sounding – and therefore also Yiddish- or Jewish-sounding – names were denounced as Jews or Zionists even if they were not of Jewish background, and typically the letter-writers always claimed to speak on behalf of 'the people' or 'the working class'.

On 5 May the paper *Práce* published one of the anonymous letters which it had received in order to give its readers an impression of what they were dealing with. This letter, signed by 'a worker of Avia Motor Works, Čakovice', contained the following phrase: 'Mister Stern, Fleissig, Kohn, Weiner, Kraus or whatever your name may be, we know that you are Jews and parasites of the people, whose destiny is none of your business.' On 9 June Josef Fleissig, one of those attacked, an editor of *Práce*, and not a Jew, published a broader selection of letters sent to the paper. It included letters by people who condemned the anti-Semitic insults but also some anonymous letters supporting anti-Semitism or expressing such insults. Some of the latter claimed that the paper was 'controlled by Jews, who were ready to sell the Republic'. Others blamed 'the Jews' for their bad housing conditions, high rents, low pensions and so on. Fleissig wrote a comment declaring that he regretted the attitude of 'the little Hitler of today' and also the fact that most of the anti-Semitic letter-writers stressed that they were party members

22 KOHOUT, ref. 11, pp. 50–55; LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 244–5; SCHULZE WESSEL, ref. 9, pp. 155–6; SKILLING, H. Gordon. *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 193. ISBN 0691052344.

and 'true communists'. He wondered if he could stay in the same party with people like that, noting that there was only one Jew among the editors of *Práce*.²³

The anti-Semitic campaign also included a deception and provocation ostensibly, but not really, initiated from Austria. At the end of May and the beginning of June several hundred people in Prague, both Jews and non-Jews, received a forged letter signed by 'Simon Wiesenthal', the head of the Documentation Centre of the Association of Jewish Victims of Nazi Persecution in Vienna. The letter declared that the democratic developments in Czechoslovakia were '*also favourable for the cause of World Jewry and our State – Israel. The Jews love freedom, because they can only fulfil their historic mission, the spiritual domination of the world, in conditions of freedom ... Therefore I appeal to you and other friends in Czechoslovakia, courageous fighters for the cause of the Jews, to continue your efforts in the interest of our cause*'. Wiesenthal sent a protest to the Czechoslovak ambassador in Vienna and the Austrian embassy in Prague was informed about the falsification as well. On 20 June the Documentation Centre published the fraudulent letter together with Wiesenthal's protest, and in the following months the matter was reported in *Le Monde* and other international newspapers. It is not certain that the 'Wiesenthal letter' had a Czechoslovak origin. It was similar to a forged letter sent to Dr Zofia Majewska in Gdańsk, a well-known Jewish physician, in which the Polish Jews were called upon to immigrate to Israel. It is possible that both letters were Polish in origin and had been compiled by agents of the anti-Semitic '*Partisan*' movement of Moczar.²⁴ It also may have been a joint action of 'anti-Zionists' in Poland and Czechoslovakia or of elements within the security services of both countries.

A major target of the Czechoslovak anti-Semites was Eduard Goldstücker, the Jewish president of the Writers' Union, a university professor, and a zealous protagonist of the reform policy and the idea of a new, democratic socialism. Goldstücker was an old communist of the idealistic type and had been Czechoslovak ambassador to Israel in 1950–51, then to become a victim in the Slánský trial. He was imprisoned for several years, but survived and was released, later returning to academic life in Prague's Charles University as an expert on German-Jewish literature. He was one of the initiators of the conference about Franz Kafka held in 1963, where he delivered a speech which played a part in the rise of the Czechoslovak reform movement (and of the critical idea of 'alienation' in modern bureaucratic society). Being both a Jew and a pro-reform communist – though not one with much political influence – he was an ideal target for the anti-Semites. Perhaps the most vicious attack on Goldstücker was an anony-

23 KOHOUT, ref. 11, pp. 50–55; LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 246–7; SCHULZE WESSEL, ref. 9, p. 246.

