

Hudek, Adam, Michal Kopeček, and Jan Mervart, eds. Czechoslovakism

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Just when it seemed that historiography on nationalism in East Central Europe reached the point of saturation, this publication brings a fresh perspective to the topic. Exploring the shifting meanings of Czechoslovakism, it discusses the emergence of the idea of Czech and Slovak reciprocity in the mid-nineteenth century, the era of nation-state building in the interwar period, and the concept's unexpectedly renewed life after 1945, and indeed around 1989. In part, this is a narrative of profound failure. Even at the time of its greatest purchase for Czechoslovak "mythmaking" in the 1920s and 1930s, the idea's proponents could neither unite on its meaning nor utilize its political potential domestically. Yet, the authors in this volume take up Czechoslovakism as a "productive working hypothesis" (17) to illuminate how it continued to preoccupy elites in both parts of the country and shape their politics throughout the twentieth century.

The volume comprises seventeen chapters, primarily in intellectual and political history, that are divided into three temporally defined sections. The essays in the first section, "Czechoslovakism before Czechoslovakia," show that Czechoslovakism was neither a viable nor a particularly compelling idea prior to World War I. Existing as a "latent" category (Doubek), it was advanced by a handful of Czech Slovakophiles and Slovak nationalists. Hungarian authorities nonetheless considered the potential of Czechoslovakist "pan-Slavism" more subversive than the Slovak nationalist movement and surveilled its advocates (Vörös). While early articulations of Czechoslovakism were based on arguments of the linguistic proximity of Czechs and Slovaks, bolstering its ethnicized, exclusionary dimension was anti-Semitism, which had served an "integrative purpose" for the interwar state (Szabó, 141).

Drawing on previous historiography, the second section of the publication, "Czechoslovakism in the time of 'nation-state' building," corroborates scholarship arguing that Czech-centric notions of the nation, Czech-German animosity, and Slovak autonomy continued to motivate elites. But it also reveals a perhaps surprising lack of investment in the political project of Czechoslovak unity. Interwar parliaments "never [put] Czechoslovakism on the agenda" (Bakke, 150); politicians also could not agree on what national holidays should represent the new state (Michela). Education authorities, on their part, did not produce textbooks that would foster identification with the nation, advancing respective Czech and Slovak national histories instead (Nádvorníková). Even the quintessential "school of the nation," the military, did not facilitate unity. Its officer corps was largely Czech, and throughout the interwar period, an increasing circle of nationalities were found disloyal to the state. This approach, tragically, prevented the integration of German anti-fascists into the army before World War II (Maršálek).

Might Czechoslovakism's moment have come during the so-called normalization after 1968? The election of Gustáv Husák as president satisfied long-standing Slovak grievances and official efforts at constructing "socialist social consciousness" on an everyday level—through television broadcasting or policies related to mandatory military service—resulted in Czechoslovak identification (Mervart, 386). At the same time, as several chapters in the last section of the volume point out, this was a period of both a triumph of Slovak national communism and complete "nonexistence" of Czechoslovakism in the Czech political discourse or media (Zahradníček, 399). As an idea, Czechoslovakism was no longer understood as a concept of national unity but had transformed into a statist, political concept.

The last section, "Czechoslovakism during the communist dictatorship and democratic transformation," entails some of the best chapters in the volume. The first two texts examine the range of

approaches of Slovak communists to the idea of “national self-determination” from 1918 to the Prague Spring. While discussing intraparty debates about the place of the Slovak nation within the Czechoslovak project, they illustrate broader tensions, fuelled by Stalinist nationality politics, between proletarian internationalism and national emancipation. If the 1950s Stalinist-era campaigns against “bourgeois nationalists” impacted generations of Slovak communists who had advocated for greater Slovak autonomy, the post-Stalinist debates rehabilitated them and created a split between those advancing greater Slovak autonomy and those advocating greater equality within the Czechoslovakist project. In short, these discussions were shaped by ideas about the proper interpretation of Marxism (Benko and Hudek, Doskočil). The final two chapters analyze the return of the “Slovak question” around 1989. While Czech politicians kept referencing the (idealized) “golden age” of interwar Czechoslovakism, Slovak politicians focused on its critique and marginalized notions of Czechoslovakism altogether (Kmeť).

The publication is only partially successful in challenging the “methodological nationalism and national provincialism” of Czech and Slovak historical scholarship (29). While the volume provided an opportunity to foster collaborations across academic communities and brought often nationally separate scholarships into one publication, the almost exclusive focus on Czech-Slovak relations fails to engage broader discussions in the fields of Czechoslovak and East Central European history. The editors of the publication state that they are aware of its absences—deeper discussions of ethnicity and race, or transnational and postcolonial approaches to Czechoslovakism, to name but a few. However, the missed opportunity to engage historiography on racialized and gendered processes of nation-building—intersecting in, to take one of the most obvious examples, Czechoslovak assimilationist policies toward its Roma communities—is keenly felt. In this light, the claim that gender historians are “yet to be found” is entirely unconvincing (18). Relatedly, while the volume’s authors occasionally note Czech-German and Slovak-Hungarian relations, the publication could have been enriched by deeper engagement with minority politics throughout the twentieth century.

This criticism notwithstanding, scholars of Czechoslovak history will find exciting material in the publication. Its periodization allows authors to uncover continuities in the association of Czechness with Czechoslovakism, and continuous Slovak criticism of this association but it also reveals a diversity of conceptions of Czechoslovakism throughout the period that at times intersected or contradicted one another. Also, the very last chapter on Yugoslavism suggests potential for comparative projects. In short, historians have more than a solid springboard for new research projects.

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Johnson, Stephen. *The Eighth: Mahler and the World in 1910*

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Perhaps once a subject of esoteric interest, Gustav Mahler’s life and work has by now been written about so often that he fits neatly into our understanding of the multiplicity of identities that enriched Central Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mahler too has become a touchstone for mental and cultural instability and so is certainly ripe for exploration by all those who feel unmoored in our modern world. Is this perhaps why his music, his artistic personality strike us as so interesting? After all, just last year this was reinforced by the release of *Tar*, an award-winning film that