

DIE DEMOKRATISCH-PARLAMENTARISCHE STRUKTUR DER ERSTEN TSCHECHOSLOWAKISCHEN REPUBLIK. Edited by *Karl Bosl*. Vorträge der Tagung des Collegium Carolinum in Bad Wiessee am Tegernsee vom 28.11. bis 1.12. 1974. Munich and Vienna: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1975. 278 pp. DM 44.

This miscellany of a dozen essays by as many authors focuses the scholarly research of several decades on the workings of parliamentary democracy in the first Czechoslovak republic. Using the invaluable prism of time, the authors help us to see familiar phenomena and personalities in a new light so that the conventional categories of "heroes" and "villains" become untenable. Reiner Franke's essay on British political opinion of President Eduard Beneš, for example, the only essay based substantially upon unpublished materials, demonstrates that Beneš had incurred the deep suspicion and hostility of British diplomats many months before these feelings surfaced in August 1938 with the Runciman Mission. Franke quotes from papers of the British Foreign Office to present a Beneš who in British eyes was obstructing a peaceful revision of an unjust post-1919 Central European order and an amicable settlement of Czechoslovakia's thorny minorities problem. But at the eleventh hour Beneš did move, as Jörg Hoensch proves through a masterly analysis of proposals for a solution to the Slovak question put forth in the summer of 1938 by Prime Minister Milan Hodža's cabinet. These proposals in effect fulfilled the long strivings of Father Andrej Hlinka's Slovak Populist Party for national autonomy within a Czechoslovak framework, Hoensch concludes, only to be rejected by Hlinka's successors in favor of illusively larger gains secured with the aid of German leverage against Prague.

An essay by Jackson Shaw illuminates the strategic role of mass organizations of war veterans and physical cultists in undergirding the fragmented multiparty political system. Shaw shows that such bodies could be mobilized by the ruling groups more easily in time of crisis than the faction-ridden parties. The significance of the Habsburg Austrian administrative system and style, transmitted almost intact to Czechoslovakia's regions of Bohemia and Moravia, is brought out by Helmut Slapnicka, while Ladislav Lipscher describes the Hungarian bureaucratic legacy inherited by Slovakia. These administrative mechanisms had such pervasive importance, according to Slapnicka, that the republic, which he marks as the true heir to Austria-Hungary among the successor states, may actually have functioned as an "authoritarian democracy."

With the various authors downgrading or ignoring the roles of well-known statesmen-politicians such as Beneš and T. G. Masaryk, the only figure they even mildly elevate is that of Milan Hodža. Oswald Kostrba-Skalicky, in a stimulating but negligibly documented piece, terms him the only true conservative politician for having presciently warned Beneš during World War II of the menace inherent in the exiled president's increasing tilt toward the Soviet Union. Other essays by Jiří Kosta on socioeconomic problems, Wolf Oschlies on the evolution of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (a marvel of compression), Hans Lemberg on the Slavic idea, Friedrich Prinz on literary trends, Norbert Linz on the structure of the German parties, and Stephan Dolezel on Czechoslovak-German relations round out a heterogeneous volume that is uneven in quality and difficult to characterize but worth rummaging through.

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*New Jersey Institute of Technology*