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CZECH JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

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Abstract. The author offers an overview of the *Czech Journal of Contemporary History*, an English language journal of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, launched in 2013.

Keywords: contemporary history, Czech Republic, Institute for Contemporary History.

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ЧЕШСКИЙ ЖУРНАЛ НОВЕЙШЕЙ ИСТОРИИ

Аннотация. В работе представлен обзор англоязычного журнала «Czech Journal of Contemporary History», издаваемого Институтом новейшей истории Академии наук Чешской Республики с 2013 г.

Ключевые слова: новейшая история, Чешская Республика, Институт новейшей истории.

The *Czech Journal of Contemporary History* (CJCH), founded in 2013, is an annual periodical of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The overall aim of this journal is to publish articles, essays, and other contributions by leading scholars in the field of contemporary history from both the Czech Republic and abroad. Particular focus is placed on Czechoslovak and Czech topics in a broader international or transnational setting. The chief editors of the journal are Vít Smetana and Kathleen Geaney. The CJCH editorial team primarily publishes articles that have been previously published in Czech

in the journal *Soudobé dějiny* (*Contemporary History*), the leading Czech-language academic journal in the field of contemporary history, in order to make them accessible to a wider readership, thereby promoting international academic discussion. At the same time, CJCH also contributes to Czech-language discourse by periodically publishing previously unpublished articles in English, which are subsequently translated into Czech for circulation in *Soudobé dějiny*. The CJCH is primarily intended to be an online platform, with a limited number of print copies of each issue.

In order to consider the *Czech Journal of Contemporary History* more closely, I shall examine the contents of its 2015 issue. Most of the contributions to this issue had previously been published in *Soudobé dějiny* in 2013-14 (two other pieces also first came out in Prague at that time), although all of them were specifically reworked and sometimes expanded for the CJCH. The authors, with the exception of Alessandro Catalano, are Prague-based scholars who represent the leading Czech research institutions and universities. Chronologically the research articles deal with the period from the early 1940s to the mid-1990s. Topics include the challenges of Czechoslovak foreign policy in exile during the Second World War, late socialist social policies in Czechoslovakia and the GDR, and the legacy of exiled Czechoslovak politician and political scientist Zdeněk Mlynař to anti-Semitism in the Stalin-era USSR and ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian War. The Prague Chronicle section is devoted to relevant scholarly events, while the book reviews section deals with new books within the scope of the journal that have been published in the Czech Republic and abroad; all of these contributions originally appeared in Czech.

In his article, "The British, the Americans, and the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of 1943," based on a wide range of archival and published sources, Vít Smetana considers Czechoslovak foreign policy in exile in the context of great power politics in World War II. The author provides interesting (and little known) details about the so-called "self-denying ordinance" (understood at that time as an obligation for allied great powers not to conclude bilateral treaties with minor allies during the war), which was promoted by British diplomacy as one of the key principles for great power politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Smetana argues that U.S. indifference was an additional complication in London's efforts to put this principle into political practice among the allied great powers. In Foreign Office postwar planning, the self-denying ordinance came together with various federalist projects in the region in order, paraphrasing a prominent British diplomat, to avoid "two Europes." The author stresses that the signing of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty in December 1943 dramatically reduced the chance not only for any form of federalist solution for the region, but also for an alternative British project: a quadrilateral treaty

(Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union, Poland and Great Britain). Thus, the study of negotiations related to the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty contributes to greater understanding of the broader question of postwar settlement in Central and Eastern Europe in Allied politics.

Kateřina Šimova`s article, "Renegades, Traitors, Murderers in White Coats: The Image of the 'Jew' as the 'Enemy' in the Propaganda of the Late Stalinist Period," uses the lens of semiotic analysis to examine two notorious Stalinist campaigns to fight primarily internal "enemies:" the campaign against cosmopolitanism that started in the USSR in the late 1940s and the related Doctors` Plot of the early 1950s. Her thorough analysis of the "texts" of the campaigns (the source base draws from press materials) highlights why Jewish imagery was so instrumental in constructing the image of the enemy in the early Cold War. The author points out that the "multi-faceted" image of the Jew, which included a considerable component of otherness, offered a fertile ground for Soviet (but not only) propagandists, who easily added more negative connotations in the second campaign, as the Cold War escalated. The author also explores the Czechoslovak reverberations of the Soviet fight against "the enemy within," noting that the Slánský trial could have provided a "script" for the Doctors` Plot. In this regard, it would also be interesting to broaden the chronology and territorial scope to include the mid-1940s and the "people`s democracies" in order to study how the pattern of anti-Semitic actions in the emerging Soviet bloc evolved from one dominated by regional and national dynamics to that of Cold War confrontation.

