

in seiner Einführung: die Tschechoslowakei, drei Völker zusammenfassend, die Tschechen, Slowaken und Ruthenen, sei 1918 entstanden, wurde im zweiten Weltkrieg auseinandergerissen und nach 1945 um die östliche Provinz kleiner wiederhergestellt. Die Tschechen, „whose Kingdom of Bohemia was for many centuries the main power in Central Europa and whose kings became Holy Roman Emperors“, seien nicht einmal nach dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg aus der Geschichte verschwunden, welcher „brought the Czechs under Habsburg control (after the Battle of the White Mountain, near Prague, in 1620)“.

Die tschechische nationale Widergeburt, die den Beginn der modernen tschechischen Geschichte kennzeichne, wird mit Dobrovský, Jungmann, Palacký und der böhmische Barockmusik abgehandelt, um dann ausführlicher den Leser in die tschechische-slowakischen Beziehungen einzuführen. Thomas G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš vertreten die Geschichte der ersten ČSR, gefolgt vom „ersten Arbeiter-Präsident“ Klement Gottwald. „Non-communist parties either merged with the Communist Party or hung on, without distinctive policies or the ability to constitute a real opposition, under the umbrella of the National Front“ – nach dieser kurzen Erklärung der kommunistischen Machtübernahme wird dann der Leser über die Hauptentwicklungen der kommunistischen Herrschaft informiert, über Wirtschaftsschwierigkeiten „attendant on the oil crisis (apart from the traditional problems of absenteeism and a generally cavalier attitude to work in many areas).“ Dann endet diese kurze Einführung mit der erfreulichen Feststellung, daß Gustáv Husák sowohl tschechisch als auch slowakisch zu sprechen imstande sei, je nach Bedarf, während der letzte ausführliche Paragraph den Erfolgen der gegenwärtigen tschechischen Verlagstätigkeit auf dem Weltmarkt gewidmet ist.

So einfach und verständlich erscheint also die Geschichte dieses einmal großen Volkes, das offensichtlich viel Sinn für Kultur hat und dessen Mißgeschick ihm vielerlei Belastungen auftrug; es überstand sie jedoch glücklich, weil ja alles auch heute gar nicht so schlimm erscheint. Es ist schwer zu entscheiden, ob hier wohl die englische Neigung zum Ausdruck kommt, nichts so richtig ernst zu nehmen, oder ob es einfach an Informationen fehlt. Viele der im einzelnen aufgeführten Bücher und Aufsätze würden zu einem anderen Bild führen, vieles würden das Bild ergänzen und differenzieren – und vieles würde auch dann noch fehlen, ohne die anderssprachigen Publikationen. Die Aufgabe, die der Autor übernahm, war nicht einfach. Vielmehr lag es schon in ihr selbst begründet, daß ein so simples Bild entstand. Ein allzu simples, und es bleibt einem jedem Benutzer überlassen, ob er ein so leicht erfaßbares Bild oder den mühsamen Weg der eigenen Erkenntnisse vorzieht.

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*Skilling, H. Gordon: Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia.*

Allen & Unwin, London 1981.

On 1 January 1987 the Czechoslovak civil rights movement Charter 77 celebrated ten years of underground existence. It is, therefore, be appropriate to review the best book on its origin and first years of existence.

H. Gordon Skilling, professor of political science at the University of Toronto and a recognized authority on Czechoslovakia, devotes approximately 200 pages to an analysis of the Charter movement up to the first months of 1981. The rest are Charter 77 and related documents. It might be added at this point that Charter 77 generated parallel activities, such as *samizdat* literature surpassing in quality its official counterpart and VONS (Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted).

The author relates the origins of the Charter, which was initiated by intellectuals abhorred by the dismal "normalization" regime symbolized by and presided over by Gustáv Husák. Persons of divergent hues and backgrounds formed a group with the aim of entering into a meaningful discussion with the regime or its representatives. The main intention, however, was to watch over the implementation of basic human rights, as agreed to by Czechoslovakia at the Helsinki Conference. The Czechoslovak Collection of Laws No. 120 of 13 October 1976 published the texts signed by the ČSSR, which became valid Czechoslovak law.

