

The Rise and Decline of Communist Czechoslovakia's Railway Sector.

By Tomáš Nigrin. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022. vii, 241 pp.

Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Tables. Maps. \$75.00, hard bound.

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Published last year, *The Rise and Decline of Communist Czechoslovakia's Railway Sector* focuses on the development of railway transport in Czechoslovakia under communism (so-called state socialism). Excepting the introduction (including methodology) and a comprehensive conclusion, the book is divided into four structured chapters, relating to the development of railway transport from as early as 1918 (despite the fact that the book's title explicitly states it covers railway development after the communist takeover after 1948).

The first chapter, "Rail Transport in Czechoslovakia from 1918 to 1970" (13–41), describes the development of railway transport from the founding of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918 to the advent of political normalization following the events of the Prague Spring. This period marked the end of the dominance of rail transport in both freight and passenger transport. In the next chapter, "Actors and Institutions of Policy-Making for the Railway Sector" (42–71), the author analyzes the structure of railway transport from the political, ideological, and transport-professional points of view. Even after the establishment of the federation in 1968/1969, the Czechoslovak State Railways (CSD) company remained a national enterprise managed by the Federal Ministry of Transport.

The third chapter, "The Internal Mechanisms of the Railway Sector" (72–108), deals with internal mechanisms. It explains the specificity of rail transport for the national economy and for strategic goals. It covers the issues of operating economically inefficient lines, limited possibilities for creating tariff rates, maintaining a large emergency reserve in the event of war, and the lack of funds for investments. The fourth chapter, "Conditions in the Railway Sector" (109–200), rests on two case studies—Operations and The Personnel Situation. It is also the most comprehensive chapter. In the case study *Operations*, systemic failure to improve quality (maintaining steam traction until 1980, falling behind in speed in both freight and passenger traffic, delays becoming status quo) played a major role. We will also find partial positives such as the introduction of the InterExpres international express category. In the case study *The Personnel Situation*, we see CSD suffered from a shortage of personnel, who were underpaid with high rates of overtime amidst little opportunities to select employees. Many of these negatives were not specific only to Czechoslovakia, but prevalent throughout the entire Eastern Bloc.

The author's aim was "to analyze the position of the railway sector in the national economy, the role of railroads in Czechoslovak transportation policy, the internal mechanisms of management, and the conditions in the sector in order to show how the railways in the Czechoslovakia of the 1970s and 1980s coped with the new trends in its economy and society. "The degree of willingness and ability in Czechoslovakia to react to changing conditions outside the country, to adapt to them, and to modernize (not only) its transport activities, will reveal the hidden roots of the gradual stagnation of the railway sector through the end of the 1980s" (2). In the opinion of this reviewer, that aim was fulfilled.

The work takes advantage of funds stored in the Czech central archives, contemporary professional and current literature, including periodicals, as well as legislative measures. Of course, it would be possible to search for materials in other archives as well, such as in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic or in foreign archives, especially German and Slovak. What is appreciable here is the commitment and the breadth of the studied material—especially with regard to

unprocessed and unavailable or only partially available materials—as well as the level of elaboration and the presentation of the main theses. I consider the case studies presented by the author particularly helpful.

The covered period is also relevant to understanding the current shortcomings in the transport infrastructure, including its historical and current underfunding. Most of the decision-making (especially political) officials viewed (and still view) transport as an area that does not actually “make money” and still needs investment. Finally, Czech transport infrastructure has not been in good shape even post 1989, and we cannot expect its radical improvement in the coming years.

If there were any criticisms to be leveled at this monograph, they would be its abandonment of the classic analysis of the sources and literature studied, to allow the foreign reader better orientation, and the overly broad time frame going back to 1918. The book can be of value for both experts and members of the general public who are interested in the development of railway transport in communist Czechoslovakia.

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Non-Aligned Movement Summits: A History. By Jovan Čavoški. *New Approaches to International History.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. xi, 298 pp. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. £81.00, hard bound or e-book.
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The past decade has seen a real proliferation in scholarly interest in the history of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the agency of the developing world during the Cold War era, with some social scientists even reappraising the benefits of geo-political non-alignment in the twenty-first century (Ngairé Woods, [‘In Defence of Non-alignment.’](#) University of Oxford blog post, October 26, 2022). *Non-Aligned Movement Summits: A History* is a valuable contribution to the field, offering a richly researched account of the aspirations, inner tensions, and achievements of the NAM, drawing upon multiple archives and previously unpublished material. In addition to the first chapter, which scrutinizes the ‘Historical meaning of non-alignment,’ the other six chapters are each dedicated to one of the official gatherings of the Movement between 1961 and 1979. Although the chapter titles give the impression that they would focus on the particular summits, the majority of the text is actually engaging with the international context surrounding the summits and the run up to them. The ‘Epilogue’ reflects on the 1980s and provides a brief overview of the three summits before the end of the Cold War era.

The detailed study of the inner dynamics of the Movement, its contributions to the debates on equitable development, as well as that of the attitudes and actions of the US, USSR, and China, demonstrate that the Movement cannot be reduced to “performing solidarity,” or that Yugoslavia “consistently failed to appreciate the racism of the international society” (Jelena Subotic & Srdjan Vucetic, “Performing Solidarity: Whiteness and Status-seeking in the Non-aligned World,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 3, (2019). Čavoški details Yugoslavia’s pro-active and conciliatory approach, the delicate balancing acts its engaged diplomats and the challenges of mediating between the more radical members of the Movement (not least Cuba as the main promoter of the “natural allies” thesis) and the moderate group that tried to keep the focus of the Movement on disarmament, economic development, and an equidistance from both Blocs. In that sense the book is invaluable in providing a close analysis of the rift that emerged at the same time as the Movement