

JOHANN WOLFGANG BRÜGEL

* 3. Juli 1905 † 15. November 1986

The death of J. W. Brügel in London on 15. November 1986 removes from our ranks an ardent seeker after historical truth about Czechoslovakia's nationality problems and relations with the Great Powers in the World War II era. Although Brügel had been unwell for some time, he remained active to the end. Shortly before his death he had accepted an invitation to participate in the closing panel on „Masaryk the Man“ at the Thomas G. Masaryk Conference, sponsored by the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of the University of London. Had he been present, he would have provided the audience with a perspective on Masaryk drawn from his own rich experience under the First Czechoslovak Republic. This began with his childhood in Ausspitz (b. 3. July 1905), his youth and gymnasium education in Brünn, and his university studies in Prague, culminating in the doctorate of law (JUDr.) in 1928. There followed a decade of service in the Ministries of Justice and of Social Welfare as private secretary to Dr. Ludwig Czech. As an active journalist and member of the German Social Democratic Party, Brügel was a marked man after the Nazi occupation of Prague on March 15, 1939. He escaped to France and then to England, where he spent the war years. There he met and married Josephine Liebsstein, also a Czechoslovak émigré, who worked as a nurse while studying to become a physician. Brügel went back to Czechoslovakia after the war but in November 1946 returned permanently to England.

Through his writings in European newspapers and periodicals, and above all by his scholarly works on Czechoslovakia, he became internationally known. He published six books, most notably „Tschechen und Deutsche 1918–1938“ (1967) and „Tschechen und Deutsche 1939–1946“ (1974). The former appeared in a revised, updated English version as „Czechoslovakia before Munich“ (1973). Widely acclaimed, these books gave scholarly weight to the record of democratic German elements within Czechoslovakia between the wars as no other writings had done. Brügel also published over eighty articles based on archival materials and a wealth of published sources.*

Brügel's most significant contribution was as a critic of the policy of the Beneš régime of wholesale expulsion of Czechoslovakia's German population, implemented immediately after the war. As a representative of state-loyal elements within German Social Democracy, Brügel was in an impregnable position to evaluate the negative aspects of the expulsions. His first article on the subject, in fact, appeared early in the war, even as the issue was being raised. Entitled „Umsiedlung?“ it appeared in *Sozialistischer Kampf*, fortnightly of Austrian Socialists in Paris, on 2. December 1939. He wrote it under the pseudonym „Walter Brünner“ because, as he noted later, „My mother still lived in Brünn.“

* For a full bibliography see *East Central Europe* 12/1 (1985) 60–64. For a sketch of Brügel's career see *BohZ* 27/1 (1986) 110–116.

Brügel was well known in North America through his participation in meetings on Czechoslovak themes, publications in American journals, and membership in the Czechoslovak History Conference. He was valued for his forthright scholarly jousts and helpful advice to colleagues. Following the close of the Masaryk Conference in London on 16. December 1986, a Memorial Assembly in his honor was held at the German Historical Institute. It was on occasion for grief at the departure of a stalwart democrat and respected colleague but even more a celebration of a life of achievement. In its death notice the Times (London) described him as „acclaimed as a historian“ and „an honourable victim of 20th century politics,“ while Züricher Zeitung regretted the loss of „einen geschätzten Mitarbeiter, der mit profunder Sachkenntnis und kritischem Geist zeitgeschichtliche Publikationen rezensierte.“ Those who knew J. W. Brügel will echo these words and add their own tributes.

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