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A Dangerous Neighbourhood: German Cinema in the Czechoslovak Region, 1933–45

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The democratic Republic of Czechoslovakia was created at the end of the First World War (1918), as one of the succession states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The new state was politically and economically dominated by the Czechs but had large German and Slovak ethnic minorities as well as smaller Hungarian, Ukrainian and Polish minorities. Centuries of sharing Central European territory had created numerous economic, political and cultural ties between the Bohemian Lands and the German Reich. Following the creation of Czechoslovakia these ties intensified. This trend, which was already noticeable under Austrian rule, manifested itself among other things in the entertainment industry.

The Czechoslovak film market (1918–38) and its ties with the German film industry

The German population of Czechoslovakia, the 'Sudeten Germans', were to adapt most readily to the rapid industrialisation of cinema. This was particularly true for the inhabitants of the industrial region of North Bohemia, who had ties both to Vienna and to the great industrial centres in Germany. Nevertheless, it was the tendency of the Czech population to live in constant contact with German culture that, despite the rhetoric of the Czech national movement, contributed to the establishment of German cinema as the second-ranking national cinema on the Czechoslovak market in the 1920s. Tensions between the German minority and the ruling ethnic Czech majority rose repeatedly, manifesting, for instance, in the famous Prague demonstrations where extremist groups protested against the presentation of German films.¹ Nonetheless, the viewing behaviour of the Czech public indicates that even after the advent of sound film the trend was in quite the opposite direction. German films took second place in terms of

viewer preference, ranking right after Czech films, not only with regard to the number of films on the Czechoslovak market, but with respect to the popularity of country of film origin as well.²

By the time Hitler came to power in Nazi Germany, early disputes associated with the advent of sound had already taken shape, involving both the reaction of the public and the patent issue, some even resulting in lawsuits. Under the 'Paris Agreement' of 1930, Czechoslovakia was part of the patent zone of Tobis-Klangfilm, a supra-national group of companies. After some initial disputes, Tobis-Klangfilm finally reached an agreement with the professional organisations of the Czechoslovak film industry, led by the Central Union of Cinematographers (*Ústřední svaz kinematografů*), settling for a flat licensing fee for patent infringing equipment.³ In 1933, the Czechoslovak film industry was embroiled in another big issue – the introduction of the quota system. In 1932 – relatively late in comparison to other European countries – Czechoslovakia started protecting its domestic film market by regulating film imports and supporting domestic film production. Modelling its legislation after the British Cinematograph Films Act (1927), the Czech Ministry of Industry, Trade and Crafts made the issue of import licenses conditional to the production of domestic films. It also introduced standards regulating the number of foreign films that could be imported to Czechoslovakia in a given year (and hence, *de facto*, how many domestic films would be produced).⁴

The Ministry of Trade had already attempted earlier, in the late 1920s, to introduce such a model to support domestic film. The proposed act got bogged down during inter-ministerial negotiations about the model as a whole, but one reason that the earlier attempt had failed was that the big American companies had threatened a boycott of the Czechoslovak market.⁵ When the quota system was finally introduced in 1932, the American companies actually did resort to this extreme measure. The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America did not accept the terms of the Czechoslovak quota system. Prague subsidiaries of the American companies Fox, MGM, Paramount, United Artists and Universal refused to produce Czech films and stopped the import of American films into Czechoslovakia. This event dramatically transformed the landscape of distribution offerings in very short order. What had until then been the dominant share of American cinema in the Czechoslovak market fell to fourth place over the course of 1932. The American's privileged position was taken over by German cinema – just as Adolf Hitler was coming into power in Germany.⁶ The Prague subsidiary of the German company Ufa ended up reacting in precisely the opposite fashion. Ufa decided to accept the new conditions and began producing its own Czech films. The first of them, *The Little Window* (*Okénko*), directed by Vladimír Slavínský and featuring rising stars Hugo Haas (who would be dismissed from the National Theatre in 1938 because of his Jewish origins) and Lída Baarová, premiered in early March of 1933.⁷ Even

after the domestic film production requirement for importers was eliminated in 1934, the Prague branch of Ufa continued producing films in the country. In total, Ufa produced 15 Czech films between 1933 and 1940.⁸

Although the Ministry of Trade was satisfied with the economic effect of the quota system, the new situation provoked considerable tension in film circles. Cinema owners complained of a shortage of new films, and more nationalist-oriented journalists attacked the influx of German films. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed considerable unease as well: Jindřich Elbl, the foreign ministry's cinema desk officer, who would be one of the eight authorised representatives of nationalised cinema from 1945 to 1948 (responsible for import and export) characterised the overall situation in a special memorandum to the minister as follows: '... the film import policy of the Ministry of Trade has led, though perhaps unintentionally, to a situation in which, for the past 2 years, cinematograph theatre has been systematically promoting a trend and influences in cinema that are undesirable and, in part, even antagonistic to the Czechoslovak state government'.⁹ Under pressure from other government offices and the public, after complicated negotiations with the Americans, the Ministry of Trade did finally abandon the quota system in November 1934, and the relative strengths of key national cinemas in the Czechoslovak market returned to their original proportions, although with a significantly lower total volume of films.¹⁰

