Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism

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condemned the military intervention in August 1968 that brought the reform movement to a violent end. Because of his role in the Prague Spring, he had to leave the Party apparatus in 1969 and was expelled from the Communist Party a second time. This time he was also banned from “propagandistic activities,” which meant that he was no longer allowed to publish in the mass media. He was sidelined and had to work in the administration of a scientific institute that was mainly concerned with economics. In 1974, at the age of 55, he was able to retire early due to his status as a former resistance fighter and political prisoner.

**Holocaust Witness and Scholar**

In the 1960s, before his expulsion from the party, Miroslav Kárný started to openly deal with the history of the Holocaust. His first historiographic contributions were two small articles about the Communist Party organization in the Theresienstadt ghetto. The publication of these articles in two specialist journals was possible because of the beginning liberalization of the 1960s, in which more and more personal accounts about the Holocaust were published, and more ideological explanations of the Holocaust (mainly that it had been a class struggle) moved to the background. Contrary to this trend, in his articles Kárný emphasized once more the importance of the communist resistance movement during the war, specifically that of the communist Jewish resistance. He insisted on the fact that resistance was not “an individual act,” but “an act of the Party, which formed and led them [i.e., Jewish communists].” Furthermore, in the discussion of the ghetto’s so-called “Jewish self-administration,” Kárný applied a Marxist approach, attributing the differences in political strategies and goals within this “Jewish self-administration” to the class and political affiliations of

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18 Interview with Miroslav Kárný, 00:05:50. For his activity as a journalist and during the Prague Spring, see his memoirs “K mé novinářské (a historiccké) biografie” [About my journalistic (and historic) biography], July 1, 2000, and “21. srpna 1968 v budově sekretariátu ÚV KSČ” [August 21, 1968, in the building of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia], November 14, 1990, NA, f. Kárných, box 1.

19 See also Miroslav Kárný to Lena Makarova, February 18, 2000, ITI, Correspondence Miroslav Kárný, folder M-R (unsorted).

20 See his memoirs about these last years before retirement: Miroslav Kárný, “Přestavba řízení v reprografickém středisku Institutu poradenství” [Management reorganization in the reprographic center of the Institute of consulting], NA, f. Kárných, box 1.

21 Miroslav Kárný, “Pravda, ale ne celá (Dopis čtenáře)” [The truth, but not the whole (Letter to the editor)] *Príspevky k dějinám KSČ* 2, no. 2 (1962): 285–89; Miroslav Kárný, “Časopis jediný svého druhu” [A journal, unique in its kind], *Novinářský sborník* 8, nos. 2–3 (1963): 180–82.

22 Kárný, “Pravda, ale ne celá (Dopis čtenáře).”
its members. In both articles, Kárný acted more as a witness than a historian. However, two aspects of these early short texts by Kárný remained central to his understanding of the Holocaust as his historical work continued: an emphasis on resistance to fascism in general and on the Jewish communist resistance in particular; and a Marxist interpretation of World War II and the Holocaust as a class struggle. Both aspects demonstrate Kárný’s Marxist convictions, but equally his attempt to widen the antifascist narrative in order to include the history of Czech Jews, the Holocaust, and Jewish reactions to it.

Kárný found more time to devote to his research after the end of his formal political career in 1968 and during his new, less arduous employment. He began to dedicate himself more fully to documenting the history and memory of the Holocaust.23 In his own view, a major impetus for his work was the then growing idea of creating a Ghetto Museum in the city of Terezín, a plan backed up by a governmental resolution of late 1968 on the renovation of the Terezín Memorial.24 Kárný indeed played an important role in the development of the Terezín Memorial, which in the second half of the 1960s little by little integrated the history of the former ghetto into its agenda. In the first two postwar decades, the curators of the memorial had focused almost exclusively on the history of the “Small Fortress,” the former Gestapo prison equally located in Terezín, where 32,000 persons, mainly Czech resistant fighters, had been imprisoned between 1940 and 1945, of whom about 2,600 were killed.25 In order to modernize the Terezín Memorial, an architectural renovation was launched in 1968. The memory and the musealization of the former ghetto occupied a prominent place within this change. For instance, the curators intended to establish a Ghetto Museum in the heart of the city of Terezín, in the former ghetto. The plan to establish a Ghetto Museum had been brought forward by Holocaust survivors and representatives of the Czechoslovak Jewish community already in the immediate postwar years. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it became more and more concrete.26

Together with employees of the Terezín Memorial and the State Jewish Museum in Prague, Miroslav Kárný participated in a team that prepared an exhibi-

23 Interview with Miroslav Kárný, interviewed by Jana Friesová, March 21, 1996, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, Interview Code 12563, tape 5, 00:07:00.
24 Interview with Miroslav Kárný, 00:07:10.
25 On the memorialization of “Terezín” (both the former ghetto and the “Small Fortress”), see Hallama, Nationale Helden, 63–141.
26 Hallama, Nationale Helden, 127–35.
tion concept for the future Ghetto Museum in the early 1970s. Kárný was consulted primarily on issues concerning the illegal communist party organization and the resistance movement in the ghetto. In 1973, the team presented a first version of the exhibition script and collected items for the exhibition. They believed that the Ghetto Museum would be ready to open in 1975.

