



T. Mills Kelly. *Without Remorse: Czech National Socialism in Late Habsburg Austria.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. iii + 235 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-586-7.

Reviewed by Caitlin Murdock (Department of History, California State University Long Beach)

Published on H-German (November, 2007)

Fractured Nationalism

In the waning years of the nineteenth century, European societies gave rise to a variety of radical nationalist movements. Their members made unprecedented demands for the fundamental reshaping of states and societies along national lines, often taking their demands to the streets and to the pages of the popular press. They hoped to win mass support for changes that traditional political structures were unlikely to deliver. In most cases, these movements failed to become mass movements before World War I. But they succeeded in radicalizing nationalist political ideas in ways that bore fruit in the twentieth century. Scholars of Germany have examined the fragmentation of German nationalism that happened as liberal nationalists were forced to compete with new radical nationalist activists, Social Democracy, and other mass movements that emerged alongside modern industrial societies and universal male suffrage.[1] Yet until recently historians of the Habsburg Empire and its Bohemian crown lands have tended to treat Czech and German nationalist movements as relatively unified, albeit with important shifts over time in their political goals and tactics.[2]

T. Mills Kelly's new book argues that late-nineteenth-century Czech nationalist politics were neither simple nor unified. Kelly traces the history of the Czech National Socialist Party (no relation to twentieth-century German National Socialism), founded in 1897 as a counterweight to the liberal Young Czechs, who had dominated the Czech nationalist political scene. By 1911, the National Socialist Party had succeeded in undermin-

ing the Young Czech Party's position as the undisputed mouthpiece of Czech national politics. Kelly describes the National Socialist Party as part of the fragmentation and "coarsening" of Czech politics at the turn of the century. The expansion of the franchise opened the way for a proliferation of political parties. Czech voters suddenly found themselves choosing among clerical, socialist, agrarian, liberal, and radical nationalist political candidates. The National Socialists espoused more radical reforms in their party platform than their Young Czech counterparts. They demanded universal suffrage, challenged Habsburg sovereignty, denounced militarism (which seems really to have meant anti-Habsburgism), and championed the interests of the Czech-speaking working class. They injected a dynamic of uncompromising confrontation and constant crisis into Bohemian politics not only between Czechs and Germans but also among Czech parties. They promoted xenophobia against Germans and Jews, and they made street violence part of everyday politics in Bohemia's cities and industrial regions.

Kelly takes a new approach for Czech history in his analysis of electoral results in terms of voter choice. He emphasizes that the absence of political polls and other data that would help link voters' choices to their socioeconomic conditions, or even to distinct national communities, makes such analysis difficult. Nevertheless, he demonstrates that while the National Socialists won new electoral support by 1911, their success was a combination of successful agitation, political strategy, and

circumstances outside their direct control. One such example was the rise in support for the National Socialist Party in rural Bohemian electoral districts after the Young Czechs stopped campaigning there. As Kelly points out, voters who wanted to support a nationalist party had only one choice. Thus, political parties' strategies and limitations shaped electoral outcomes as much as popular political radicalization. Far from representing a unified "Czech" voice across the Bohemian crownlands, the National Socialists received uneven support at best. They were absent from the political scene in Silesia, and enjoyed their greatest strength in the early industrial and urban areas of Bohemia.

Kelly explains that socioeconomic and political change in late Habsburg Bohemia produced mass migration and shifting linguistic demographics in the Bohemian crown lands. Yet he describes a political landscape that appears to have been fairly clearly divided into Czech and German political parties and electoral districts. It would be interesting to see how Kelly's findings on political parties and electoral choices mesh with the work of scholars who have emphasized the deep ambiguities of national belonging in late Habsburg Bohemia and the Czechoslovak First Republic.[3]

Kelly finishes his monograph by positing that although the Czech National Socialists never came into real policy-making power before World War I, their uncompromising approach to national politics, their use of the politics of the street, and their xenophobic rhetoric shaped Bohemians' political expectations and behavior in the First Republic. Kelly has tackled a difficult subject and his work adds to our understanding of Czech nationalist politics and Bohemian electoral politics at the end of the Habsburg monarchy. For Germanists, Kelly's work is a reminder that the decline of liberalism and the radicalization of nationalist politics in the late nineteenth cen-

tury were parts of a European rather than a peculiarly "German" story. However, this book will primarily be of interest to specialists on nineteenth-century Czech nationalism.

Notes

[1]. Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League 1886-1914* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984); Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Rainer Hering, *Konstruierte Nation. Der Alldeutsche Verband 1890 bis 1939* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 2003); and James Retallack, *The German Right 1860-1920: Political Limits of the Authoritarian Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[2] Scholars have focused more attention on differentiating strains of nationalism among German-speaking Austrians than among Czech-speakers. See, for example: Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); and Andrew Whiteside, *The Socialism of Fools: Georg Ritter von Schönerer and Austrian Pan Germanism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

[3]. Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Mark Cornwall, "The Struggle on the Czech-German Language Border, 1880-1940," *English Historical Review* 109 (1994): 914-951; and Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Caitlin Murdock. Review of Kelly, T. Mills, *Without Remorse: Czech National Socialism in Late Habsburg Austria*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. November, 2007.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13901>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.