# THE PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF THE JEWISH POPULATION IN THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC*)

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**Abstract:** The study focuses on reconstructing the professional and social structures of the Jewish population during the First Czechoslovak Republic. It is based on official Czechoslovak statistical information, which means it only analyses samples of people who identified themselves as being of Jewish faith and people who in censuses identified themselves as ethnic Jews. The author attempts to draw her conclusions mainly from the larger and more comprehensive sample of Jews (from the perspective of faith). The characteristics established therefore do not capture the conversion rate among Jews. The basic goal was to determine the difference and specific features of the Jewish populations in the lands that made up then Czechoslovakia. In this context, attention is also devoted to settlement by national land, by reproductive behaviour, and by housing conditions.

Since arriving in the Czech lands in the Middle Ages and permanently settling there, the Jews have formed a culturally, socially and professionally very specific minority community. For centuries they formed a marginal group in the population, the targets of various forms of aggressive behaviour and action by the Christian majority (pogroms, being driven out of the country, restrictions on family size, and so on), and both the church and state imposed restrictions on their professional activities.

The Enlightened-Absolutist state was interested in 'fructification' – engaging all the subjects within the state, even minorities, including the Jewish minority. In the 'pre-national' period under Joseph II, Jews were steered towards adopting the German language and culture, and they were only allowed to obtain an education at German schools, even at the university level. The era of mediaeval corporatism ended in the emergence of the concept of the right of the individual – in the various legal systems simultaneously in effect within the hierarchically ordered Estates state – and the era of civil society began, which was founded on the principles of legal unification. Jews in the Czech lands did not obtain full civic equality until 1867 (*Pěkný* 1993: 11–128). From then until the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire they quickly and dynamically grew closer to and merged with the majority, but within that majority they again began to assume a specific social and professional position. Socially, many of them began to gravitate towards the middle class, some penetrated the upper class and formed part of the elites, and professionally they transformed dramatically – they to some extent moved away from economic activity in shops and sole proprietorships, especially in the hospitality sector and the distribution of alcohol, and became entrepreneurs on a local and cross-regional scale, and they joined the ranks of the intelligentsia in various fields (doctors, lawyers, journalists, teachers at all types of schools, engineers, etc.). From the start of the Diaspora in the Middle Ages they had practised the profession of doctor, and they almost had a 'genetic'

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predisposition to be lawyers given their civil laws and preparation for the period of dispersion (*halacha*). In terms of sectors they headed substantially into the quaternary sector, they traditionally had a strong position in the tertiary sector, and they entered the secondary and primary sectors as owners, tenants and entrepreneurs (*Nesládková* 2003: 55–64; *Nesládková* 2001a: 7–27; *Nesládková* 1998: 287–298; *Nesládková and Dokoupil* 1997: 149–174).

After the Czechoslovak state was founded in 1918 the position of the Jewish minority changed substantially in the new state. The First Republic enabled this specific cultural and ethnic minority to identify itself not just in the traditional sense as a religion (until the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire the Jews were defined as a religious community) but also as an ethnic group. In the amendments to the Czechoslovak constitution for the first time a reference is made to a Jewish ethnicity. In the population census in 1921 the Jewish population for the first time was able to declare Jewish ethnicity, regardless of their mother tongue, which contemporary science deemed the basic indicator of ethnic affiliation (so-called tribal affiliation) (*Bubeník and Křesťan* 1995: 119–134). In practice this meant that we find both Jews from the ethnic perspective and Jews from the perspective of faith. Every member of Judaism, so even non-Israelites, whether from the Czechoslovak, German, Hungarian, or other ethnic or cultural circle, could declare themselves to be of Jewish ethnicity. The new state thus accommodated the situation of ethnic Jews, which had no state and from the end of the 19th century and under the effect of new waves of anti-Semitism began to develop a version of nationalism in the form of Zionism. Ethnicity was considered a very important social symbol in the very heterogeneous state during the interwar period, as noted by the prominent Czech demographer and statistician at that time, Antonín Boháč: 'Of…population only two-thirds (66.24%) are of Czechoslovak ethnicity, the other third is made up of minorities…German (22.53%), Hungarian (4.89%), Russian or Ukrainian (3.86%), Polish (0.68%), and Jewish (1.39%)' (*Boháč* 1936: 83). It is necessary to remember that the circumstances this minority was in were very complicated, as their historically conditioned, traditional cosmopolitanism meant that they tended to master the languages of the region they lived in (e.g. in the Ostrava region they could speak German, Czech and Polish), so it always depended on a number of political and also cultural and other circumstances, which led to the adoption of this or that language and culture, which was then attached to other commitments and expectations. Historical tradition adhered to for centuries dictated that they should cleave to the majority nation of the state and support the state. However, this mechanism and model of behaviour was disturbed by the advancement of Zionism, and in Czechoslovakia things were further complicated by the emergence of a new Czechoslovak ethnicity. Many Jews during the time of the Monarchy had already assimilated and merged with Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, and so on, and on rare occasions some of them left the Jewish religion and adopted another faith (Roman Catholic, Evangelical) or became atheists. Population census results reveal how this occurred at the level of the family. For example, the father, as head of the household, became an atheist, his wife remained a member of the Jewish faith, their one son was an Evangelical, and their two daughters followed Judaism. The combinations were infinite. A regional evaluation reveals various tactics and strategies are observed in the behaviour of individual families. During the Austro-Hungarian Empire the situation also varied by country: e.g. in Bohemia many more Jews were inclined to become Czech, while in Moravia they remained German; in Bohemia Zionism did not develop much, while in Moravia it did.

