

Jesse Siegel

## German-Czechoslovak Businessmen in the European Market, 1918-1948

My dissertation argues that German businessmen from Czechoslovakia constructed their dual political identities as German minority nationals and Czechoslovak citizens to protect their position as factory owners and financiers in the European market after World War I. Their maneuvers sought to legitimize Czechoslovakia at home and abroad while also exceeding Czechoslovakia's limitations in international business and society. From their experience of navigating multiple political identities in Czechoslovakia and Europe, many of these same businessmen were able to successfully build new political identities and businesses in the postwar world. Through this project, I plan to offer a geographically expansive, transnational history of how businessmen as mobile, privileged individuals and families helped define and escape the limitations of German nationality and Czechoslovak citizenship to pursue economic success in twentieth century Europe.

I use the category "German-Czechoslovak" as an inclusive analytical tool for studying Germans in Czechoslovakia during the twentieth century. Because the first half of the century offered several ways to identify as German, often carrying political weight, I chose this formulation as specific to German nationality (identified through national census, local records, social commitments, press opinion and business language use) and Czechoslovak citizenship without the connotations of political positions or goals. Together, this category intends to bring together the experiences of two groups whose fates wildly diverged: non-Jewish German and Jewish-German businessmen. While Jews in the First Czechoslovak Republic were encouraged to identify as Czech or Jewish on the national census and in political life, many Jewish businessmen continued to identify as German, leading urban German cultural institutions and operating in similar business and social networks with their non-Jewish German peers until 1938. While the intersection of German nationality and Czechoslovak citizenship collapsed under the differing traumas of the occupation in 1938 and the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans in 1945-1947, the grouping allows me to argue that both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans from Czechoslovakia built new businesses and national identities using similar methods and practices gained from their experiences of navigating the interwar European economy as German-Czechoslovaks.

As the definition above for German-Czechoslovak businessman reveals, I am less interested in who or what was German in interwar Czechoslovakia, but what Germanness meant in interwar Europe and how it could be imposed, removed, chosen, and discarded depending on economic and political circumstances. German-Czechoslovak businessmen chose to emphasize differing aspects of their nationality or citizenship, depending on whether these identities would give them greater social or economic advantage. At the same time, cosmopolitanism, often used to explain how Jewish businessmen saw their place in Czechoslovak society or even as a goal of Czechoslovak state ideology, does not adequately explain the choices of German-Czechoslovak businessmen. While businessmen chose to emphasize Czechoslovak citizenship or German nationality in different European contexts, they do not appear to have understood these political identities as equal to other available identities. This project therefore understands the political categories of nationality and citizenship as having importance to how businessmen navigated the European economy, even as they were less important to businessmen than business success and personal survival.

To explore how German-Czechoslovak businessmen and their relationship to German nationality and Czechoslovak citizenship changed over time, I am focusing on elite industrial business families from Czechoslovakia. The advantage in examining these families and their businesses is they ran multi-generational firms as well as producing a vast archival record through corporate records, press coverage, and personal recollections. By focusing on individuals within these families, I explore issues of nationality and citizenship that are opaque at the level of corporate or national economic history, and how they changed in confrontation with economic and political crises. While many of these families represented a social elite, they also provide a framework through which to compare the choices of other businessmen, such as borderland factory owners and independent financiers, for which there is less archival documentation. Therefore, my category of “German-Czechoslovak businessman” is not intended to be a discreet group of individuals or businesses, but a category for analyzing a privileged social elite and their relationship to Germanness and Czechoslovak citizenship.

My dissertation follows German-Czechoslovak businessmen starting from the inception of their dual political identities with the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. As a privileged group in the empire, German businessmen had a great deal to lose and were potentially threatened by Czech national goals

of economic justice and national self-sufficiency. I argue, that through identifying with Czechoslovakia in their dealings with the government, seeking Czech business partners or building Czechoslovak business networks, and supporting social stability after 1918, German-Czechoslovak businessmen emerged as part of a “middle-class aristocracy” in Czechoslovakia: internationally oriented, locally dominant, but protected at the national level from the backlash against landed aristocracy across East-Central Europe.

At the same time, German-Czechoslovak businessmen strengthened their ties to a wider European economy, leading lives that could be described as “international.” Most German-Czechoslovak businessmen ran export-dependent businesses that needed to replace the Habsburg imperial marketplace with continuing investments and sales in other successor state economies as well as finding new markets in Western Europe. As members of a wealthy international German-speaking social elite and pursuing business interests that predated World War I, German-Czechoslovak businessmen also grew social and economic networks abroad. While still active at home, German-Czechoslovak businessmen were less defined by being in Czechoslovakia than being German-Czechoslovak businessmen living and traveling across Europe. This mobility was crucial to their self-image as “big industrialists” leading “world companies” as well as lent ammunition to politicians at home and abroad to criticize them as too “international.”

The world economic crisis and the rise of Nazism produce what I see as a double move of increasing German-Czechoslovak businessmen’s attachment to Czechoslovakia while incentivizing a diversification of risk across the transatlantic economy through investment or personal relocation abroad. While both crises led offering some German-Czechoslovak businessmen to move to Germany and a rise in German nationalist movements in Czechoslovakia, most German-Czechoslovak businessmen turned to Czechoslovakia, where they invested more of their resources, sold more of their goods, took an even more active role in promoting German elite culture, and cooperated with the Czechoslovak government in responding to social unrest and insecurities. The new dedication to Czechoslovakia in the 1930s was also outward facing, as German-Czechoslovak businessmen participated in organizing local branches of international organizations and engaged in international projects that identified them with Czechoslovakia. This inward and outward facing support for Czechoslovakia helped German-Czechoslovak businessmen secure their economic fortunes at home against a less economic.

Finally, I consider the collapse and legacy of the intersection of German and Czechoslovak political identities within an international marketplace as occurring over a *longue durée*. When Jewish German-Czechoslovak businessmen confronted expropriation by Nazi Germany, they could fall back on pre-World War I investments in Western Europe and the United States, where they had already fought expropriation by the Entente as enemy nationals during the war. For non-Jewish businessmen, geographically diverse investments offered choices, such as moving to Britain and taking on new citizenship or adjusting their German nationality to Nazi-occupied Europe. After being expelled from Czechoslovakia at the end of World War II, they turned to their remaining international economic and social networks to reestablish themselves. Despite the divergent fates of former German-Czechoslovak businessmen, I argue that at least one constant remained, their professional identity as businessmen. From their interwar experience of navigating competing political identities, former German-Czechoslovak businessmen crafted new identities as they built new businesses in Western Europe and the United States. While these identities were constrained by strong nation-states in the postwar economy, businessmen reframed their experiences to suit their new realities. Most crucially, from the 1950s to the 1970s several German-Czechoslovak businessmen wrote and funded histories that supported or critiqued nation-state narratives of early twentieth century European history, drawing on their experiences as international businessmen in interwar Europe to offer what they presented as unique, far-ranging perspectives. German-Czechoslovak businessmen therefore played a role in building both the postwar transatlantic economy and historiography that was rooted in common experience of interwar Europe as international businessmen with German nationality and Czechoslovak citizenship.

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**Kontakt:**

Jesse Siegel, Rutgers University, [jes460@history.rutgers.edu](mailto:jes460@history.rutgers.edu)