

Nina Pavelčíková:
ROMOVÉ V ČESKÝCH
ZEMÍCH V LETECH 1945–1989
(Roma in the Czech Lands
1945–1989). Prague: Úřad
dokumentace a vyšetřování
zločinů komunismu (Office of
Documentation and Investigation
of Criminals of Communism), Sešity
12, 2004, 183 pp., supplements,
English and German summaries.

The issue under review represents the most compelling synthesis of the Ostrava historian Nina Pavelčíková to date. The subject of her research after 1989 became Czech (Czechoslovak)-Romani coexistence covering the period from the end of the Second World War to the present. In the pages of *Urban People* we mention this work, especially because the Romani national minority (in Pavelčíková's concept, an ethnic group), during the period of so-called communism from the early 1950s, went through an insensitive process of a very rapid and revolutionary form of urbanization. As a result of a postwar advertising campaign looking for an unqualified labor force, the culturally distinct, linguistically – at least in the first years – different, educationally and, therefore, also socially handicapped minority came from Slovakia to Prague, Ústí nad Labem, Most, Kladno, Pilsen, Děčín, and other northern and western Czech border cities. In Moravia, they headed for Ostrava, Brno and Karviná.

The special subject of interest of Nina Pavelčíková, however, became the relation of state organs to the Roma and to the so-called Romani question. As

a historian, she emphasized the idea that problems of coexistence with the majority population have historic roots. Increasing Romani unemployment, the non-functioning family, various forms of addiction (to drugs, slot-machines, etc.), parasitic ways of supporting themselves, usury, etc., are the result of complicated historic development and also of different traditions. Pavelčíková characterizes Romani otherness as a difference in origin, physiognomy, language, a lack of written culture, a different socio-cultural system, a system of family, relatives and mentality and norms of behavior.

Despite usage of some sources which are routinely considered non-standard in historiography (Romani literature, memoirs, remembrances, interviews, data from the fieldwork among Roma in Vitkovice, Ostrava and southern Moravia [1999], musical recordings, film, but surprisingly no sayings and proverbs), this is a historic work based mainly on archival research of sources of authoritative provenance (the most interesting of which are printed in the concluding supplements and expanded with eight photographs of a Romani school and model pupils, Romani workers, a Romani family in Ostrava in the 1950s, and Romani officials). Meanwhile it is very significant that only few of the sources used are of Romani provenance and these are, as a rule, stimulated by the interest of the majority: Romani officials claim to be among the builders of socialism; they justify their parasitic way of living by blaming their poverty or the relation of the majority society to Gypsies as to an inferior, isolated group. As a warning, the Romani Holocaust is recalled. The majority

society is then called upon to be patient and to express good will toward allegedly timid and mistrustful co-citizens.

Pavelčíková's analysis of the postwar period is original, especially in her attempt at periodization of the official majority attitude toward the Roma, which, to a certain extent, corresponds to the historic periodization of the postwar period (1945–1948, 1948–1957, 1958–1968, 1969–1977, 1977–1989), and further, her refusal to make a superficial evaluation of the former regime and call it a regime of ill will. On the other hand, Pavelčíková actually reveals the roots in those times of the contemporary crisis of Romani society: she sees them in the broken or disturbed institution of family and neighborhood and in the deformation of traditional Romani values of solidarity, cooperation, absence of egotism and miserliness.

A key period was, according to the Ostrava historian, the late 1950s, a time of urbanization, balancing itself with the unfriendly environment of an industrial city full of unknown elements of civilization. As a result of the zeal (often well-meant) to create a model educated, hard-working and healthy socialist citizen, however, there arose tense coexistence between the majority and the minority as well as the rise of new Romani ghettos. The Sovietization of national politics led to a new discrimination law that forbade a traveling lifestyle (1958), emanating from the myth about traveling Roma in the past (page 15 – actually we have documents about Roma who had already settled in the 14th and 15th centuries). While the postwar period, when only 583 Czech and

Moravian Roma returned to the Czech lands from concentration camps, oscillated between suggestions of repressive measures that were comparable to Protectorate policies (a register of persons of Gypsy origin, forced-labor camps, re-education centers, removal of children from Romani families) and an attempt to respect Roma as a special nation with its own culture and language, the second stage was characterized by unconditional assimilation. The first era was shaped by the first migration waves of socially handicapped Slovak Roma. At the time of creation of the communist conception of a solution of the so-called Gypsy question after February 1948 when another stream of migration came, important personalities came forward to push for liquidation of the Romani handicapped. Several original pedagogical and educational institutions with remarkable consequences for Romani children and Romani parents were founded. The most popular of them became the Gypsy School of Peace in Květušín near České Budějovice and then later in Dobrá Voda, linked to the famous pedagogue Miroslav Dědič. The next period beginning in 1958, on the other hand, formed the so-called dispersal (1965–1968) or, more precisely, the forced urbanization of the Romani population. It was divided into three groups: the settled Gypsies, the most numerous semi-settled Gypsies and the most problematic (from the point of view of the majority) traveling Gypsies, at whom a law regarding permanent settlement (1958) was aimed. A positive aspect of that era was the rise in the health, social and educational level of the Roma, although the Roma never achieved the

