

## CZECHS AND SUDETEN GERMANS AND THE PAST

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The problem of coping with the past or better, of coming to terms with it and learning to accept it is something which has always accompanied social crises and pronounced shifts in historical judgements, which are more likely to be caused by changes in living circumstances than by changes in historiography itself. This is borne out by the self-reflection of the Sudeten Germans, which was rather practical (integration in Germany) than intellectual, and the same may be presumed with respect to the beginning Czech self-reflection. Sudeten German intellectual and cultural activity, insofar as it has been different from that of other Germans during the postwar period, has centered and still centers around the topic of expulsion and the pre-Nazi past; the history of Sudeten German nationalism, including the fate of the Sudeten territory during the National-Socialist era, remains a "blank spot" or a gap which has yet to be closed. An obstacle in the way of a critical discussion of the past was also – on both sides – the Cold War and the division of Europe into two blocs. On the Czech side, the communist system systematically sought to prevent this discussion, and the resulting taboo could be broken – after an effort had been made in the 1950s and 1960s – only by the dissidents on the threshold of the 1980s. Such efforts as were undertaken were hampered by the long-term isolation in the opposition. When they finally began, the critical (and self-critical) discussion among the Czechs and the reappraisal of traditional historical judgements were all the more dynamic. This development is delayed and made more difficult by the tumultuous historic developments after 1989 and, on the other hand, accelerated by political relaxation and the free exchange of opinions. A meaningful discussion of the past, which might result in a reconciliation, cannot be brought about by the simple expedient of Sudeten German and Czech self-reflection. What is needed is a cooperatively established synthesis of the "common history".