
Seminar of the Jewish Community and Communist Society (Attempt at Analysis of the Years 1948-1968)

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Seminar of the Jewish Community and Communist Society (Attempt at Analysis of the years 1948-1968) [Seminář židovská komunita a komunistická spoločnosť (pokus o analýzu rokov 1948-1968)].

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The first day of the spring Bratislava seminar took place in the framework of the solution to the problem Reflections of totalitarian systems - relation of the Jewish community and state power after 1945 (head of project, Peter Salner, assistant head, Blanka Soukupová), which is one of the main goals of the Ethnological Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. In his introduction, Peter Salner summarized the consequences of the Shoah for the Jewish community in Czechoslovakia (lessening of their number, unfortunate changes of its demographic structure generally, change of its value orientations, necessity and for the first time in history also the possibility [!] of choosing further strategies of the future). One of those strategies (emigration to Palestine [Israel]) was addressed by the Bratislava ethnologist Ivica Bumová of the Institute of Jewish Studies of Comenius University in Bratislava. Until October 1949, 20,000 Jews left the state. The second, very timely with regard to the strengthening influence of Catholic historiography on Slovakia, was a paper presented by Jaroslav Franěk, chairman of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic. Franěk dealt mainly with the well-known Slánský trial (1952), which he compared to a medieval Inquisition trial. He further pointed out that Slovak society was willing to rehabilitate fully only the non-Jewish victim of the largest Czechoslovak trial - Slovak Dr. Vladimír Clementis, at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs. In the current Slovak society, there allegedly exists the stereotype that communist means Jew. He compared the history of so-called state communism with the beginnings of Christian society. Prague anthropologist Blanka Soukupová analyzed the intellectual world of the Jews in the Czech lands in the 1960s at the time of relaxation of restrictions as well as a time of hope within the intentions of reformed communism. The renewal of the minority, as the Jewish representatives wanted to realize it, was also a renewal within the boundaries of the Communist Party. The Jews enriched social discussion with the topics of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism of the Czech lands before the Second World War. At the conclusion of the first day of the seminar, moderated by the Bratislava ethnologist Monika Vrzgulová, Peter Salner presented his paper. Salner, concentrating on the period 1945-1953, underscored the postwar ideological differentnesses of the Jewish minority, clarified the causes of its tendency toward communist ideology and post-Holocaust relation of the minority to Palestine (Israel).

While the first day was devoted to analyses of the relation of the Jewish community to communist society, the second day was dedicated to the subjective experience of the Shoah after the Shoah. The organizer of this panel was Monika Vrzgulová, the head of the project Construction of life of the Jewish minority of Slovakia after 1945 in biographic narratives. In the introductory paper, the well-known Bratislava philosopher Egon Gál reflected on the theories devoted to possible recurrence of the Shoah. The Prague anthropologist Hedvika Novotná introduced the audience to the theoretical frame of her doctoral thesis dealing with memory of the Shoah. The central point of her paper was Halbwach's and Assmann's interpretation of memory. The Prague psychologist and psychotherapist Monika Hapalová analyzed a few individual Jewish memories from a psychological point of view. At the conclusion, Monika Vrzgulová spoke about the influence of a collection of testimonies on the researcher in the course of his scientific path (using her own example) and about the character of the remembrances of the respondents of different historic periods.

The space of the Jewish religious community in Kozí Street and the ritual dining room contributed to the scientifically demanding, though friendly, atmosphere of the seminar. The second evening the celebration of the Day of remembrance of the Holocaust and heroism (Yom Hashoah Vehagvurah) also took place there. Its focal point was the solemn lighting of the candles and the projection of the documentary film of Israel television Children from a photograph about the fate of Slovak children who survived Auschwitz. Those children were photographed for propaganda purposes by the Soviet liberators at the most famous Nazi concentration camp.

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