**The settlement of the Jewish population in Czechoslovakia**

The new republic emerged as a conglomerate of historical lands and territories that had various histories and were at different stages of economic and other development. The situation of Jewish communities living in these regions was even more complicated. The Jewish community was also considerably diverse. Ashkenazi Jews inhabited the entire territory of the new state, but while in the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia) they were Central

European Jews, in Subcarpathian Ruthenia and partly also in eastern Slovakia the way of life was closer to that of eastern Jews. The differences between them were large – not just in terms of the degree of assimilation, cultural habits, the concept of the family and everyday life, but also in a social and professional sense (on this history of the Jews, see, e.g. *Haumann* 1997: 50–169; *Milosz* 1997: 84–98).

The Jewish population did not live in a compact settlement in the new state but dispersed throughout it. In Bohemia the most intensive form of assimilation occurred in the 'national' period, with almost 50% of Jews declaring Czechoslovak nationality (49.5% in 1921), which by the second census in 1930 declined slightly to 46.4%. In 1921 only 14.6% of Jews in Bohemia identified themselves with the newly formed Jewish ethnicity, but by 1930 the share had grown significantly to 20.3% (*Kořalka* 1999: 16). Here Jews lived concentrated in large towns that were important centres of trade, industry, science and culture, and very few Jewish families lived in the countryside. One such town was Prague and in it the Jewish ghetto in the city, along with Staré Město, Nové Město, Karlín, Královské Vinohrady, Malá Strana, and Žižkov. In 2001 there were more than 31 000 Jews in Prague, by 1930 the number had increased to 35 425. Substantial Jewish minorities also lived in the spa towns of Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně, Teplice-Šanov, and also in Plzeň, Liberec, České Budějovice, Ústí nad Labem, and elsewhere.

In Moravia and Silesia, like in Bohemia, Jews (ethnic and of faith) mainly resided in towns, but unlike in Bohemia they did not live primarily in large towns. Historically the degree of assimilation into the Czech language environment and culture and the effort to advance this process were significantly different. During the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy 82–90% of Jews declared German as they colloquial tongue, but during the First Republic a dramatic change occurred, as 47.8% claimed Jewish ethnicity in 1921 and 51.67% in 1930. This fundamental shift in orientation was understandably accompanied by a decline in the share of Jews who identified themselves as ethnic Germans (to around 34–29%) and also a decline – compared to the period before the First World War – in the share of people who identified themselves as ethnic Czechs or Czechoslovaks (15–9.5%). Jewish settlement followed from earlier development, and historically significant communities lived in Kyjov, Boskovice, Břeclav, Hodonín, Bzenec, Strážnice, Uherský Brod, Holešov, Uherské Hradiště, Přerov, Prostějov, Lipník, Hranice, Mikulov, etc., and new centres formed in Brno, Ostrava, Olomouc, and the largest communities were in the large towns of Brno and Ostrava. Centres of Jewish settlement in Silesia were Opava, Nový Bohumín, Fryštát (Karviná today), etc. (*Boháč* 1936: 83–85; *Šišková* 1998: 53 and further).

An altogether different situation took place in Slovakia within the new state. There Jews formed a large ethnic minority: 54% of the Jewish population of Slovakia declared Jewish ethnicity. They were settled unevenly in the country, and lived in large, mid-sized, and small towns, and significant numbers also settled in the countryside. There were large numbers of Jews in the south and the west of Slovakia. In the Hungarian-speaking parts of Slovakia, for instance, in Dunajská Streda, they made up as much as 26% of the population. In the Slovak-speaking region centres with large Jewish minorities included Trnava, Sereď, Nitra, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Trenčín, Púchov, Velká Bytča, and Žilina. A much smaller Jewish population settled in the central region of Slovakia, while conversely in eastern Slovakia there evolved a large continuous belt of Jewish settlements centred on Košice, Bardejov, Humenné, and Michalovce. The largest Jewish population was in Bratislava, where in 1930 there were 15 000 Jews, and there were also large communities in Nitra (over 4300 people), Prešov (4300), Michalovce (more than 3900), and Žilina (2900). In the interwar period the decline in the share of Jews declaring Hungarian ethnicity gained in intensity (in 1921, there were 16.5%, in 1930 only 9%), while the share of Jews-Slovaks or Jews-Czechoslovaks increased insignificance (in 1921, there were 22%, in 1930 more than 32%).

In Subcarpathian Ruthenia 87.3% of the members of Jewish communities identified themselves with the new Jewish ethnicity. Jews here lived not just in towns but also in rural areas. In this administrative region they formed two islands in which Jewish ethnicity predominated over Ruthenians and Hungarians. One of them was the town of Mukačevo, which was considered the most Jewish town out of all the towns in Czechoslovakia, and the second was Handal Buština at Terešva (*Boháč* 1926: 148–161).

**The reproductive behaviour of Jews (by ethnicity and faith) in Czechoslovakia**

Differences stemming from the nature of the settlement structure, ranging from the predominant presence of Jews in large towns in the west of the republic to a stronger rural presence in the east of the state, were reflected on other levels, and of fundamental significance was the demographic area connected with reproductive behaviour, which was integrally linked with social development. While in the Czech lands the population declined almost continuously since the 1890s, which was due to a number of causes, in the east the population grew. One of the obvious causes of a reduction in the size of the Jewish population was assimilation, permanent emigration, a dynamic reduction in the number of children in the family, which was faster and more intensive compared to the majority population, and a change in the structure of marital status that reflected a continuous increase in non-family households made up of permanently single individuals, outside the reproductive process, and marital couples with two children. The formation of small families that were already practising planned parenthood, which the Jewish population did, initially spread in the cultural and social environments of urban neighbourhoods, where they lived side by side with members of the majority population with similar reproductive behaviour. This means that there was no major difference between minority (ethnic and religious) Jews and the middle-class non-Jewish majority. This trend progressed in the parts of the cities inhabited by the elites, regardless of their religious or ethnic profile. A difficulty here is that the method of processing natural change in statistics does not allow a reconstruction and evaluation of these data. Nevertheless, in the Czech lands statistics show decreases in the Jewish population by natural change and a continuous deteriorating of the age structure as the number and percentage of children aged 14 and under decreased while the share of elderly in the population grew. The crude fertility rate of the Jewish population in Bohemia was around 9‰, while among the majority population it was 20‰. In addition, there was also an increasing trend of mixed marriages, which were most often with Roman Catholics or people with no religious faith. This was another source of the decline in Jewish fertility. Typical differences included marriages between much older spouses, both compared to the majority population and in relation to ethnic Jews and Jews of faith in the Czech lands compared to Subcarpathian Ruthenia (*Nesládková* 2001b: 47–56; *Statistická ročenka*...1934: 23–24; *Statistická ročenka* 1938: 22–23; *Friedmann* 1934: 729–735).