Admittedly, the concept for the exhibition reproduced several traditional, communist interpretations of the recent history. For instance, the depiction of Czech antisemitism during the so-called Second Czechoslovak Republic (1938–1939) was merely a matter of the “bourgeois” politicians and the concept presented an idealized picture of the solidarity between the Czech people and their Jewish fellow citizens. Nevertheless, the exhibition was clearly innovative in that it presented German antisemitism (rather than imperialism or class struggle) as the driving force behind the persecution and murder of the Jews. Indeed, in the first part of the exhibition concept, devoted to the ideological and historical preconditions of the ghetto’s history, the authors intended to cover the ideological and legal bases of anti-Jewish persecutions in Nazi Germany, the first phase of the persecutions from 1933 to 1939, Czech antisemitism and fascism prior to World War II, and the application of racist laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. No mention was made here of capitalism, imperialism, communism, or the class struggle. The authors’ focus on antisemitism was so strong that even the director of the State Jewish Museum recommended the in-


28 “Návrh na osnovu libreta k expozici dějin tzv. ghetta v Terezíně” [Draft concept of the exhibition on the history of the so-called Terezín ghetto], n.d. [1972], SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14.

29 “Kontrola plnění vládního usnesení 446/68” [Supervision of the execution of the government resolution no. 446/68], n.d. [February 1973], SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 1; “Návrh na osnovu libreta k expozici dějin tzv. ghetta v Terezíně” [Draft concept of the exhibition on the history of the so-called Terezín ghetto], n.d. [1972], SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14.

30 “Zpráva o plnění vládního usnesení 446/68 na úseku stavebně-technickém k 30.9.1972” [Report about the execution of the government resolution no. 446/68 in the field of construction and engineering], n.d. [ca. October 1972], SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14; “Porada o práci na scénáři muzea ghetta” [Meeting about the Ghetto Museum’s concept], December 6, 1972, SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14.

31 “Návrh na osnovu libreta k expozici dějin tzv. ghetta v Terezíně” [Draft concept of the exhibition on the history of the so-called Terezín ghetto], n.d. [1972], SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14.
roduction to be broader, for the Nazi politics were “not only antisemitism, but were directed also against other ‘inferior’ nations.”

At that time, Miroslav Kárný started to fully engage with the study of the history of the Theresienstadt ghetto. According to a letter he wrote to the director of the Terezín Memorial Václav Novák in 1973, he already had a clear objective as a historian: to write “a truly scientific history” of the Theresienstadt ghetto. Therefore, he studied in different archives, read domestic and foreign literature (including German, American, and Israeli publications), and—as I will discuss later—collected interviews with Theresienstadt survivors and other documents from Theresienstadt.

Kárný sought institutional and financial support for his research. As, in his own words, the “only historian in Czechoslovakia” working on the history of the Theresienstadt ghetto, he hoped to be supported by the Terezín Memorial in 1973. However, the close cooperation that had existed between Kárný and the Memorial in the early 1970s soon came to an abrupt end. In a letter from late 1973, the Memorial’s director already expressed his worry that in some issues “we will certainly have problems.” He was most likely referring to the politics of “normalization” in the early 1970s that brought about personal changes in the Terezín Memorial’s history department as well. Karel Lagus, a Jewish survivor of the Theresienstadt ghetto who had been the head of that department since 1969, had to be dismissed already in late 1971. Lagus’ dismissal signaled that the narrative of specifically Jewish suffering in the Theresienstadt ghetto would not be in the forefront of the Terezín Memorial’s agenda. This might have been also the reason why an article that Kárný proposed in 1973 for the Memorial’s journal Terezínské listy (Terezín papers) was not accepted for publication (the reasons for the refusal remain unknown). Thus, apart from an edition of a document concerning the cultural life in

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32 “Porada o práci na scénáři muzea ghettta” [Meeting about the Ghetto Museum’s concept], December 6, 1972, SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14.
33 Miroslav Kárný to Václav Novák (Památník Terezín), November 3, 1973, SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14.
34 Miroslav Kárný to Václav Novák (Památník Terezín), November 3, 1973, SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14.
35 Václav Novák (Památník Terezín) to Miroslav Kárný, n.d. [November or December 1973], SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14.
Theresienstadt from the early 1970s, Kárný did not publish in this journal until the 1990s. He finally succeeded in getting institutional support from the State Jewish Museum in Prague. In 1976, two years after his retirement, the State Jewish Museum commissioned Kárný to carry out a research project about the “Nazi solution to the Jewish question” in the Czech lands. Part of this project was also to document the period of World War II and gather material from domestic and foreign archives concerning the anti-Jewish persecutions in the Czech lands.

