

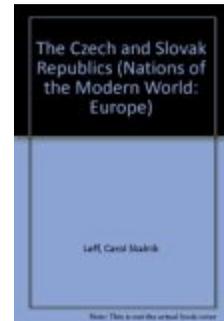
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Carol Skalnik Leff. *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation Versus State*. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1997. xvii + 295 pp. \$45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8133-2922-2; \$69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8133-2921-5.

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## Czechoslovakia and its Successors

Carol Skalnik Leff has written a work about Czechoslovakia and its successor states that follows her earlier success with *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia*.<sup>[1]</sup> This volume aims to show the path that Czechoslovakia, and later the Czech Republic and Slovakia, have taken toward the development of democracy and market economies, and their continued drive to achieve these goals.

Although the title seems self-explanatory, it is a bit deceptive. The book is more than a monograph on Czechoslovakia, as the crux of the study here lies in its subtitle, "Nation versus State" and the triple transition of democratization, marketization, and national transformation. Consequently, Leff weaves common experiences from throughout the former eastern bloc when appropriate and even makes references to Asia and the Americas when explaining a point that might be difficult for the reader to understand. Czechoslovakia, however, provides a particularly good means to examine the pressures brought on by these changes where apparent political unity can fall victim to a lack of common identity. "Triple transition" increased animosity in all areas of society between the two distinct regions of the country. These characteristics, largely suppressed for the more than forty years of communist rule, resurfaced and increased after the euphoria of the Velvet Revolution faded, so much so that leaders of the Czech lands and Slovakia could no longer agree on a common future, in spite of majority popular support for a continued Czechoslovakia.

In her introduction, Leff explains her intention of writing for the college student, who will not be disappointed in this book. As such, it may seem derivative at first glance. Leff, nonetheless, effectively blends secondary sources in political science and history on the topic with contemporary news reports to explain the rapidly changing political, social, and economic climate in the two countries. Scholars in the field will also find it to be more than satisfactory, yet the author never forgets her principal audience. Mindful of her readers, Leff has split the book into three major themes: "The Historical Context of Czechoslovakia's Postcommunist Transition," "The Domestic Politics of the Triple Transition," and "The International Dimensions of Domestic Transformation." She separates these topics into a total of nine chapters that are then subdivided into more than thirty smaller sections allowing easy reading for both the novice and the expert. Her introductions and the conclusions of each chapter offer excellent summaries of the issues presented, while her notes demonstrate that she has conducted extensive research and has kept up to date on the issues and historiography.

In her introduction, which is also subdivided into sections, Leff describes the basic outline and scope of the book, and she defines terms used throughout like "triple transition" and more controversial ones such as "East Europe" and "postcommunist." As the latter two tend to cause great debates as to their meaning, and many may disagree with her definitions, the reader understands what her terminology denotes and the points she makes.

Although she is a political scientist, Leff's work avoids political jargon.

Leff's first two chapters describe the background of political and social transformation and how it relates to today, providing a historical basis for the remainder of her work. Some may argue that this material duplicates numerous other published works, but repetitive as such information may seem it provides a context necessary for understanding Czechoslovakia's legacy from the development of the state in 1918 through the fall of communism. Without this framework, many readers would find themselves bewildered and the text would seem somewhat disjointed.

Chapter One traces the development of Czechoslovakia from its founding through World War II, emphasizing nationality issues and problems, domestic and international politics, and economics. Leff adroitly shows how each of these concerns would be of major importance after the Velvet Revolution. Chapter Two addresses communist Czechoslovakia, highlighting economic transformation, politics, foreign affairs, the continued nationality issues and problems, and the Prague Spring. Like the first chapter, each of these major topics had an enormous impact after 1989.

Part Two's four chapters discuss how "triple transition" affected domestic politics of Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution, and, in effect, led to its dissolution. Leff continues her study after January 1, 1993, emphasizing the Czech Republic's and Slovakia's democratization, their progress toward market economies and, again, their nationality concerns.

Part Three, in two chapters, considers the international implications of "triple transition." Here the main points for Czechoslovakia and its successors involve the problems associated with the end of the eastern bloc, small state security, subordinating the military to civilian noncommunist authority, economic and political integration with the West, and domestic public opinion concerning these issues.

The inclusion of a brief chronology of Czechoslovakia from 1918 to 1993, various tables, maps, and a brief, selected bibliography of thirteen significant monographs and an essay also make this volume appealing. Leff's suggestions to consult *OMRI Daily Digest* and to "surf the web" for current updates about the Czech Republic and Slovakia are most welcome. Finally, sprinkled throughout the pages are helpful sections, separated from the text, in box format. These items further aid in the clar-

ification of issues in the main text. For example, Box A offers pronunciation tips for the Czech and Slovak languages, Box 2.1 compares the Prague Spring to Gorbachev's perestroika, while Box 6.1 discusses the Asian Tiger model of market democracy that the states of the former eastern bloc chose to avoid.

On the whole, Leff has produced a solid work. Yet, as with any monograph, there are some shortcomings. The importance of the dissident Charter 77 movement should have merited its own subsection in Chapter Two rather than being included under the Prague Spring where it appears as a mere appendage of the events of 1968. An important issue absent from the book concerns the controversial Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam project. This topic involves many issues, including energy policies, Czech-Slovak relations in Czechoslovakia, Slovak national pride, and Hungarian-Slovak foreign policy.

Leff attempts to bring the reader as close as possible to the present within the constraint of the publisher's deadline. In so doing, her monograph stumbles regarding contemporary Czech-German relations. The author refers several times to the continued cool Czech-German relations, resulting from the thorny issues of the Nazi destruction of Czechoslovakia and the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans after World War II which cloud economic and political cooperation between the two states. After protracted negotiations, the recent Czech-German joint resolution appears to have brought reconciliation. Furthermore, in her earlier chapters Leff makes several historical mistakes, stating that the last Habsburg emperor abdicated when technically he did not, and that Czechoslovakia contained as many Germans as Slovaks during the interwar period. In actuality, Germans were more numerous. She also remarks that the Great Moravian empire was "too historically distant even for the tenacious memories of Europeans to build a shared identity around" (p. 7). Yet, from the nineteenth century until the end of Czechoslovakia, various scholars have attempted to use Great Moravia as the predecessor of a common state.[2]

In addition, four of the five maps seem rudimentary, as if drawn by hand, while the fifth, on the contrary, gives the impression of a professional cartographer's product. The index could have been more detailed. People and events—for example, Jozef Tiso—are mentioned in the text but are not listed in the index. Lastly, Leff refers to the Slovak leaders as Milan Stefanik and Bela Tuka. The standard method of writing their names includes Stefanik's middle initial R or full name Rastislav, while Tuka's first

name appears as Vojtech rather than its Hungarian variant.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned shortcomings are few and inconsequential. Indeed, Leff has accomplished her goal of presenting a work that undergraduates can use successfully. Experts will also find it a useful resource for years to come.

#### Notes

[1]. *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia: The Making and Remaking of the State, 1918-1987* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[2]. For example see Jakub Hudecek, *Dejiny Velke Moravy: 1100 roku statu ceskoslovenskeho* (Přerov: Knihupectvi spolecenske knihtiskarny nihkupectvi spolecenske knihtiskarny, 1935) or Stanislav Matousek, *K geneze ceskoslovenskej statnosti: Historicke predpoklady* (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenskeho, 1978).

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