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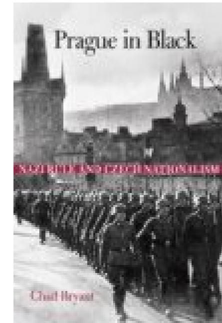
Chad Bryant. *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. xv + 378 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-02451-9.



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The Protectorate in Shades of Gray

The Nazi dismemberment of Czechoslovakia represents a key turning point in modern central European history for a number of reasons. The Munich Agreement of September 1938 revealed the weakness of collective security that Europe struggled to build after the First World War. The establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 demonstrated the failure of the appeasement policy that the English and French had extended to Adolf Hitler. It also symbolized the destruction of democracy and triumph of dictatorship in the region. Together, Munich and the creation of the Protectorate exposed both the Nazi aim of territorial aggrandizement and the bankruptcy of its concern for Germans living outside the Reich. Chad Bryant's new book reveals yet another way that the Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia marks an important shift in central European history: it ushered in an era when the state determined an individual's nationality, often with devastating implications.

Prague in Black presents a compelling analysis of the Nazi regime's nationality policies in the Protectorate and how Czechs responded to them. In it, Bryant argues that Nazi leaders from Hitler to local officials had differing, often opposing, and sometimes even changing perspectives about how best to make Bohemia and Moravia part of a greater Germany. From petty disputes among Nazi officials to wartime exigencies, he shows how a variety of factors influenced Germanization policies in the Protectorate. In so doing, Bryant demonstrates that ideological concerns about the purity of race or the need for *Lebensraum* did not determine nationality politics, but rather a mixture of different personalities, economic concerns, victories and defeats at the front, and the actions of Czechs did.

Through this study, Bryant challenges the traditional understanding of resistance and collaboration. Rather than accepting these categories as a matter of black and white, he continually points to the difficult choices people faced under Nazi occupation and the blurred distinctions between resistance and collaboration. To demonstrate his point, Bryant employs the idea of "acting nationally" to characterize Czech responses to Nazi rule. On the one hand, he considers it a normative set of actions that people used to express their nationality. "Acting nationally meant creating and imbibing cultural products" (p. 4). On the other hand, during the occupation, as Bryant argues, the public space in which Czechs could act nationally increasingly became circumscribed. At the outset of the occupation, Czechs could still gather together at events that celebrated national movements and moments. By the middle of 1942, the environment had changed. Germanization plans had been pushed forward, Czech schools had been closed, the underground had been decimated, and the village of Lidice had been destroyed. Even under these bleak circumstances, he argues, Czechs still acted nationally, but in less obvious ways.

More important, Bryant utilizes the idea of "acting nationally" as a conceptual tool to dislodge the reciprocal notions of resistance and collaboration that previous historians have used to describe people's behavior during periods of occupation. Attempting to fit people's actions

into these narrow categories, he suggests, is a misguided venture that only bolsters interpretations of guilt or innocence based on collective or national behavior. Even at an individual level, how are we to judge a worker who worked extra shifts in an armament plant but also participated in underground activities? Instead of labeling individuals or groups as guilty or innocent, Bryant argues that "asking how people acted nationally allows us to understand these motives and actions on their own terms" (p. 5). Throughout this book, Bryant demonstrates that the history of nationality politics in the Protectorate was not a series of unilateral decisions provoking either acceptance or dissent, but a confusing mess–one that he deftly untangles for the reader.

In chapter 1, Bryant emphasizes the great degree to which Czechs acted nationally even as the Nazis established their authority throughout the country. From attending performances of Bedrich Smetana's "Ma Vlast" to ad hoc celebrations of Jan Hus, Czechs found ways to express their national solidarity at a time when the Gestapo was arresting thousands of people. As Bryant notes, despite (or perhaps because of) the impositions of the new regime, Czechs "seemed to be celebrating, not bemoaning, their national existence in unison" (p. 41). In contrast, Germans did not appear so united. The arrival of Nazi power did not immediately improve the balance of nationality politics or the economic well-being for the Germans living in Bohemia and Moravia. Many of them had long sought to redress what they considered the unfair practices of the First Czechoslovak Republic, such as the use of Czech language in public administration and the restriction of the number of German schools. In addition, Reich Germans moved into the Protectorate and occupied the highest posts in the government and schools. In response, Bryant argues, Protectorate Germans felt resentful and misled. The lack of German unity was evident as well from the problems in the drive to register German citizens. Not only did some Protectorate Germans fail to sign up for Reich citizenship, but some Jews and people of Czech ancestry also enrolled.