**Table 1 Number of religious Jews by lands in Czechoslovakia in 1930**

| Lands | Numbers | Per cent |
|---|---|---|
| Bohemia | 76 301 | 1.07 |
| Moravia and Silesia | 41 250 | 1.16 |
| Slovakia | 136 737 | 4.11 |
| Subcarp. Ruthenia | 102 542 | 14.14 |
| Czechoslovakia | 356 830 | 2.42 |

*Source:* Statistická ročenka Republiky československé. Praha: 1934, p. 12, table II. 9.

It is interesting to compare the data on natural population change in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia with the Jewish population as a whole in Czechoslovakia. We will conduct this brief analysis just for ethnic Jews, aware, however, that these just very general values are distorted by the age structure. Nevertheless, we recorded a relatively high intensity data, showing that in the 1930s natality in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia ranged between 23.7‰ and 18.9‰, mortality between 13.2‰ and 12.6‰, and the natural increase fell sharply from 12.9‰ to 4.8‰. If we

**Table 2 Occupational structure of religious Jews in Czechoslovakia 1921**

| Economic activity | Numbers | Per cent |
|---|---|---|
| Agriculture | 43 261 | 12.2 |
| Industry and trade | 78 992 | 22.3 |
| Trade and finance | 145 814 | 41.2 |
| Transport | 9 348 | 2.6 |
| Civil service, freelance occupation | 25 538 | 7.2 |
| Army | 1 534 | 0.4 |
| Servants, job | 2 676 | 0.8 |
| Other professions, without occup. | 47 179 | 13.3 |
| Total | 354 342 | 100.0 |

*Source:* Československá statistika, vol. 23, p. 146, table 166.

compare data on individual 'Carpathian' lands where there were centres of ethnic Jewish communities we find substantial differences. Jewish reproduction in the 1930s was lower in Slovakia than of other ethnic groups (natality 16–12‰, mortality 12–11‰, natural increase 4.7–1.1‰). Conversely, the highest reproduction rate of ethnic Jews in the state was in Subcarpathian Ruthenia (natality 34.5–25.9‰, mortality 12.3–11.8‰, natural increase 22.7–13.7‰). It is clearly apparent therefore that the state-wide figures were significantly influenced by the conditions in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The differences between individual lands were considerable (*Slaminka* 1938: 82, 96–97, 147).

## The professional and social structure of the Jewish population

Two population censuses carried out in 1921 and 1930 provide us with information about the professional and social structure of ethnic Jews and Jews by faith. In these censuses their professional and social characteristics were observed from two perspectives: as individuals of the Jewish faith and as individuals of Jewish ethnicity. However, it is necessary to recall that only those people who identified themselves with one of these two characteristics could be observed, and not anyone who had converted or assimilated. Given that there was a significant increase in the number of mixed marriages, the assimilation process also grew in intensity, and the number of people remaining outside this record also increased. Therefore, this information is always just relative and to some degree approximate.

The professional and social structure developed more slowly, so it makes sense to observe it over the long term and note basic trends. In Czechoslovakia as a whole there were 354 342 Jews of faith and 190 856 ethnic Jews (180 855 of the latter with Czechoslovak citizenship), in 1930 there were 356 830 Jews of faith and 204 779 ethnic Jews, of which 186 642 had Czechoslovak citizenship, and 18 137 were Jews with foreign citizenship. These figures show that the number of people of Jewish faith stagnated and the number of ethnic Jews grew. In 1930 there were 572.9 ethnic Jews for every 1000 Jews of faith, and out of 1000 ethnic Jews 998.3 were Jews of faith. The characteristic of religious faith thus captures the Jewish community more entirely and also offers more information from the perspective of social and professional characteristics, and therefore in the ensuing discussion we will primarily adhere to this line (*Československá statistika*, vol. 23... 1927: 145; *Československá statistika*, vol. 98... 1934: 104–107).

In 1930 on the day of the census there were 76 301 Jews of faith in Bohemia (1.07% of all the inhabitants in the state), 41 250 in Moravia and Silesia (1.16%), 136 737 in Slovakia

**Table 3 Occupational structure religious Jews in Czechoslovakia in 1921 by lands (%)**

| Lands | Agriculture | Industry and trade | Trade and finance | Transport | Civil service, freelance occupation | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bohemia | 3.4 | 19.6 | 47.9 | 2.2 | 8.8 | 18.1 |
| Moravia and Silesia | 1.9 | 24.3 | 45.2 | 3.5 | 8.0 | 17.1 |
| Slovakia | 10.7 | 22.3 | 46.0 | 1.7 | 7.4 | 11.9 |
| Subcarp. Ruthenia | 26.9 | 23.6 | 26.4 | 4.0 | 5.2 | 13.9 |

*Source:* Československá statistika, vol. 23, p. 149, table 171.

