

This book, then, is Jacques Julliard's highly personal prescription for progressive politics in the present. Intellectuals, according to this work, should address themselves both to a re-reading of Sorel and to an extended denunciation of the dependence of the left intelligentsia upon a bourgeois ruling class. They should as well practice a history grounded not in teleology but rather in that painstaking, time-consuming archival research that alone reveals the quotidian activities of the dominated which in turn gives a genuine context for their political actions. Finally, intellectuals must take special care never to "collaborate" in the statism implicit both in bourgeois democracies and in communist countries. Pluralism of all kinds – social, economic, philosophical – must be the ruling principle. (And, one cannot avoid adding, Julliard's plea for a new generosity of thought and practice, his insistence on the absolute necessity of pluralist behaviours, his commitment to a politics of the working class developed from within that class, all support a new effort to include the most marginalized of social and economic groups, working-class women.)

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**MCDERMOTT, KEVIN.** *The Czech Red Unions, 1918–1929. A Study of their Relations with the Communist Party and the Moscow Internationals.* East European Monographs, Boulder 1988; distr. by Columbia University Press, New York. xiii, 350 pp. \$40.00.

This is a meticulously researched, well-written account of an important period in the development of social democratic and communist trade unions in Czechoslovakia. While the study does not come to any startling conclusions, it does tell us a great deal about the relationship between the Communist Party and industrial labor in the 1920s, an experience that foreshadowed the tragic demise of Czechoslovak free trade unionism once the Communists came to power in 1948.

Although the book focuses on the interaction between the social democratic and communist trade unions, and between the communist unions on the one hand and the Communist Party and the Moscow internationals (the Profintern, or Red International of Labor Unions, and the Comintern, or Communist International) on the other, it first presents a valuable discussion of the emergence of a Czech labor movement in the late Habsburg Empire. The first labor organizations sprang up in Prague in the 1860s. Czech socialist unions subsequently evolved both as part of an international movement centered in Vienna and as an expression of the Czech national revival, just as Czech socialism was influenced by both German socialist ideas and Czech nationalism. The tension between nationalism and internationalism informed the development of Czech labor for several decades. The leaders of Czech social-democratic trade unionism pressed for greater recognition of their autonomist aspirations within the framework of the All-Austrian union center – the Viennese Imperial Trade Union Commission, or simply "Vienna Commission", after 1893 – but to little avail. Understandably, the Vienna Commission saw the Czech demands as a threat to its own power and to labor unity, though even the

Austrian government had granted the Czechs some concessions in the political sphere.

The inevitable result of Viennese recalcitrance was the formation in January 1897 of a separate Czechoslovak Trade Union Association (*Odborové sdružení československé* – later renamed to take account of its Slovak elements, i.e., *československé*). McDermott notes that the founding of the OSČ was more a step toward federalization of the Vienna Commission than a complete split, but it was nonetheless an expression of the same nationalist spirit that made Czech trade unions resistant to efforts at control by the Moscow internationals and their domestic agents in the 1920s.

The OSČ gained many new members, largely in Bohemia, during the years preceding World War One. However, the OSČ, and indeed all Czech labor, faced harsh times during the war, when factory life was subordinated to the war effort and assertive industrial workers faced the possibility of shipment to the front; similarly, during the early years of the fledgling Republic, economic dislocation, profiteering, and employee anti-labor practices alienated many workers. The failure of the Social Democratic-led government of 1919–20 to enact promised measures of nationalization, an emotionally charged issue, was particularly galling to trade unionists. The emergent left wing of the OSČ demanded resolute action by the organization to realize labor's political and economic agenda and to push back the forces of social reaction. The left was further galvanized by the Bolshevik experiment in Russia and by the formation of the Profintern and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická Strana Československa* – KSČ) in 1921. In contrast, OSČ leaders, who perhaps were better attuned to political realities and fearful of destabilizing the young republic, were more inclined to compromise when faced with demands for wage reductions, and to be supportive of their Social Democratic colleagues who were in positions of political responsibility. The escalating conflict between left and right in the OSČ resulted in the formation of a separate International All Trade-Union Organization (*Mezinárodní Všeodborový Svaz* – MVS), the “red unions”, in October 1922. McDermott concludes in a detailed analysis of the months leading up to the split that there was no preconceived plan among communist forces to splinter the workers' movement, and that many moderate communist trade unionists, embittered by the OSČ's decision to expel rebellious unions, moved toward a split over the objections of the Profintern and elements in the KSČ who preferred that the left continue to work within a unified movement.

The war for the hearts of manual workers was now fully engaged. McDermott devotes some detail to the MVS's efforts to undermine the OSČ – its relentless agitation at the enterprise level, its calling of (usually futile) strikes to draw a contrast between its own resoluteness and the compromising impulses of the OSČ, and its joining with the KSČ in heaping invective on the OSČ leadership for “selling out” to the capitalists. The tactics varied somewhat with the changing instructions of the Moscow internationals, as, for example, in shifts of emphasis between the “united front from above” and the “united front from below”. Through all the twists and turns of Communist strategies and tactics, however, the MVS persisted in its determination to win over individual workers to the red unions, even after this “transfer” policy had become contrary to Moscow's line. By draining the OSČ of committed leftists, the MVS greatly inhibited the formation of Communist “frac-

tions" in the rival unions. In effect, the MVS leaders were placing the welfare of their organization above the Communist Party's struggle for long-term political control of Czechoslovakia. This heretical behavior generated frequent criticism from the Profintern and KSC, as did alleged deficiencies in ideology, organization, and day-to-day union management. The MVS's independence was made easier by the indiscipline and absence of agreement on tactics within the KSC itself, so that ultimately the problem had to be solved by the dual purging of moderate and nationalist elements in the KSC and MVS during the "bolshevization" of both organizations in 1928–29. McDermott's description of the "state of semi-permanent tension" between the MVS on the one hand and the KSC and the Moscow internationals on the other is his most interesting and valuable contribution.

