

In 1940 Bedřich Kolín writes an ironic poem about the ‘advantages’
of being a Jew in the Protectorate¹

Poem by Bedřich Kolín, Prague, 1940

1940 F.R.²

Blessed, o blessed the life of a Jew.

Once, as an official, the Jew had tough work,
‘Good morning!’ he’d say to his boss, a big jerk.
But now, without worries, he carelessly capers,
untroubled by balance sheets, numbers and papers,
not peeved that vacations come always too late,
o blessed, o blessed, today a Jew’s fate.

A Jew who’s an entrepreneur – likewise he’s
now living more comfortably, much more at ease.
No more of the threats and the risk his work brings,
because the commissioner handles those things.
He isn’t involved any more, not a jot.
O blessed, o blessed, is now a Jew’s lot.

Once, buying goods, a Jew always debated
to make sure the prices were not overstated.
Now neither tailor nor cobbler can con him,
junk shoes from merchants have no effect on him.
He has no ‘body’;³ can’t trick him, nohow,
blessed, o blessed, a Jew’s life is now.

Once, sitting through films – was a Jew even able?
He was so sick and tired of dull old Clark Gable,
and always that Garbo – they weren’t worth two damns,
he wished he did not have to watch all those hams.
A small note now spares him the ticket desk queue.⁴
Blessed, o blessed, to be now a Jew.

Once the Jew asked: Shall we spend Christmas in
Karlovy Vary or Špindlerův Mlýn?

1 JMP, DP 79, Bedřich Kolín. This document has been translated from German.

2 Handwritten note.

3 Czech: ‘points’. The German equivalent (‘Punkte’) was added by hand. The term may refer to rations.

4 Handwritten addition: ‘No access for Jews’.

Now he sits tight at his home with his spouse,
or might go to Střešovice,⁵ near their house.
Isn't that splendid, isn't that great?
Blessed, o blessed, today a Jew's fate.

To make his name known in the arts, once a Jew
needed to labour all day and night through.
To earn a name these days, it taxes him not.
His name's Israel, doesn't that hit the spot?
O blessed, o blessed, today a Jew's lot.

The Jew spent last New Year's in typical vein:
first movie, then Šroubek, then out for champagne.
He's blithe as a kid now, his time's better spent,
those spots 'not accessible' where he once went.
Invited to friends' homes, it's tickety-boo!
Blessed, o blessed, the life of a Jew.

Once, if a Jew came home late in the night,
he'd clash with his wife, she would scold him all right.
Now he's no need for excuses to say,
for oh, how the hours at night slip away.
Now, what a joy, he's reliable from eight.
O blessed, o blessed, today a Jew's fate.

Getting up early was really not pretty
when there was shopping to do in the city.
Now there's a chance to have long dreamy snores
without wasting hours for visiting stores.
If there are simply no goods to be had,
all that saved money can make you so glad.
Life was so hard with expenses to pay,
blessed, o blessed, a Jew's life today.

It's nicer to ride the last car of the tram
than up in the front one, where other folks cram.
That Jewish salon's not the worst of all places,
you've never before met so many new faces,
Mr Kohn, Mrs Pick, Mr Schwarzkopf, Mrs Stein,
o blessed, o blessed, Jews' life is so fine.

Why does a Jew need to go to the park,
and what's at the sports field that's worth a remark?

5 A district of Prague.

To take a nice dip that's refreshing and cool,
is it vital to mix with the folks at the pool?
That saying of old is now proven anew,
the coffeehouse is the sole place for a Jew.
So let us all sing it and cheer it and yell,
blessed, o blessed, a Jew lives so well.