

Jeremy King. *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. 284 S. \$39.50, gebunden, ISBN 978-0-691-04892-5.



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Jeremy King's sweeping study examines how national affiliations emerged in the south Bohemian town of Budweis/Budejovice during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the mid-nineteenth century, the vast majority of Budweisers had a non-national identity that included a strong affiliation with the Habsburg crown and state. Throughout the course of the nineteenth century, a growing number of politically active citizens adopted a German or Czech national identity. Local affairs became more entwined with provincial, Habsburg, and eventually even imperial German politics.

The book develops its argument chronologically, with five chapters detailing the origins of national politics (1848-1871), the spread of nationalist politics in Budweis (1871-1890), growing radicalism (1890-1902), the institutionalization of national politics in Cisleithania (1902-1918), and the assertion of first Czech and then German hegemony (1918-1945). Concluding remarks deal with the expulsion of the Germans after World War II. In each chapter, King analyzes the concepts of Czech and German national political identity as well as

key issues and disputes. King's argument is based on an understanding of the contingent nature of modern national identities and a rejection of the idea that such identities are constructed on pre-existing ethnic bases. He argues that in accepting an ethnic interpretation of the origins of national identity, historians are mistaking practice for analysis (p. 7). Theoretically, King relies most heavily on Rogers Brubaker, who argues for a more nuanced approach to understanding the types, styles, and aims of nationalist politics and emphasizes the importance of state policy in shaping nationalism.[1]

A number of themes are intertwined in this analysis. King firmly places events in Budweis in the context of both Bohemian and Cisleithanian politics, with references to the international context as well. He argues that the role of the Habsburg state has been slighted in previous scholarship and illustrates ways in which state interests affected local politics. The Habsburg state preferred national affiliations to socioeconomic or religious ones and therefore encouraged a nationalizing politics that became institutionalized by the

end of the nineteenth century. The gradual extension of the franchise did not lead to the expected triumph of socioeconomic over national interests, in part because the Czechs were successful in incorporating the lower middle class into their national movement, in part because the working class was left out of electoral politics long enough to become conscious of national differences within its ranks as well. Certain categories of citizens, particularly military offices, clergy, and state bureaucrats, were less likely to affiliate with one or the other national group and retained their loyalty to the Habsburg state. Federalists became supporters of the Czech national cause, while centralists backed the German national movement.

Non-ethnic affiliations remained important at least until the twentieth century. Early civic associations were *utraquist*, having both German and Czech members. The working class had its own political and sociocultural associations. The small Jewish population remained distinct and the target of attacks by both Germans and Czechs. And the attitude of the church toward nationalism was ambivalent. At the same time, however, nationalist politicians succeeded in forcing most individuals and associations to choose sides and give up their "amphibian" identities.

The book is best in its analysis of the complex and gradual process by which a common *Budweis* identity eroded and was replaced with a sense of belonging to a national community. Disputes over the use of the Czech language in schools, voluntary associations, and town government evolved into struggles for control of cultural, economic, and political assets. Local political leaders encouraged potential voters to identify themselves as Czech or German and vote accordingly. The introduction of a question on the language of daily use in the 1880 census forced Czech and German political leaders to confront demographic changes and take action to strengthen their positions. National movements grew both through the proliferation of associations and through confrontation

and radicalization. In King's view, intranational conflict within the Czech and German camps also drew in more *Budweisers* and deepened their commitment to national interpretations of local issues.