majority's average. The period around the so-called Prague Spring activated Romani activity of its own. The Roma created for themselves the Union of Gypsies (Roma) (1968–1973) and made contact with international organizations. This promising development was interrupted during the time of normalization when there was a return to the model of the controlling, socially generous state rejecting individuality and permitting, in its beginnings, only small cultural activities (the rise of Romani bands, organizing of exhibitions of Romani crafts). The turnaround of state policies toward the Roma in 1989 was already foreshadowed in the document called Charta 77, which criticized the state concept of the so-called social and cultural integration of the Roma which also devalORIZED the Romani past (in fact, between 1972 and 1974, a large-scale pig farm was built in Lety on the land where there had been a concentration camp for Roma under the Protectorate). Probably the largest memorial of unreal notions of that era was the realization of the idea of a Romani prefabricated housing development in the Chánov section of the town of Most. Romani families of very different social levels were unable to find a *modus vivendi* and, for integrated Roma, Chánov changed into a space from which they wanted to escape. An official party document that appeared at the end of the 1980s was reflected in an increase of Romani activity plus realistic thinking about the state of the Romani community and the causes of the failure of assimilation, including criticism of state paternalism.

Pavelčíková's book is thus new proof of the fact that the generous social policy of

the totalitarian state of excluding private activity despite the declaration of a scientific and complex solution of the problem does more harm than good. At this point, one can also regret that Pavelčíková did not consider a comparison of Czechoslovak state policies toward the Roma with state policies of other Soviet satellites and with state policies of advanced capitalist states. The attentive reader, familiar with the gains and state of contemporary schooling and culture must, however, come to the conclusion that everything here has already been, even if, e.g., a Romani boarding school in the 1950s would not be successful in the light of postmodern pedagogy with its accent on child nurturing in the family. At the same time it would be very interesting to follow the life stories of Romani children reared in such schools, the degree of their involvement in the majority society and the degree of their assimilation or, more precisely, the functioning or non-functioning in direct proportion of the help of the majority and social involvement to the satisfaction of the minority. Subtle anthropological research could then, on the bases of oral-historic interviews, augment the fascinating testimony of the Romani activist and author Elena Lacková and record how the state-created "great" history was reflected in the fates of ordinary people.

Throughout the book, which is a useful picture of the dark postwar period, Nina Pavelčíková promotes a thesis about the improvement in education of the Roma as an assumption of the improvement of their social success. And this intellectual cliché is an illustration of our underestimation of the importance of the quality

of the majority population, the degree of their prejudices, xenophobia and racism. It is shown that the quality of coexistence is a two-sided matter, even if the greater responsibility falls on the shoulders of the advantaged (majority). Undoubtedly it would, therefore, do the text good if the postwar position of the Roma were followed in comparison with the position of other minorities and certain patterns were revealed in the coexistence of unequal neighbors.

Blanka Soukupová

**ŽIDÉ V KOLÍNĚ A OKOLÍ
(Jews in Kolín and its
Environ). Proceedings of
the Kolín Museum – Social
Science Series IX. Edited by
Ladislav Jouza and Jaroslav
Pejša.**

Kolín: Kolín Regional Museum,
2005, 228 pp.

Despite the large number of texts dedicated to the Jewish minority in the Czech lands, only relatively few monographs or other publications mapping the Jewish minority in a particular location with an important Jewish population have appeared since 1989. This slight applies to the Czechs to a large degree because some sort of parallel to the *Jews and Moravia* series of the Kroměřížsko Museum in Kroměříž is missing here.

The reviewed collection of contributions to the Regional Museum in Kolín at least partially attempts to repay this debt. Its topic of interest became the his-

tory of the Jewish minority in Kolín and its environs as a certain type of Jewish community in the Czech heartland. In chronological order and with the help of various sources and literatures (only documents of material culture remained undervalued), a qualified team of archivists and historians (critical towards older literature) blocked out the development of Jewish settlement from their celebrated beginnings in the Middle Ages (Vojtěch Vaněk), when the Kolín Jews created the second most important Jewish community in the Czech land, through the well-known exodus in 1541 (Stanislav Petr), and to its post-war demise (definite in 1979). Also, the post-war development of the Jews in Kolín (Jaroslav Pejša), as if it copied the fates of other Jewish communities: Of several hundred deported Jews, only a few dozens (the final count was 487 victims of the Shoah) returned to the city. The community encountered the problem of abandoned synagogues and cemeteries; Jewish corporations were only formally restored; Jewish monuments (in this case, a cemetery) found themselves imperiled; surviving Jews tried to honor the memory of their murdered and fallen co-religionists with the construction of a monument (unveiled in April 1950). After the February Revolution of 1948, the community gradually fell under the control of state organs. In the late 1960s there was a revival of interest in Jewish history and culture in this small town, which faded at the beginning of normalization.

Between these two turning-points, according to the authors, there was a memorable period before the Hilsneriada (the condemnation of Leopold Hilsner for the apparent Jewish ritual murder