(4.11%), and 102 542 in Subcarpathian Ruthenia (14.14%), and in Czechoslovak they comprised 2.42% of the population. While in the Czech lands they formed just a very small part of the total population, in Slovakia they formed a larger share of the population and in Subcarpathian Ruthenia they accounted for more than one-seventh of the total population. When we examine this in relation to different ethnic groups in each of the lands in the state, we arrive at some interesting results. The most Jews that identified with Czechoslovak ethnicity were in Bohemia, but in a long-term perspective there was a steady and very substantial decline in the number and share of Czech or Czechoslovak Jews – in 1930 there were 35 418. German ethnicity experienced a sharp decline of 23 660 individuals at the time of the census, when 15 697 Jews identified themselves as ethnic Germans. In Moravia and Silesia most Jews identified with Jewish ethnicity, 21 396 people, followed by German ethnicity at 11 997 people, and in third place Czechoslovak ethnicity at just 7251 people. Jewish ethnicity predominated among Jews in Slovakia (72 678), followed by Czechoslovak ethnicity (44 009). Small numbers of Jews identified with German or Hungarian ethnicity – 9945 Jewish Germans and 9728 Jewish Hungarians. A unique situation arose in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where 95 008 Jews identified with Jewish ethnicity, while the number of Jews that identified with other ethnicities, except for Hungarian at 5870 people, was negligible (811 Jewish Czechoslovaks, 130 Jewish Germans) (*Československá statistika*, vol. 98..., 1934: 104–107).

In the interwar period all of industrialised Europe, including Czechoslovakia, experienced significant changes in their national economies. They can very concisely be summarised as a general tendency towards fewer people working in agriculture and forestry as the primary sector, an end to the growth in the number of people linked to industry (secondary sector), and an increase in the share of people in services (tertiary sector) and science and culture (quaternary sector). This development was clearly headed towards a decline in the significance of the production sectors (agriculture and industry) and a rise in the importance of non-production sectors (services in a wide range of fields, from business, finance, transportation, to scientific institutions and cultural facilities). While in 1890, 80.1% of the population worked in agriculture and industry and just 11.9% in business, transportation, public services, and independent professions, in 1921 the significance of the primary and secondary sectors had declined to 71.59% and conversely the non-production branches had grown to 17.5%. In 1930 statistics indicated a further decline in the production sector to 67.0% and an increase in the non-production sector to 20%. A more detailed look at the non-production structure in 1930 reveals that 7.4% of this population worked in business and finance, 5.5% in transportation, and 4.9% in state and other public service and in free professions. An 'abnormal' increase was recorded mainly in business linked to banking (*Boháč* 1936: 65).

In this situation Jews of faith and ethnic Jews continued to work in those fields and professions that they had tended to work in for many generations, with the major difference that

**Table 4 Occupational structure of the population of Bohemia and religious Jews in 1921 and 1930 (‰)**

| Economic activity | Total population | | Religious Jews | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1921 | 1930 | 1921 | 1930 |
| Agriculture | 296.8 | 240.6 | 34.1 | 20.5 |
| Industry and trade | 405.5 | 417.8 | 196.0 | 179.5 |
| Trade, finance, transport | 124.5 | 150.9 | 501.2 | 514.6 |
| Civil service, freelance occupation, army | 60.9 | 63.2 | 96.3 | 106.1 |
| Servants | 12.0 | 14.9 | 2.0 | 2.6 |
| Other professions, without occupation | 100.3 | 112.6 | 170.4 | 176.7 |
| Total | 1000.0 | 1000.0 | 1000.0 | 1000.0 |

*Sources:* Československá statistika, vol. 98, p. 104 et seq.; Čsl. statistika, vol. 23, p. 142 et seq.

they were able to do so now with civic freedom in the majority community, and they also pursued numerous other activities connected with the advancement of modernisation.

In 1921 (religious) Jews in Czechoslovakia were distributed between the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors as follows: 12.2% : 22.3% : 51.8%; when the primary and secondary sectors are combined the ratio is 34.5% : 51.8%, which means that there were more Jews working in non-production sectors than production sectors. The distribution of production and non-production sectors among the population of Czechoslovakia as a whole (including the small percentage of the Jewish population by faith) was diametrically opposed (71.6% : 17.3%). If we base the calculation on (ethnic) Jews in the same year in Czechoslovakia, the result is somewhat different: 16.8% : 22.1% : 47.8%, and the ratio of production to non-production sectors is 38.9% : 47.8%. Qualitatively the structure remained the same, only the share in the production sectors increased slightly, especially in relation to agriculture and forestry, and the percentage of non-production branches decreased, which had to do with the large number of ethnic Jews settled in the eastern part of the state (Subcarpathian Ruthenia) (*Československá statistika*, vol. 23…, 1927: 131, 146).

A detailed look at the occupational branches that the Jewish population was employed in most on a nationwide scale reveals their prevalence in areas they had traditionally worked in for centuries, namely business and finance, areas in which 41.2% of Jews of faith were working in 1921. This was followed by industry and sole proprietorships in second place, agriculture, forestry, and the fishing industry in third place, and state and other public services and the independent professions in fourth place, and transportation in fifth place, while other fields were statistically insignificant.

From the perspective of occupational categories, the largest share of Jews of faith worked in the goods trade (113 084 Jews of faith worked in this occupation), in industry the main

**Table 5 Occupational structure of ethnic Jews and religious Jews in Czechoslovakia and selected lands in 1930 (‰)**

| Economic activity | Slovakia | Subcarpathian Ruthenia | Czechoslovakia – Jews by nationality | Czechoslovakia – Jews by religion |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agriculture | 70.6 | 214.8 | 106.8 | 88.8 |
| Industry and trade | 202.4 | 243.1 | 271.5 | 215.5 |
| Trade, finance | 530.4 | 337.0 | 473.3 | 453.3 |
| Transport | 18.1 | 54.5 | 31.7 | 28.6 |
| Civil service, freelance occupation | 73.4 | 45.0 | 84.9 | 77.4 |
| Servants | 6.4 | 6.7 | 10.0 | 5.7 |
| Other professions, without occupation | 96.4 | 93.7 | 21.6 | 123.6 |

*Source:* Československá statistika, vol. 104, p. 12 et seq.

occupations were in clothing (23 942), food (20 157), timber (5601), leather working (5398), and the machine and tool industry (4544). In the primary production sector agriculture and animal husbandry predominated (41 964), and in relation to the age structure a substantial number were rentiers and support recipients (33 920), the independent professions and public services (18 240), and education (4110) (*Československá statistika*, vol. 23…, 1927: 147, 148).