Although Miroslav Kárný had been expelled from the communist party and was, partly, prevented from publishing his texts about the Holocaust of Czech Jews, he remained a communist and loyal to the state. Furthermore, his wife, Margita Kárná, remained a Party member. And unlike other journalists or historians who had been involved in the “Prague Spring,” he did not choose to publish in the samizdat or to engage with the dissidents in the emerging civil society. His loyal stance was also appreciated by the communist secret service (Státní bezpečnost, StB) who approached him in early 1973 with the objective of obtaining information about “Zionism” in Czechoslovakia, that is, information about Czech Jews, the situation within the Jewish community, and their relations abroad. Miroslav Kárný was judged valuable by the StB officers because of his many contacts among Czechoslovak Jews and his relations with foreign scholars, part of whom were Jewish emigrants from Czechoslovakia (for instance the historian Livia Rothkirchen at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem). The StB file containing information from the “secret collaborator” Kárný (with the cover name “Mirek”) is almost 100 pages, covering 15 years from 1973 to 1988. From the file, it is not clear if Kárný harmed anyone directly by cooperating with the

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38 Miroslav Kárný to Památník Terezín, November 2, 1973, and Václav Novák (Památník Terezín) to Miroslav Kárný, January 23, 1974, SOA Litoměřice, PT, box 14. See also Interview with Miroslav Kárný, interviewed by Jana Friesová, March 21, 1996, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, Interview Code 12563, tape 5, 00:09:00–00:10:10. According to entries in Kárný’s diary from 1979, he prepared another article (about “the path to the ‘Final Solution’”), which has never been published in Terezínské listy. Diář 1979, NA, f. Kárných, box 3.
41 Archiv bezpečnostních složek (hereafter, ABS), Prague, TS-800656 MV.
However, his collaboration certainly helped facilitate his research on the Holocaust. Kárný’s anti-Zionist stance, which he demonstrated by working for the StB, probably helped him gain the support of the State Jewish Museum a few years later. Its scientific department declared the fight against Zionism and the critique of Zionist interpretations and “falsifications” of history as one of its main objectives in 1976. The Museum’s director from 1972 to 1976, Erik Klíma, was not only willing to adjust the Museum’s politics to follow party lines and implement an anti-Zionist course, but he himself was also one of the secret police’s collaborators who had recommended Kárný to the StB in 1973.

Kárný’s collaboration with the StB probably also allowed him to build contacts in Western countries (in particular with people from West Germany, the US, and Israel), to receive Western literature, and even travel to the West. In an StB memorandum on Miroslav Kárný from October 1973, the StB officer in charge did not see any indication that Kárný would attempt to emigrate if he was allowed to make a trip abroad. Four years later, the secret police supported Kárný’s successful application for a three-week research trip to West Germany, Austria, and Switzer-

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42 The information given by Kárný was judged reliable, but his activity was considered little. (See, for instance, “Vyhodnocení spolupráce s TS ‘Mirkem’ za uplynulé období a doplnění údajů do memoranda” [Evaluation of the cooperation with secret collaborator ‘Mirko’ during the past period and completion of details to the memorandum], October 29, 1974, ABS, TS-800656 MV, n.p.) In the 1980s, Kárný’s findings were considered of “only informative character.” (See, for instance, “Vyhodnocení TS za rok 1980” [Evaluation of the secret collaborator for the year 1980], January 29, 1981, ABS, TS-800656 MV, fol. 67–68.) Therefore, the collaboration lessened over the years and was suspended in 1988. (“Návrh na uložení TS MIRKA, č. sv. 21294” [Proposal to deposit secret collaborator MIRKO, no. 21294], June 9, 1988, ABS, TS-800656 MV, fol. 96–97.)


46 State-socialist Czechoslovakia controlled and restricted travels to foreign—in particular to Western—countries. After a period of easing travels to both socialist and capitalist countries in the 1960s, travels were again severely limited. In order to travel to Western countries, Czechoslovak citizens had to not only to apply for a passport and a visa, but also, and first of all, for foreign currency. Applications were, thus, examined considering political (e.g., the applicant’s loyalty and the probability of their emigration) and economic aspects.
Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to assume that Kárný carried out his research simply on behalf of the secret police. For instance, while the StB officers closely supervised his first contact with Livia Rothkirchen, they were apparently less interested in the voluminous correspondence that Kárný and Rothkirchen had throughout the 1970s and 1980s, which permitted Kárný to get a general idea of Israeli historiography on the Holocaust of Czechoslovak Jews, to exchange opinions, and to receive literature published in Israel.

