

*Wheaton, Bernard: Radical Socialism in Czechoslovakia. Bohumír Šmeral, the Czech Road to Socialism and the Origins of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (1917–1921).*

East European Monographs, Boulder 1986, 204 pp. (East European Monographs 213).

While a number of books concerning the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) have appeared in the West, they have primarily concentrated on the Second World War and postwar period. Surprisingly little has been written about the formative years of the Party, and still less about its first chairman, Bohumír Šmeral. When Šmeral does appear in the general literature, he is too often dismissed as a renegade Social Democrat, and little, if any, further reference is made to the development of his political ideas. Thus, Bernard Wheaton's book is a welcome contribution both to the political history of the First Republic and to the history of radical socialist politics in the period immediately following the First World War. The author concentrates on the development of Šmeral's political ideas between 1917 and 1921, roughly from the time of the Russian Revolution to the foundation of the KSČ. He interprets Šmeral's

brand of radical socialism – “Šmeralism” – as a third route to socialism and as a challenge to the two socialist orthodoxies, Social Democracy and Leninism (pp. xi–xii). In a larger context, Wheaton regards the failure of Šmeralism as yet another example of the failure of socialism to meet the needs of the movements and the societies which produced it (p. xxvi).

The book is organized topically, rather than chronologically. In Part I, Šmeral's political writings are discussed. The chapters in Part II deal with the impact of nationalism on radical socialism, the effect of the Czech political environment on the same, the challenge of the radicals to the Czechoslovak state, and the nature of their economic and political demands. A section on social mobility has also been included. Part III concentrates on the major external influences on “Šmeralism”: the Russian Revolution, the Versailles Peace negotiations, and the problem of Hungary. Šmeral's attitudes are compared and contrasted with those of other prominent radicals in Czechoslovakia, including the Communist Alois Muna and the German Social Democrat Karl Kreibich. In addition, there is discussion of another neglected aspect of Czech political historiography – the Czech(-oslovak) National Socialist Party – both in terms of this party's nationalist influence on the working class and its relations with the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party.

The topical arrangement of the book, while well suited to the subject matter, exacerbates the major flaw of this monograph, indeed of many monographs, the lack of context. The failure to maintain a delicate balance between keeping to the subject at hand and providing the reader with sufficient background makes it sometimes difficult to follow the author's argument. This is compounded by two stylistic problems: first, the question of abbreviations and acronyms; while a table of abbreviations has indeed been provided, it is incomplete, and sometimes confusing. Although most readers will easily discern that “C-in-C” means Commander-in-Chief (p. 56), it is perhaps too much to expect that they will immediately recognize that “CSP” (p. 69) is a reference to the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party in yet another one of its permutations. Further, it is confusing when “MP” is used not only to signify Marxist Party but also Member of Parliament (p. 84). A second stylistic problem is posed by the cast of characters. When a new person is introduced he is rarely identified by his full name or by his occupation (see for example p. xiii, Josef Hybeš, but [Václav] Vacek and [Václav] Houser). One must depend on the index for a first name, and identification.

The above comments are not meant to detract from this work, for it contains many interesting observations, and usually presents the complicated subject in a lucid way. In general, however, the authors of monographs should attempt to make life easier on the reader and not to assume too much prior knowledge.

Porto

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