After the abandonment of the quota system, the Ministry of Trade suggested to representatives of the domestic film industry that they should regulate the import of foreign films themselves. This led to the establishment of the Cartel of Film Importers (*Kartel filmových dovozců*) in September 1935. The cartel established general rules for film imports, even including price ceilings which were intended to prevent inflated prices for films due to intra-market competition. Germany, as the second strongest national cinema represented on the Czechoslovak market, contributed to a large degree to the general implementation and acceptance of this price regulation. In January 1936, representatives of the Reich Film Chamber signed an agreement with representatives of Czech cinema governing conditions for the import of German films into Czechoslovakia. From the Czech perspective the agreement's major benefit lay in the acceptance of the price conditions set by the cartel: the agreement essentially legitimised these terms for international commerce. Parallel negotiations with representatives of the Austrian film industry towards a Czechoslovak–Austrian cinema agreement broke down over those same terms, for that very reason. Pointing to the newly reached agreement with Germany, the Czechoslovak side rejected the Austrian proposals, which were based on specific features of the Austrian film industry (for example, the fact that in Austria, 90 per cent profits from the exploitation of feature films came from exports). The Czechoslovak–German film agreement of 1936 spontaneously became a sort of unofficial standard.¹¹

February 1937 saw the ratification of a new bilateral film agreement, this time including the export of Czechoslovak films to Germany.¹² The

agreement guaranteed the exchange of films between the two countries in the ratio of 1:15, with the stipulation that no more than five Czech films in a German version would be exported to Germany per year. Under the agreement, these films were to be imported into Germany without quota sheets and would be treated in the approval procedure like films produced in Germany. Imported films not covered by this agreement would be subject to the standard regime for foreign films.¹³ The text of the agreement does not make clear what is meant by German versions of Czech films, whether that meant a 'multiple language version' (MLV) or a dubbed version (apparently either). At any rate, it is noteworthy that the ratio stipulated reflected actual practice: Czechoslovakia produced around five multiple language versions of Czech films annually from 1931 to 1938, the vast majority of them in German, aiming at German-speaking countries, and imported around 80 German films every year.¹⁴ The agreement was advantageous for the Czechoslovak side, as the possibility of bypassing the German quota system while exporting Czech films to the German market benefited Czech exporters. The Germans, for their part, had a guarantee of the regular acceptance of the stated number of German films, and with it a permanent presence on the Czechoslovak market not vulnerable to the increasingly dramatic situation in bilateral relations at the political level.¹⁵ Hence the Reich's strategy towards the Czechoslovak film industry was a fairly obliging one, for the sake of ensuring that German cinema maintained the favourable position it had been holding in the Czechoslovak market.

In defence of democratic values, the Czechoslovak government (through the Film Advisory Council (*Filmový poradní sbor*) at the Ministry of Trade) issued guidelines that set the certain conditions on film imports. Under these guidelines, films that did any of the following were not admissible:

1. Jeopardise or harm state interests
 2. Jeopardise public law and order (regulations)
 3. Might lead to disturbances in the national, religious or political tolerance
 4. Jeopardise our political – democratic – system either directly or indirectly through the propaganda of other governments or non-critical praise of monarchies, aristocratic societies and so on
 5. Evoke and glorify the former politic constellation in Central Europe
 6. Mar or contravene the relations of Czechoslovakia towards other nations, especially towards such as are in agreement with the concepts of Czechoslovak foreign policy
 7. Defame persons of other nations
- [...]¹⁶

The state also furthered its interests by placing geographic restrictions on the use of the language of the German minority. Films dubbed into German could only be shown in municipalities where over half the population was

ethnically German; if a company showed such a film anywhere else, it was required to pay a fee of 20 000 crowns into the 'registration fund' (a fund for the promotion of cinema).¹⁷

While the state may have retained certain wariness in its relations with Germany, in cinematic circles the German neighbour was viewed with considerable admiration. Certainly, they were impressed by the interest that the German government took in cinema. In late April of 1935 there was an international film congress held in Berlin on behalf of the International Film Chamber.¹⁸ The 40-member delegation sent to the Berlin congress from Czechoslovakia came back bearing powerful impressions. Germany could boast the recently established film academy and the brand new Reich Film Archive (*Reichsfilmarchiv*); up to 2500 congress participants were able to see Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1935); a 50-member delegation was even given an audience with Adolf Hitler.¹⁹ The International Film Chamber and the International Federation of Film Critics (*Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique*, FIPRESCI) were both established at the congress, which also advocated the establishment of national film archives, while representatives of the Reich Film Chamber also appealed for the organisation of national film chambers. Although they denied that it was a source of inspiration, Czech cinematic circles were also clearly interested in the institution of the *Reichsfilm dramaturg*:²⁰ that same year, 1935, Julius Schmitt, the leading Czech producer, suggested that some kind of 'official Czech cinema dramaturge office' might one day emerge from the current thoughts about film dramaturgy.²¹

After Hitler's accession to power, Czechoslovakia became one of the destination countries for emigrants fleeing Germany. Several Jewish producers, directors and actors found work in the film industry there, despite protests from the film unions. Directors Max Neufeld, Walter Kolm-Veltée, Jakob and Luise Fleck, and Robert Land, and actor Hans Jaray and others were involved in the production of multiple language versions of Czech films. Czechoslovakia was also one of the major customers for what were known as 'independent films' from Austria, that is, productions by Jewish emigrants who were attempting to establish themselves in the Austrian film industry, which had no chance of being exported into Germany.²²

German influence on the (Czech) film market of the 'Second Republic' and the 'Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia' (1938–44/45)

The Munich Agreement (September 1938) resulted in the dismemberment of the state of Czechoslovakia. In the west, Sudetenland was incorporated into Nazi Germany. In the east, Slovakia was turned into an 'independent' satellite state of Nazi Germany while Poland and Hungary acquired pieces inhabited by 'their' ethnic minorities. The remainder of Czechoslovakia, the

so-called 'Second Republic' or 'rump' Republic, only existed from October 1938 until 15 March 1939. On that date, the Republic was invaded and occupied by the German Wehrmacht. Czechoslovakia ceased to exist and was turned into a German 'protectorate'. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, as it was henceforth called, still had a Czech government but was in reality governed by the administration of a German Reich Protector.²³

