

# THE SECOND CZECHO-SLOVAK REPUBLIC AS REFLECTED IN CONTEMPORARY CZECH PRESS OPINION

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The short time in which the Second Czecho-Slovak Republic existed, from October 1938 to March 1939, represents an interesting period, not only with regard to foreign policy, but also to domestic politics, and constantly offers the historian the possibility of posing new questions.

The present study is based primarily upon the Czech daily press of these six months and attempts to show the attitude of journalism with respect to the manifold questions and problems of that time.

The Munich Agreement had plunged the residual Czech state into a great crisis at home and with regard to its foreign policy. However, men could be found who tried to save what could still be saved. In foreign policy they aspired at first to strict neutrality toward both the Western Powers as well as the Axis. In domestic politics the main problems developed, on the one hand, in the area of the party system, which urgently required reform, both in the field of ideas and with regard to the number of parties and the replacements in party leadership; on the other hand, the economy of the country, which had been seriously affected by the cessions, required reorganization and at the same time forced reconstruction; finally, as a third factor, was the clarification of the question of the further living together of the Czechs and the Slovaks.

There are already studies on all of these important points which review the state of affairs on the basis of archival material and memoirs. However,

no detailed evaluation has as yet been made of the attitude of the Czech press, which, without any doubt, decisively influenced the mood of the population. This investigation attempts to close this gap, as far as this is permitted by the newspaper material from this period, which is only incompletely available in the West.

It can be clearly discerned that the press was entirely aware of its important task in this time of transition and reorganization. In a concrete and temporally limited situation it made an important contribution to preventing the decay of the domestic political structure. Immediately after the crisis it repeatedly kept the consciousness of the great sacrifices before the eyes of the people, and warned it to maintain composure and faith; it dropped the matter of the mistakes that had been committed, and was able to place the advantages of the limitation to a smaller area ahead of the disadvantages; in domestic affairs it propagated the simplification of the party system, and the importance of the sensible living together of the Czechs, Slovaks, and Carpatho-Ukrainians, and appealed for a forced economic development as the basis for the new statehood; it advised caution in foreign policy, neutrality, and incorporation into a new *Mitteleuropa*, and finally, referring to the principle of self-preservation, even recommended leaning upon the Third Reich.

The study places emphasis on the treatment of these points, assuming that they were the most decisive ones in the period of transition, and as long as it had not yet become all too apparent that the days of the Second Republic would be numbered.