
REVIEWS AND ANNOTATIONS

Helena Petrův: *Zákonné bezpráví, Židé v Protektorátu Čechy a Morava, Auditorium, Praha 2011, s. 262, [Legal Injustice, Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Auditorium, Prague 2011, pp. 262.]*

Helena Petrův (Hofmannová) wrote a book with an apt name; the Legal Injustice. In this book the author analyzes unjust legal regulations from the period of the Protectorate with respect to the Jewish population. This publication builds on the author's previous publication – Legal Position of Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1939 – 1941), which was published by a Prague publisher Sefer in 2000.

However, Legal Injustice represents a completely new output because the author added new chapters to the original work, created new structuring and used a number of new legislative and archival sources.

The reviewed monograph is divided into eight chapters, in which the author gradually unveils in front of the reader the concept of the “final solution of the Jewish question”; from persecution and isolation of Jews from the rest of the population in all areas of social life, to displacing and transporting Jews to ghettos and concentration camps. Of course, ghettos and concentration camps had existed since the beginning of the war; however their use intensified considerably over the years.

In the first chapter H. Petrův describes the formation of the Protectorate and specifies the legal means used for anti-Jewish policy and legislation. Clearly visible here is the feudal principle in the personality of the law, which is contradictory to the modern law.

The second chapter entitled Myths Versus Reality introduces to the reader the role of the Protectorate government in creating anti-Jewish regulations and reveals, contrary to previous beliefs, that the government was not

very active in the persecution of Jews. The author investigates the discussions regarding the definition of the term “Jew” that had taken place repeatedly during the Protectorate years, but also the implementation of the Nuremberg definition of the term “Jew” into the legal system of the Protectorate.

According to the author the professional organizations of that time failed completely, because they were in close pursuit of the efforts of state authorities by limiting entrepreneurial and other profitable activities of Jews and by preventing the Jewish population from carrying out certain occupations, such as advocacy and medicine. These organizations also published anti-Jewish memorandums, for which they later apologized.

The third chapter focuses on the confiscation of Jewish property (including jewelry and other movable assets), limiting Jews in their economic activities, taxing and impounding their bank accounts. The author looks closely at the Aryanization process of Jewish property.

The apt title of the fourth chapter – Removal of Jews from the Public Life in the Protectorate – introduces also the contents of the chapter. Jews were removed from their jobs in the sphere of public administration, from the education system and other areas. Let us mention, for example, that famous actor and director Hugo Haas was dismissed from the theater for his race. His last role in the National Theater before his dismissal was the part of the director Busman in Čapek's R.U.R. Together with the dismissal Haas also received an apology from the management of the theater.

The fifth chapter analyses the regulations for displacing Jews, as organized by the Center for Displacing Jews (Ústředna pro židovské vystěhovalectví). Described is also the founding of the ghetto in Terezín.

The sixth chapter maps in detail the situation of the Jewish population in marital and

family legal matters. To “protect the Aryan race” people of mixed race with Jewish roots and persons married to Jews would be removed from public service and various other occupations. “Aryan persons” married to Jews were pressured to end the marriage. New marriages between “Aryan persons” and Jews were forbidden.

The seventh chapter deals with the registration system and labeling of Jews with yellow six-point star and the word JUDE. The author describes the hard-to-believe segregation of Jews in normal life. Jews had, for example, assigned time for shopping, they were not allowed to visit theaters, cinemas, pubs, reserved for members of the “clean race”. Some bans were completely absurd; during Christmas 1941 Jews were not allowed to receive any coffee, garlic, newspaper and magazines. Jews were only allowed to use the public transport system for traveling from home to work and back. And all this was to the smallest detail captured in the law!

It would be certainly interesting if the author also included the names of the advocates, who were permitted to represent Jews in the courts of the Third Reich and mediate for them contact with their families at the time Jews were, prior to transportation, located in a “gathering place”. This would open the window to the fates of concrete persons before they were sent to concentration camps.

The eight and final chapter summarizes and completes the process of “legal solution to the Jewish question” in the Protectorate. A key part of the legal aspect of the solution to the Jewish question was a document from the Wansee conference (in Wansee, Berlin), which

took place in early 1942 and was presided over by R. Heydrich. Of course, the text of this document does not deal with murdering and exterminating Jews. This idea is indirectly implied within the sentences about executions and displacing. The author also mentions that 80 thousand persons were subjected to this solution in the Protectorate, noting, that the numbers are not sufficient to describe the situation, it is also important to know the “reasons, why and in what way did it happen” (247).

Publication *Legal Injustice* deals with a very serious topic, but in spite of it, it is very reader-friendly. While maintaining high level of expertise it has similar effects as fiction literature dedicated to the situation of Jews during the World War II. Let us mention for example the *Pianist* – a true story of W. Szpilman captured in a book, based on which R. Polanski made an excellent film.

This excellent book by H.Petrův, a historical memento, is in the aptly titled introduction “The Devil in Us”, characterized by Pavel Holländer using words well-suited also as the conclusion: “searching for the truth about historical failures, finding this truth and speaking it out is never popular. But there are always courageous people at various levels, lead by the moral imperative and intellectual honesty, who build the foundation of truth for the national history... This moral and intellectual challenge is present also in the book written by Helen Petrův. It is an important book!” (11).

Karolina Adamová,
Antonín Lojek