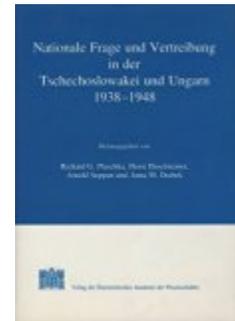




Richard G. Plaschka, eds. *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung in der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn 1938-1948: Aktuelle Forschungen*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997. xvii + 205 pp. DM 75,00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-7001-2519-8.

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Published on HABSBURG (July, 1998)



The End of the Old Central Europe

Every fin de siècle invokes assessments about the main characteristics of the period that is ending. The twentieth century was not only the century of the Holocaust and the Gulag, it may also be called the century of expulsion, *Vertreibung*. About 80 million people were forced to migrate within Europe itself. Many more encountered the same fate in Africa and Asia. The majority of these forced migrants had to leave their homeland permanently, mostly because they belonged to the “wrong” nationality or ethnic group. The expulsions reached their peak during World War II and after, when about 30 million people were “ethnically cleansed” in Central and East Central Europe.

The book under review covers Central Europe, which as an ethnically mixed area was changed most by expulsion. Whereas prewar Czechoslovakia had housed a one-third minority population, in 1948 the country was 94 percent Czech and Slovak. Less than 20 percent of the prewar minority population remained in Hungary after 1945. Poland, which is not dealt with in the book, also became an almost entirely homogenous nation state.

The profound changes in the ethnic map of Europe began after 1938 when Nazi Germany initiated the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Germans from the Soviet Union, the Baltic states, and Italy. In order to settle these repatriates, the Nazis started mass expulsions in Poland. More than one million Poles, including Polish Jews who were later murdered in the Holocaust, were driven out of Polish territories annexed by Nazi

Germany. Several hundred thousand Slovenes, Serbs, Czechs, and Poles in the General Government (*Generalgouvernement*) were to follow in order to create more “living space” for Germans. However, the ethnic changes in East Central Europe were not carried out according to an entirely German script. Between 1939 and 1941, the Soviet Union deported Polish citizens from the annexed territories of eastern Poland. Moreover, several countries such as Romania and Hungary concluded agreements about the exchange of population, a term commonly used to disguise “ethnic cleansing” and expulsions. So already during the war, minorities in East Central Europe came under pressure, were persecuted or, as in the case of the Jews and the Gypsies, exterminated because of racial motives.

Between 1945 and 1948, 11.5 million German expellees paid a high price for Hitler’s *Lebensraum* policy. About 5 million people fled from the advancing Red Army, and the ones left behind were collectively held responsible for the crimes committed by Nazi Germany and permanently expelled from East Central Europe. About 3.5 million Germans from Poland, 3 million from Czechoslovakia, and 250,000 from Hungary had to leave their homelands. The expulsion of the Germans from Poland was also connected to the westward movement of this country. More than two million Poles were expelled by the Soviet Union from eastern Poland between 1944 and 1948 and mostly settled in the former eastern territories of Germany. Several million Ukrainians, Hungarians, Finns, Yugoslavs, and other nationals

and ethnic groups were also expelled from their homelands. It was the goal of the victorious allies to build a postwar order based on homogenous nation states. This has to be taken into consideration when the responsibility of states for the expulsion of other nationals is discussed. Nevertheless, the volume under review proves that Czechoslovakia pushed far more for the “transfer” of its German and Hungarian minorities than Hungary for the expulsion of other nationals from its territory.

Although the expulsions had a paramount influence on the postwar social and political history of Europe, they have been less thoroughly researched than they deserve. One of the reasons is that censorship in East Central Europe suppressed any discussion of this matter until 1989. The archives usually did not permit access to their collections dealing with expulsion, and the restrictions were especially severe for Western historians. So they relied on a very limited number of sources until the early 1990s. Because of this and the instrumentalization of “ethnic cleansing” during the Cold War, many Western publications on this topic are either politically biased or factually incorrect. For example, most West German publications described the expulsion as a martyrdom suffered by Germans only.[1] The responsibility of Nazi Germany for the expulsion of Germans was less talked about. The expulsions were also presented as unlawful and used as a basis for territorial and financial claims against Germany’s eastern neighbors. Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union defended themselves against this by arguing that the expulsions had been covered by international law and were carried out according to the treaty of Potsdam in a “humane and proper manner.”