The signing of the Munich agreement and the creation of the 'Second Republic' had an immediate impact on the film sector through the marked reduction in the size of the cinema theatre network. With the severance of Sudetenland and additional territories a total of 545 cinemas (almost 30 per cent of the original network, of which only 354 had been German) were suddenly outside of the newly demarcated borders.²⁴ A xenophobic mood accompanied the oppressive atmosphere in the 'rump' republic. Nationalist rhetoric was heard mingled with the rhetoric of anti-Semitism, even in the film sector. Particularly enterprising in this respect was the Czechoslovak Film Union (*Čs. filmová unie*), under the leadership of director Václav Binovec, as well as the Central Union of Cinematographers, which deliberately played the anti-Semitic card in its attack on film rental operations, and on local subsidiaries of American companies in particular.²⁵

The establishment of the Protectorate fuelled extensive changes in the entire film sector. Shock at the collapse of the Republic fed a spontaneous desire towards internal integration of the sector. In response to the country's occupation, as early as May 1939, the Centre of Film Branche (*Ústředí filmového oboru*) was set up, associating the individual representatives of the Central Union of Cinematographers, the Film Production Union (*Svaz filmové výroby*), the Film Industry and Commerce Union (*Svaz filmového průmyslu a obchodu*), the Film Import Association (*Sdružení filmového dovozu*) and the Czech Film Union (*Česká filmová unie*). The new central organisation underwent several transformations over the following months. As of July it was subject to the supervision of Hermann Glessgen, film commissioner of the Office of the Reich Protector. The aim of this centralised union institution, which gradually took on the character of a film chamber, was to create more stable internal organisation on the one hand and to protect it from the outside on the other. At the same time, of course, its very existence made it easier for the Germans to implement occupation policies in the film sector and to regulate domestic cinema securely.²⁶

In the end, the plan of creating a film chamber came to fruition under German direction. By decree of the Reich Protector, dated 26 October 1940, on 15 February 1941 the Bohemian–Moravian Film Center (*Českomoravské filmové ústředí – Böhmischemährische Filmzentrale, ČMFÚ/BMFZ*) was created, a Czech–German public corporation with mandatory membership for all business owners, merchants and artistic film employees engaged in film-making (formally this obligation extended to German subjects of the Protectorate²⁷). The chairman (a Czech) and vice-chairman (a German) were appointed by



Joseph Goebbels (front) visits the Barrandov Studios in Prague on 5 November 1940. On the left: state secretary Karl Hermann Frank. *Source:* Czech News Agency, CTK Photo Desk.

the Reich Protector and the Protectorate government had three representatives in the organisations management. The state delegated several of its powers to this highest-level body of corporate self-government, including that of granting concessions for the operation of cinemas. The mission of the ČMFÚ was to promote cinema within the framework of the overall economy, set binding regulations for internal transactions within the sector, represent the interests of individual groups, and resolve any conflicts arising among members of the chamber. All professional cinematic activities within Protectorate territory fell under its jurisdiction. As the ruling body in the sector, the ČMFÚ acted with great enterprise and regulated with directives the everyday activities in the film sector down to a high level of detail. In addition to a wide range of lower level directives, it introduced the mandatory registration of film subjects (December 1941), the approval of programmes produced (December 1941), an obligatory sequence for the information in the introductory credits and a maximum length for them of 50 m (July 1942),

and monitoring of correct Czech usage by Czech language experts. It also set a maximum length of 2600 m for a feature film (August 1941) and imposed a compulsory film programme: cultural short (*Kulturfilm*), newsreel and feature film (July 1941). ČMFÚ clearly ruled the Czech film industry and continued to do so right up until May 1945, when it ceded its duties to the National Committee of Czech Film Workers (*Národní výbor českých filmových pracovníků*). Through ČMFÚ, Czech film workers gained considerable experience with the central direction of the sector as a whole and in that sense it represents a significant developmental phase on the path towards the post-war introduction of the state monopoly in film commerce, when many former ČMFÚ representatives found employment in the ruling bodies of nationalised cinema. The establishment of the ČMFÚ brought with it a fundamental change in the overall legal framework in the film sector, as it *de facto* revoked the effectiveness of Ministerial Act No. 191 of 18 September 1912, which had until then been the key legal standard in the sector.²⁸

Before the Munich Agreement dismembered Czechoslovakia's so-called 'First Republic' (1918–38), two central authorities shared jurisdiction over the film sector. The Ministry of the Interior was responsible for film censorship and the issue of cinema theatre licenses whereas the Ministry of Trade took care of everything else, for example allocating state funds for film production and foreign currency for film imports, awarding of film prizes and so on. The Germans took over film censorship on 1 September 1939 – the responsibility went to the Office of the Reich Protector, where later on a film inspection office (*Filmprüfstelle*) was set up based on the German model. The Ministry of the Interior lost its second area of competence (licenses for cinema theatre operations) with the establishment of the ČMFÚ. Following dismantlement of the Ministry of Trade in a wider reorganisation of central authorities, cinema (now more or less limited to decisions regarding funds for Czech film production) came into the purview of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment (*Ministerstvo lidové osvěty*) in January 1942.

Two events symbolised the approaching fate of the Czech film industry under the Protectorate. On 16 March 1939, the name of Osvald Kosek, the only member of Jewish descent of the AB Company's board of directors, was struck from Commerce Register. That same day also saw an unsuccessful attempt by Czech fascists to occupy the studios at Barrandov. Right from the start, the fundamental objective of the German occupiers in the film arena was to take control of the production base of Czech cinema. Their main instrument in this, as in other sectors of the Czech economy, was the Reich Protector's Decree on Jewish Property of 21 July 1936, which set off the 'Aryanisation' process.