The situation facing Protectorate Germans improved only marginally during the early years of the war, covered in the first two chapters. While the Nazis made a more concerted effort to open German schools and establish German control of the local administration, it still appeared to most Protectorate Germans that this was a Nazi regime rather than a German one. A similar situation existed in the economy. Bryant makes clear that the Nazi government brought the Protectorate firmly within its economic sphere, as it did across eastern Europe. Although Protectorate Germans benefited in greater numbers than anyone else from the Aryanization of Jewish property in Bohemia and Moravia, they complained that Reich Germans obtained the best businesses. While Germans were fighting over the spoils, Czechs were making plans for the postwar period. Bryant notes that after the fall of France, Czech resistance leaders began to press Edvard Benes and the exiled Czechoslovak government in London for the expulsion of all Germans after the war. While some differences between Benes and the domestic underground emerged over the question of the postwar treatment of Germans, overall, the prospects for Protectorate Germans looked bleak.

Chapter 3 asks one of most intriguing questions of this book: why did Nazi leaders in the Protectorate devise plans to assimilate half of the Czech population and expel the other half? After all, many Nazis, including Hitler, considered the Czechs to be subhuman Slavs, and ideas about assimilation were considered heretical for Nazis espousing their new racial order. Bryant's answer to this question demonstrates that Nazi policies were guided by much more than ideology and involved a host of conflicting considerations. Bryant situates the Protectorate's evolving Germanization plans firmly in the framework of the Nazis' broader reorganization of eastern Europe. Here, Bryant is at his best. Drawing on the work of recent Nazi scholarship as well as extensive research of his own, he demonstrates how the convoluted Nazi plans to create a region of racial purity became derailed by facts on the ground. He connects the development of the Protectorate's assimilation policies with the Nazis' failed efforts to push Germanization plans forward in occupied Poland. He reminds us also how Czechs' critical contribution to Nazi war production helped to obstruct expulsion and resettlement plans.

Still, these factors do not fully account for the shift in Nazi plans for the Protectorate. Bryant convincingly argues that the two leaders of the Protectorate, Karl Hermann Frank and Konstantin von Neurath, both realized the futility of a total expulsion of the Czechs–a consideration that Frank at least had previously considered necessary–and offered rival plans in the summer of 1940, which included the assimilation of large numbers of Czechs. Bryant demonstrates that an otherwise unknown Nazi bureaucrat helped usher in their change of thinking. By seeking to establish his own *Gau* in Moravia, Hugo Jury threatened to undermine the existence of the Protectorate and, in so doing, threatened the power of Frank and Neurath. Their response to this threat was to devise plans that pushed racial policies fur-

ther without damaging economic output or the Protectorate's existence. Thus, Bryant shows that their plans were in many respects a response to administrative politics as much as ideological goals.

The plan to assimilate half the Czech population and to "eliminate" the other half assumed new force with the replacement of Neurath by Reinhard Heydrich as the Acting Reich Protector in late 1941. Heydrich, with his ties to the SS and the highest echelons of Nazi racial planners, was better positioned and more interested in imposing racial order in the Protectorate than Neurath had been. Heydrich began by successfully attacking Jews and Roma. Next, he proved able to overrun local officials and replace them with his trusted agents to impose Germanization plans. He even dispatched teams of "racial experts" to test racial characteristics of the local population. However, as Bryant continually reminds us, what made a German a German remained impossible for local officials, "racial experts," and Nazi officials to clearly define. "When put into practice, when asked to construct strict criteria and forced to face the reality of human agency and human diversity, Nazism seemed more like an ideological system with a hollow core" (p. 159). Thus, it was no surprise that when Heydrich was assassinated in the summer of 1942 the Nazis were no closer to realizing their Germanization goals than when they had started. Only the Holocaust was proceeding apace.