Tomáš Vilímek`s article, "The Tool of Power Legitimation and Guardianship. Social Policy and Its Implementation in the Pension Systems of Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic (1970–1989)," explores the social policy of the most developed socialist economies with a focus on their pension systems. It is well known that the leaders of socialist countries paid particular attention to social policy, as it was deemed to be (and mostly was) some kind of a universal instrument to send a positive message to domestic and international audiences about the advantages of socialism. In this period, social policy had become ever more important. The years following the events of the Prague Spring in 1968 unleashed considerable opposition potential in Czechoslovakia and reverberated in other socialist countries, exacerbated by the deepening economic crisis in the region. Therefore, the author concludes, the role of social policy as a tool of legitimization of state power had intensified in these years. At the same time, however, it could hardly be fulfilled because of growing economic deficiencies. Vilímek convincingly demonstrates that pensions in both countries were the least preferable of the available social policy instruments to support loyalty mainly due to their costs. Nevertheless, they did produce new inequalities. The author also highlights both challenges and opportunities that the FRG, an obvious capitalist

competitor, created for the GDR in its pensions system, while stressing the more resolute policy of Czechoslovakia in addressing the existing flaws in this aspect of social policy.

Alessandro Catalano, in his article “Zdeněk Mlynář and the Search for Socialist Opposition. From an Active Politician to a Dissident to Editorial Work in Exile,” primarily analyses the samizdat-style projects carried out in exile by prominent Czechoslovak dissident and Communist Party functionary Zdeněk Mlynář. He thus partly continues the theme of the Prague Spring’s aftershocks and of the subsequent “normalization” that significantly affected Mlynář’s fate. The author relies solely on unpublished documents from the Mlynář personal archive, which is now available in the National Archive in Prague. In order to reveal the peculiarities of samizdat in this case and to evaluate its impact, Catalano highlights not only the complex structure of the Czechoslovak dissident movement and the place of Mlynář in it, but also how the professional and personal experience of this dissident influenced the evolution of his views and his choice of publishing mode for the research papers of his team. In particular, the author convincingly argues that Mlynář’s focus on western audiences with more or less relevant positions while neglecting the Czechoslovak civil society was partly motivated by the fact that he, “as a functionary of the KSC, believed that influencing higher political spheres was more important than initiating a public debate.” As a consequence, the results of his team’s projects were not disseminated in Czech and failed to reach a wide audience. At the same time, Mlynář’s efforts served the desired purpose of influencing the “Euro-Communists” and some broader circles of the West European Left, although these political forces proved to have been of little relevance in the dramatic changes of the late 1980s in Eastern Europe. The author does not share the opinion that Mlynář’s concept of “democratic socialism” influenced his friend Mikhail Gorbachev when they both studied law at Moscow State University. Rather, he demonstrates the opposite: Gorbachev’s perestroika made the Czechoslovak dissident revive his belief in the Party as a key force of reforms “from above.” This thorough and detailed sixty-six-page article is also interesting as an overview of the life and worldview of a Communist functionary from the Soviet bloc, who attempted to reform the system while in power and to replace or reform it while in exile.

Ondřej Žíla’s article, “The War Conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Phenomenon of Ethnic Cleansing,” is an excellent example of balanced and thorough research on the complex and painful topic of the Bosnian War of 1992–95 that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia. While highlighting the imbalance in the available source base and secondary literature, which makes an unbiased and detailed study of this tragic war conflict rather problematic, the author argues that a chronological lens, which dominates much of the literature, is unlikely to be a fruitful approach in this context. Instead, Žíla stresses that one should closely

examine the local and regional dynamics at the subnational level and the complex interplay between domestic and international factors to understand the parallel tragic development of three nation-state projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The author's preliminary study along these lines led him to point out *inter alia* that "conclusions based on the course and extent of ethnic cleansings in a specific part of Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be generalised and applied to the entire territory of the country."

To conclude, the *Czech Journal of Contemporary History* is a valuable periodical in the field of contemporary history and an important platform to make high-quality Czech scholarship more accessible to an international readership. The CJCH research materials on Czech history clearly contribute to understanding broader regional (and sometimes also global) patterns and phenomena, while the articles on subjects unrelated directly to the history of the Czech Republic demonstrate an original approach, while at times also drawing connections to Czech history and culture, thus highlighting their additional dimensions.

As the CJCH is mostly intended to serve as an online platform, it might be helpful for it to introduce the publishing modes and techniques often used in online academic publishing. For instance, it might provide particular articles (and other types of contributions) in various formats for view and download, place the journal metadata in relevant international databases (e.g. WorldCat, DOAJ, Scopus, etc.), and make articles available in online libraries in order to reach a wider readership, visibility, and recognition.

About the author

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