

Zitierhinweis

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Jan Gerber: Ein Prozess in Prag. Das Volk gegen Rudolf Slánský und Genossen. (Schriften des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts, Bd. 26.) Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. Göttingen 2016. 296 S. ISBN 978-3-525-37047-6. (€ 45,-.)

The show trial with Rudolf Slánský, Secretary General of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), and thirteen other leading members of the KSČ in Prague in November 1952 was one of the largest, and one of the last, political trials of the late Stalinist era. This trial is extraordinary not only because of the number of pronounced death sentences, but also because of its anti-Semitic character. Historians have been searching for its roots for decades and the study by Jan Gerber, based on his dissertation, shines a new light on this topic. The author argues that the trial cannot be understood only from the perspective of the clash between the East and the West, but must also be seen through the lens of a long national conflict that had already started in the 19th c. Unlike the witnesses and survivors of political trials and unlike their historians who are predominantly Czechoslovak, he suggests that the anti-Semitic character was not derived just from the fact that the trial was organised from Moscow and influenced by changes in the relationship between the Soviet Union and Israel, but was also a consequence of the antagonistic Czech-German relationship in which the Jews were seen as 'Germans' because of their deep ties to the German culture and language, a concept dating already to the era of the Habsburg monarchy. This conflict culminated during the Second World War and afterwards in the expulsion and displacement of the Sudeten Germans.

The author puts forward his arguments in five chapters and an epilogue. His main source on which he draws to demonstrate his thesis are the biographies and literary works of two writers, Louis Fűrnberg and F. C. Weiskopf, both German-speaking Jews born in the Czech lands who in the interwar period both sympathised with the KSČ. Using these sources, G. shows that the prevailing arguments, which claim that the trial was mainly influenced by the Soviet Union and the complicated interpersonal relationships between Czechoslovak communists dating back to the interwar years, do not explain why the movement against Zionism acquired a different dynamic in Czechoslovakia and why Fűrnberg and Weiskopf preferred to relocate to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) at a time when the show trials in Czechoslovakia had already ended but were still being prepared in the GDR.

The first, mostly introductory chapter brings a short overview of the international and ideological context of the Slánský trial and a summary of the prevailing arguments and justifications. In his evaluation of available literature, G. argues that the discourse was and still is influenced by the ideological milieu of destalinization and an antagonistic confrontation of the two blocks, in this case arising from the experience of the defeat of the Prague Spring in 1968. He believes that historians tend to downplay the Czechoslovak contribution and do not take into account other factors and influences responsible for the anti-Semitic character of the trial.

The next three chapters present various arguments using methodology and sources which had not yet been considered. The author uses the approach of experience history (Erfahrungsgeschichte) to demonstrate the various background influences of the Slánský trial. Using the lives and literary work of Fűrnberg and Weiskopf, he shows not only a marked shift in the politics of the KSČ and a change in its approach toward national minorities, but the difficulties with the acculturation of Czech and Moravian Jews into the majority society as well. These new sources bring a refreshing perspective and force the reader to consider the roots of the Slánský trial in more depth than usual. G. describes the gradual transformation of the narrative of the KSČ, influenced by the historical reversals and the changing policy of the Soviet Union, and explains their context. He shows how in the years 1921-1952 the narrative oscillated between nation and class and why the national aspect eventually won. I particularly appreciate the author's analysis of the transformation of the Communist Party from a minority party to the majority party.

Although I personally see this approach as innovative, it seems to me that the methodology and sources do not provide the answers to all of the author's questions and do not fully support his arguments. G., moreover, sometimes pays more attention to the life and work of the two writers than the stated goals of the publication. This is particularly noticeable in the fourth chapter in which he describes the war experience as seen from Jerusalem (Fürnberg) and New York (Weiskopf), which does not bring any new insight into the central issue and can even be seen as misleading. In some parts, the book reads more as an analysis of the writers' identities and how they transformed depending on the time and place where they lived. G.'s sources only provide insight into the national factor of the politics of the KSČ. Any links to Zionism and the Jewish community are only secondary. Another missing aspect is an analysis of Czech society's attitude towards Jews in this time period, even though this may have been another important factor which influenced the anti-Semitic character of the trial. The leadership of the KSČ was naturally responding to the popular opinion of society and its demands.

The attitude of Czech society is described in the fifth chapter, where the reader finally finds answers to the questions raised in the first chapter. G. describes violence against Jews in the year 1918 and the problems with their return after World War II, particularly economic issues and problems with acculturation. This part reveals that anti-Semitism was deeply rooted in Czech society as such and that an important role was played also by the widespread myths about Jews. I believe it would have been fruitful to pay more attention to these questions and also link them with the findings of other historians who have studied anti-Semitism; this would provide a far stronger foundation for G.'s arguments.

The last part, an Epilogue named 'Slánský und K.', summarizes the main arguments. G. analyses the aims of the organisers of Liblice conference in 1963 dealing with the literary work of Franz Kafka. G. states that the organisers tried to rehabilitate the German and Jewish tradition in Czechoslovakia. From this point of view the Liblice conference meant according to G., the final point behind the Slánský trial.

Even though the book has its weaknesses caused by the excessive focus on the lives and work of Weiskopf and Fürnberg (which is a consequence of the selected methodology and sources), it is important particularly because it asks new questions. While historians who study anti-Semitism do admit that there is a link between the Slánský trial and an essentially nationalist conflict, historians of communism often deny this connection and tend to assign responsibility exclusively to the Soviet Union, trying to absolve the Czech society of its share in these crimes. G., however, points out that other factors might have been involved and that there was a strong strain of anti-Semitism present in Czech society at the time.

Praha

Klára Pinerová

Jerzy Giedroyc, Leszek Kołakowski: Listy 1957-2000. [Briefe 1957-2000.] Hrsg. von Henryk Citko. (Archiwum Kultury, Bd. 16.) Wydawnictwo Więź, Warszawa 2016. 377 S., Ill. ISBN 978-83-62610-95-2. (PLN 28,-)

Jerzy Giedroyc, Juliusz Mieroszewski: Listy 1957-1975. [Briefe 1957-1975.] 3 Bände. Bearb. von Rafał Habielski. (Archiwum Kultury, Bd. 17-19.) Wydawnictwo Więź. Warszawa 2016. 1377 S. ISBN 978-83-62610-99-0. (PLN 48,-)

Die vorliegenden Quelleneditionen beinhalten den Briefwechsel zwischen Jerzy Giedroyc, dem Leiter der polnischen Exilzeitschrift *Kultura*, die 1947-2000 monatlich in Maisons-Laffitte bei Paris erschien, und zwei wichtigen Autoren dieser Zeitschrift. Nach dem Ende des kommunistischen Regimes 1989 traf Giedroyc die Entscheidung, die umfangreiche Korrespondenz, die im eigenen Archiv aufbewahrt wurde (und wird), sukzes-