In its battle for workers' support earlier in the decade, the MVS made some significant gains at the expense of OSČ unions. As we have seen, the author suggests that many workers were indeed ripe for a more confrontational stand against management, having been radicalized by political events and their own dire circumstances. Nonetheless, the MVS lost the struggle even before bolshevization completely isolated it from mainstream labor sentiment. It is not surprising that few workers were willing to join forces with the Communist Party in denouncing Social Democrats as "social fascists" and "enemies of the working class" when the Comintern declared an end to the united front in 1928. Most union members, if they were political at all, placed great value in union solidarity. The vast majority of workers, however, were unresponsive even to more measured calls for class conflict prior to the shift in the Soviet line. McDermott presents a number of reasons for the MVS's failure to win them over, above all the average Czechoslovak worker's absence of revolutionary consciousness and tendency to place higher priority on the stability of the new Czechoslovak state than on class struggle. These moderate and nationalist sentiments hardened many workers' suspicions of MVS intentions, which in fact were not always as "radical" as they appeared to be. McDermott's analysis of the workers' attitudes, which is understandably limited by the absence of survey research data, could have been a bit more systematic. At times he tends to fall back on the stereotype of the passive Czech when explaining their behavior, a view that appears to conflict with his account of the confrontational enthusiasm of a significant minority of unionists. The evidence he does present suggests that many Czech workers, like their counterparts elsewhere, were deeply alienated and resorted to confrontational tactics when faced with sudden material deprivation and obvious affronts to their dignity, but that their radicalism seldom extended to challenges to the political system or the basic authority structure of the society. We are left uncertain as to whether their lack of a revolutionary zeal was the product of the peculiar circumstances that prevailed in the country, a deep-seated characteristic of the Czech personality, or some broader, cross-political phenomenon perhaps characteristic of European workers in general. McDermott opts for this third alternative on another matter when he asserts that workers in Western countries were uncomfortable with the conspiratorial and clandestine politics necessitated by the building of communist fractions in social democratic unions.

In his final chapter the author draws comparisons between events in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and those in Britain, France and Germany during the same period, basing his decision to do so on the correct assertion that only in a comparative

context can we adequately interpret the meaning of developments in one country. In his discussion he makes the point that the resistance of the MVS to Muscovite manipulation was paralleled, in varying degrees, in all three of the other countries in question and required the similar response of a purge to cleanse the various labor movements of the nationalist infection. The desire for national specificity – for example, a “Czechoslovak road to socialism” – was a compelling concern for Communist union (and, for that matter, Party) leaders during the 1920s, for they were products of national labor movements and had the task, as they saw it, of advancing the rights and interests of industrial workers in the most effective possible way. The Comintern and Profintern, on the other hand, were prone to impose uniform tactical standards on various European party and labor movements without regard to unique conditions in each country. Thus, the “tendency to resist intervention from Moscow and, more conclusively, to pursue policies at odds with those of the Comintern reveals that the seeds of ‘national communism’ were present in the major communist Parties and Red Unions of Europe from their very foundation”. Further, “the desire for autonomism and independence from centralized control and the efforts to seek domestic solutions to domestic problems in tune with Czech democratic and pluralist traditions represent a trend in Czechoslovak labour history that has been evident throughout the existence of the KSČ”.

These doubtless correct assertions raise some fascinating questions: if “national communism” was endemic among the parties and red unions of Europe, what if anything was unique about the Czech experience? Were the Czech national revival and the newness of the Czechoslovak state relatively unimportant factors in motivating MVS and KSČ leaders, who acted much like their socialist brethren in more established states in the face of Muscovite heavy-handedness? McDermott’s earlier discussion suggests that these events were crucial, but his comparative analysis raises the possibility that they were unnecessary to a nationalist response. Moreover, was the common thread simply nationalism, or was it also a desire on the part of political and labor leaders, not generally known for their lack of egoism and ambition, to control their own fates and advance their causes and careers in the way most likely to work in their specific national environments? On another point, what impact did “Czech democratic and pluralist traditions” have on the MVS, especially when the Germans, who certainly did not possess a vigorous democratic tradition at the time, behaved in much the same fashion? Were Czech workers mere clones of other West and Central European workers in their aversion to “conspiratorial secrecy and clandestine activity”?

In conclusion, Kevin McDermott has provided us with an important addition to the literature on Czechoslovakia in the 1920s, especially with regard to the labor movement and the state of Czechoslovak communism prior to the bolshevization of the Party in 1928–29. His discussion also helps to round out our picture of the interaction among Communist parties, labor movements and the Moscow internationals in Europe during a formative era. It is useful to know how similar the Czechoslovak experience was to that of other countries whose Communist movements were seeking to fashion their own roads to socialism in the face of unfavorable domestic and international circumstances.

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