24 LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 117–8, 247, 324 n54.

mous letter sent to him on 28 May 1968. On 23 June the *Rudé právo* published this letter at the request of Goldstücker himself, together with the latter's reply (*'Občané pozor!'*). This vulgar and insulting letter called him a *'Zionist hyena'* and *'sent him a million curses, not only in the name of the working class of our country but also on behalf of other socialist countries'*. The *'latest developments'* in Czechoslovakia (i.e. the reform policy) had *'opened the eyes of decent Czech people, workers and party members'*, making them understand that in the early 1950s Goldstücker *'should have been hanged alongside Slánský'*. Goldstücker *'was not a worker'* and did not belong in the communist party but *'should look for another party, perhaps an Israeli one'*. *'They knew very well'*, the letter continued, that he had been in contact with *'centres of espionage'* in Israel and elsewhere. They had *'photocopies and other documents'* which they would place at the disposal of the authorities, *'especially in the Soviet Union'*, so that they could take the necessary steps to *'expose'* his character. Indeed, *'he was done for.'*

The letter addressed Goldstücker personally, but simultaneously the Jews in general: *'You want to rule, you Jews, not just in Israel; as a Zionist you want to control the whole world. Therefore, all of us here know very well that the instigators of the latest events, including in Poland, are the Zionists, who are doing all these things in order to realise the expansionist plans of international Zionism.'* The letter concluded by calling Goldstücker a *'Jewish pig'*, whose days would come to an end soon. After some weeks of reflection, Goldstücker decided that he should take the letter seriously and write a reply. He wrote in the *Rudé právo* that even if the letter was the product of a *'pathological marginal figure'*, the people of his generation could not forget that in a similar pathological atmosphere the Nazi party had emerged.

Moreover, he knew the vocabulary, the phraseology, and the *'stylistic principles'* from his experiences in the 1950s, from his interrogators, his prison guards, and the judicial incrimination fabricated against him. Goldstücker believed that the letter was written by someone who had been connected with State Security in the 1950s and who was still thinking along the lines of those days. He felt that someone *'was dreaming again to stage a trial against an alleged Zionist conspiracy'*, and that he had been chosen to play the role of chief accused. *'I know this song and the authors of the lyrics and the melody very well. I know that my life is at stake. I place myself under the protection of my fellow citizens in the conviction that this is my best protection.'* He clearly regarded the threat as more serious than just some statements by a pathological figure. The anti-Semitic letter and Goldstücker's reply triggered a considerable response.²⁵

25 Ibid., pp. 247–9; SCHULZE WESSEL, ref. 9, pp. 34–6, 247–50, 306; SOUKUPOVÁ, ref. 3, pp. 198–200.

On 1 July 1968 the *Rudé právo* informed its readers that within one week 218 letters had been received from various individuals and organisations; by 3 July the number stood at 562, including 82 anti-Semitic letters. On 10 July the paper printed a selection – letters from anti-Semites as well as from people who protested against anti-Semitism – and warned against ‘*fascist tendencies*’, which were ‘*perhaps the greatest threat to democratic socialism*’. A clear majority of the letters – including statements by the Union of Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters, prominent scientists, and even a representative of the People’s Militia – spoke out against anti-Semitism and expressed solidarity with Goldstücker, often arguing that anti-Semitism was more than just a marginal phenomenon. However, some anonymous letters regretted the fact that Goldstücker ‘*had not been gassed*’, and a letter by ‘*some honest workers from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic*’ challenged Goldstücker to carry out an opinion poll in order to find out what the people were really thinking about the Jews (‘*then it will become clear to him what his end will be like!*’).

