

ON THE HISTORY OF THE BOHEMIAN JEWS IN THE AGE OF MODERN NATIONALISM

Christoph Stölzl

In the age of Francis Joseph, from the Revolution of 1848 to the First World War, the Jews of Bohemia experienced their „economic miracle“. The Jewish social and occupational structure was tailor-made to the needs of the emerging modern Austrian capitalism. By 1900 the Jewish population had undergone a significantly more rapid material and social rise than had the society as a whole; for the most part, the Bohemian Jews had become part of the bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie. This „economic miracle“ was accompanied by extensive internal migration which brought the Jews to the centers of economic expansion. As a result new Jewish settlements were created in the provincial towns of the Czech-speaking interior and in the German Bohemian industrial areas that had scarcely been settled by Jews before. Prague and Vienna, however, remained the focal points of Jewish hopes for advancement.

In the 1850s the Bohemian Jews were among the pillars of the neo-absolutist regime. The continuing anti-Jewish pressure exerted by the Czech petite bourgeoisie prevented any improvement of the strained relationship between the national movement and the Jews. After the Hanka affair of 1858, when the former Czecho-Jewish sympathizer David Kuh joined battle with the „icons“ of the Czech-national renewal creed, the German Jews of Prague and their press, with its close ties to Vienna, became one of the main targets of national propaganda. In the economic crisis of the 1860s, the national-socialist slogans kindled various movements of social rebellion, the biggest of which, in the spring of 1866, engendered a situation approaching civil war.