A very different situation existed at the level of the different lands within the state. In the primary sector (agriculture, forestry) there was a very clear west-east decline/cascade. In this sector the biggest difference was between the Czech lands on the one hand and Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia on the other, or specifically between the Czech lands and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Industry and sole proprietorships (we cannot break down and specify individual trades) were the source of livelihood for relatively the most equal shares of people across the country. In the most typical professions – business and finance – the situation in

the Czech lands and in Slovakia was roughly the same (around 45%–48%), while conversely in Subcarpathian Ruthenia the share of local Jews in these professions was roughly the same as in agriculture, industry, and sole proprietorships. It is worth mentioning the notable difference between the share of Jews in state services and the independent professions in the Czech lands and Slovakia compared to the situation in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The extent of the difference can also be documented by the share of Jews working in domestic services. While in the Czech lands and Slovakia the percentage was negligible, in Subcarpathian Ruthenia the figure was 2%.

**Table 6 Social structure of ethnic Jews in Czechoslovakia in 1921**

| Economic activity | Numbers | Per cent |
|---|---|---|
| Independent | 115 450 | 63.8 |
| Independent without occup. | 15 405 | 8.5 |
| Tenats | 816 | 0.5 |
| Officials | 15 867 | 8.8 |
| Workers | 29 202 | 16.1 |
| Servants | 1 483 | 0.8 |
| Soldiers, pupils, students | 2 632 | 0.9 |
| Total | 180 855 | 100.0 |

*Source:* Československá statistika, vol. 23, series VI, workbook 5, tome II. Praha: 1927, p. 140, table 154.

The very specific and unique professional structure of the Jewish population is indelibly linked to social stratification. This description – unfortunately – will be based on contemporary categories processed and published in *Československá statistika* (Czechoslovak statistics). The social structure was divided very roughly into three basic social groups: the independent class, the administrative class, and the working class. It is necessary to realise that the scope of these categories was enormous, so the independent class encompassed wealthy factory owners, large landowners, other large property owners or leasers, but also smallholders, small tradesmen and shop owners, and also included pensioners, the poor, the disabled, retired farmers, self-employed, rentiers. According to contemporary practice, the working class included low-level employees, apprentices, day labourers, and domestic servants. If we look at the Jewish population at the level of the individual lands, again there is considerable differentiation from the west to the east of the republic. A similar structure is observed among the Czech lands, a slightly different structure formed in Slovakia, while in Subcarpathian Ruthenia the social stratification of the Jewish population was completely different. While the basic structure remained the same across the state – the independent class predominated and from the west to the east grew continuously more pronounced. While in Bohemia 61.8% of Jews belonged to this category, in Moravia and Silesia the figure was 62.4%, in Slovakia 72.1%, and in Subcarpathian Ruthenia the figure was 74.1%. The administrative class be-

**Table 7 Social structure of religious Jews by lands in 1921 (‰)**

| Lands | Branches | Agriculture | Industry and trade | Trade, finance | Transport | Civil service, freelance occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bohemia | Independent | 839.7 | 541.6 | 676.3 | 273.5 | 470.2 |
| | Officials | 89.0 | 279.1 | 156.8 | 576.3 | 468.5 |
| | Workers | 71.3 | 179.3 | 166.9 | 150.2 | 61.3 |
| Moravia and Silesia | Independent | 747.6 | 497.0 | 757.8 | 293.8 | 370.0 |
| | Officials | 150.5 | 266.4 | 82.4 | 536.8 | 549.6 |
| | Workers | 101.9 | 236.6 | 159.8 | 169.4 | 80.4 |
| Slovakia | Independent | 764.5 | 620.0 | 841.8 | 577.1 | 243.9 |
| | Officials | 126.9 | 116.6 | 40.2 | 198.9 | 662.6 |
| | Workers | 108.6 | 263.4 | 118.0 | 224.0 | 93.5 |
| Subcarp. Ruthenia | Independent | 733.5 | 729.4 | 873.0 | 716.9 | 173.7 |
| | Officials | 9.4 | 21.5 | 20.6 | 28.5 | 713.4 |
| | Workers | 257.1 | 249.1 | 106.4 | 254.6 | 112.9 |

*Source:* Československá statistika, vol. 23, series VI, workbook 5, tome II. Praha: 1927, p. 151, table 174, 176, 177.

**Table 8 Social structure of some ethnic groups in Czechoslovakia in 1930 (**%)

| Economic activity | Czechs | Slovaks | Germans | Jews | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Independent | 35.2 | 51.4 | 34.2 | 68.8 | 39.6 |
| Officials | 19.8 | 12.4 | 18.0 | 18.0 | 17.2 |
| Workers | 45.0 | 36.2 | 47.8 | 13.2 | 43.2 |

*Sources:* Statistická ročenka Republiky československé. Praha: SÚS, 1938, p. 15; Průcha, V. Odvětvové…, p. 74, table 2.

came a fast-growing group in Bohemia (22.8%) and in Moravia and Silesia (20.2%), while in Slovakia they represented just 12.6% of the community and in Subcarpathian Ruthenia just 5.9%. Another typical feature is the small share of working class. In Bohemia this category comprised just 15.4% of the community, in Moravia and Silesia 17.4%, in Slovakia 15.4%, and in Subcarpathian Ruthenia 20%.

When the Jewish population is combined according to contemporary social class divisions with basic economic sectors in the individual lands we find, for example, that the largest share of people in the independent class were employed in business and finance in Subcarpathian Ruthenia and Slovakia, while in Bohemia this class predominated in agriculture. It is very clear that these were primarily small-scale independents: small shop owners, as well as the poor, the disabled, and rentiers in Subcarpahtian Ruthenia, and smallholders in Bohemia.