The problem of anti-Semitism continued to be discussed in Czechoslovak newspapers and TV programmes. It was also something which evidently overlapped with the intensifying conflict between supporters and enemies of the reform policy, both in Czechoslovakia and in other communist states. Anonymous pamphlets distributed in Prague and other cities almost always coupled attacks against the reform programme with ‘anti-Zionist’ diatribes. Since in Czechoslovakia and in the Czechoslovak Communist Party there were not that many Jews at all, the anti-Semites had to ‘create’ Jews in order to discredit the leaders of the reform movement.²⁶ Thus, Ota Šik, the principal initiator of the economic reforms and, though of Jewish descent, apparently not regarding himself as a Jew, was described as a ‘Zionist’ by some of his enemies. Šik felt constrained to stress in letters published in the newspapers *Svobodné slovo*, *Mladá fronta*, and *Reporter* at the end of March that in fact he was not Jewish and that ‘*even the Nazis had treated him as an Aryan*’. But because in the eyes of some people his origins were ‘obscure’, they claimed that he was a half-Jew or quarter-Jew. Men like Goldstücker or Kriegel may have been primarily hated by dogmatic communists because they were reformers, but since they were also Jews they could be discredited as such. In the process those with an allegedly ‘doubtful’ background like Šik, or the pro-reform communist Čestmír Císař, were associated with the Jews as well, the implication being that they were either of Jewish origin or at least

26 As we have seen, in 1968 there must have been between 12,000 and 18,000 Jews, or people with a Jewish or partly Jewish background, in Czechoslovakia (the precise figure being difficult to ascertain), of whom about a third (between 4,000 and 6,000) left after the invasion in August; of the 25,000–30,000 Jews in Poland, at least 15,000 left between 1968 and 1972. Cf. LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 34, 310 n30; WASSERSTEIN, ref. 14, p. 192; BROD, ref. 9, p. 153.

'creatures of the Zionists'.²⁷ On 5 and 6 July 1968, Prague newspapers reported that a leaflet had been distributed in the city attacking Šik, Kriegel, and Císař as 'political adventurers who were striving for a form of freedom that would allow them to slander the Communist Party and to prepare the ground for the rule of the Zionists, a freedom that would lead to the destruction of the achievements of the people'. In other words, they were facilitating an attack by the Zionists as well as a return to capitalism.²⁸ It was not the first nor the last time that anti-Semitism and a populist form of anti-capitalism went hand in hand.

After the invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968, it soon became apparent that the anonymous Czechoslovak authors of the anti-Semitic pamphlets of the preceding months, and those who had been threatening the reformers by letter or otherwise, had not acted independently but probably in co-operation with their Soviet masters. This can be concluded, among other things, from the fact that the invasion became the signal for a renewed massive 'anti-Zionist campaign' from Moscow, Warsaw, and indeed East Berlin. Perhaps, the idea was to direct the hatred of the Czechoslovak population away from the Soviet occupiers and towards the 'Zionists', who were depicted as fascists. On 22 August the Soviet paper *Izvestia* accused in an hysterical article, which also attacked 'former Nazi generals, SS-officers, old Fascists, reactionary clerics' and so on, three non-Jewish leaders of the Czechoslovak 'Club of Engaged Non-partisans' (an association founded during the Prague Spring) of being 'counter-revolutionaries' and 'agents of the international Zionist organisation known by the name of Joint'.

A Soviet publication, *About the Events in Czechoslovakia*, which appeared in several languages in Moscow, reiterated that these three individuals were 'agents of an international Zionist organisation'. The secret congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party on 22 August which defended the reform programme and condemned the invasion; the declaration by some Czechoslovak government ministers in Belgrade where they were treated by the Yugoslavs as the only legitimate representatives of their country; and the appearance of foreign minister Hájek at the U.N. Security Council in New York were all seen as insults, triggering the 'anti-Zionist' campaign of Moscow and its allies. Kriegel, one of the Czechoslovak party leaders – and the only Jew among them – forcibly brought to Moscow after the invasion to 'negotiate' with the Soviet leaders, received a special treatment. He was insulted, beaten, and in fact the only Czechoslovak leader

27 LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 249–50, 324 n56, quoting inter alia a publication by the Institute of Jewish Affairs in London, *The Use of Anti-Semitism against Czechoslovakia* (London, 1968), and *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 September 1969.