In July 1939, an 'Aryanisation office' for the entire film sector was created in Prague. A registry of family origin (the so-called 'Aryan registry') was set up at this office; this was the office that registered the confirmations of 'Aryan' descent (*Ariernachweis*) that were a prerequisite for continuing

in the field. The requirement to submit such a document to the director of the Aryanisation office by 30 September 1930 extended to all company owners, all board members (boards of directors and management boards), authorised agents, directors and signatories, as well as to licensees, operators, and directors of cinema theatres, and to artistic film-workers involved in film production (including director's assistants, production heads, sound technicians, etc.). Jewish staff had to be dismissed by 15 August 1939, so that Czech cinema would enter the 1939/1940 with no Jewish employees.

In July and November 1939, the German 'trustee' (Treuhand) Karl Schulz took over respectively the modern studios of Barrandov with its experienced and high-quality staff and the Host studios in Prague. Largely through his efforts, all three Prague studios gradually fell into German hands. The majority stakeholder in AB Company, Miloš Havel, was forced to sell his shares to Germans in the spring of 1940; Bat'a Film Studios (*Filmové ateliéry Bat'a*, FAB) had to give up their lease on the studio in Hostivař, and finally, Karl Schulz manoeuvred the owner of Prague's third studios, Foja in Radlice, into selling them in March 1942. Only a few days earlier the Bat'a studios in Zlín had succumbed to pressure from the German Tobis group of companies – which set up the subsidiary company Bohemian–Moravian Small Film Company (*Böhmisch-mährische Schmalfilmgesellschaft*) which specialised particularly in animated and puppet film too.²⁹

Control of the production base of Czech cinema represented the first step along the path to the planned liquidation of Czech film production.³⁰ This end was never actually fully achieved, but nevertheless the indicators for domestic production from the Protectorate years are alarming. Annual production of feature live-action films fell from 41 in 1939 to 9 in 1944. From 1943 to 1945 only two Czech firms were allowed to produce films: National film and the Havel family's Lucernafilm. In the new environment, Czech producers had to rely completely on production capacity allotted by Prag-Film; only rarely and with difficulty could they get access to the most modern studios, those at Barrandov. Only 23 Czech films were made at Barrandov in the years of the Protectorate (only 11 between 1941 and 1945), while 42 German films were produced there in the same period. The majority of the Czech films that were made were filmed in the smaller and less well equipped studios in Hostivař and Radlice. In total, 124 feature live-action films and 1230 other films were made in Czech production from 1939 to 1945. Although the effect on the production volume of documentary and news films was relatively small, the number of producers was reduced by half. German film production developed alongside Czech film production in the territory of the Protectorate, with using Czech directors, cameramen, composers, actors and other professions, including the Czech technical staff at the Barrandov studios.

In late 1941, the Germans transformed the AB Company into the stock-company Prag-Film for this purpose; the company then became part of the

Reich's Ufa group of film companies (and, later on, of the Ufi Trust). Prague and its Barrandov studios evidently played a key role in the plans made by the Germans for cinema: a new studio was constructed at Barrandov at Goebbels' instigation; there was major renovation of the film laboratories, as well as the introduction of colour film production; the establishment of the animated film studios; and the founding of the Prag-Film Orchestra in 1943, which was transformed into the Film Symphony Orchestra (*Filmový symfonický orchestra*, FYSIO) after liberation.³¹

Film commerce was also subjected to extensive changes during the Protectorate years. After 15 March 1939, a whole raft of Czech, American and French films were banned, and as were all Soviet films. With the onset of the war in September 1939, all remaining English and French films were banned and there was a further reduction in American films. The last remaining American films stayed on the Czechoslovak market to a limited extent right up until the United States entered the war. Although the import of nearly the entire German production partially 'compensated' for this loss, the statistics reveal a relatively dramatic recession in film commerce. By 1944 the number of premiers had fallen by nearly 65 per cent (from 242 in 1939 to 87 in 1944). Germany had an unrivalled hegemony on the market: German films represented 55–69 per cent of new annual offerings in the years 1940–44. Of all German films, only certain propaganda films were not made available to Czech audiences, those which might provoke negative feelings in the Czech population against the protectorate (for example, Veit Harlan's *The golden City* (*Die goldene Stadt*, 1942), portraying, in *Heimatideologie* spirit, the tragic fate of a German girl from the countryside who is destroyed by her association with a Czech waiter from Prague).³² Local Czech production had a share ranging from 10 to 17 per cent of annual offerings.

Clearly, Czech films enjoyed the greatest popularity with the public during the Protectorate: public demand regularly kept Czech films in Prague premiere cinemas two to three times longer than German films. German films were by no means the subject of any boycott, though one indication for which is the steep rise in audience attendance numbers against the background of the domination of German films in the Protectorate market. But it was rare for German films to be as popular with cinema audiences as their Czech counterparts – with the exception, it would seem, of Willy Forst's *Operetta* (*Operette*, 1940), the 'Austrian' musical 'retro' film with its multiple star cast, and Ufa's spectacular German colour film, *Münchhausen* (1943), fourth in the series.

The decline in film commerce was accompanied by a reduction in the number of operations doing business in the sector. In the 1930s, approximately 40 film distributors rented out films in Czechoslovakia. There were still 20 such operations active in 1939; however, with the concentration took place within the film commerce sector, by 1943 there were only 7 (9 in 1944).³³ A considerable change in the legal status of such operations also

played a role. Film commerce had always been 'free', but from 1941 one required permission from the ČMFÚ to engage in it.

