

künftigen Forschungen jedoch in einer Weise problematisiert werden, wie dies schon für andere Länder und Sprachgruppen geleistet worden ist.⁴

Innsbruck

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⁴ Zur Übersicht: MARIUS TURDA (Hrsg.): *The History of East-Central European Eugenics, 1900–1945. Sources and Commentaries*, London et al. 2015.

Lukáš Novotný: *The British Legation in Prague*. Perception of Czech-German Relations in Czechoslovakia between 1933 and 1938. De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Berlin 2019. 284 S. ISBN 978-3-11-064711-2. (€ 99,95.)

This monograph deals with the reporting of the British Legation in Prague on the issue of Czech-German relations in interwar Czechoslovakia and the reception of those reports in the Foreign Office. This topic has not yet been the subject of a book-length analysis, despite serving as a background to the infamous Munich agreement of September 1938 and it deserves further exploration. To his credit, Lukáš Novotný has used a range of archival material, including not just British and Czechoslovak but also German, Austrian and French documents. With this in view, it is a pity that he has not produced a more satisfactory work. His book reads like a compilation of overlong and repetitive summaries of the reports coming from Prague rather than a structured analysis.

N.'s argument is that the Sudeten German issue was "a Czechoslovak internal affair in the eyes of the British Legation" (p. 181) until the pressures of the international situation, namely Nazi Germany's expansionism, turned it into a danger with which the British Cabinet was increasingly concerned from late 1937 onwards. Thus, it was not before mid-February 1938 that "the idea of vast concessions by the Czechoslovak Government" to satisfy the demands of Konrad Henlein's party (SdP) "first manifested [itself] in the Legation's considerations" (p. 185). This is entirely unconvincing. The Sudeten German area was, along with Austria and the Polish Corridor, one of the major spots in which resurgent Germany was expected to make trouble. The British had been concerned since the mid-1930s that the Czechoslovak internal dispute would invite Germany's interference and turn into another European-scale war given the existing defensive treaties between Czechoslovakia and France (1925), Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, and France and the Soviet Union, concluded in 1935.

Joseph Addison, Minister in Prague (1930–1936), spared no effort not just to vilify the Czechs for their treatment of the German minority, but also to present Czechoslovakia as an artificial and unviable country. His anti-Czech prejudices were striking, no less than his willingness to commit to paper his racist comments (even by the standard of that era). Charles Bentinck continued to reiterate the necessity of improving the lot of Sudeten Germans, but he stayed in Prague only briefly. Basil Newton replaced Bentinck and took a more balanced view (which N. fails to note). Newton admitted that the SdP was inclined towards totalitarianism and played Berlin's game; since Germany was insincere in its declarations concerning the Sudeten Germans, it was possible to gain some "breathing space" but not to make any lasting agreement. Despite his personal sympathies with the Czechs, Newton believed it would be better for the peace of Europe to encourage a shift from Czechoslovakia's "unstable equilibrium" to "a position of natural stability," even if that implied an infringement on the country's independence.¹

But it was the Foreign Office that made policy. Its officials, especially Permanent Under-Secretary Robert Vansittart, were convinced that Henlein was a moderate who voiced

¹ Newton to Sargent, 1937-11-22, in: *The National Archives*, Kew, R 7807/188/12, FO 371/21132; also Newton to Eden, 1937-10-31, *ibidem*, R 7355/188/12, FO 371/21131; Newton to Foreign Office, 1938-03-15, *ibidem*, R 2755/162/12, FO 371/22337.

legitimate German grievances and blamed Prague for not putting its house in order. They also discounted any possibility that Henlein was a tool of Berlin, and Vansittart even met him in London. Vansittart became disillusioned with Henlein no later than October 1937, when the Foreign Office obtained evidence of Germany's funding of the SdP, of which N. makes no mention. Perhaps the author overlooked the importance of that discovery because it brought about no visible change in British policy. But the underlying reasons for the continued advocacy of an improvement in the status of the German minority were largely a matter of handling the Third Reich: Vansittart wanted to strip the Germans of their excuse for meddling in Czechoslovakia's affairs and buy some time in the process.² This was part of his policy recommendations for the purpose of containing Germany, since he thought, unlike many of his colleagues, that German hegemony over Central Europe would endanger Britain's security. He and Orme Sargent, Assistant Under-Secretary, proposed to do for Czechoslovakia what Britain had done for Austria—to express interest for the independence of that country, even if that was no more than “a judicious bluff.”³ Ultimately, it was Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's taking control over foreign policy that militated against any attempt to support Prague diplomatically. As Britain could not intervene in Berlin without being snubbed, it exerted pressure on Edvard Beneš to grant concessions, and eventually full autonomy, to the Germans. The nature of a settlement was of no importance; it was all about preventing Germany from going to war for the alleged protection of Sudeten Germans.

None of these crucial developments are explained in N.'s exegesis. He does not engage with the vast literature on British foreign policy and the Foreign Office, or with the more modest number of works relating to his specific theme. It is telling that he refers (just a few times) to Ph.D. theses rather than published monographs by Gábor Bátonyi, Michael Roi and the reviewer. He also displays a strange confusion with respect to the position of important individuals within the British establishment. For example, Sargent was not a “British politician” and Vansittart was not “the second highest official in the Foreign Office” (p. 119). Moreover, N.'s references do not fit with any standard convention, while the main text is replete with atrocious errors of grammar, spelling and syntax, and with missing words and quotation marks, which at times make it extremely difficult to grasp the meaning. The book should not have been published in such a poor state.

Beograd

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² Vansittart minute, 1937-01-14, *ibidem*, R 133/133/12, FO 371/21125.

³ Sargent memorandum “Problem of Czechoslovakia,” 1937-01-11, *ibidem*, R 622/188/12, FO 371/21126; Vansittart minute, 1937-02-16, *ibidem*, C 926/270/18, FO 371/20734.

Political and Transitional Justice in Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union from the 1930s to the 1950s. Hrsg. von Magnus Brechtken, Władysław Bułhak und Jürgen Zarusky. Wallstein Verlag. Göttingen 2019. 336 S. ISBN 978-3-8353-3561-5. (€ 39,10.)

This edited volume is a collection of 16 papers that were originally presented at an international conference in Warsaw in 2015. The goal of the conference was to demonstrate through historical analyses of multiple case studies how two seemingly separate spheres of justice—political and transitional—can intertwine and become difficult to distinguish from one another. Transitional justice, encompassing legal processes of prosecuting and punishing for crimes committed by a previous regime, becomes entangled with political justice when these legal processes start being employed for political purposes. The convergence of political and transitional justice is the central theme tying all chapters together.

In the introduction, editors Magnus Brechtken, Władysław Bułhak and Jürgen Zarusky present three institutions whose close research collaboration led to the publication of the volume: the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History in Germany, the Insti-