28 *Rudé právo*, 5 July 1968; *Večerní Praha*, 6 July 1968.

who refused to sign the Moscow Protocol of 26 August, which quasi-legitimised the massive presence of Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia. The Russians wanted to keep Kriegel in Moscow, but Dubček and the other Czechoslovak leaders refused to go back home without him, whereupon the Russians let him go. However, the Soviet leaders seem to have demanded that the Czechoslovaks organise an ‘anti-Zionist’ trial with Kriegel and Goldstücker as the chief accused. Eventually they were not successful, but Kriegel was only released by them on condition that he immediately resign his political functions. Reports on the Soviets’ anti-Semitism and their plans for an anti-Zionist show trial – whose function was to justify and explain the invasion – appeared in *Le Monde* and the London *Times* on 12 and 13 September 1968. The British philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote a letter (published in *The Times* on 16 September) about this Soviet intention and appealed to socialists and communists around the world ‘to forcefully resist the Soviet demands for scapegoats’. Thus, at least some ‘progressive’ figures in the West acknowledged that the suppression of the Prague Spring was accompanied by outbreaks of anti-Semitism and ‘anti-Zionism’. The Paris edition of the *International Herald Tribune* of 24 October, and Pavel Tigrid’s report about the Moscow ‘negotiations’ in August 1968 (published in *Le Monde* on 25 March 1969), provided further details on the anti-Semitic attitude of the Soviet leaders.²⁹

For obvious reasons, particularly shocking was the contribution to the ‘anti-Zionist’ campaign made by the leaders of East Germany. On 25 August 1968, *Neues Deutschland*, the central organ of the East German communists, commented as follows on the rebellious secret congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party: ‘Zionist forces have taken over the leadership of the party.’ The next day the paper referred to Josef Smrkovský, the radical pro-reform chairman of the Czechoslovak parliament, as one of those who were involved in a ‘Zionist conspiracy’. A correspondent of *Neues Deutschland* brought the ‘sensational report’ that Smrkovský’s advisers ‘had sold strictly secret information’ about the Soviet-Czechoslovak meeting at Čierna nad Tisou on 29 July to 1 August (the last attempt to prevent a crisis in mutual relations) to the ‘Israeli Secret Service’. Meanwhile, the Polish party paper *Trybuna ludu* reported on 25 August that according to General Jan Czapla, a political commissar of the Polish Army, ‘the sources of the March events in Poland and of the attacks in Czechoslovakia were identical: revisionism and Zionism’. The aims were identical as well, ‘but while in Poland the attacks had been successfully beaten off, in Czechoslovakia these forces went so far as to threaten the foundations of socialism ... They wan-

29 LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 250–2, 324 n58–59; FEJTÖ, ref. 1, pp. 569–70 n24.

ted to break open the southern flank of the Warsaw Pact.' On 2 September the Trybuna ludu wrote that 'the Zionist forces' were one element among 'those who pulled the strings of the counter-revolution'. But unfortunately in Czechoslovakia they were speaking 'too little about the powerful Zionist forces' because of the 'unpleasant experiences' in the times of Stalin, when citizens of Jewish descent 'suffered as well'. On 28 August the Ukrainian party paper *Pravda Ukrainy* reported that the Ukrainian Writers' Union had passed a resolution describing 'the so-called writers Goldstücker, Procházka, Vaculík, and others ... as accomplices of world imperialism and militant Zionism'. In East Germany a Czech newspaper (*Zprávy*) and a Czech radio station (*Rádio Vltava*) were established shortly after the invasion of Czechoslovakia to spread propagandistic disinformation, including claims about the counter-revolutionary role of 'the Zionists'. On 26 August Radio Prague, still in the hands of Dubček's reformers, sarcastically reported that 'at last we have learned who is responsible for the non-existing Czechoslovak counter-revolution', thanks to the media controlled by the occupiers. 'They did not openly say "Jews", but said "international Zionism." Apparently our East German friends are experts on this issue, which has its origin in the time of the Second World War. Then it was a question of the final solution of the Jewish problem, today of the suppression of the Czechoslovak counter-revolution.' Radio Prague gathered from the reports of the occupiers that they were discovering 'Zionists' everywhere: 'Why shouldn't they find two million Zionists when the Soviet Army instructs or Neues Deutschland wishes them to do so?'³⁰ The anti-Semitic tendency of the official propaganda from Moscow and East Berlin was resented by the more decent type of communists in East and West. The *Volksstimme*, the paper of the Communist Party of Austria, described the anti-Zionist diatribes as 'unbearable'.³¹