At the start of the Protectorate, there were four newsreels in the Czech Lands – the domestically produced *Aktualita* in two editions, Ufa's *Auslandstonwoche* (Foreign Weekly Newsreel ATW, in Czech and German versions) and two American productions, *Fox* (Czech) and *Paramount* (Czech and German). Production of the American newsreels was stopped in 1939, so for the remaining period only the *Aktualita* and Ufa newsreels were shown in cinema theatres in Protectorate territory: both completely in the service of German war propaganda.

For the period of 1 year, beginning in late July of 1937, the original Czechoslovakian newsreel *Aktualita*, issued by the company of the same name (in which the state had a partial interest), was issued in a German version as well, targeting the German minority in Czechoslovakia. In August of 1938, the German edition was cancelled due to lack of interest on the part of Sudeten German cinemas – or to be more precise, it was replaced by a second Czech version (B).³⁴ *Aktualita* continued to operate after the Protectorate began – with one of the company's co-founders, Karel Pečený, as its head. In February 1942, *Aktualita* received a new owner: the *Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH*, responsible within the system of the German film industry for film news reporting within the Reich and the newly acquired territories. *Aktualita* continued to bring out A and B versions, with the new addition of German subtitles. A newsreel consisted of six to seven items, more than half of which were taken over from the ATW or German Weekly Newsreel (*Deutsche Wochenschau*) – generally with a week's delay. The final two items were always connected with the situation on the front.³⁵ Showing them was mandatory in cinemas and there were even controls set up to ensure that audience admission genuinely took place prior to the newsreel screening rather than just before the main feature. The period of their circulation was also gradually decreased from 28 to 16 weeks in 1940 and then to 10 weeks in 1941, for reasons of relevancy. In view of the fact that 55 copies of *Aktualita* were produced in contrast to only 16 copies the *Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH* made in the final period of the Protectorate, it is clear that *Aktualita* was competently fulfilling the propaganda aims of the German occupying powers. The *Aktualita* crew also received certain special assignments – for example, recording Joseph Goebbels' 3-day visit to Prague in November 1940; portraying the destroyed town of Lidice in the post-Heydrich era; and making propaganda film about Terezín.³⁶

Cinemas were fairly evenly distributed around Bohemia and Moravia (in contrast to a much lower density in Slovakia, let alone Ruthenia). With the severance of the Sudetenland under the Munich Agreement, the number of cinemas on the territory of the Republic had fallen from 1850 to 1279, and the dissolution of the Republic saw the further loss of the cinemas in Slovakia and (Hungarian-occupied) Ruthenia. When the Protectorate was

formed there were a total of 1115 cinemas in the Bohemian Lands. While the number of cinemas in Czechoslovakia had already been essentially stagnating from 1933 to September 1938, numbers in the territory of the Protectorate actually rose by almost 12 per cent, during the period of 1939–44, to 1244 cinemas. As in the territory of the Third Reich, the construction of permanent cinemas for narrow film was typical for the period: 77 such cinemas were built from 1941 on. It is also interesting to note a new shift associated with the long-term decrease in the numbers of travelling cinemas, whose historical role had appeared to be drawing to a close in the 1930s. In the Protectorate period the number of travelling cinemas returned to the levels of the first half of the 1930s, although their economic significance was negligible on the whole, and their cultural significance was of secondary importance.³⁷

Legal conditions for operating cinemas were fundamentally changed. The license system that dated back to 1 January 1913 was eliminated as of 31 July 1941 and replaced at first with the requirement of ČMFÚ membership and then, as of 30 July 1943, with the introduction of cinema concessions, this time tied to professional eligibility as determined by the ČMFÚ, and not by Ministry of the Interior as it had been prior to 1941. So, paradoxically, it was under the Protectorate – although under distorted circumstances – that film-makers finally got what they had been striving for since the early years of the century's second decade. In the early days of occupation, Aryanisation had a marked effect on the structure of cinema ownership.³⁸ Another fundamental transformation of the structure of cinema operators took place when activities of the Sokol gymnastic organisation, the most significant operator, accounting for more than half of cinemas, were halted in the spring of 1941.³⁹ In 1942, the Bohemian–Moravian Cinematographic Company (*Českomoravská kinematografická společnost*) was established in order to operate the Sokol cinemas (and those of the Legionnaires), under German administration and management. A similar fate caught up with the Orel cinemas, after the Catholic gymnastic organisation's activities were stopped in 1942: its cinemas were thenceforth administered by a special 'trustee' (*Treuhänder des beschlagnahmten Orel-Vermögens*).

Cinema attendance rates during the Protectorate show a continual increase – over 127 million viewers for 1944 – an incredible 132 per cent increase compared with 1939. No single factor was responsible for this abrupt rise. Most European countries saw steep increases in attendance during the war years. In addition, this increase is a sign that Czech society accepted cinema as an autonomous cultural phenomenon and turned to it at a time of upheaval in cultural life with corresponding interest. It is quite clear that a significant role was played by the maintenance and even improved quality of Czech production, which enjoyed truly exceptional popularity. Cinema's position was also strengthened by the gradual reduction in other types of entertainment available, culminating in the closure of theatres in 1944.