The Czech national movement was successful, in part, because it was more socially inclusive than its German counterpart, which retained an elite, bourgeois orientation that made it difficult to reach out to newly enfranchised members of the lower middle class in the 1880s and 1890s. King argues that there were fundamental differences in the criteria by which "Czechness" and "Germanness" were defined. In the mid-nineteenth century, "Germanness" had a historical-cultural and civic meaning, while "Czechness" was primarily "ethnic" (by which he means that it was defined by language use and kinship), with a historical-territorial strand related to Bohemian state rights and the presumptive role the Feudal Conservative nobility could play in helping achieve Czech national goals. Over time, these definitions changed. The Czechs retained a primarily ethnic and linguistic understanding of "Czechness" until the expulsion of the Germans in 1945-1946, after which civic and territorial notions became more important. The cultural and civic aspects of "Germanness" made linguistic assimilation to the German nation possible until the Nazi era, when racial characteristics became more important. These changing definitions influenced how each side viewed potential recruits to their cause. Czech national leaders tended to look for *crypto-Czechs*, whose "real" identity had been submerged in the German cultural realm and who needed to be uncovered and retrieved for the Czech cause. Germans tended to emphasize the cultural superiority of their nation, particularly as their demographic and political dominance eroded.

Related to this is the changing process by which the national affiliation of individuals was determined. Self-ascription by individuals was

preferred by both the Habsburg and Czechoslovak governments. At the same time, however, Czechs demanded that "objective" criteria be imposed to correct improper national identification, particularly in cases where economic pressure had been applied to force employees to declare their "language of daily use" to be German.

Despite intense nationalization, however, non-national loyalties could still play a role, as the case of the Budweis municipal brewery makes clear. This brewery, dominated by German liberals, was mismanaged. It was challenged directly by a Czech brewery (established in 1895), which employed more modern business practices and had a built-in national market. However, the ultimate challenge to liberal control over the town brewery came from a *voelkisch* political leader who exposed corrupt and wasteful practices and took over control of the brewery with the help of its Czech shareholders. In this case, intra-German conflict and economic interests outweighed national solidarity (pp. 106-111).

King's analysis of changing voting patterns and electoral campaigning in municipal, provincial, and imperial elections is revealing but could benefit from a table showing clearly the votes in each curia in each election. Likewise, census data and school enrollment figures could be summarized profitably in tabular form. Although town government had a combination of German, Czech, and Budweiser representatives in the 1860s, by the 1880s Germans had come to dominate municipal government and all of its perquisites, using patronage and eventually even fraud to maintain their position. Efforts to effect a compromise similar to that adopted in Moravia failed when the Bohemian Diet (which was to ratify the agreement) was suspended in 1913 and World War I intervened in 1914. After World War I, municipal government was taken over by the Czechs, even while local governments lost power throughout Czechoslovakia.

Although comprehensive, the book does have some weaknesses. The political context is often sketched with an overly broad brush, particularly in the post-1918 period. For a local history, a surprising number of details are lacking. The names of important individuals are often left out, as for example the name of Minister President Stuerghk's successor, Ernest von Koerber (p. 151). The study is based mainly on contemporary newspapers and pamphlet literature. The source base does not appear to include some critical primary sources, including the minutes of the Budweis Chamber of Commerce. As a result, nationalist politics in the chamber and some other local institutions (such as the municipal savings bank and the Czech credit cooperative) are slighted. The German regional national defense association, the Boehmerwaldbund, is identified as a "liberal" organization, without explanation (p. 102). King's efforts not to engage in nationalist practice leads to some stylistic infelicities, such as referring to the Czech National party as the Bohemian/Czech National party (p. 32) or translating "Ceskoslovan-sky" as "Bohemoslavonic" (p. 89). In neither case did Czechs intend these terms to be inclusive of all Bohemians. And for a book that seeks to redress the nationalist balance, it is surprising that it lacks a picture of August Zatka, the leading Czech political figure of the late-nineteenth century, while including one of his main political opponent, German liberal Josef Taschek. King focuses his attention primarily on Budweis/Budejovice's elite, while also discussing the attitudes of the working class in several sections of the book. Yet the key constituency that was attracted in growing numbers to the nationalist causes was the lower middle class. Their motivations and individual choices are not examined here in depth. The book's central argument and supporting themes, while not all developed fully, engage the reader and will provoke further questions and research into precisely how nationalist politics developed in central Europe in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Note

[1]. Rogers Brubaker. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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