Arnošt Frischer and the Jewish Politics of Early Twentieth-Century Europe by Jan Láníček (review)

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In sum, while many details of the activities of Office VI are already widely known, this book will appeal particularly to—and be read with profit by—specialists in intelligence history. In many ways it is a case study in how not to conduct intelligence. Ultimately, Walter Schellenberg was simply adept at playing internal politics inside the SS; in the business of intelligence he was at best a beginner, at worst he was bordering on the incompetent.

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Arnošt Frischer and the Jewish Politics of Early Twentieth-Century Europe. By Jan Láníček. London: Bloomsbury, 2017. Pp. 288. Cloth $114.00. ISBN 978-1472585899.

When Arnošt Frischer returned from his London exile to Ostrava, Moravia after World War II, the multiethnic city that had long been his home was changed beyond recognition. Thanks to the actions of the Germans and their accomplices, the Jews were already mostly gone: Ostrava's community of 8,000 Jews had been reduced to about 700, and only 15 percent of the total prewar Czechoslovak Jewish community survived until liberation. The returning Czech authorities had wasted little time in organizing the expulsion of ethnic Germans and Hungarians from within the nation's reconstituted borders. The Jews who remained in Czechoslovakia not only faced continuing antisemitism, but also serious questions about their status as rightful inhabitants of the postwar Czechoslovak state. Were the Jews members of the Czech or Slovak nations? What if they primarily spoke German or Hungarian? The Jews had worked hard to establish their right to be counted as Jews qua Jews in the 1921 and 1930 Czechoslovak censuses; yet the community that had suffered the most under the German occupation was suddenly not among the designated inhabitants of the country in the postwar settlement. How could such a situation arise? What Kafkaesque bureaucracy would place the Jews of Czechoslovakia in such a parlous position? And what was the response of Jewish leadership?

In *Arnošt Frischer and the Jewish Politics of Early Twentieth-Century Europe*, Jan Láníček has produced an important work that narrates and explains the history of Jewish identity and cultural politics in Czechoslovakia in the first half of the twentieth century. The politically precarious situation of the Jews after the war had much to do with the changing idea of Czechoslovak republicanism and nationalism in the interwar period, reflected inside the Jewish community through various political alignments: Zionist/Jewish nationalist, assimilationist, and Communist. Arnošt Frischer is Láníček's main character, but that is mainly because Frischer was part of—or at least an observer and commentator on—nearly every major political activity undertaken by the Jews of Czechoslovakia from the establishment of the First Republic

in October 1918 to the Communist coup in February 1948. Over the course of eight richly sourced chapters, Láníček narrates the struggles of Jewish leaders to navigate the shifting currents of Czechoslovak politics, and gives a deep scholarly account of the hardships (and occasional triumphs) of Czechoslovak Jews as they fought for a voice in the country's constitutional and societal framework.

Chapter 1 is devoted to Frischer's early life and the development of Zionist/Jewish nationalist politics in interwar Czechoslovakia. The book's main themes emerge in chapter 2, with Frischer as a key figure in the formation of the Jewish Party, which advocated for Jewish minority rights within the broader constellation of ethnic communities residing in Czechoslovakia (German and Hungarian chief among them). One of the key demands for Jewish nationalists immediately after the establishment of the republic was the recognition of Jews in the census of 1921, a demand that was met—although, as Láníček writes, such efforts "created a potentially dangerous situation. The Jewish nationalists could be lumped together into the same category as the remaining minority groups . . . . The threat of being perceived as a disloyal minority became more tangible than before" (41). As Láníček later details in chapter 7, which focuses on Frischer's role in the postwar reconstitution of Jewish life in Czechoslovakia, that is exactly what happened.

Following a chapter on Czech Jewish responses to Munich and the German occupation of the Sudetenland, chapters 4–6 all view the unfolding catastrophe in Europe from Frischer's perspective in London, where he was a member of the government-in-exile and one of a team of Czech Jews working to help their coreligionists on the mainland. These chapters are Láníček's most important, and they show in vivid and painful detail the slow realization by the Allies, exiled governments, and various aid workers of the true nature of German policies toward the Jews of occupied Europe. The chapters also chronicle the labyrinthine bureaucracy these exiled Jews were forced to navigate in order to provide assistance aid and supplies to the imprisoned and starving communities back home. While Láníček finally sides with historians who argue, with the Allied leaders of the time, that the best hope for the Jews was a quick end to the war, his evidence for Allied bureaucratic intransigence toward even the smallest nonmilitary solutions is staggering.

Ultimately, this book is far less about Frischer than it is about the complicated Jewish politics of his age. We do not have much emotional sense of Frischer the man, and even his somewhat complicated romantic life (a wife and children in exile; a mistress and her daughter caught in Europe and sent to Theresienstadt) registers as only a very minor theme across the pages. The book is also less about the Slovak portions of Czechoslovakia than about Bohemia and Moravia. That makes much sense—linguistically and politically—when examining Láníček's sources. For readers interested in the Jewish politics of Bratislava and the Hungarian borderlands, they must turn to another book. Nevertheless, Láníček has written a masterful history of

Jewish identity politics in mid-twentieth–century Czechoslovakia, one that promises to be an essential resource for the history of that nation and its Jews.

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Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940–1948. By Sandra Ott. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xviii + 362. Paper $29.99. ISBN 978-1316630877.

Sandra Ott's new book sits at the intersection of history and anthropology, scrutinizing the unique interactions of the French, the Basques, and the Germans in wartime France. Drawing on postwar trial dossiers, newspaper accounts, memoirs, and archival documents, Ott focuses her study on ordinary people who became involved with the German occupiers of the French Basque region, with the dual aim of reconstructing their lives during the war and examining postwar justice in the Pyrenean borderlands. The research is grounded in archival work, but is enhanced by the wealth of interviews and extensive fieldwork that Ott has conducted in the French Basque country.

In some ways the Basque country was unique: its location on the Franco-Spanish border made it an important center of multicultural, multilingual, and multinational exchanges. Its geography also made it important as a potential escape route and for black market activities. While some people welcomed the region's diversity, others complained about the foreigners in their midst, creating tensions that could be exacerbated during wartime. Unlike in other parts of France, Germans stationed in the region sometimes stayed there for a considerable length of time, allowing them to establish personal relationships with locals. Furthermore, the Germans had a long-standing interest in the Basque's unique language and culture as an example of the *völkisch* tradition. German scholars traveled to the region, recorded Basque legends, folktales, and songs, and published books and films related to Basque ideas of community. One French Basque nationalist maintained a relationship with Werner Best throughout the 1930s and while Best was stationed with the MBF in Paris.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first provides the context while the second provides nine microhistories of individuals accused of "collaboration" with the Germans. The contextual information includes the cultural, social, and political background of the region, which is crucial for understanding the relationships formed between the French, the Basques, and the Germans during the war. Ott also provides information relevant to the postwar period including information on the Liberation and the judicial system as well as concepts that are central to the historiography of World War II, including accommodation, cohabitation, and collaboration. Throughout this first section, Ott balances the macro and the micro, placing the specific case of the Basque region within a wider French and European perspective.