According to contemporary witnesses, in late 1939 a major discussion took place at the Prague's cultural centre *Mánes* in which several dozen writers, film-makers and actors attempted to find an answer to the essential question of whether to attempt to keep maintaining and further developing Czech cinema amidst the restrictions and lack of freedom, or to stop working in protest at the situation and wait for the post-war period. The assembly came to the conclusion (influenced by the remarks of Vladislav Vančura, among others) that it was crucial to preserve every opportunity of contact between artists and the public. Three basic principles for Protectorate film-making were formulated at the meeting: films (particularly those with contemporary subject matter) must not come across as collaborationist; they should foster a mood of resistance in the Czech population (specifically, by strengthening national feeling through references to cultural and historical tradition); and the ultimate end should be an overall improvement in the quality of domestic production.⁴⁰ In the field of the fiction film, film-makers in the main managed to keep these resolutions; the area of news and documentary films, however, was a more problematic one.

The attempt to stiffen resistance in the public by accentuating national cultural and historical tradition was typical of film-making in the years of the Protectorate, and the 1939–41 period in particular. Films based on the works of a whole raft of classic Czech writers were produced, while Czech national music and the local musical tradition in general were also much in the foreground. Films of this kind could be relied on to resonate with the public, without giving the censors any grounds for objection. František Čáp's scrupulous adaptation of the Božena Němcová novel *Babička* (Grandmother, 1940), culminating in the 'national oath' of loyalty to the Czech land, and Vladimír Slavínský's film *That Was a Czech Musician* (*To byl český muzikant*, 1940) about bandleader František Kmoč, the author of a long series of popularised songs, were both cited in a Gestapo report on Czech cultural efforts in 1940 as examples of films that had inspired spontaneous national demonstrations in cinemas.⁴¹

Along with the films taking up the symbolic material of national themes, of course, production of films that were purely entertaining and frequently not of the best quality continued unabated in the early years of the Protectorate. But shrinking opportunities for domestic film production stimulated increased interest in the quality of Czech cinema in both producers and state authorities, who hoped to demonstrate Czech cultural maturity, even in this young, modern medium. Urgency born of external pressure led essentially to a 'natural' selection of artists according to their talent or solid technical mastery. On the creative side, the dominating personalities among directors in Czech Protectorate cinema were primarily Otakar Vávra and Martin Frič, František Čáp for the youngest generation. The attention of film circles and state authorities was also concentrated on attention to the literary groundwork of a film, resulting in the increasing role of film dramaturgy. In 1940,

initiated by the Minister of Trade, the Council of Film Lectors (*Sbor filmových lektorů*) was established to assess screenplays and original material for films, with some of the leading Czech writers as members.⁴² In 1940 and 1941, as a flamboyant manifestation of Czech cinema culture, the first screenings of the year's new Czech films were held at an event held in Zlín funded by the Ministry of Trade called the 'Film Harvest' (*Filmové žně*). (Preparations for the next year were thwarted by the Germans.)

Cinema in 'independent' Slovakia (1938–44/45)

Despite the exceptional circumstances and repressive pressure, the Czech film industry demonstrated a marked ability to survive and a clear stability that were the products of its sophistication, its popularity with Czech audiences and its low level of economic dependence on exports. Paradoxically, not even as shocking an experience as the dissolution of the state, which had a severe impact on many sectors, had a very great immediate impact on the film sector. In the interwar years, from the internal perspective, Czechoslovak cinema and Czech cinema were one and the same: all production capacity was in Bohemia and Moravia; Prague, Brno and Zlín had become the major film centres. Regular production did not develop in Slovakia until the late 1930s; only one-off, occasional activity went on there. In the same period, attempts to build up the regional film distributing operations tended to be of short duration, due to the sparse nature of the cinema network. After the establishment of the independent Slovakian state, the Slovakian government decided to address this situation. Act No. 14 of 18 January 1940 established that 'a company to be appointed by the Ministry of the Economy shall attend to domestic film production, building up of cinemas, and the import, export and commerce in films in the territory of the Republic of Slovakia'.⁴³ The Ministry appointed the company *Nástup*, the establishment of which the government itself had arranged in the previous months. *Nástup* was a limited share company, with 51 per cent state participation. The act guaranteed this company a monopoly position in the area of film commerce, import and export. *Nástup* took over (with German assistance⁴⁴) production of the newsreel of the same name, *Nástup*, which had been produced since November 1938. In addition to film news reporting, it engaged to a limited extent in the production of documentary films.

The establishment of an independent Slovakian state also brought a change in the structure of the owners and operators of cinemas with regard to nation of origin. By law, only Slovakian citizens could apply for a cinema-operating license. As a result, corporations based in Prague and Brno lost their cinemas, as did Jewish operators, whose enterprises were swallowed up by the fascist 'Hlinkova garda'. By 1945, that organisation owned 131 of a total of 254 cinemas.⁴⁵

Slovakian cinema, forming rather belatedly and, to some extent, at the state's behest, did not have adequate technical foundations for film production and was also confronted with serious deficits of personnel. Both of these factors were remembered when plans for the post-war organisation of the sector were made illegally by Czech and Slovak film workers working together. Their views were influenced by recent experience with the exceptional significance of culture in times of oppression. Film professionals from a range of political persuasions made plans for the nationalisation of the sector from around 1941, in the conviction that as cinema was, in the first rank, a cultural phenomenon the state ought to take over its care. State officials came to share the opinion that the role of the state in cinema should be strengthened, as evidenced by the draft for a directive on the nationalisation of cinemas drawn up by the government-in-exile in London.⁴⁶ Cinema was ultimately nationalised as a whole, by Decree of the President of the Republic No. 50/45 of 11 August 1945, the first sector of the national economy in the liberated Republic of Czechoslovakia to be so.