The smallest percentage of people in the administrative class recorded in the census in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was in agriculture, while the largest was again in Subcarpathian Ruthenia in state service and independent professions. The largest share of working class in the state was in Slovakia in industry and sole proprietorships, while in Subcarpathian Ruthenia it was in agriculture and transportation. Again, we cannot distinguish the share of industrial labourers from the complex categories of the working class in trades.

In Bohemia the independent class predominated in all the basic economic fields, with one exception, state services and the independent professions, in which the share of the independent class and the administrative class was equal. The census recorded the most working class people working in industry and in sole proprietorships.

The situation was the same in Moravia and Silesia as in Bohemia, except for the higher share of officials in state services, the independent professions, and transportation. Like in Bohemia industry and sole proprietorships belonged to the working class categories, the share of which was relatively higher.

In Slovakia the social structure was more distorted than that in the Czech lands, with a higher share of the independent class in business and finance, industry, sole proprietorships, and transportation. The administrative class was not as big – only a small percentage of people in business and finance belonged in this category and most were found in state services and the independent professions. The largest share of the working class was in industry, sole proprietorships, and transportation.

In Subcarpathian Ruthenia the west-east progressive increase in the share of the independent class reached its peak, except in state services and the independent professions. There was almost no administrative class, while conversely the working class formed the largest share in agriculture, industry, sole proprietorships, and transportation (*Československá statistika*, vol. 23…1927: 151, 152).

It is interesting to observe the social structure of ethnic Jews in combination with other ethnic groups recorded in Czechoslovakia. In 1921, according to contemporary measures, the social stratification of ethnic Jews diverged completely from that of other ethnic categories; they were entirely unique. Above all, they had the largest percentage of people in the independent class in the whole state – 72.8%, which, compared to Czechoslovaks at 45%, Germans at 40.4%, and Hungarians at 52.8%, stands out substantially. Also, there was a larger

share of people in the administrative class among ethnic Jews at 8.8%, compared to Czechoslovaks at 5.5%, Germans at 7.4%, and Hungarians at 4.7%. Conversely, the smallest share of ethnic Jews was recorded in the working class at 17%, compared to 47.6% among Czechoslovaks, 50.7% among Germans, and 41.4% among Hungarians representing the exact opposite (*Československá statistika*, vol. 23,..., 1927: 142). In the notes accompanying contemporary statistics we find comments on the tables, for instance, like: '…it is clear, however, that the Jewish people have the largest stratum of the best economically situated people…'. (*Československá statistika*, vol. 23...1927: 140). For more on the specific features of the social structure of the Jewish population during the First Czechoslovak Republic, see, e.g., *Soukupová* 2002: 5–16; *Zahradníková* 2002: 17–23; *Čermáková* 2003: 9–20; *Machačová and Matějček* 1999: 135; *Nesládková* 1999: 114–123).

It is possible to observe trends in the changes to the professional and social structure of ethnic Jews and Jews of faith when we compare the two censuses dating from the First Czechoslovak Republic. Among the Jewish population at the state-wide level the significance of the primary sector declined significantly – agriculture, forestry, and the fishing industry. Among the majority population (ethnic Jews and Jews of faith) a similar tend occurred – but starting from a much larger base. The importance of industry and sole proprietorships among Jews of faith decreased very slightly, while in the population of Czechoslovakia as a whole it increased very slightly. Czechoslovakia became a state in which the population connected with industry, sole proprietorships and services outweighed those tied to agriculture. The economic profile of the Jewish population, even during the crisis of the 1930s, remained grounded in business and finance, which as non-production sectors grew from 41.2% to 45.3%, and that was the biggest increase of all the branches observed and of significance for the given community. In the population of the state the significance of these fields also grew – increasing from 5.8% to 7.4%. Other branches worth mentioning are state services and the independent professions, which increased slightly among Jews of faith – from 7.2% to 7.7%, in the total state population (including military) increased from 5.6% to 6.2%. In the context of crisis it is interesting that the significance of other professions and of people without occupation was further decling among Jews of faith – from 13.3% to 12.4%. However, even the population of Czechoslovakia as a whole did not experience any sharp changes, just a slight increase – from 10.8% to 11.3%, but the higher shares among Jews of faith are interesting.

A regional look encompassing the entire population of the state reveals some characteristics that were typical for certain lands. In 1930 Bohemia had the most advanced branch structure, both among the total population and among Jews of faith. One of its key characteristics was that it had the lowest share of people involved in the primary sector – just 24.1%, while Jews of faith in Bohemia were much less involved in agriculture – just 2.1%. While 41.8% of the population made their living in industry and sole proprietorships, and only 18% of Jews of faith did. While 15.1% of the population in the region was tied to business, finance and transportation, 51.5% of Jews of faith were involved in these professions. State services, the independent professions, and the military provided a living for 6.3% of the population of Bohemia and 10.6% of Jews of faith in the land. The census also recorded a difference in the case of other occupations and people without an occupation, where the total population accounted for 11.3%, and Jews of faith clearly more at 17.7%.

It is also informative to compare statistical data from 1930 on Jews of faith and ethnic Jews at the state level from the perspective of branches and professions. In that year a certain disproportion remained between the two structures. In the numerically larger group of Jews of faith there was significant growth of non-production sectors at the expense of production sectors, which means that it corresponded to the overall trend in Europe and the world, as did the group of ethnic Jews, though the previous state slightly more rigidly remained accented on the production sectors. Among Jews of faith this situation can be expressed in the ratio of

30.4 : 56.5, among ethnic Jews as 37.8 : 60. However, compared to the population of the republic as a whole, where the relationship of production to non-production sectors was 65.8 : 22.9, both groups show an entirely different, directly 'opposite' quality. The economic profile of the Jewish population, though internally differentiated, remained distinct and diametrically opposite throughout the period of the First Republic.