The end of the Cold War did not end the mutual accusations about the expulsions between 1938 and 1948. Even after 1989, they were a contentious topic in Czech-German relations, until a note of mutual understanding was exchanged between the Czech and the German government in 1997. But even within the former Warsaw Pact, expulsion and past ethnic conflict remained a source of problems in international relations. This is especially true for Polish-Ukrainian and Hungarian-Slovak relations, where mutual accusations and distrust are still quite common. It may be concluded from these tensions between neighboring countries in East Central Europe that more research on the topic is pivotal for securing good international relations. Only if more is known about “the tragic decade in Central Europe” (Jan Havranek) will it be possible to avert one-sided interpretations of history and maybe come to an agreement about contentious topics. Doubtless the volume about

the “national question and expulsion in Czechoslovakia and Hungary 1938-1948” is an important contribution to reaching this goal.

The political importance of expulsions and genuine academic interest in filling blank pages of history has prompted a lot of research in East Central Europe since 1989. Several publications have recently appeared in the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and also in Poland. However, because of language barriers these studies have received little attention outside their countries of origin. It is the merit of the Austrian Academy of Sciences to bring together some of the most prominent contemporary historians from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary in this collective volume. Some articles contain sources unknown to western and sometimes even eastern readers.

In the introduction, Czech historian Jan Havranek pinpoints in an almost poetic way the difference between expulsion and the Holocaust by using the example of the Prague Jews and Prague Germans. As he points out, the journey of the German minority in Prague usually ended in 1945 after crossing the Bavarian or Saxon border in poverty. The journey of the Jews almost always led through Theresienstadt to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. (p. xvii). The distinction between expulsion and Holocaust is very important, if only to restrict the inflationary use of the term genocide. The primary goal of the states and nations that expelled people was to remove them from a certain territory. The primary goal of the Nazis was to extinguish people. It should be added, though, that the editors of the volume have been less intellectually strict than Havranek. Although they included a substantial article by Michael John about the persecution and deportation of Jews from Upper Austria and Southern Bohemia and a rather enigmatic article about the Hungarian Jews, the Holocaust does not appear in the title of the volume.

The Slovak historian Dusan Kovac and his Hungarian colleagues Laszlo Szarka and Ladislav Deak point out that the expulsions can only be understood in view of the national conflicts in the interwar period. Several articles also deal with the wartime itself, especially the “Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia.” The volume shows that the old multinational Europe was already destroyed when the Jews were deported and killed. The Austrian co-editor Arnold Suppan concludes in his article about the six years of German occupation in the Czech lands that they resulted in “total exclusion and total separation.” Although the occupational regime was less harsh

than in Poland and in Serbia, it still created such hatred against Germans that the vast majority of Czechs demanded their expulsion to Germany. In his article, Suppan implicitly criticizes the position of prominent Sudeten German historians. He does not demand an explanation by the Czechs as to why they expelled the Sudeten Germans,[2] but instead he explains the change of attitudes among Czechs during the war which caused the expulsion.

Jaroslav Kucera also attacks some of the conventional wisdom about the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. Building his argument on an article he published in Czech in 1991, he shows that the West German statistics about the victims of expulsion were made on a weak basis and are, in fact, wrong. So the number of victims was not around 225,000, as the Federal government in West Germany and publications supported by it claimed, but around 40,000. Obviously this does not change the moral judgment about expulsions. As Emilia Hrabovec shows in detail, the expulsion was cruel, vengeful, and inhumane in its first phase during the spring of 1945.[3]

The articles about the problem of the Hungarian minorities in the prewar and postwar area are a substantial contribution to historiography in Hungary itself and outside of the country. First, they all refrain from nationalist undertones, common to many articles and books published in the past.[4] Stefan Sutaj provides an overview on the fate of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia after World War II. As he shows, the Czechoslovak government initially wanted to get rid of the entire minority, but because it lacked international support and faced resistance from Hungary it was only able to “transfer” 89,660 Hungarians.[5] So more than 350,000 Hungarians were still living in Slovakia in 1950.