Notes

1. N. M. Wingfield, 'When Film Became National: "Talkies" and the Anti-German Demonstrations of 1930 in Prague', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 29:1 (1998), pp. 113–38; D. Moravcová, *Československo, Německo a evropská hnutí 1929–1932* (Praha: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku, 2001), pp. 198–216.
2. P. Szczepanik, 'Poněmčený Hollywood v Praze: Receptce "německých verzí" a popularita zahraničních filmů v pražských kinech počátkem 30. let', *Illuminace*, 18:1 (2006), pp. 59–84.
3. The one-off fee for use of patent infringing equipment ranged from 4000 to 9000 crowns depending on the size of the cinema.
4. For details of the quota system, see G. Heiss and I. Klimeš, 'Kulturindustrie und Politik: Die Filmwirtschaft der Tschechoslowakei und Österreichs in der politischen Krise der dreißiger Jahre', in G. Heiss and I. Klimeš (eds), *Obrazy času: Český a rakouský film 30. let/Bilder der Zeit: Tschechischer und österreichischer Film der 30er Jahre* (Praha – Brno: NFA – OSI Brno, 2003), pp. 408–10, 457.
5. I. Klimeš, 'Stát a filmová výroba ve dvacátých letech', *Illuminace*, 9:4 (1997), pp. 141–9; 'Osнова zákona k podpoře domácí filmové výroby', *Illuminace*, 9:4 (1997), pp. 161–75.
6. The issue is not that simple of course. Even imports of German films registered a huge drop (from 171 films in 1931–84 in 1932). This was a reflection of the Ministry of Trade's drastic overall restriction of imports in 1932 – imports overall were down by a factor of 56 per cent relative to 1931.
7. Baarová eventually left Prague for Berlin. She starred in several German productions but was forced to leave the country in 1938, when Hitler ordered the break-up of her love affair with Joseph Goebbels. H. Fraenkel and R. Manvell, *Goebbels der Verführer* (München, 1960), pp. 240–8.
8. 1933: *Okénko* (*The Little Window*, dir. Vladimír Slavínský), *Její lékař* (*Her Doctor*, dir. Vladimír Slavínský), *Madla z cihelny* (*Madla from the Brickworks*, dir. Vladimír Slavínský); 1934: *Zlatá Kateřina* (*Golden Catherine*, dir. Vladimír Slavínský), *Dokud máš maminku* (*While You Have a Mother*, dir. Jan Sviták), *Grandhotel Nevada*

(*Grandhotel Nevada*, dir. Jan Sviták); 1935: *Pan otec Karafiát* (*Father Karafiát*, dir. Jan Sviták); 1936: *Komediantská princezna* (*The Comedian's Princess*, dir. Miroslav Cikán), *Švadlenka* (*The Seamstress*, dir. Martin Frič); 1937: *Advokátka Věra* (*Lawyer Věra*, dir. Martin Frič), *Lidé na kře* (*People on the Iceberg*, dir. Martin Frič); 1938: *Škola základ života* (*School Is the Foundation of Life*, dir. Martin Frič); 1939: *Jiný vzduch* (*Changing Wind*, dir. Martin Frič), *Tulák Macoun* (*Macoun the Tramp*, dir. Ladislav Brom); 1940: *Katakomby* (*The Catacombs*, dir. Martin Frič). But no multiple language version was produced for any of these films.

9. Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, III. section 1918–39, box 400, vol. Osvěta, no. 13.602/1934; Foreign ministry to interior ministry, Prague, 27 January 1934.
10. In the years of the quota system, that is 1932–34, new German films accounted for 37.9 per cent of total film premieres (the formerly dominant United States accounted in the same period for only 15.5 per cent, from 1935–37 it was 24.3 per cent (42.3 per cent for American films). Nevertheless, the principle of the approval procedures for film imports introduced in Czechoslovakia in 1931 was retained and was reflected in the decrease of the total volume of newly released films – in the final years of the 1920s there were 500–600 new films annually, from 1932 to 1934 the state cut that number to 219, 215 and 216, respectively. From 1935 to 1937, the average number of new films reached 328. According to the experts of the time, the capacity of the Czechoslovak cinema network (with, on the average, 1925 cinemas in the years 1931–37) amounted in fact to around 300 new films.
11. Heiss and Klimeš (2003), pp. 440–52, 475–83. For Czech and German-language versions of the agreement, see *Národní filmový archiv* (National Film Archive, NFA), file ‘Kartel filmových dovozců’.
12. The Reichsfilmkammer represented Germany; representatives of the three major professional associations (Film Industry and Commerce Union of Czechoslovakia, Film Production Unions in Czechoslovakia and Central Union of Cinematographers in Czechoslovakia) signed for Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs viewed activities of this sort with considerable disquiet, as they were not subject to any state controls although there could be no doubt about their foreign policy implications. There was no appropriate counterpart to the Reichsfilmkammer either in the Czechoslovak film industry or in the structures of the state administration, which both complicated negotiations for the agreement and somewhat reduced its significance. Nazi Germany was very interested in seeing other countries establish film chambers, viewing such chambers as an institutional instrument for furthering German influence. That is why the Germany was so involved in the activities of the International Film Chamber.
13. Czech version of the agreement: J. Havelka, *Čs. filmové hospodářství IV: Rok 1937* (Praha: Nakladatelství Knihovny Filmového kurýru, 1938), pp. 15–16; German version of the agreement: ‘Filmabkommen bereits in Kraft: Der offizielle Wortlaut der deutsch-čsl. Filmvereinbarungen’, *Filmwoche* [Aussig], 17:10 (1937), p. 1.
14. I. Klimeš, ‘Multiple-language versions of Czech films and the film industry in Czechoslovakia in the 1930s’, *Cinema & Cie*, 4 (Spring 2004), pp. 89–101.
15. The conclusion of bilateral film agreements became practically standard practice in the second half of the 1930s. Germany was at the forefront of this, trying to regain the ground in the European markets that it had lost following the Nazis’ accession to power. Czechoslovakia entered such an agreement with the United