Let us also look at the branch structure of ethnic Jews in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where there were large communities. There were quite large differences between the two regions. While the share of ethnic Jews involved in agriculture was small in Slovakia, in Subcarpathian Ruthenia it was more than one-fifth. The share working in industry and sole proprietorships was more or less the same in both regions. More than one-half of ethnic Jews in Slovakia were engaged in the most typical professions of business and finance, while only one-third in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Also, transportation provided a livelihood for just 1.8% of ethnic Jews in Slovakia, but for 5.5% in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Similarly, more ethnic Jews worked in state services and the independent professions in Slovakia than in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. In both lands only a negligible share of ethnic Jews worked in domestic service (*Statistická ročenka*…1938: 15; *Československá statistika*, vol. 98, 1934: 46 et seq.; *Československá statistika*, vol. 104, 1934: 12 et seq.).

What shifts occurred in the social structure of Jews of faith and ethnic Jews between the first and second population censuses? If we compare the structure of the population of ethnic Jews in 1921 and 1930 in Czechoslovakia it is impossible to overlook some very clear changes. Above all, the share in the variegated category of the independent class decreased, which, given the ongoing economic crisis, was understandable and adequate for that time. Conversely, the administrative category grew considerably, while the very under-dimensionalised working-class category decreased further. The unique and, if you will, distorted social structure of the ethnic Jewish population remained intact. Its specificity stands out compared to the total population of the state and in comparison with the largest ethnicities of Czechoslovaks and Germans. The social stratification of Czechoslovaks and Germans was most alike and also most resembled the state-wide situation, or, to be more precise, it was the Czechs and Germans that were most alike. The share of the independent class among Czechs was 35.2%, among Germans 34.2%, and in the state as a whole 39.6%. 19.8% of Czechs belonged to the administrative class (including low-level staff), 18% of Germans, and 17.2% of the population as a whole belonged to the administrative class. Also, in the working class were 45% of Czechs, 47.8% of Germans, and 43.2% of the total population. Ethnic Slovaks differed overall and the agrarian nature of the population was confirmed at another level. The independent class was larger among Slovaks – 51.4%, and the administrative class, including low-level employees, was smaller – 12.4%, and the working class was also not as large as it was among Czechs and Germans, accounting for 36.2% of the population. We will leave aside the internal structure of labourers, where in the west of the republic, that is, among Czechs and Germans, industrial labourers predominated, while the eastern part of the state was predominated by agricultural and forestry labourers (*Průcha* 1999: 73–75; *Československá statistika*, vol. 116, 19...:10–22; *Statistická ročenka*..., 1938: 15).

An overall unfavourable developmental trend in the social structure was observed not just among ethnic Jews but also Jews of faith. A comparison of the two censuses reveals the same features as those observed for ethnic Jews. The 1930 census showed a sharp decrease in the share of the independent class, but social decline in this case was much greater, and the statistics employ the term 'pauperisation'. Conversely, the category of the administrative class and low-level employees saw unusual growth, while the category of the working class grew smaller. Social stratification in this – numerically much larger – population underwent even more extreme development than in the case of ethnic Jews.

**Housing**

To accompany these professional and social characteristics we can add relevant information on the housing situation of the population drawn from a survey that was conducted in large towns in the Czechoslovak Republic on 1 December 1930. The statistical data say nothing about the religious or ethnic composition of the given urban population, but they do refer to the social stratus of the dwelling's occupant/owner. The survey was conducted in 34 urban agglomerations throughout the state, and those agglomerations included had to have at least 10 000 inhabitants (with the exception of 10 agglomerations where this criterion was ignored). According to the social divisions used to divide up the sample it is possible to obtain a relatively good idea of the housing situation of the population in the given urban agglomerations in general and the housing situation of the Jewish population in particular.

The survey primarily found that 'the dominant part of the population in our large towns' was made up of people employed in industry and skilled trades and their family members. The larger the city, the more dwelling owners/occupants that were found to be involved in business, transportation, public service, and the independent professions, which were all occupations typical for the Jewish population. Urban agglomerations also contained sizable shares of rentiers and pensioners, who contributed (according to contemporary classifications) significantly to the structure of the most diverse social category, the independent class. The Jewish population also formed a significant share of this group. Contemporary statistics also included the poor, if they had their own dwelling, in the independent class. Truly wealthy people therefore disintegrated within this almost unlimited category and their influence on the characteristics of the given social stratum was small. However, just under one-third of the large share of the working class (40%) owned their housing (this relates to flats in permanent structures). Conversely, two-thirds of the dwellings located in provisional structures were occupied by people in the working class. The administrative class and low-level employees formed a significant urban category, one that also contained many Jewish families.

Interesting differences can be traced between the given urban populations by the different lands in the state. Here again there are significant differences between the Czech lands on the one hand and Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia on the other, above all with regard to the share of the population involved in industry and the skilled trades, in which the western part of the state clearly dominated, or specifically Moravia did, thanks to the Ostrava and Zlín regions. Conversely, the structure of large towns in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was different, with much larger categories of the population (as well as flat owners) involved in business, transportation, the independent professions, and public services, professions and fields in which there were large shares of Jews of faith and ethnic Jews. For this reason in this region large towns had a smaller working class in any branch but larger independent and administrative classes. This structure thus played more to and was more equated with Jewish households and flat owners *(Československá statistika*, vol. 17..., 1935: 40–47).

Social inclusion and the standard of the property also had an influence on the size of the flat. The survey showed that it did not depend on the specific occupation but on the social category. Relatively the largest flats were owned by people in the independent class and the administrative class, the smallest by the working class. The narrow stratum of entrepreneurs, and people involved in free professions (especially doctors and lawyers), who more often lived in the largest flats, stood out from the relatively diverse class of independents. Again we find the Jewish minority in this group. Surveys conducted in some specific towns show large shares of Jewish doctors and lawyers. For example, in Moravská Ostrava and Ostrava the share of Jewish lawyers at the turn of the 20th century range between one- and two-thirds out of the total in the given professional category (here this refers to followers of Judaism). In 1910 the share in Moravská Ostrava was extraordinarily large – 68%. The situation in the interwar period underwent not profound changes in this respect (*Pokludová* 2003: 87–88).