Charter 77 drew attention to the civil rights documents and pointed out their constant violation by the authorities. It pointed out that freedom of expression was "purely illusory", that hundreds of thousands of citizens were denied "freedom from fear". The right to education and the right to receive information were being willfully obstructed. Public expression of opinion was obstructed by centralized control of the mass media. Freedom of religious confession was curtailed. The right of citizens to leave their country was consistently violated. A non-party authority, which citizens might contact for recourse, was simply non-existent. The first Charter document expressed the determination of this informal association to press the issue of human rights in order to help Czechoslovak citizens "to work and live as free human beings".

Skilling does not hide his sympathy for the Charter. This attitude is not to the detriment of the scholarly nature and objectivity of the book. The author discusses openly the outward and inner barriers encountered by the Charter movement. No meaningful dialogue with the regime has been achieved. The signatories were subjected to humiliating police surveillance, were discriminated against and persecuted in every manner customary in the "milder" post-Stalinist period. Their families were discriminated against, their children not admitted to institutes of higher learning. The "dissidents" themselves were fired, often repeatedly, and relegated to low menial jobs.

The number of signatories grew in the first months, soon passed the 1 000 mark, but then stagnated when faced with the vicissitudes of harassment. In spite of thousands of silent sympathizers, the Charter movement remained isolated in the community by a combination of police repression and a willy-nilly accommodation of most citizens to the obtaining conditions after the Soviet invasion.

From the very beginning the Charter strove to stay beyond day-to-day politics. It would have fallen apart had it not managed to do that. Yet it has proved difficult to bridge the inherent differences between conservatives, liberals, socialists, ex-communists, religiously motivated adherents or near-Trotskyites. No less critical were divergences in temperament between relatively circumspect and legalistic advocates of human rights such as Jiří Hájek, those we might call centrists such as Ladislav Hejdránek

or Ludvík Vaculík, and radicals, be it of the type of Václav Havel, Jaroslav Šabata or Petr Uhl.

Another painful problem relates to Slovak participation in the Charter. Skilling rightly suggests that federalization of the Republic in 1969 gave new jobs to the Slovak intelligentsia both in Prague and in Bratislava. He states correctly that the pressures of the regime were less drastic in Slovakia than in the Czech Lands, and the desire for accommodation stronger. He also mentions the difficulties in communication between the Prague and Bratislava "dissidents". He might have added in explanation that much of the motivation of the reformist movement of the 1960s in Slovakia was nationalist in character, that genuine human rights advocates were in a minority, isolated and with little public appeal.

In spite of all the obstacles encountered, Charter 77 succeeded. While Skilling, understandably enough, was somewhat uncertain of this at the time he wrote, we see today, after more than ten years of its existence, that it provides the only life line to the better Czech traditions. It is a tenuous link to the principles of a democratic and humanitarian Czechoslovakia in the broad area of human rights, dangerously operating within an unreconstructed totalitarian system.

Charter 77 was successful in another important respect. It provided a much needed cultural and political linkage to Western countries, serving as a permanent reminder that, in spite of all failures, there are Czechs who refuse to submit to the levelling down imperatives of the post-1968 "normalization", to the humiliating demands of dreary "real socialism".

Without having mentioned Gorbachov by name, the anniversary Charter document of January 1987 gave expression to hope for the human rights movement in the newly emerging circumstances. Indeed, it does seem probable that the regime will no longer be able to suppress its "dissidents" now, after it had failed to achieve that in the course of the past decade. A new volume would urgently be needed to cover Charter 77 activities from 1981 to the present. Meanwhile, for any student of the first years of this historic human rights movement, H. Gordon Skilling's work is a must.

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*Entgegnung zu K. A. Sedlmeyers Besprechung von W. Sperling: Tschechoslowakei. Beiträge zur Landeskunde Ostmitteleuropas (BohZ 27/1 <1986> 175-179).*

Der Einladung, zu der Besprechung meines Buches „Tschechoslowakei“ durch Herrn Prof. Dr. K. A. Sedlmeyer Stellung zu nehmen, komme ich nur mit Zögern nach, da solche Repliken meist weitere Gegenäußerungen zur Folge haben, die der Sache wenig dienen und mit neuen Vorwürfen, Verdrehungen und Unterstellungen verbunden sind. Zahlreiche Besprechungen in in- und ausländischen Fachzeitschriften sowie briefliche Äußerungen von Fachkollegen hatten nicht nur einen positiven Tenor, sondern lobten das Buch uneingeschränkt, würdigten auch die Art und Weise, wie ich da und dort für andere Standpunkte argumentiere, als sie von den Rezensenten