- States (in the form of an exchange of note) in June 1938. For a list of signed agreements, see Heiss and Klimeš (2003), p. 445.
16. J. Havelka, *Čs. filmové hospodářství III. Rok 1936* (Praha: Nakladatelství Knihovny Filmového kurýru, 1937), p. 19.
 17. Ibid.
 18. See Chapter 2.
 19. The Czech delegates at this audience were Ernst Hollmann, chairman of the Svaz německých kin v ČSR (Union of German Cinemas in Czechoslovakia), and the chairman of the Central Union of Cinematographers, Vladimír Wokoun, who later represented Czechoslovakia at the International Film Chamber.
 20. See the introductory chapter by Welch & Vande Winkel.
 21. J. Schmitt, 'Filmová situace optimisticky', *Přítomnost*, 12:24 (1935), p. 377.
 22. A. Loacker and M. Prucha (eds), *Unerwünschtes Kino: Der deutschsprachige Emigrantenfilm 1934–1937* (Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2000).
 23. Hitler initially appointed Konstantin von Neurath. Von Neurath was gradually replaced by Reinhard Heydrich. After Heydrich's assassination, Colonel Kurt Daluege became Reich Protector.
 24. J. Havelka, *Filmové hospodářství V: 1938* (Praha: Nakladatelství Knihovny Filmového kurýru, 1939), p. 41.
 25. I. Klimeš, 'Die "Entjudung" der tschechischen Filmindustrie', in Loacker and Prucha (2000), pp. 77–84.
 26. J. Doležal, *Česká kultura za protektorátu: Školství, písemnictví, kinematografie* (Praha: NFA, 1996); T. Fauth, *Deutsche Kulturpolitik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren 1939 bis 1941* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2004).
 27. This regulation brought the Office of the Reich Protector into conflict with the Berlin leadership of the *Nationalsozialische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), which immediately protested against having a Czech head up the ČMFÚ. But the Office of the Reich Protector considered it important that the many unpopular measures that the ČMFÚ was to introduce be brought in under Czech auspices. See the correspondence between the propaganda office, *Reichspropagandaleitung*, of the NSDAP and the Office of the Reich Protector [Amt des Reichsprotectors] of 1941, Bundesarchiv (BA), NS/18 (Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP), vol. 361.
 28. J. Hora, *Filmové právo* (Praha: Právnícké knihkupectví a nakladatelství V. Linhart, 1937); K. Knap, *Přehled práva filmového* ([Praha]: Knihovna Filmového kurýru, 1945). The official press organ of the ČMFÚ was the bilingual *Věstník Českomoravského filmového ústředí/Mitteilungen böhmisch-mährischen Filmzentrale* (1941–45).
 29. P. Bednařík, *Arizace české kinematografie* (Praha: Karolinum, 2003).
 30. T. Dvořáková, 'Německá dohoda o budoucnosti kinematografie protektorátu', *Illuminace* 14:4 (2002), pp. 101–5.
 31. T. Dvořáková, 'Prag-Film (1941–1945): V průniku protektorátní a říšské kinematografie', MA thesis, Dept. of film studies, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Charles University in Prague, Praha, 2002; Fauth (2004), pp. 21–2.
 32. These propaganda films were shown in selected cinemas that only Wehrmacht and NSDAP members could attend.
 33. J. Havelka, *Filmové hospodářství v českých zemích a na Slovensku 1939 až 1945* (Praha: Čs. filmové nakladatelství, 1946), p. 38.
 34. I. Klimeš and P. Zeman, 'Aktualita 1937–1938: Československý zvukový týdeník/Tschechoslowakische Tonbildschau/Slovenský zvukový týždenník', *Cinema & Cie* [Bologna], No. 4 (Spring 2005), pp. 62–70.

35. K. Margry, 'Newsreels in Nazi-Occupied Czechoslovakia: Karel Peceny and his Newsreel Company Aktualita', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 24:1 (2004), pp. 69–117.
36. K. Margry, 'Theresienstadt (1944–45): the Nazi propaganda film depicting the concentration camp as paradise', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 12:2 (1992), pp. 145–62.
37. L. Pištora, 'Filmoví návštěvníci a kina na území České republiky: Od vzniku filmu do roku 1945', *Illuminace*, 8:4 (1996), pp. 35–60.
38. T. Dvořáková, 'Funkce treuhändera v protektorátním filmovnictví', *Illuminace*, 16:1 (2004), pp. 111–13; 'Práva a povinnosti treuhändera', *ibid.*, pp. 115–25.
39. There were 692 Sokol cinemas as of 1 January 1945. The cinemas continued to operate, but revenues flowed into the account of the 'Finance Office' (Vermögensamt). Havelka (1946), p. 51.
40. E. Klos, *Dramaturgie je když... Filmový průvodce pro začátečníky i pokročilé* (Praha: ČSFÚ, 1987), pp. 41–2.
41. F. Springer, 'Důvěrná zpráva gestapa o českém kulturním úsilí v roce 1940', *Svobodný zítřek*, 2:3 (1946), p. 8.
42. I. Klimeš, 'Stát a filmová kultura', *Illuminace*, 11:2 (1999), pp. 125–36.
43. V. Macek and J. Paštěková, *Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie* (Martin: Osveta, 1997), p. 83.
44. See Chapter 18.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–6.
46. K. Jech and K. Kaplan, *Dekrety prezidenta republiky 1940–1945: Dokumenty I* (Brno: ÚSD AV ČR in Doplňek, 1995), pp. 390–2f.