The anti-Zionist campaign also continued to focus on Goldstücker. On 27 September and 2 October, respectively, *Neues Deutschland* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the organ of the Soviet Writers' Union, attacked him in remarkably long articles connecting his 'counter-revolutionary role' to his 'by no means accidental attempts to spread the philosophy of Franz Kafka', whose notion of alienation

30 Quotations in LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 252–3.

31 *Volksstimme*, 3 September 1968. When the Czechoslovak foreign minister Jiří Hájek, who had declared at the U.N. in New York that the invasion happened without the consent of his government, was attacked by Moscow in an anti-Semitic manner ('he had changed his name from Karpeles to Hájek', etc.), the *Volksstimme* protested again, writing that the attack reminded them of 'the tone of the Stürmer', a notorious Nazi newspaper; see *Volksstimme*, 4 September 1968. To make matters worse, the Soviets were actually confusing the non-Jewish Jiří Hájek with the Jewish pedagogue Bedřich Hájek, making their propaganda look even more primitive.

was anathema to orthodox communists. The *Literaturnaya Gazeta* described Goldstücker as ‘*a particularly dangerous man*’ and informed its readers that as a secondary school student he had already been ‘*an active member of a Zionist youth organisation*’. As yet, the Czechoslovak press managed to retain a measure of independence, which demonstrated that the process of ‘normalisation’ and suppressing the resistance of the reformers was a relatively slow one. On 12 October 1968 the *Rudé právo* reported that Dubček – who still had some room for manoeuvring – had declared in a speech that the Czechoslovak party must ‘*take care not to be defiled by anti-Semitism*’. In November the presidium of the Czechoslovak parliament protested against an anti-Semitic attack by the *Zprávy* on Kriegel, who had dared to oppose the legalisation by parliament of the ‘*provisional stationing*’ of a large number of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. The *Zprávy* continued to accuse Czechoslovak Jews of being ‘*part of a cobweb of Israeli aggression*’ and similar political crimes. The support for this kind of talk was growing in Czechoslovak party circles. At a meeting on 22 January 1969 of several hundred dogmatic communists, Vilém Nový, a member of the party’s central committee, denounced the ‘*shameful role*’ of Goldstücker, Kriegel, Hájek, and Šik – to which those present responded by shouting, ‘*Down with revisionism and Zionism*’, and, ‘*Throw them out of the party!*’ Anti-Zionist rhetoric was a means to weaken the position of the last pro-reform communists and to oust Dubček as first secretary of the party, which finally happened in April 1969. Thus, the voices of protest against the anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic propaganda campaign were gradually silenced. The campaign, largely orchestrated from Moscow, reached a low point of degradation when in March 1969 various Soviet and East European media (notably Radio Moscow with its English- and Arab-language programmes) began to repeat the old story, mainly derived from Lebanese newspapers, that Israel and West Germany were planning ‘*the sterilisation of Arabs*’. Other malevolent stories were that ‘*one thousand Nazi military officers and war criminals were training the Israeli army*’, and that Israeli prime-minister Golda Meir ‘*was hiding the Nazi criminal Martin Bormann in her house*’.³²

In Czechoslovakia the official ‘anti-Zionist’ propaganda was not yet that extreme, but the situation was quickly deteriorating. In March 1969 the Czech writer Vilém Hejl warned against the growing potential of anti-Semitic rhetoric: ‘*Jews are easier to demarcate, characterise than for example the intellectuals, the opposition, those who deviate from the party line ... every Aryan knows exactly that he is not a Zionist.*’ This did not mean that non-Jews in ‘normalising’

32 Quotations in LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 257–60, 325 n71–77, quoting inter alia the periodical *Jews in Eastern Europe* (July 1969), p. 45.