Probably the most important contribution in the entire volume is Agnes Toth’s article “Zwang oder Moeglichkeit. Die Annahme der Maxime von der Kollektivschuld und die Bestrafung der deutschen Minderheit in Ungarn.” Initially the Hungarian government hesitated to expel the German minority because it was afraid that this would serve as an example and excuse for the Czechoslovak, Yugoslav or Romanian government to treat their Hungarian minorities similarly. However, the Soviets exerted decisive pressure several times to expel the Germans. The deputy leader of the Interallied Control Commission, General Lieutenant Sviridov, gave the Hungarian government an instruction to transfer between 400,000 and 450,000 Germans in the summer of 1945. In November 1945, Marshal Voroshilov sent another letter

demanding the resettlement of half a million Germans. This is another proof that the mastermind behind the expulsions in East Central Europe were indeed the Soviets.[6]

Toth’s article also shows that the expulsions were deeply connected with the social transformation of Hungary. The land that had been owned by Germans was the main pillar for the land reform. Toth concludes that the main motivation for the expulsion of the Germans in spring 1945 was not their collective punishment but the needs of the land reform and of Hungarian refugees. The expulsion of the Germans gave the Hungarian government the possibility to pursue a redistributive policy that may be regarded as a step toward socialism. Similar conclusions about the effects of the expulsion can be made for Czechoslovakia, where almost 6 million hectares of land, 11,200 factories, and 55,000 small businesses were dispossessed. The property of the expellees fell into the hand of the states that “transferred” them. This gave the new regimes in East Central Europe ample possibilities to build up political allegiances among the populace and to transform society. However, this topic is beyond the reach of this volume. Only the Czech sociologist Vaclav Houzvicka gives a short overview about the social consequences of expulsion in the Czech borderlands.

Overall, the volume is an important contribution to the field and gives incentives for future research. Although several publications about expulsion during and after World War II have appeared recently or are in print, this area is still not very well researched. There is especially a need for more English language publications. Another topic which has even more potential for social and political historians are the consequences of expulsion and ethnic changes. It is to be hoped that more publications like this one are forthcoming that will cover other parts of Europe as well.

Notes

[1]. See Alfred Maurice de Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Expulsion of the Germans from the East* (London: Routledge, 1977), and *ibid.*, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), reviewed on HABS-BURG, <http://h-net2.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?~path=1720863819285>.

[2]. See as an example for this position the various publications of the Sudeten German historian Fritz Peter Habel, e.g. *Dokumentensammlung zur Sudetenfrage*, 3. erw. Aufl. (Munchen: Sudetendeutsches Archiv

Muenchen, 1962); *Die Sudetendeutschen* (Muenchen: Langen Mueller, 1992); and *Eine politische Legende: Die Massenvertreibung von Tschechen aus dem Sudetengebiet 1938/39* (Muenchen: Langen Mueller, 1996).

[3]. For more extensive information about the expulsion, see Hrabovec's monograph *Vertreibung und Abschub: Deutsche in Maehren 1945-1947* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996). See also a comprehensive Czech monograph not cited by Hrabovec: Tomas Stanek, *Odsun Nemcu z Ceskoslovenska 1945-1947* (Praha: Academia; Nase vojsko, 1991). Kucera has presented his views in various articles.

[4]. As an example for this, see Stephen Borsody's various English language publications about the Hungarian minorities in East Central Europe.

[5]. Unfortunately this statistical information is only provided in Sutaj's monograph on the same topic. See

Stefan Sutaj, *Mad'arska Mensina na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948* (Bratislava: Veda, 1993), pp. 138-39.

[6]. Recent research has also shown that the Soviets played a decisive role in both the expulsion of Poles from the Ukrainian USSR between 1944 and 1948, the expulsion of Ukrainians from Poland in 1945 and 1946, and the deportation of the remaining Ukrainians within Poland in spring 1947. See Orest Subtelny, "The Resettlement of Poland's Ukrainians 1944-1947," in: P. Ther, ed., *Expulsion, Settlement, Integration, Transformation: The Consequences of Forced Migration for the Postwar History of Central and Eastern Europe*, Harvard Cold War Book Series, Denver (forthcoming).

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Citation: Philipp Ther. Review of Plaschka, Richard G., eds., *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung in der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn 1938-1948: Aktuelle Forschungen*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. July, 1998.

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