



Chad Bryant. *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. xv + 378 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-02451-9.



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Radicalizing Bohemia

Chad Bryant's study of the transformation of nationality in the Bohemian Protectorate fills an important gap in the historiography of modern Bohemia and Czechoslovakia and makes that history an essential part of the story of Europe's twentieth century. Bryant mines a variety of rich archival sources in the Czech Republic and Germany, mostly untapped during the Cold War, to tell the story of National Socialist Germany's occupation of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. He examines the ways in which Czechs reconfigured their understanding of what it meant to be Czech or German under occupation and the consequences of that understanding for the reconstruction of the Czechoslovak state and society after World War II. He demonstrates that nineteenth-century nationalist movements and rhetorical patterns played a critical role in defining national communities in Nazi-occupied Europe generally and in the Protectorate specifically. At the same time, he makes a compelling case that occupation and the Nazi administration of the Protectorate fundamentally changed official and popular understandings of nationality and nationality politics in the Bohemian lands. These new frameworks replaced nineteenth-century ideas of nationality as a matter of in-

dividual choice with radical, immutable state-driven definitions. They paved the way for the mass expulsions of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia after World War II and for the creation of the communist Czechoslovak state.

Western Czechoslovakia fell under Nazi Germany's control by the loss of its borderlands in the 1938 Munich agreement and by military occupation and the creation of the Bohemian Protectorate in 1939. At the time, these events seemed to mark the triumph of German nationalism in Central Europe and the loss of Czech national self-determination. But as Bryant shows us, the Protectorate proved a defining moment for Czech national and political identity that laid the ground for the national homogeneity and mythology of today's Czech Republic.

Bryant demonstrates that Bohemians continued to "act nationally" within the context of an explicitly German nationalist occupation. But the forms of national expression and the political meanings they conveyed to other Bohemians, Nazis, and foreign observers changed dramatically during the occupation. Czechs and national "amphibians"—people whose nationality was unclear and

who moved back and forth between German and Czech national communities—first treated the occupation as a return to Habsburg rule. They revived national symbols and forms of expression from nineteenth-century nationalists overnight. As a result, what was supposed to be a moment of German national triumph as the Third Reich absorbed Austria and Czechoslovakia, proved to be one of apparent national certainty and unity for Czechs and of ambiguity and anxiety for Germans. German Bohemians discovered that the Reich German occupiers had little understanding of Bohemian nationalities politics, and little inclination to take their Bohemian co-nationals' opinions to heart in setting policy. Reich Germans were distressed to find that German Bohemians did not flock to embrace Reich citizenship and policy.

Tensions between Reich and Bohemian Germans were especially pronounced over the question of where Czechs fit into Nazi Europe. The Nazis divided Europe into zones to be developed for full Germanization, occupation, and exploitation. The Bohemian lands were designated to become core German lands and an integral part of the German economy. As a result, the Nazi administration considered it critical to delineate clearly the population into Czechs and Germans. This goal proved complicated. The Nazis used Reich citizenship to distinguish these groups. Germans were eligible to become citizens of the German Reich, whereas Czechs became Protectorate citizens, with fewer rights and a different legal system. But Reich citizenship had to be applied for, and in the early days of the Protectorate, Germans stayed away in droves. Those who did apply (the numbers rose after the fall of France convinced Bohemians that the occupation would last) included amphibians, people who spoke little German, and even Jews. German citizenship made nationality a strict legal status rather than a question of civil and political culture and personal choice. And it evolved into a Nazi project for the mass Germanization of Czechs despite German Bohemian nationalists' insistence that the two national communities were irreconcilable.

Germans' conviction that the Protectorate had to be refashioned into homogeneously German space proved the starting point for a radicalization of national politics that ended in the postwar expulsions. Bryant embraces Norman Naimark's argument that the expulsion of Armenians and Greeks from Anatolia set the stage for a broader European acceptance of population transfers as a way to build national populations.[1] Nazis decided that Czechs had to be removed from the Bohemian landscape through a combination of expulsion and assimilation. By 1940, Czechs were engaged in the same

conversation, demanding the expulsion of Germans from Bohemia after the war. Bryant argues that the expulsions were not an inevitable outcome of Bohemian nationalities politics or of World War II. He demonstrates that the Protectorate's rigid, if ill-defined national categories and its destruction of civil and political cultural realms radicalized Czech national demands on the home front. These more radical nationalist politics pushed Eduard Benes and the Czechoslovak government in exile to demand more extreme postwar solutions from the Allies and insist that all Germans share collective guilt for Nazi crimes. Bryant shows that making the expulsions central to the recreation of Czechoslovakia encouraged Benes to forge close ties to Stalin and the Soviet Union, make Czechoslovak communists central political players in the postwar Czechoslovak state, and eased the way for Czechoslovakia's incorporation into communist Eastern Europe in 1948.

Bryant makes it clear that in the context of fascist Europe, Czechoslovakia was not, as Neville Chamberlain asserted, "A far-away land of which we know nothing," but a central part of the European story. This book will prove essential reading for a variety of audiences. For German historians it demonstrates that even in the twentieth century, what it meant to be German was shaped profoundly by historical actors outside the limits of the German state. Indeed, Bryant makes the case that Eduard Benes played a critical role in establishing a narrative of German collective guilt for World War II that still shapes German and European politics and cultural debates today. It helps us understand the complex relationship between pragmatism and ideology that shaped Nazi rule throughout Europe, and the deep ambiguity of categories of collaboration and resistance for analyzing repressive societies. It demonstrates that even in the 1940s European national communities remained ill-defined, unstable, and highly contested. Above all, it draws explicit causal links among nineteenth-century nationalisms, twentieth-century national states, fascism, ethnic cleansing, and the rise of communism—stories that are usually told separately. This book challenges historians to think across the boundaries of conventional disciplinary categories to reconsider what we mean by German and Czech history, how we tell national histories in general, and what the stories we tell gain and lose by the chronologies we employ. It is a challenge well worth taking up.

Note

[1]. Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

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