Czechoslovakia were safe, however, for the 'deviants' among them were likely to be attacked later.³³ After Husák's take-over as first party secretary in April 1969, the remaining criticism of anti-Semitism was suppressed and the official Czechoslovak media became more openly 'anti-Zionist'. The *Rudé právo* and other press organs now were full of hints at the Jewish background of a communist reformer like Kriegel, who according to the *Rudé právo* of 4 July 1969 was actually not 'a real Czech', because he was born in East Galicia as the son of an Austrian father and a Polish mother. On 28 May the *Pravda*, the leading Slovak party paper, attacked the communists' old enemy Pavel Tigrid, using again the well-known trick of referring to him – the Jew who had become a Catholic and changed his name – as '*Tigrid-Schönfeld*'. Around the same time, in connection with the 'discovery of an anti-socialist conspiracy', the Czechoslovak Minister of the Interior Jan Pelnář mentioned the names of leading intellectuals, including a disproportionate number of Jews, as being involved. In early June the Minister of the Interior of Slovakia – now formally an autonomous republic following the new federalisation policy – mentioned among the '*foreign centres*' organising subversion, '*the branches of the nationalist Zionist organisations Joint, Sochnut, and Hias*' in Vienna. The *Pravda* became remarkably active during the course of the propaganda campaign in 1969–70. On 5 August 1970 the paper expressed its satisfaction that the 'over-Judaisation' of the press and radio had finally been ended. Indeed, until recently '*a group of intellectual Jews was trying to invent a Jewish problem that neither exists in Czechoslovakia nor in the Soviet Union or any other socialist country*'. Thus, anti-Semites could complain of Jews who were complaining of anti-Semitism. The flood of 'anti-Zionist' declarations following after the fall of Dubček also included more substantial publications and translations of anti-Semitic books from the Soviet Union. An example of this was a Slovak edition of Yuri Ivanov's *Beware: Zionism*, with an epilogue about '*the activities of the Zionists in Czechoslovakia*' by a Soviet 'expert', Jevseyev. An example of a home-grown work was that by the Czech anti-Zionist F.J. Kolár, *Sionismus a antisemitismus* (Prague, 1970), which was full of falsifications and tendentious observations. Kolár inordinately dramatized the alleged influence of '*Zionist and pro-Israeli propaganda*' in Czechoslovakia during the years 1967–68, speaking of an excessive Jewish influence in cultural life and '*an orgy of Kafkaiism*'. He concluded that the Jews had either to assimilate or go to Israel, because the Jewish and non-Jewish identities were difficult to reconcile. He turned victims into perpetrators and vice versa by claiming that during 1967–68, '*nobody wanted to look like an anti-Semite who was longing for a new genocide*'

33 HEJL, Vilém. A solution once and for all. In *Zitřek*, 19 March 1969. Shortly afterwards the independent cultural-political weekly *Zitřek* was banned.

of the Jews’, with the result that many were following the ‘fashion’ of embracing things Jewish while dismissing those who did not do so. Kolár accused Israel and Zionism of rejecting the assimilation of the Jews, of trying to separate them from non-Jews, and of encouraging the Jews to immigrate to Israel. It is doubtful, however, that he wanted to distinguish between the Jews and Israel himself. When he wrote down his observations, there were some 8,000 Jews left in Czechoslovakia. This was enough to create a great ‘Zionist’ story about them.³⁴