The impact of Kárný’s collaboration with the secret police on the ability to carry out his research should also not be overestimated. However, if we believe a note written by an StB officer in 1987, relating to Kárný’s—again successful—application for a trip to West Germany, Kárný considered the permission for the trip also to be a “reward” for his collaboration with the secret services. In any case, compared to less loyal historians in socialist Czechoslovakia, Miroslav Kárný enjoyed quite a privileged position. He was able to carry out research in several domestic and foreign archives, for instance in East and West Germany, Poland, and Austria. He could participate in international conferences in West

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49 Correspondence between Livia Rothkirchen and Miroslav Kárný, 1973–1993, ITI, Correspondence Miroslav Kárný, folder R-[Y] (unsorted).


Germany, for instance in Hamburg in 1987, and at the FernUniversität Hagen in January 1989. He had access to Western literature through interlibrary loan—in 1973, he reportedly ordered about 60 books from abroad—and also through private book shipments. Indeed, his personal network enabled him to assemble a collection of books that was otherwise hardly available in Czechoslovakia. Through his private correspondence with historians abroad, in particular from West Germany, the US, and Israel, he had direct access to information about recent developments in the research on World War II and the Holocaust, such as the German “Historikerstreit.” He was able to publish articles in the country’s most influential scientific journals—although he had no university degree and was never employed as a historian—as well as in magazines, popular scientific journals, and newspapers—although he was officially banned from any journalistic activity. In the 1980s, he was increasingly consulted as an expert in the field, for instance in reviewing new literature or ongoing research about the


55 From a complaint Kárný made in 1988 concerning a book shipment from the West German “Hamburger Stiftung für Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts,” which was considered “incompatible with the interests of the ČSSR” by the Czechoslovak postal system, it becomes obvious that this was the first time for Kárný that a book shipment from Western countries was not delivered. Miroslav Kárný to Federální úřad pro tisk a informace, April 14, 1988 and May 6, 1988, Federální úřad pro tisk a informace to Miroslav Kárný, April 21, 1988, Petr Dřímalka (Ředitelství mezinárodní poštovní přepravy) to Miroslav Kárný, May 3, 1988, Kárný’s reply, May 5, 1988, and Miroslav Kárný to Vratislav Vajnar (Federální ministerstvo vnitra), June 4, 1988, all in ITI, Correspondence Miroslav Kárný, folder F-G (unsorted); Miroslav Kárný to Angelika Ebbinghaus, April 23, 1988, NA, f. Kárných, box 8.


57 For instance, Kárný contributed to Československý časopis historický, Slovník historický, and Historica, all of which were edited by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.

58 Miroslav Kárný explained that it was mainly his ban from publishing as a journalist that enabled him to publish in scientific journals. Interview with Miroslav Kárný, interviewed by Jana Friesová, March 21, 1996, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, Interview Code 12563, tape 5, 00:08:30. He nevertheless continued to contribute to non-academic periodicals, in particular, until 1982, to Hlas revoluce, the weekly newspaper of the Union of Antifascist Fighters.
history of World War II. In 1983, his book *Tajemství a legendy třetí říše* (Secrets and legends of the Third Reich), a collection of published articles and original contributions, appeared in an impressive initial print run of 25,000 copies in a series “intended for the youth.” Until the end of socialist rule in Eastern Europe, Kárný managed to establish an internationally respected position as a historian of the Holocaust of Czech Jews. His research was accessible not only because part of his publications in Czechoslovakia were published in German, but also because he was given the opportunity to publish in East and West German journals. When, for instance, the Klarsfeld Foundation in France planned in 1985 to publish a *Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs du Protectorat*, they asked Kárný to write the introduction. Kárný and Emmanuel Lulin from the Klarsfeld Foundation had met personally at the end of 1984, when Lulin visited Prague. When foreign journalists and scholars were looking for Czech Holocaust survivors to interview, Kárný often acted as a mediator.

**Class Struggle and Imperialism, or the Persecution and Murder of the Jews?**

Kárný was both a historian of World War II, interested in what Marxist historiography called the history of German fascism and imperialism, and a historian of the Holocaust. Many of Kárný’s studies examine German war goals in

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61 This was the case for his articles in the journals *Judaica Bohemiae* and *Historica*, which published texts in foreign languages (mainly German, French, English, and Russian).


66 In several letters, Kárný presented his research interest as being the history of “German fascism.” See, among others, Miroslav Kárný to Bernt Engelmann, June 2, 1987, NA, f. Kárných, box 8.