

THE QUESTION OF THE GERMAN EXPULSION FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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An essay on the history of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans published shortly ago by a highly qualified scholar in a well-known German periodical gives rise to some critical remarks on the same subject. They are grouped under different aspects: (a) the Czech-German general situation since 1919, (b) the origins of the expulsion-scheme, (c) the responsibility of the three leading Allied Powers for its effectuation.

After a condensed survey on the literature hitherto published on the subject, the essential problem is stated: the part played by Edvard Beneš, the late President of Czechoslovakia, in the planning and execution of the compulsory mass-"transfer" of Germans in and after 1945. A brief discussion of the terms "activism" and "negativism" (which played a prominent role in Sudeten German and Czech politics during the years after 1919) is followed by an analysis of certain pertinent statements which Beneš is alleged to have made with regard to basic tendencies of Czech policy towards the German element in Czechoslovakia, and especially with regard to the problem of interracial equality vs. Czech preponderance (the so-called "national State" as an ultimate object of Czech policy).

Before discussing the questions related to the events after the outbreak of World War II, a remark on the legal admissibility of compulsory mass-migrations is inserted. This question is answered in the negative. It has to be admitted that such a statement, coming from German side, may give rise to critical comment. The writer has been careful therefore not to couple it with an attempt to minimise or even deny German transgressions of the same nature.

A detailed and documented analysis of the preparations of the expulsion-scheme is attempted. As far as the available records go, the prominent part played by Beneš does not seem to allow doubts about his intentions. It is noteworthy that Beneš conceived the idea of a compulsory mass-exodus of more than one million persons as early as mid-September, 1938. Further, it is established that he persued his plans with persistence and skill during the years of his emigration, and it does not appear that he ever has been ready to abandon his course. He planned to render Czechoslovakia a "nationale State", i. e. an ethnically almost homogenous political entity. He has achieved his aim, and he has been vividly praised by one of his closest diplomatic aides. On the other hand, he received strong support from Czech

Communist quarters, and likewise there have been certain German circles in London who, during the winter 1944/45, professed readiness to co-operate with the Czechoslovak Government-in-exile even with regard to its expulsion-project. In this connection, the position and intentions of the Anglo-Saxon leaders, their diplomats, and of the Soviet Union deserve careful notice and detailed analysis. These developments culminate in art. XIII of the Potsdam Protocol and the subsequent Control Council resolution of November 20, 1945, which must not be overlooked. It constitutes a written agreement of the three Powers and of France with regard to the mass-expulsion of Germans, thus opening the question of legal responsibility of these powers for this measure.

The expulsion of the Sudeten Germans must be regarded in a greater historical context. It has been Hitler who, in his speech of October 6, 1939, publicly advocated compulsory mass-migrations as a means of "solving" minority problems; in substance, there is identity with Beneš' proposals made in secret one year before. The development of international Public Opinion during World War II is marked by a tragic change: under the impact of accumulating information about the National Socialist régime's misdeeds, the idea of mass-retaliation against "the Germans" fatefully gained vigour, and the question whether compulsory mass-migrations be admissible, receded into the background, the technical modalities of mass-migrations commanding exclusively public attention. Hence, the decisive issue does not appear to lie so much with Beneš' schemes or guilt, but with the fact that the idea of mass-expulsions, originally practised by the National Socialist, Fascist and Soviet régimes, was allowed to spread into Western circles. Accepting this idea as a feasible political feature, the West tragically succumbed to the wrong his best heads had set out to fight against.