Not just the size of a flat but also the facilities of housing revealed something about the social status of the given household, its advantages, but also about the lifestyle of the inhabitants. The survey indicated that the vast majority of flats had one room, no entrance vestibule, no WC of its own, and no bathroom. Conversely, large flats had a number of rooms, an entrance vestibule, or even a hall, a WC, a bathroom, and a room for servants. Often the flats of the working class and even low-level employees were modern. They tended to have electricity, running water, and gas. On the whole lower-level employees had small flats because large numbers of them were located in administrative buildings, where they were belonged among the flats for servants. The independent class most often lived in their own homes, the administrative class and low-level employees lived in tenement buildings, often in service flats. There was a large share of the Jewish population among the independent class and the administrative class.

Private flats could be used not just as housing but also for operating a business (in the given sample this was the case of around one-tenth of the total). During the First Republic this phenomenon has a declining trend. Most such flats were concentrated in centres of domestic industry (e.g. Prostějov, Kraslice, the Jablonec agglomeration). An exception to these small businesses and shops were flats connected with the offices of lawyers, notaries, doctors, and dentists, and so on. These accounted for a full forty flats out of (every) one hundred flats used in health services. To a smaller degree this connection was also found among lawyers (solicitors, notaries). These so-called 'business' flats were in as many as 80% of cases five-room flats, and they were usually located on the ground floor or the lower floors (*Československá statistika*, vol. 107,..., 1935: 47).

**The example of the Jewish community in Nitra**

The specificity of the Jewish minority in the wider social and cultural context is also revealed in a historical-demographic study of Nitra carried out for the period of the First Republic. Nitra was a centre of business and administration in western Slovakia with traditional cultural institutions (the Nitra chapter house, secondary school, seminary, *ješiva* – school of higher education focused on the study of Talmud Tora, Talmud Tora). The local Jewish community was characterised by its strong focus on the tertiary sector, which used to be customary for this minority. While only a small percentage of the Jewish population there was involved in agriculture (3%), and only 4.6% with industry, a large share of the population was involved in skilled trades (22.7%), and among women the figure was even 37%. As everywhere else, business dominated, involving more than two-thirds of the observed population. In the sphere of hospitality and hotel services around one-half of all restaurants were owned by Jews, and they owned three out of the five hotels. On the whole they were widely employed in administration (especially private) – as much as 30% of the population – and in the banking sector (21%). They were significantly involved in professions in the field of the independent professions. More than one-half of the doctors were Jews (28 of the 53 doctors were Jewish), and they all had their private medical offices, and none worked in hospitals. Out of the 30 lawyers 15 were Jews, out of the 19 notaries 9 were. Just under one-tenth of the Jewish community was involved in education. Social status was also attached to the overall identification. A large number of owners and tenants of estates and farms lay in the sector of basic industry, and large-scale entrepreneurs were in industry (these involved entrepreneurs in the sugar-refining and brick manufacturing industries, the production of tobacco paraphernalia, a quarry, a mill, etc.). Skilled tradesmen were already operating smaller-scale sole proprietorships (tailors, barbers, skinners, cobblers, upholsterers, tinsmiths), with a substantial number of women among them, too. It is understandable that in Nitra Jews of faith and ethnic Jews lived in large privately owned homes or buildings and in large flats with modern amenities in such buildings and in flats used as accommodation and as a place of business.

This was especially true in the case of flats used as accommodation and a doctor's office (*Zetocha* 2003: 89–103).

## Conclusion

It is possible to sum up that both Jews of faith and ethnic Jews remained faithful to their traditional professions and occupations during the period of the First Republic, but they also pursued other fields and activities with a basic economic focus, which became widespread in all the advanced states in the world. Owing to this trend the weight and significance of the production sectors decreased amidst the advancement of non-production branches. This focus conformed to the centuries-long general economic orientation of Jewish communities in this country, corresponded to their intellectual background, behavioural models, and so on. They differed significantly from the rest of the population in the state in terms of professions and in terms of their social structure, which was considerably dominated by categories in the independent class and a small working class. Households in the administrative class grew most significantly, and it can be assumed that it was made up of people in lower-ranking employees than elites in managerial and top-ranking positions.

Despite the basic consistency between characteristics of professional orientation and social structure there were differences between the Jewish populations (both ethnic and of faith) in the lands that made up the First Czechoslovak Republic running from west to east. The industrialised and most advanced westernmost part of the state had very specific characteristics, as did the more agricultural and more backward easternmost part.

These distinctions were reflected mainly in the share and significance of basic industry in the given population. While in the Czech lands the sector had a minor role that decreased further during the First Republic, in Slovakia in 1930 the sector was more than three times greater than that in Bohemia, and in Subcarpathian Ruthenia the share of the sector indicated the involvement of the majority society. The areas of business, finance, and to some extent transportation, which accounted for more than half of the economic activity of the Jewish population in the Czech lands and Slovakia, was also the largest in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, but the primary sector and sole proprietorships immediately followed it. Jews in this land had three basic economic 'pillars': business, sole proprietorships, and basic industry. Social stratification varied more significantly by land. Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which differed most from the rest of the state, was characterised by a larger share of working class in basic industry, the independent class among sole proprietorships and in transportation. Conversely, the independent professions and state services, where the fewest sole proprietors were found but the most administrative workers, were entirely under-dimensionalised.

The given differences were also related to reproductive behaviour. If in the Czech lands the Jewish population was decreasing by natural change, in Slovakia it still had increases, albeit the lowest increases, while in Subcarpathian Ruthenia reproductive growth was the most dynamic.

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