Following Heydrich's assassination and Nazi retaliation in the form of mass arrests and the annihilation of Lidice and its male inhabitants, Czechs felt the pressures of war in more poignant ways. Thousands were sent to Nazi Germany as laborers. "A misstatement by a child could lead to a visit by Gestapo agents looking for parents guilty of anti-Reich statements" (p. 197). As Bryant argues in chapter 5, under such conditions, questions about resistance and collaboration became blurred. Yet, the domestic resistance argued that the majority of Czechs acted properly, by telling jokes, listening to foreign radio programs, and even speaking Czech. Bryant argues that "jokes and rumors offered medicine to patriots sick with worry that the national project might come to an end" (p. 201). While Czech patriots considered a range of activities as evidence of a healthy nation, Bryant demonstrates that their views papered over several ambiguities. These ambiguities included growing German opposition to the Nazis and the fact that, at times, jokes and rumors may not have reflected the nationalist meaning that Czech patriots liked to assume. In these final years of the war, as the situation grew more dire and dangerous, Bryant argues, Czechs survived the war as best they could, waiting for a reckoning with the Germans.

In chapter 6, Bryant examines the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from the Bohemian lands after the war. He argues that the expulsions were the logical complement to the Germanization plans unleashed by the Nazis in the Protectorate. Just as the Nazis had made plans for the removal of Czechs from Bohemia and Moravia, so too the Czechs had laid the groundwork for the expulsion of Germans early during the war. Bryant adds that the Czech nation was also united by the end of the war in their hatred of everything German. He paints the expulsions as an outburst of widespread popular violence. Relying on previous interpretations that characterize the early postwar months as the "wild transfer," he argues that the violence was the result of unbridled hatred toward Germans. "Despite differences in class, age, geography, or political stance, most patriotic Czechs now shared one commonality: an intense hatred of anything, or anybody, 'German' " (p. 220). This hatred, he continues, "readied Czechs to beat, kill and humiliate their neighbors" (p. 221).

Although the suggestion that hatred toward Germans ran high following the war is not new, such an argument stands in stark contrast to Bryant's approach for the period of the occupation. Such unity of feeling and purpose, he skillfully demonstrates elsewhere in the book, never existed for the Nazis when planning and implementing their various Germanization schemes for the Protectorate. The Czech leadership, as Bryant demonstrates, likewise was hardly unified in its attitude toward expulsions. The domestic resistance movement had consistently argued for a total expulsion, but Benes publicly distanced himself from this solution, at least until the end of the war. By that time Benes had changed his position and called for a more thorough expulsion. Bryant argues that Benes's calls for a near total expulsion set the stage for popular reprisals against Germans. However recent research indicates that local governments differed from the Prague government in their approach to the expulsions. In addition, the Czechoslovak military, rather than the broader public, played a much more decisive role in the expulsions than previously assumed.[1] Though, in fairness, this research may not have been available to Bryant prior to the book's publication, the evidence pointing to massive popular violence against Germans remains somewhat oblique. Furthermore, some Czechs went out of their way to help or protect Germans, while others expressed dismay at the brutal treatment that many Germans endured. By downplaying some of these complexities, Bryant paints the expulsions in black

and white terms, while in many respects nationality politics remained colored in shades of gray.[2]

As Bryant notes in the conclusion, the Nazis helped to prepare the ground for the Communist rise to power in postwar Czechoslovakia. The war experience, including postwar expulsions, reshaped the entire nature of the Bohemian lands, from its moral foundations to its economy. Bryant's concise and illuminating study clearly demonstrates how critical Nazi nationality policies and Czech nationalism were for the lives of the inhabitants there. Moreover, this book forces us to realize that people's decisions during the war cannot always be measured in simple terms, and it strongly challenges accepted notions of resistance and collaboration. This book would be particularly useful for anyone studying Nazi population policies and modern European nationality studies, as well as for specialists of the Bohemian lands.

Notes

[1]. Tomas Stanek and Adrian von Arburg, "Organizovane divoky odsun? Ulohá z ustrednich statnich organu pri provadeni 'evakuace' nemeckeho obyvatelstva (kveten az zari 1945)," *Soudobe dejiny* 12, no. 3-4 (2006): 465-533.

[2]. For other accounts of the expulsions and the complexities involved, see Tomas Stanek, *Odsun Nemcu z Ceskoslovensku, 1945-1948* (Prague, 1991); Zdenek Radvanovsky, *Konec cesko-nemeckeho souziti v ustecky oblasti* (Usti nad Labem, 1997); Adrian von Arburg, "Tak ci onak," *Soudobe dejiny* 10, no. 3 (2003): 253-292; David Gerlach, "For Nation and Gain: Economy, Ethnicity and Politics in the Czech Borderlands, 1945-1948," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh (2007).

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