We may conclude that in 1967–69 the authoritarian type of communists resorted to ‘anti-Zionism’ as a propaganda tool against the Czechoslovak reformers, both on an official and an unofficial level. They tried to mobilise old anti-Semitic prejudices and harness them to their political needs, but they also harboured these sentiments themselves. Their rhetorical anti-Zionism was a means to channel their frustrations about the military defeat of the Arab allies of the Soviet Union as well as their loss of control at home. At the same time, the fight against ‘anti-Zionism’ and anti-Semitism by other groups of the population was a remarkable chapter in the history of Czechoslovakia and proof of the country’s democratic tradition. The subject is remarkable for the ways in which international politics, domestic Czechoslovak politics, and the old issue of anti-Semitism in the new context of authoritarian socialism overlapped. This makes it a complex and revealing case of anti-Semitic dynamics, which is in need of additional historical research on a number of aspects, including the specific situation in Slovakia both before and after 1968, the role of various Czech and Slovak personalities and different social and cultural groups, and crucial details concerning the ‘secret history’ of the apparatus of Czechoslovak State Security.

* The study is a result of the project VEGA 2/0025/17 *Post-war Slovakia – From popular democracy through communism to democratic Slovak Republic*, researched at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

34 LENDVAI, ref. 3, pp. 263–4, 326 n85–86; FEJTÖ, ref. 1, p. 516; MEŠŤAN, Pavol. *Antisemitizmus v politickom vývoji Slovenska (1948–1992)*. Bratislava: Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 1999, pp. 24–7. ISBN 8080600058; SOUKUPOVÁ, ref. 3, pp. 236–48 for more details on anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism (including the role of Kolár) during the early years of normalisation 1969–70.

‘ANTI-ZIONISMUS‘ UND DER KAMPF GEGEN DEN ANTISEMITISMUS
IN DER TSCHECHOSLOWAKEI, 1967–1969

ZUZANA POLÁČKOVÁ – PIETER C. VAN DUIN

Dieses Artikel analysiert das Phänomen des ‚Anti-Zionismus‘ und Antisemitismus in der Tschechoslowakei in den bemerkenswerten Jahren 1967–1969. Die Reaktionen zum Arabisch-Israelischen Krieg in Juni 1967, die politische Liberalisierung während des Prager Frühlings 1968 und die Periode der ‚Normalisierung‘ nach der sowjetischen Invasion in August 1968 waren die Hauptdeterminanten der Entwicklung dieser Erscheinung. Anti-Israelische Rhetorik und ‚anti-Zionistische‘ Propaganda waren politische Instrumente die von den kommunistischen Regime der Tschechoslowakei, Polen und der Sowjet-Union manipuliert wurden und mehrere Funktionen hatten. Sie haben die Frustration über die Niederlage der arabischen Klientele-Staaten des sowjetischen Bloks zum Ausdruck gebracht, und auch darüber dass viele osteuropäische Bürger nicht einverstanden waren mit der einseitigen anti-israelischen Politik ihrer Regierungen. Die ‚anti-Zionistische‘ Kampagne beabsichtigte auch die oppositionelle und pro-Reform Kräfte in den sozialistischen Staaten zu diskreditieren, diese zu identifizieren und quasi gleich zu stellen mit Israel und den Juden. Diese Kampagne könnte nur Wirkung haben insoweit wenigstens ein Teil der Bevölkerung empfindlich war für eine Reaktivierung der antisemitischen Vorurteile und Gefühle, die eine lange Geschichte in vielen Teile Osteuropas hatten. Aber ein anderer Teil der Bevölkerung, vor allem in der Tschechoslowakei, war entschlossen gegen der antisemitischen und anti-Zionistischen Propaganda zu kämpfen. Das hat eine neue, vielleicht unterschätzte, Dimension in den Geschehnisse der Jahren 1967–1969 hinzugefügt – in der Tschechoslowakei, aber zu einer gewissen Grad auch in Polen. Eine Analyse dieser politischen und sozialen Entwicklungen wird beitragen zu einer besseren Einsicht in der Art des Antisemitismus und ‚Anti-Zionismus‘, aber auch in dem Charakter und der Evolution der kommunistischen Regime sowie der oppositionellen Aktivitäten ihrer Kritiker.

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